Ten commandments for sports parents

By ROBERT P. LOCKWOOD

1. Don't act like a jerk in front of your kids: Refrain from any behavior that is dumb or boorish. Simple rule: Don't do anything at a game that you would not do in front of your child anywhere else.

2. Sports algebra: Sports are fun for us and our children in an inverse proportion to the importance we put on it. The more serious our attitude toward our children's participation in sports, the less fun it becomes for the children and us.

3. We know this is true, but let's act like we know it is true: Our children will not play professional sports. Our children will more then likely not win athletic scholarships to college. Period. Ninety-nine percent of all kids involved in sports at the elementary level do not have that kind of talent and never will, no matter how hard they work at it. Enjoy what they can do and what they enjoy doing. Forget our own fantasies.

4. Know who is really out there: We are not playing the game. Our kids are not us. How our children perform in an athletic endeavor has nothing to do with our own self-esteem or our own childhood dreams. It is unfair for our children if we feel — and act — as if their athletic performance is somehow a reflection on us.

5. Other people's kids are still kids: Especially when children are young, remember that all the kids are trying to have some fun under difficult circumstances (namely, being watched by adults). The other team is not some collective "enemy." It is just a bunch of other kids in different uniforms. Treat them as kindly as we want your children to be treated by other adults.

6. Put up or shut up: Leave the coaches alone. Understand that they are usually volunteers who give up a great deal of personal time trying to help your kids. They are not professionals and they will certainly make mistakes. If we don't like the job they do, shut up and volunteer next year. And the same thing holds true for umpires and referees.

No coach has the right to treat children in a disrespectful or abusive manner. Screaming at elementary kids taking part in sports should be against the law, or at least be punishable by public humiliation. We have every right to pull our kids off a team when the coach behaves in such a fashion. We also have every right to complain to league authorities.

7. Take the pulse regularly: Having fun? Check regularly. Especially at the elementary level, there is really only one reason to have children involved in sports — because it is fun. If the child is not having fun, you should seriously consider withdrawing.

8. If you don't have something positive to say, don't say it: The last thing our kids need is a detailed rerun after a game that explains all their mistakes and how to avoid them in the future. If they did something well, celebrate it. If something bad happened and they want to talk about it, talk about it — but only to build the child up and put things in proper perspective.

9. You are supposed to have fun, too: If the "fun" for us depends solely on a win or on how well our children have performed, then we have to re-examine our whole attitude. At the end of the game — win or lose — both you and your child should have had a good time. If that's not the case most of the time, then something is seriously wrong.

10. Every kid is his or her own kid: Some kids like sports, some don't. Some kids are good at sports and some aren't. And it doesn't depend on whether we liked sports or were good at sports when we were kids. Every child is a unique gift from God. We never want to define a child's worth by the level of skill on a playing field.

Used with permission of Our Sunday Visitor Inc.

Lockwood is general manager of the Pittsburgh Catholic and diocesan communications director.

Think summer all year long

Conley Resort

Indoor Pool & Pirate's Cove Waterpark

- Two Slides
- Sauna and Hot Tub
- Shallow Pool
- Party Room with Games and Snacks

Open Year Round ! Perfect for Birthday Parties and Weekend Getaways!

Conley RESORT

740 Pittsburgh Rd (Route 8) • Butler, PA 16002

724-586-7711 • 800-344-7303 • www.conleyresort.com