

CEDAR RAPIDS (IOWA) JUNIOR COUGAR BASEBALL CLUB



2017-18 PLAYER & PARENT HANDBOOK

** Updated 10/07/2017 **

OPEN LETTER FROM YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Welcome to the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Junior Cougars baseball program. We are glad to have your child and you participating. Our baseball program is one of the best school-based programs in the State of Iowa, and the Midwest. Our intent is to offer competitive baseball to all those that participate. Your children will learn to play the game competitively from the beginning. We teach playing the game with respect for the game, in addition to their teammates, coaches and opponents, all while having fun. As a result, our teams are highly successful in developing the skill set and mentality to become excellent student-athletes at Kennedy High School.

Every year, we look to field teams from ages 7 to 14, typically encompassing 16+ teams, 30+ coaches, and 180+ student-athletes. These numbers are very impressive, also making us one of the largest school-based programs of its type in the nation. Our program is proud to have developed countless All State baseball players, high school state baseball champions, and collegiate athletes. More so, it has developed, in part, young persons into outstanding citizens, parents, employees, and employers.

Our program is run by parent volunteers, in total contributing well over tens of thousands of hours a year. With the help of many schools and private property lots around the city, we play on the best fields in the greater Cedar Rapids area. And, we are priced more competitively than any other program in the area, making your investment in your child as attractive as possible.

We look to take guidance and instruction on what is to be taught from Coach Bret Hoyer and his staff at Kennedy High School. Although varying methods of developing your children into baseball athletes exist, with all having their merits, our program is structured to do it the "Cougar Way" – play with hustle, be fundamentally sound, and play hard ball. As Coach Hoyer says, "TODAY is a GREAT day to be a COUGAR!"

We firmly believe there is no finer group of student-athletes playing the game with respect; no better group of committed parents coaching our children; and no finer feeder program anywhere.

This handbook's intent is to deliver you information on who we are, what we do, and how we do it. Although there are fees attached to the program (unlike high school baseball), it is still a privilege to play within the Junior Cougar baseball program, and one we look for all players, coaches, and parents to both understand and appreciate.

Best of luck to all as they look to play within our competitive system and have fun growing up appreciating America's Pastime!

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Our Mission

The Cedar Rapids Junior Cougars will provide all Kennedy High School-bound student-athletes an opportunity learn baseball so that they can compete against the best competition in preparation for high school baseball, where they will then compete for a state championship every year.

Our Philosophy

- Have fun;
- Improve every day as a student-athlete;
- Exhibit good sportsmanship in both victory and defeat; and
- Learn to play the game the “Cougar Way”.

This is just a game. There is not one win or one loss that will define anyone’s effect on life. We believe that if you play the game the right way by doing your best always, you will not only succeed on the field but off the field as well. Baseball is a game that moves excruciating slow until it suddenly becomes one of the fastest moving sports. This requires everyone on the team to diligently drill to be ready in the slow times for the fast times that come along. To have fun, it requires success in executing in practice, to perform in games. We believe that doing it the “Cougar Way” is the best path to success. Taking steps forward, albeit at times they are little steps, is how we get better. And, since the inception of baseball nearly 200 years ago, nobody worth remembering made their mark without failure. Case in point: the greatest baseball players of all time typically only hit the ball successfully three out of ten times. So, to fail it to provide an opportunity to learn from the failure and get better. As is true at the high school level, we coach all players to concentrate on every pitch and give 100% effort on all plays. Simply, you play like you practice, and you play life you practice.

Coach’s Role

All our coaches are selected based on their ability to lead the team. While skill sets vary, all are passionate about the game, and educating all on how to respect the game and do it the “Cougar Way”. Through clinics and continued evaluation, all coaches are also coached on how to get better themselves. While flexibility is given to them to run their respective programs for the general good of all, no coach will mistreat any player in a way that is counter to the “Golden Rule” – treat others as you wish to be treated.

Parent’s Role

Parents are a vital part of the team. All are as important to the success of the team as the players. Be supportive of your child’s coaches, all players on the team, and, of course, your own child. Negative comments in front of your child or others on the team about any of these three parties inhibits improvement.

Parents are asked to adhere to their team’s schedule and continually communicate with the coaching staff. They should keep coaches updated on any problems that may arise, including notice on absences well in advance of said event the absence will affect.

All parents need to know that every coach has an open-door policy. At the lower ages (7U – 10U), parents should communicate with coaches as they see fit. At the older levels (11U – 14U), we ask that the player get involved with communicating on issues of playing time and / or position. This is standard practice at nearly every high school in the country, and most certainly at Kennedy High School. It allows your child the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, work through the conversation in a logical manner (versus an emotional manner), and gives them the opportunity to directly hear from the coach. Certainly, these conversations can include parents, but let your child take the lead.

Parents are asked to understand and respect the “24-hour rule”; please refrain from conversations with members of the coaching staff regarding your child’s role during a game / tournament until 24 hours has passed since the conclusion of the last game. Calmer heads always prevail!

Parents are expected to play a role in the team’s success, whether it be setting up schedules or hotels; field work; or coaching. Please offer your services, as everyone serves a role and is expected to pitch in.

Last, Junior Cougar coaches are not babysitters. Please do not treat practices as such. With all that goes into developing athletes, please stick around and help out. Truly, there is nothing needed to help out other than a giving attitude.

Expectations

We understand this is youth baseball. We still have expectations of your child when they step out onto the baseball diamond. These expectations are not only going to help your child to become a better player but will also help them succeed in other sports and other aspects of their life.

1. **Have fun!** Current St. Louis Cardinals manager, Mike Matheny, coached a youth sports team just prior to being named manager of the Cardinals. He wrote a letter to parents of youth baseball players that he was coaching and it “went viral” on the internet. Coach Hoyer asks all his high school parents to read this as well. You can find this article, and others of interest, at the end of the handbook.
2. **Be prepared to learn.** Learning is not always fun, nor is it necessary supposed to be. There are going to be times when practices will be tough and we will ask your child to do things new to them. We do not expect, nor will we ever expect them to pick up a concept the first few times that we go through it with them. However, the coaches will make every effort to teach your child in ways that will reach them and make learning the skill fun for them. We ask them not to goof off in practice since this takes away from their learning as well as the learning of others. Goofing off can cause injuries to your child, if not injuries to other children. It is not only the coach’s time that they are wasting; they are wasting their time to learn.
3. **Sportsmanship.** Youth sports has, at times, garnered a less-than-positive reputation around this country with numerous YouTube videos posted of inappropriate parent behavior at youth sporting events. The Junior Cougar organization, while not perfect, does have a very solid reputation of players, coaches, and parents conducting themselves in a respectful, sportsmanlike manner at games and tournaments. That being said; there is room for improvement in this area. Please remember that this is youth baseball, with amateur umpires who are doing the best they can on any given day. If we can all follow the golden rule of treating others as we’d like to be treated, there would not be any issues with sportsmanship.
4. **Hustle.** We firmly believe that hustling will make up for mental mistakes most of the time. We don’t care if a child makes a mistake, since those can be corrected in practice or with repetition. However, we view that the lack of hustle hurts the team. We will tell the players that during practices you can hustle to the next station and rest when you get there.
5. **Fees.** For ages 7U, the investment in your child is \$200 to Junior Cougars. For ages 8U – 14U, the investment is \$300. The first \$100 is due by October 1, with the remaining balance due by February 1. Checks are given to your team’s head coach, who in turn sends the team’s balance due soon after those dates to the league treasurer.

6. **Be on time to practice and games.** Be at practice or games when coaches give you a time to be there. “Cougar time” means 10 minutes earlier than scheduled – “if you arrive 5 minutes early, you’re already late”. Your child’s position on the team is very important so please use absences diligently, and responsibly. Please try to plan vacations around the season’s games and practices. We keep the number of players on the roster down to increase the number of practice and game repetitions the players receive. However, a disadvantage of this is realized when we have multiple families leave for a vacation, leaving us shorthanded for games / tournaments. And, when baseball is in-season, we expect it to be the priority sport.
7. **Attire.** Junior Cougars emulates the high school program. The uniform to be worn for practices and games is the issued green Cougars baseball jersey and green hat. In addition, solid gray pants, green socks, green belt, and black cleats are to be worn. Players are not allowed to wear jewelry, braided or unbraided necklaces, wristbands, bracelets, one-armed sleeves, eye black, or tape, with the exception being for religious or medical reasons (religious items must be worn under the uniform and taped to the body; medical items may be worn on the outside and must be taped). Sunglasses on the bill covering the “C” is not allowed. If you take sunglasses on the field (because the sun is shining), make sure they are being worn correctly. Do not wear sweatshirts or stocking caps; instead layer underneath with green sleeves that cover both arms. Last, all players are expected to be clean cut.
8. **Schedule.** Your team’s schedule will be finalized following PST (Positive Sports Training) League meetings held in the early part of the year. Tournaments are scheduled at the preference of the head coach and team, collectively. Knowing our intent is to promote playing winning baseball over simply settling for winning baseball games, all teams are encouraged to compete at the highest level possible to experience the toughest baseball schedule possible. Please note: there is a fine balance between beating everyone without much effort and consistently losing to very good teams. We ask that coaches work to schedule games that make kids better over the years versus collecting trophies.
9. **Practice location.** Practice locations are assigned by age group. Fields are difficult to acquire / access so teams may need to practice at multiple locations throughout the year. Teams using said fields are responsible for their maintenance and upkeep, which is the responsibility of all families and not just coaches.
10. **Fundraising.** In conjunction with the high school baseball program’s fundraising efforts, we are extending a unique opportunity to all Junior Cougars to offset your fees. At the end of this document, you will find information on how to have some of all your fees eliminated while supporting the high school team’s fundraising efforts. There is no individual team fundraising allowed outside of this offering.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of tournament and leagues does the Junior Cougar baseball program participate in? All levels typically participate in sanctioned USSSA tournaments and PTS (Positive Team Sports) league. Although some teams play outside this, we recommend playing in well managed tournaments where teams experience competitive baseball.

What is the cost? For ages 7U, the investment is \$250. For ages 10U – 14U, the investment is \$300. For this investment, you receive...

- USSSA registration fees

- PST League registration fees
- Insurance for players and coaches
- Funds to maintain, repair and replace equipment needed to maintain baseball fields we use
- Field equipment and materials to conduct practices and games
- Representation at USSSA and PST annual meetings
- Portable restroom services at our fields
- Website services to promote and conduct Junior Cougar activities
- Access to Kennedy batting cages and bullpen mounds, as well as indoor space
- Access to Coach Bret Hoyer for instruction and consultation
- Junior Cougar Night / recognition at a Kennedy varsity baseball game
- Game shirt and hat

Beyond that, it is up to each team to collectively determine which tournaments to participate in, and fund those outside either the \$250 or \$300 investment listed above. Typically, most kids are all in for around \$600 - \$700, all in(excluding overnight stays / travel expenses).

There is minimal travel at the 7U level, which also limits the investment. We do encourage all levels to travel to at least one tournament outside Eastern Iowa to compete against teams they will normally not see.

Are there other costs? You are responsible for equipment needed to play the game, such as gloves, bats, and bags. Each new team (typically 7U, understandably) gets up to \$250 to purchase catcher's equipment and other items needed to start a new team (tee, net, balls, etc.), based on submission of receipts and approval by Connie Caviness.

How often do teams practice? The is up to the individual team. In 2018, we will provide modulized practice plans designed by Kennedy Cougar coaching staff personnel and highly recognized collegiate coaches, with the emphasis on development and playing winning baseball. Attention will be paid to arm care, certainly. Please note; nothing comes overnight. It had been proven that it takes over 10,000 hours of correct and proper repetition to master any craft (see: "The Outliers", by Malcolm Gladwell). The expectation is that your child work on their craft outside of Junior Cougar sanctioned practices. Winter workouts occur 1 – 2 nights a week. In the early spring, practices occur 3 -5 nights a week. Baseball become a top priority once practices begin in late March, where attendance is required. Practices, games and tournaments continue after the state baseball tournament in late June / early August, where players continue to develop, yet is not mandated to conflict with fall school sports.

What level will my child play at? We categorize teams based on ability by color: gold, green, and white. The intent is to play at the highest level of competition at each group, so that your child learns to be competitive, yet has fun. All gold teams play AAA or higher in sanctioned leagues and USSSA tournaments.

How many players are on each team? The goal is to have between 11 – 13 players per team, based on inventory and appetite.

Who will be coaching teams? Right now, we rely on parents to volunteer. We will not go away from that thought, but will select coaches based on belief in the system, ability to coach the game as prescribed by the Cougar program, and temperament.

How are statistics kept? All head coaches are responsible to record all games (scrimmages included) and share with the team and the organization using the approved program for the season (likely "I-Score").

How can I help? Outside of coaching, all families are required to participate in field maintenance and help with team logistics, as mandated by the team's head coach.

Who do I call with questions? Your first call should always be to your team's coach. Beyond that, you may reach out to the appropriate age group director (see below). In the event you do not receive an answer that

satisfies you, you may reach out to Junior Cougar President Bret Hoyer. We ask that you follow this hierarchy, with the exception only being with mistreatment of your child and/or you with matters not related to playing time.

- 7U – 8U: Nate Burkert: Nathan.Burkert@verizonwireless.com or 319-360-9377
Amy Strasburger: amy@katalystsystemsimpact.com or 319-270-3237
- 9U – 11U: Tom Doyle: tsdoyle27@yahoo.com or 319-654-6901
- 12U – 14U: John Behn: john.behn@hotmail.com or 319-360-1689

Does my child need to live within the Kennedy School district? Yes.

Letter from Mike Matheny.

I always said that the only team that I would coach would be a team of orphans, and now here we are. The reason for me saying this is that I have found the biggest problem with youth sports has been the parents. I think that it is best to nip this in the bud right off the bat. I think the concept that I am asking all of you to grab is that this experience is ALL about the boys. If there is anything about it that includes you, we need to make a change of plans. My main goals are as follows:

(1) to teach these young men how to play the game of baseball the right way,

(2) to be a positive impact on them as young men, and

(3) do all of this with class.

We may not win every game, but we will be the classiest coaches, players, and parents in every game we play. The boys are going to play with a respect for their teammates, opposition, and the umpires no matter what.

That said; I need to let you know where I stand. I have no hidden agenda. I have no ulterior motive other than what I said about my goals. I also need all of you to know that my priorities in life will most likely be a part of how I coach, and the expectations I have for the boys. My Christian faith is the guide for my life and I have never been one for forcing my faith down someone's throat, but I also believe it to be cowardly, and hypocritical to shy away from what I believe. You as parents need to know for yourselves and for your boys, that when the opportunity presents itself, I will be honest with what I believe. That may make some people uncomfortable, but I did that as a player, and I hope to continue it in any endeavor that I get into. I am just trying to get as many potential issues out in the open from the beginning. **I believe that the biggest role of the parent is to be a silent source of encouragement.** I think if you ask most boys what they would want their parents to do during the game; they would say "NOTHING". Once again, this is ALL about the boys. I believe that a little league parent feels that they must participate with loud cheering and "Come on, let's go, you can do it", which just adds more pressure to the kids. I will be putting plenty of pressure on these boys to play the game the right way with class, and respect, and they will put too much pressure on themselves and each other already. You as parents need to be the silent, constant, source of support.

Let the record stand now that we will not have good umpiring. This is a fact, and the sooner we all understand that, the better off we will be. We will have balls that bounce in the dirt that will be called strikes, and we will have balls over our heads that will be called strikes. Likewise, the opposite will happen with the strike zone while we are pitching. The boys will not be allowed at any time to show any emotion against the umpire. **They will not shake their head, or pout, or say anything to the umpire. This is my job, and I will do it well.** I once got paid to handle those guys, and I will let them know when they need to hear something. I am really doing all of you parents a favor that you probably don't realize at this point. I have taken out any work at all for you except to get them there on time, and enjoy. **The thing that these boys need to hear is that you enjoyed watching them and you hope that they had fun.** I know that it is going to be very hard not to coach

from the stands and yell encouraging things to your son, but I am confident that this works in a negative way for their development and their enjoyment. Trust me on this. I am not saying that you cannot clap for your kids when they do well. I am saying that if you hand your child over to me to coach them, then let me do that job.

A large part of how your child improves is your responsibility. The difference for kids at this level is the amount of repetition that they get. This goes with pitching, hitting and fielding. As a parent, you can help tremendously by playing catch, throwing batting practice, hitting ground balls, or finding an instructor who will do this in your place. The more of this your kids can get, the better. This is the one constant that I have found with players that reached the major leagues....someone spent time with them away from the field.

I am completely fine with your son getting lessons from whomever you see fit. The only problem I will have is if your instructor is telling your son not to follow the plan of the team. I will not teach a great deal of mechanics at the beginning, but I will teach mental approach, and expect the boys to comply. If I see something that your son is doing mechanically that is drastically wrong, I will talk with the instructor and clear things up. The same will hold true with pitching coaches. We will have a pitching philosophy and will teach the pitchers and catchers how to call a game, and why we choose the pitches we choose. There is no guessing. We will have a reason for the pitches that we throw. A pitching coach will be helpful for the boys to get their arms in shape and be ready to throw when spring arrives. Every boy on this team will be worked as a pitcher. We will not over use these young arms and will keep close watch on the number of innings that the boys are throwing.

I will be throwing so much info at these boys that they are going to suffer from overload for a while, but eventually they are going to get it. I am a stickler about the thought process of the game. I will be talking non-stop about situational hitting, situational pitching, and defensive preparation. The question that they are going to hear the most is "What were you thinking?" What were you thinking when you threw that pitch? What were you thinking during that at bat? What were you thinking before the pitch was thrown, were you anticipating anything? I am a firm believer that this game is more mental than physical, and the mental may be more difficult, but can be taught and can be learned by a 10- and 11-year-old. If it sounds like I am going to be demanding of these boys, you are exactly right. I am demanding their attention, and the other thing that I am going to require is effort. Their attitude, their concentration, and their effort are the things that they can control. If they give me these things every time they show up, they will have a great experience.

The best situation for all of us is for you to plan on handing these kids over to me and the assistant coaches when you drop them off, and plan on them being mine for the 2 or so hours that we have scheduled for a game, or the time that we have scheduled for the practice. I would like for these boys to have some responsibility for having their own water, not needing you to keep running to the concession stand, or having parents behind the dugout asking their son if they are thirsty, or hungry, or too hot, and I would appreciate if you would share this information with other invited guests...like grandparents. If there is an injury, obviously we will get you to help, but besides that, let's pretend that they are at work for a short amount of time and that you have been granted the pleasure of watching. I will have them at games early so we can get stretched and loosened up, and I will have a meeting with just the boys after the game. After the meeting, they are all yours again. As I am writing this, I sound like the little league Nazi, but I believe that this will make things easier for everyone involved.

I truly believe that the family is the most important institution in the lives of these guys. That said; I think that the family events are much more important than the sports events. I just ask that you are considerate of the rest of the team and let the team manager, and myself know when you will miss, and to let us know as soon as possible. I know that there will be times when I am going to miss either for family reasons, for other commitments. If your son misses a game or a practice, it is not the end of the world, but there may be some sort of repercussion, just out of respect for the kids that put the effort into making it. The kind of repercussions could possibly be running, altered playing time, or position in the batting order.

Speaking of batting order, I would like to address that right from the top as well seeing that next to playing time this is the second most complained about issue, or actually tied for second with position on the defensive field. Once again, I need you to know that I am trying to develop each boy individually, and I will give them a chance to learn and play any position that they are interested in. I also believe that this team will be competitive and when we get into situations where we are focusing on winning; like a tournament for example; we are going to put the boys in the position that will give the team the best opportunity. I will talk with the boys individually and have them tell me what their favorite position is and what other position they would like to learn about. **As this season progresses, there is a chance that your son may be playing a position that they don't necessarily like, but I will need your support about their role on the team.** I know that times have changed, but one of the greatest lessons that my father taught me was that my coach was always right...even when he was wrong. The principle is a great life lesson about how things really work. I hope that I will have enough humility to come to your son if I treated him wrong and apologize. Our culture has lost this respect for authority mostly because the kids hear the parents constantly complaining about the teachers and coaches of the child.

I need all of you to know that we are most likely going to lose many games this year. The main reason is that we need to find out how we measure up with the local talent pool. The only way to do this is to play against some of the best teams. I am convinced that if the boys put their work in at home, and give me their best effort, that we will be able to play with just about any team. Time will tell. I also believe that there is enough local talent that we will not have to do a large amount of travel, if any. This may be disappointing for those of you who only play baseball and look forward to the out of town experiences, but I also know that this is a relief for the parents that have traveled throughout the US and Canada for hockey and soccer looking for better competition. In my experiences, we have traveled all over the Midwest and have found just as good competition right in our back yard. If this season goes well, we will entertain the idea of travel in the future.

The boys will be required to show up ready to play every time they come to the field. Shirts tucked in, hats on straight, and pants not drooping down to their knees. There is not an excuse for lack of hustle on a baseball field. From the first step outside the dugout they will hustle. They will have a fast jog to their position, to the plate, and back to the bench when they make an out. We will run out every hit harder than any team we will play, and will learn how to always back up a play to help our teammates. Every single play, every player will be required to move to a spot. Players that do not hustle and run out balls will not play. The boys will catch on to this quickly. **The game of baseball becomes very boring when players are not thinking about the next play and what they possibly could do to help the team.** Players on the bench will not be messing around. I will constantly be talking with them about situations and what they would be doing if they were in a specific position, or if they were the batter. **There is as much to learn on the bench as there is on the field if the boys want to learn.** All of this will take some time for the boys to conform to. They are boys and I am not trying to take away from that, but I do believe that they can bear down and concentrate hard for just a little while during the games and practices.

I know this works because this was how I was taught the game and how our parents acted in the stands. We started our little league team when I was 10 years old in a little suburb of Columbus, Ohio. We had a very disciplined coach that expected the same from us. We committed 8 summers to this man and we were rewarded for our efforts. I went to Michigan, one went to Duke, one to Miami of Florida, two went to North Carolina, one went to Central Florida, one went to Kent State, and most of the others played smaller division one or division two baseball. Four of us went on to play professionally. This was coming from a town where no one had ever been recruited by any colleges. I am not saying that this is what is going to happen to our boys, but what I do want you to see is that this system works. I know that right now you are asking yourself if this is what you want to get yourself into and I understand that for some of you it may not be the right fit. **I also think that there is a great opportunity for these boys to grow together and learn some lessons that will go beyond their baseball experience.** Let me know as soon as possible whether this is a commitment that you and your son want to make.

Thanks,

Mike Matheny

ARTICLE BY CAL RIPKEN, JR.

For a youth coach, nothing beats a group of supportive parents who get their kids to practices and games on time, pitch in when asked, and encourage the players throughout the course of the season. There is a fine line, however, between being supportive and getting in the way.

It is important for parents to support their kid's athletic interests and to encourage their participation in sports. The importance of maintaining an active lifestyle cannot be underestimated when it comes to developing healthy habits that will lead to a better quality of life as kids get older. Understanding how exercise and sports participation can help prevent obesity and the health risks that come with being overweight is an important life lesson.

It's just as important, however, for kids to learn what it means to be part of a team and to perform in an environment that is separated from too much parental interference. Of course, kids love to see and hear the support of their families while competing, and coaches love having a group of supportive parents. But, unless you are an actual member of the coaching staff or are assisting the team in another official capacity, give your kids some space when they are competing.

Getting too involved in the learning process that kids go through when participating in youth sports can lead to confusion that results in on-field paralysis. If your child is listening for your voice instead of focusing on what the coaches might be saying, or is trying to listen to both of you at the same time, he or she is either going to wait too long to react or is going to respond inappropriately at least in the coach's view.

If you want to coach, sign up for that responsibility before the season starts. Otherwise, save your coaching for the backyard. Even if you shout out an instruction that your kid follows and you know that you are right, if it's not what the child is being instructed to do by the coach, you are causing the team to function less efficiently and undermining the team's authority figures.

That type of behavior does not set a good example for our kids. Throughout life we are faced with situations in which we work for somebody who has a different approach than we do or we are assigned to work on a project with a group of people who may think differently or might not be true team players. In those instances, it is our responsibility to learn to function efficiently within that environment. Teaching our kids to freelance or deviate from the system that has been established is setting them up for a lifetime of frustration and other personal and professional difficulties. Youth sports provides parents with the best of both worlds: You get an opportunity to be close to your kids and support them they know you are there and enjoy having you around while at the same time letting go and allowing them to learn how to function independently, socialize and interact with authority figures.

If something serious happens like an injury or illness you are there to take care of everything. If something good happens you are there to shout your approval. If something bad happens you can provide encouragement. Instead of getting caught up in what the coach is doing or trying to correct every mistake, enjoy this opportunity to be close to your kids and allow them to do something they love while still giving them the chance to grow up and expand their horizons.

Sharing the sports experience should be something that parents and kids look forward to, something that creates wonderful memories that can last a lifetime. Sports are meant to be a diversion, not a source of stress,

tension or disagreement between you and your child or you and your child's coach. Show up, support your kids, play with them at home, and most of all, enjoy the moment. It goes by too fast not to.

Here are some guidelines to help parents and their kids enjoy the sports experience:

Let the players play and the coaches coach. Perhaps you played a sport at a high level and hope to pass that knowledge on to your children. Do it. But remember, there is a time and a place for everything. Your kids are tuned into your voice, so if a play is going on during a game and you are shouting instructions, your child is going to hear them. What do you think is going to happen if the coaches and other parents are shouting as well? Maybe you all are shouting the same instructions or maybe you are shouting three different sets of instructions. On the field, when the game is being played, the players should be listening to their coaches for better or worse. Otherwise they may do something that disrupts the team, and as they get older they may not respect or listen to their coaches the way that they should.

It's okay when you are playing in the backyard at home or watching a game together on television to point out different methods of doing certain things on a ball field. Those are great teachable moments that allow parents and kids to bond through sports. But, when the game starts, the coach is the designated authority figure, and it's important for kids to understand the importance of respecting and listening to those in positions of authority as they grow up.

Stay out of the dugout or bench areas. The dugout or bench area is for the team and the coaches. It's a place where they go to listen, observe, support their teammates, be taught and unite as a group. Give them their space and let them become a team. This area is the coach's domain. Sometimes things need to be said to athletes of all ages that are not necessarily what parents want to hear. Sometimes kids say things that parents don't want to hear. And sometimes, coaches must have brutally honest conversations with players or about players that they should be able to have without worrying about who is standing next to them listening.

Make sure your kids have everything they need equipment, water, sun screen, sports drinks and so on with them on the bench before the game starts. From that point on, they are part of the team. You are there to support them, but not to take care of them. They need to understand the necessity of managing their equipment, paying attention to what is happening on the field, supporting their teammates and giving their undivided attention to their coaches. These are the responsibilities that come with being on a team, and understanding them is an important part of the maturing process. It is not only inappropriate for parents to be walking in and out of the bench area with snacks, ice towels, sun screen and drinks, but also it causes confusion and really hinders a coaches ability to communicate successfully with his or her team.

If you really feel that there is an urgent need for you to talk to your child or to give him or her something, wait until there is a stoppage in play and ask the kid to come and see you, making sure that he or she is back on the bench before play starts up again. Remember, there is going to be a day in the future when you can't be there to do everything for your child. The time to begin preparing for that day is now. He or she has the team to depend on when something goes wrong or when a need arises,

Teach your kids to respect the coaches. Coaches are educators, plain and simple. Just like a teacher, a good coach is someone a child is going to look up to and potentially remember for the rest of his or her life. Because kids generally enjoy sports and look forward to their games and practices, they may remember all their coaches good and bad. While it's okay to teach your way at home in the backyard, remind your child that when he or she is on the field the coach is the boss.

Your kids should go to practice understanding that they will try their best always to do what the coach asks of them even if it's different from what mom or dad says. Nothing turns a coach off more than a kid who says, "my dad says I should do it this way." Enough comments like that from kids will drive an adult out of coaching altogether, which is not healthy at a time when it is hard for youth leagues to find truly committed coaches.

I doubt that many parents would send their kids to school without teaching them to respect the teacher. There may be more than one way to solve a math problem, but imagine what would happen if a kid refused to perform a task that was being taught to the entire class because mom or dad said to do it a different way.

There are great coaches out there who have so much to offer kids and many instances of successful adults citing coaches as the most important influences in their lives. Because of the time they are committing and the impact they can have on your children, they deserve the respect of you and your kids. So, make sure you give them and your children the space they need to be successful.

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