

## Tips for Being a Supportive Parent

by Bob Carpenter

Being the parent of a high school interscholastic athlete can be an extremely exciting experience. Barrington (Illinois) High School has between 800 and 1,000 young men and women participating in 23 sports on 73 different levels of competition. Participating in this adventure with a son or daughter can be and should be a cherished activity. Parents' support is very important to these athletes, the high school, and the community.

To make this cooperative effort the most rewarding it can be for the parents and the athletes, following are some thoughts collected over the years on being a supportive athletic parent.

- 1. Be positive.** Being on a high school team is quite an accomplishment. Don't let playing time dictate the athlete's happiness. Celebrate the fact they were good enough to make a team. When you consider over 300 Little Leaguers end up as 10-15 seniors on the varsity baseball team, each year they can remain part of a team is cause for celebration.
- 2. Be supportive of the coaching staff in front of your son/daughter.** Nothing can erode the intricate fabric of teamwork faster than athletes doubting the capabilities of their coaches. It can be a cancer that affects performance, confidence, and the edge needed to compete. Most teams are so evenly matched, many times it is this little extra that can spell victory or defeat. Believe me the coaches are trying to do their best at every moment. No one is born a coach; it takes years to develop the technical, psychological and social skill necessary in the profession. You may not realize that the administration of all duties a head coach must perform can easily be more time consuming than actual "on the field" coaching. If you have concerns, see the coach. He or she will listen, appreciate your confidentiality, and give you a timely response.
- 3. Be part of the parent network,** Whether you are part of a booster club or not, very special relationships can be fostered over the careers of our athletes by socializing with other parents. This socialization can take place at games, after games, at team dinners, etc. Parents need support too! Be positive with each other, and don't hesitate to remind each other about remaining positive at all times. If you hear a rumor that concerns you about any athletic issue, call someone to verify or clarify, what you've heard. Don't perpetuate a rumor by passing it on or by remaining silent about an issue that could affect a program.



4. **Booster Parents.** If you are an active booster parent, first, God bless you. Be satisfied with supporting the athletic department without ever thinking that you have to donate to allow your son/daughter to play. I have heard that misconception on more than one occasion. Donate to help make the experience for every athlete the best it can possibly be. The support we receive is extremely welcome in providing our athletes with much appreciated equipment and supplies. Booster clubs do make a difference, but the spirit should be focused on the total program.
  
5. **Winning and Losing.** To say winning and losing is not important is not true. If it weren't, we wouldn't keep score. The higher the level of play each athlete achieves, the greater the emphasis will be on being competitive. We take a great deal of pride in the traditions of our accomplishments; preparing for that competition is the athlete's ultimate goal. When things are not going well for your son/daughter or for the team, that is when parents need to be most positive and supportive. If we strive toward making our programs consistently competitive, the success will take care of itself.
  
6. **College Scholarships.** Having lofty expectations for our children is a normal, healthy, challenging goal. In striving for these expectations, we must also be realistic. Not everyone can receive a college scholarship, nor should your son/daughter's athletic success be measured by the number of offers he/she receives. We have received our fair share of scholarships based on all the hard work you, the athletes and coaches have put in. Our coaches will help individuals and parents in whatever way they can to find an opportunity for those who wish to pursue collegiate careers. They will not, however, recommend a school at which the athlete cannot potentially be successful. Let the coach know if you have any special needs or assistance. If they have that knowledge, they possibly can find a school to accommodate those needs and fit the profile for your son/daughter. To borrow a quote from my predecessor, Bob Madding, "The success of our athletic program is not dictated by the athlete alone. Our school's teams, students and adult supporters are engaged in a joint venture. If the contribution of either is less than total, everyone stands to lose."

"We have a tremendous amount of support for our athletes by the coaches, the administration and the school board. We thank you for your support, too. One final thought, publicly, be positive, privately — be more positive. Good luck, and I sincerely hope you enjoy the athletic experience your son/daughter will go through. The four years goes extremely fast, be a partner in the adventure with your athlete and the school. We need your support, thank you for your participation.

Carpenter is athletic director of Barrington High School, Barrington, Illinois. Reprinted from "Illinois Interscholastic."