



Overzealous Parents: Their affect on the game and their kids.

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One of the best things about the game of hockey is the support of the parents. One of the worst parts about the game of hockey is also the support of the parents.

This problem is the biggest issue surrounding the sport of amateur hockey yet it is also probably the most denied issue in the game as well. Most parents will never admit to you or anyone that they are over involved and living vicariously through their son or daughter. But unfortunately many do this and some may not even realize that this is happening. That is where the majority of things go astray. Before it is even realized, parents have inadvertently, most of the time, put such an unbearable amount of stress on their kids that they are suffering some major anxiety. This problem is not age specific. I have been around the game at a high level for some time now and have seen this happen all the way down through the younger ages to as low as 5 year olds. Dads envisioning their sons as the next Wayne Gretzky and doing anything in their power to help their child to obtain this lofty goal.

As a side note I will throw a little statistic in here. And this is published by the Central Scouting Agency. For those of you who don't know who they are, that is the organization responsible for scouting future NHL'ers. As per them, only about one in a million ever make it to the National Hockey League.

Effectively that means that 999,999 of you fathers can back off your sons and relax on the dreams of getting them a NHL job. For the other one out there whom may get a shot at playing for a NHL team, I'd still hold off on settling on an agent for a few years.

Most of the problem comes in at the pee wee or bantam ages. This is when the kids start to develop and there are noticeable differences in the skill level of the players. They start to pull away at earlier ages but at around this time if your child is playing at the high AAA level, then they are looked at for higher levels of hockey and parents start to obsess over size, skill, and where they are playing. I spend a great deal of



time in rinks watching this level because my little brother is 14 years old and plays AAA hockey for a team here in Detroit. I am often appalled by the number of parents who approach me and question me relentlessly on the skill of their sons. My response is often a smirk with a headshake and the comment 'they are 14 years old. They only need to worry about having a good time with the game and their friends.' Unfortunately that is not a good enough answer for most and they still put an exorbitant amount of pressure on their kids. Doing does this nothing for them and usually damages them and their hopes of just wanting to play the game.

Some parents are under the mind set that by being hard on their athlete will encourage them to perform better. Some parents even have offered bribes and incentives for their kids to perform well and score a set amount of goals. Bribery is no way to encourage your child into playing a good game. I have found that the best way to motivate a player and a team is by positive re-enforcement. Even if your child does not have a good game. Dwelling on that while in the car is no way to fix it or encourage better play. Chances are, if they played a bad game, made a mistake, or are stressed about a particular loss; they already know this before exiting the locker. Most parents should just back off and let their kids come down from the loss.

"I usually ask him how he did, and they are usually honest with you. You have to encourage them. When they play bad, you just have to tell them they are maybe trying too hard and that of course defeats the purpose. Just praise them when they do good, and if they make a mistake ask them how they played and go from there," said Dennis Gazley, father of a Bantam Major AAA player.

Being positive with them will help them ease out of a stressful game. It is important, especially at the younger ages to try and help them through a situation that involves them feeling bad about a game rather than add to the dismay they are already feeling.

Another big problem that too many parents contribute to is what I call the "GM complex". Too many parents envision themselves as the General Manager of their son or daughters youth hockey team. Making comments on players, other parents and even the coaching styles and techniques of their athletes bench bosses. Though this is usually done to their friends and rarely heard by anyone else, the act of this is purely detrimental to the concept of team. Parents are fully permitted to be dissatisfied with the on goings or interworkings of the team, but speaking out on them to other parents is not a good idea. These types of things have tendencies in reaching back to the coaches and then causing problems for the parents who said it and usually their athlete who had absolutely nothing to do with the incident.

There is never anything wrong with parents trying to be actively involved in their son or daughter's pursuits in sports. But with that said, there is a fine line that must not't be crossed. A line that divides a casual active observer parent who is interested



solely in the well being of their athlete, from the overzealous “GM complex” parent, who no matter what, is never satisfied, always unhappy, and knows exactly what to do to make the situation better.

Like I said earlier, most parents are truly unaware they are putting too much pressure on their athlete or even that they are too involved. Pointing this out to them is a dangerous endeavor; normally it is followed by hard feelings. The only cure is to hope that they realize it. It is unfortunate, but I have seen kids who are very good at hockey and who have a could be promising future in the game up and quit from the sport that they love because there parents are pushing too hard on them to achieve and advance to the next level of the game.

My advice to you all out there is simple. Let your child first and foremost have fun. Don't push them to the next level; don't come down on them if they don't do well. Let your son or daughter advance and achieve the next level of the game when they want to and when they can. Don't try and get them somewhere they either don't want to be or can't be.

I know it may be hard to believe but kids have stress just like you and I, with school with growing up, the last thing I think a parent would want their kid to have is stress over one of the things they do for enjoyment and in many ways what they do to escape the pressure of everything else.

There is nothing wrong with being an involved parent. Go to the games, go to the practices, but in the end, on those car rides home, be positive no matter what. Your child could have accidentally fired the puck into his own net on a clearing attempt and that goal may have won the game for the opponent. Even then find the positives from the game, point those out, and then laugh at the mistake with your child, make them feel better, not worse about mistakes made in the course of the game. Explain to them that as long as we learn from our errors, they can actually be beneficial.

Good luck with this and try and picture yourself as going to the extremes. If this is you then take stock of what you are doing and ease off. The result will be a happy hockey player, a happy team, and, more success.