

## Just be there to cheer

As a sports parent I have to admit that there have been times in the past when I have crossed the invisible white line between enthusiastic supporter for one of my children and being an embarrassment to the family name.

Strangely, my son's basketball coach, the match umpire or the manager of my daughters oztag team did not always welcome my well-intentioned advice.

On one infamous occasion, my 9-year-old son was trialling for the state under-12 basketball team. The boys were engaged in a ball control drill. I was watching my son's every move with my characteristic obsessive keenness when I noticed that some boys were stepping over the sidelines. Rising from my chair, I confidently approached the silver-haired coach who was running the drill, his formidable voice barking instructions. Managing to get the man's attention, I offered helpfully, 'You know, some of the boys are running out of bounds in this drill. I didn't know if you realised'.

The coach, who probably had better things to do than engage with an interfering know-it-all parent, smiled pleasantly and replied in a mind-your-own-business sort of way, 'It's okay, the boss knows what he's doing!'

The 'boss' he was referring to was the head coach of the program, one of Australia's most credentialed basketball mentors.

'Okay', I said, somewhat chastened, but I doubt if the coach would have heard. He was already back on court, gesticulating and directing.

Slam dunk to the coach. Tech foul to me.

After the session was over, my son, who had watched the brief exchange, asked me, 'What did you say to the coach?' He was clearly embarrassed. By the time I had explained, he was mortified. 'Please don't speak to the coach,' he pleaded. 'Okay', I nodded.

My son, who was talented but inexperienced at this level, was having enough trouble dealing with the expectations and stress of competing with and against older or more seasoned players. Now his father had humiliated both of them. Bad form!

Luckily, my son is still in that program. The coach and I get on very well but I quickly learnt where the boundary line was.

After those exchanges, I vowed never to step over the parent-coach divide again and I have since extended that embargo to contact with referees, managers and administrators. This is not to say that sometimes I have not had to bite lips and chew fingernails to resist the urge to rail against misperceived injustice against one of my children or their team, but I make a point these days of just being Dad, cheerleader and property steward. Being coach and referee as well is just too much multi-tasking.

My well-intentioned but misguided advice was mild compared to the abuse coaches, referees, umpires, team managers and administrators receive on an almost daily basis. Some parentsturn Saturday morning Australia from a fun park into a war zone, convinced that the coach or referee will somehow see how wrong they are IF THEY WOULD ONLY LISTEN!

Junior sport is about smiling engagement, participation, effort and friendship.

As parents, our role is to facilitate and enable those qualities. Winning is merely a by-product, but it is the ingredients that are the most enjoyable to savour.

Having reflected on my own occasional descent into sports-parent nut job (and redemption!), I have put together my personal code of conduct:

**I AM A DAD. MY CHILD HAS A COACH AND THE GAME HAS AN  
UMPIRE.  
I'LL DO MY JOB AND LET THEM DO THEIRS.**

Most sports associations and clubs have a code of conduct, not only for parents but also for coaches, officials, spectators, administrators and players. They are well worth reading, and heeding.

Play by the Rules has code of conduct templates that can be found at <http://www.playbytherules.net.au/features-mainmenu/club-toolkit>.

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