

# Coaching Your Daughter

*By Jonathan H. Buzby*

I have found two of the most challenging roles as an adult to be parenting and coaching children. This naturally makes coaching as a parent one of the toughest assignments you can undertake. Yet, as with parenting and coaching, being a parent-coach can be one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever encounter.

There are many reasons parents choose to coach. One is for the love of sports. There are many parents who coach before, during and after their own child plays sports. Another reason parents coach is because their child will not participate if they are not involved in some way. Some children are accustomed to Mom and Dad being around all the time and do not take instruction well from others outside of a school setting. A final reason parents coach is because nobody else wants to do it. Without this dedicated parent the team might not exist. This parent may not have any sports experience, but is willing to take over the team for the benefit of the children.

Two of my proudest moments as a coach have been related to my role as a parent-coach. The first is when a mother told me it took her three practices to realize which child was mine. This told me that I was treating my child as a member of the team in all aspects of the practice. I instructed him as I did the other team members, spending as much individual time with him as I did with the other players but also insisting he follow the same rules as his teammates and not take advantage of Dad being the head coach.

No matter what reasons a parent becomes a coach the challenges are the same. The biggest challenge is how to treat your own child as a member of the team. Parents tend to treat their child in one of two ways. The first is by being harder on their child than the other team members. This is sometimes because a coach feels his/her child should lead by example. This might also be so the other parents won't accuse him/her of playing favorites. Regardless of the reason it should be avoided.

An example from my personal experience happened during a recent hockey game when I removed my son from the game because his shift was over. He began crying because he had not shot on goal yet. I became very angry ("no son of mine was going to carry on like that") and told him he wasn't going back in the game. I took a minute and recalled how I previously handled a similar situation with another player and realized I had made a mistake. I went to him and explained that "everyone has to play and take turns" and that he would get to go back in again when it was his shift. He quickly calmed down and returned to the game during his normal shift (he never did score). I learned an important lesson as a parent-coach that game.

The second way I have seen parent-coaches handle their own child is to treat him special. Special treatment is letting him always hit first or play a popular position all the time. This makes the transition to a non-parent head coach even more difficult and will upset the parents who paid money for their child to be treated as an equal player on the team. Your child has to understand that he will get to hit first or play point guard the same number of times all the other players do.

Treating your own child too harshly and favoring your child are two situations that should be avoided. One thing I've learned as a coach is to treat every child (including my own) like I would want my child to be treated if I weren't the coach.

My second proudest moment as a coach was when my son came over to the post-practice team huddle, put his arm around me and said, "Dad, you're a great coach!" I don't know of a parent or coach who couldn't be touched by that act of appreciation. It was a nice reminder that parents coach because they enjoy spending time with their kids and that your child will always appreciate you first and foremost as mom or dad.

You will be called upon to be a parent while you are coaching many times. It is difficult for kids to differentiate the roles of parent and coach and therefore you shouldn't expect them to never treat you like a parent during practices or games. An example would be when your child gets injured. Another player on the team might cry or get upset but probably wouldn't turn to you like he would his own parent. Your own child most likely will. He will expect you to act and treat him like a parent during these times and it is important that you do. If he falls and skins his knee at practice he expects you to treat him just like you do at home when the same thing happens. I tell parent-coaches to remember that "you'll be a coach for a season, you are a parent forever."

Another example would be when your child experiences the frustration of playing a bad game or losing. He won't want to hear your coaching speech on "lessons to be learned from losing" but instead will want to be consoled as a family member. I always make a point of avoiding "coach to player conversations" on the car ride home. Instead I make sure our conversation is as father and son whether we talk about the game or something completely irrelevant.

One last piece of advice I'll recommend is to take an opportunity to be a supportive parent-spectator for a season. This will give your child the experience of playing without you as a coach and might also give you some insight on how to treat him by seeing how he best reacts to different coaching styles.

No matter how many seasons you coach, being an effective parent-coach is a never-ending challenge. Keep these things in mind to help make coaching your child one of the best experiences you'll ever have.

Jonathan Buzby is the Director of Coaches Education for Special Olympics Delaware and is a volunteer coach for the Y.M.C.A. of Newark, Del. He has over 15 years of experience administrating, teaching and coaching children in sports. He has written a book titled, "Coaching Kids: It's More than X's and O's."