

Ugly Parents Syndrome

One of the issues confronting junior athletes and coaches alike, is the **Ugly Parent in Sport**. We have all had experiences witnessing a parent who has had difficulty distancing themselves from their child's sporting experience. The following articles look at some experiences and strategies when dealing with the Ugly Parent in Sport.

Overview

The syndrome many like to refer to as the **Ugly Parent In Sport** occurs all too frequently in junior sport and physical activity. Spectating adults, particularly parents, become 'ugly' and vocal when they are too focused on the result of a match or a player's performance. Studies have shown this behaviour can ruin the enjoyment of the sport or activity for the children involved.

Sport can teach children positive values, such as teamwork, cooperation, handling and learning from mistakes, developing confidence and winning and losing gracefully. Parents and caregivers can have a great impact on the development of these values, and their children's performance and enjoyment of sport.

FOR @%#@\$ SAKE JOHNNY! KICK THE ##@*% THING!

Is your club or school having difficulty in encouraging parents and spectators to be positive? Is it interfering with team or individual spirit? Ruining the atmosphere at games?

Active Australia has some tips on how to make **ugly parents** positive ones.

We all know that sport and physical activity helps young people develop positive values such as teamwork, cooperation, and confidence. Parents, caregivers, teachers and coaches have a great impact on developing these values and their children's performance and enjoyment of sport.

But walk around any venue where a junior game or competition is on you'll see the syndrome called Ugly Parents in Sport in action. These 'Ugly Parents' damage their child's and their child's team performance and enjoyment in playing sport. Everyone criticises and complains about them, but what can you do to turn those annoying few into positive and encouraging sideline parents?

For clubs, associations, schools, and councils

There are a number of simple strategies and ideas to help you address the issue. Sports can give referees/officials the power to send spectators away from the field of play for the game if they are not positive. Associations can introduce penalty points for the club if any spectators on the sideline were negative during a game. A competition in Brisbane awards bonus points for teams if their behavior on the sideline is positive during their game. Club officials can identify parents and adults on the sideline early in the season that are loud and potentially negative and make them the sideline monitor. They wear a sash and their job is to ensure spectators' comments are supportive. The local district does spot checks on games, awarding bonus points for clubs whose supporters are cheering and being positive. At the end of the season the most positive team and club are awarded a fair play award. Clubs can be awarded a "Good Sport Certificate" from the local community for rewarding good behaviour on the sideline. Botany Bay council announced a suspension system in 1999 - suspending unruly parents from council facilities for a week if they verbally abused officials, players or spectators. Repeat offences earned a 3-week suspension.

For Parents

Your Kids, Their Game has some ideas for good sideline behaviour, such as:

- Cheer and call out encouragement, keeping your voice positive.
- Let the coach do his/her own job. Like the children, they are doing their best.
- Stay in the designated area for spectators.
- Understand that referees/umpires are doing the best they can. Have faith in them and thank them for officiating at the end of the game of event.
- Show self-control. Remember you are watching children participate in sport - it is not the Olympic Games.
- Cheer the entire team and encourage all players
- Congratulate the opposing players/athletes at the end of the event.
- Provide support for your child by listening to them and trying to understand their feelings.

Positive Comments on the sideline for adults and spectators include:

- 'Good try, Toni' or 'Well done, Frank that was a great pass'
- Clap enthusiastically for good performance of skills (not just for scoring),
- Act as role models for young people and thank the coaches and officials at the end of the competition.

Ask positive questions at the end of the event such as: How did you go in your game? not Did you win?; What did you think of the competition today?; or Did they enjoy themselves?