

INSIDE LACROSSE EDITORIAL : The PURPLE CARD

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- Crista Samaras

To all of the lacrosse parents out there who continually whip yourselves into a frenzy during your daughter's games and practices, I need to pose a question:

What on earth do you realistically expect of Susie?

Do you suppose that forcing her into organized sports and guiding, er, yelling from the sidelines will help foster a decorated and successful career in the sports world?

Will ranting on the sidelines at a youth game or summer tournament help her chances for more playing time or a college scholarship?

Might insulting referees-of whom we expect as much perfection as a garden manicured by Martha Stewart- put everyone on her team at an even steeper disadvantage than you are likely imagining? Will ranting on the sidelines at a youth game or summer tournament help her chances for more playing time or a college scholarship?

Will berating opposing players over your breath do anything other than embarrass your daughter?

Parents who are raucous, uncontrollable and stubborn are more likely to burst than Al Roker's belt buckle, as they continue to infest youth sports events with poor sportsmanship and bad tempers. If you adhere to the ideals of the poignant saying "attitude reflects leadership", consider what type of leader you are to your child . . . on the sideline.

Sideline control of parents is an issue of impending interest, indecision and controversy. With the January conviction of Thomas Junta, the Massachusetts ice hockey father recently found guilty of manslaughter after beating another dad to death, many organizations are taking aim at a problem some have deemed an epidemic in America. Sports Illustrated writer Rick Reilly has dedicated a column to this country-wide problem, offering humorous anecdotes. But funny it is not.

You know those parents. Maybe a little too well? Are you that parent? Have you ever considered that a coach might exclude your daughter from a team, tournament, game or camp to avoid having to deal with you? Do you think coaches get paid enough to coach fabulous kids if the players' parents are exactly the opposite?

The problem of sideline rage has become more prevalent and heated as incidents continue to occur at events featuring children as young as 6 year olds. When did it become more than a game? When did parent's add "at all cost" to the athletic canon of youth athletics?

The core issue revolves around one simple concept- perspective. How high are the stakes for your kids in sports? Is getting the right call from a volunteer referee (probably a high school kid) at a little league game worth assaulting another human being, who in another life circumstance would never provoke such rage?

Is winning so important to parents that losing all sense of the decency and appropriate behaviors expected of pre-schoolers is now acceptable? I understand encouragement is essential to sports and life. There needs to be support. As a lifelong athlete who has suffered more last minute losses than wins- some on the whim of a referee's suspect call- I can grasp "getting emotional". Believe me, I get wanting everything to be fair. But, life's not fair- every kid has heard that question stumper ad nauseum. Have you ever said that to Susie?

As a former college and now a high school coach, I have a nano-inking about how it must feel to sit and watch your kids go through the pains of losing and the many injustices accompanying games: cheating, injury, etc.

As an athlete, however, isn't it adversity that makes us stronger? When I ran my college sprints, two quotes always strobed on the back of my eyelids as I squinted in pain, racing to the finish line:

"What does not kill us, makes us stronger"

"It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog"

As naïve as I may have been between ages 18-22, my athletic endeavors were always based on a simple concept- work hard. As Maryland head coach, Cindy Timchal once told me, "Maybe your best isn't good enough. But, maybe it is."

I remember at my last college game, a game we were expected to win on a day when my best wasn't good enough. I broke down to my mother in the parking lot after the crowd left, the reporters stopped questioning and my career came to a screaming halt.

She just hugged me. And I just cried. And right then, that's what I needed. I didn't need to hear how it was the ref's fault or my coach made a wrong decision or the other team cheated or that my mom was going to jail for punishing a Penn State mother.

Across the country, organizations are taking aim at this problem-hoping to create some sort of preventative system that will eliminate another hockey-dad incident. In places like Jupiter, FL, parents are required to sign sideline behavior contracts and take a class outlining what is appropriate. The American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) created "Kids Zone" on the education agenda in an attempt to curb poor sideline behavior. Now required are (!) badges worn by all AYSO fans and supporters, (2) signs advertising behavior standards and (3) a pledge all AYSO parents sign holding them to outlined standards.

And in Anne Arundel County, MD – considered the mecca of girls lacrosse- basketball leagues have executed "silent" days where games are held in complete silence except for the hustle of the athletes, the direction of the coaches and the rulings of the referees. Can you imagine that world? Can you imagine a world where referees are getting offered assault insurance?

To quote early 1990's weight loss guru Susan Powter: "Stop the insanity!" How do we address the problem in our sport? Do we need to take drastic measures? Have we, as lacrosse fans and sports aficionados, fallen victim to the spreading sideline rage disease?

Perhaps there is one possible solution: the Purple Card. Womenslacrosse.com- the company known for its recruiting tournaments and play days- has taken an initiative through its referees to eliminate potential sideline blow-ups. Nationally ranked umpire Bonnye Lang came up with this idea, one that could help lacrosse guide its parents to enjoyable sideline conduct by addressing the issue immediately.

Because of this ongoing rift between parents ranting, jeering and causing commotion on the sidelines and the coaches/referees doing their jobs, **womenslacrosse.com now requires all referees at all sponsored events to carry the "purple card"**. Unlike the red, yellow and green cards, a purple card is issued to sideliners who are disrupting- in the opinion of the referee- the honorable environment of the lacrosse game or event. It is a public admonition and a fierce warning to attendees to consider not only their children, but every athlete, coach, and fan trying to enjoy a game of lacrosse.

Since 2000, womenslacrosse.com has used the Purple Card and been successful in curbing poor sideline behavior and fostering a supportive environment for everyone. Is it appropriate? Will it work?

How many times would you have given yourself a Purple Card?

Your actions have run contrary to the high level of sportsmanship expected of participants at all events sponsored by

womenslacrosse.com

CLEAN UP YOUR ACT

or you will be officially escorted off the field and from the site of this event.



Your behavior does not reflect the "Spirit of the Game"

Inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated by anyone.

Period.

Curbing commotion on the sidelines since 2000.