

Proactive Coaching Newsletter 32 --- A Father's Promise

We are going to take a break from the qualities of great coaches to present an insightful perspective on parenting an athlete. One of our most requested presentations is The Role of Parents in Athletics from the perspective of the athlete.

This is a different look. It is from a father to his young children who are just about to begin their sport experience. These are excerpts from an article written by a college soccer coach, John Keating, entitled "A Father's Covenant".

To: Jack (7), Dublin (5), Finn (2) and Savannah (born June, 2010) Keating;

"I'm writing this piece while you are all young. I have been coaching for a long time now and have seen the good, the bad and the ugly in youth sports. I've learned a lot about adults and children through coaching and even more about how adults treat their children when it comes to sports. Some of it is not so great, and some of it is exactly how it should be done.

I want to make sure you hold me accountable for being a good [sport] dad so I am going to write down some promises and make them public so that you (and your mama) can let me know if I'm doing okay as a [sport] dad and remind me about my promises if I break one. So here goes (and remember, I'm going to do my best, okay?)

1. Before we ever get involved with "organized" [sport], I promise to play lots of [sport] with you in the back yard.
2. I promise that we will play more pickup games in the backyard than you'll ever play with an "actual" team.
3. I promise to spend time watching your coach in action before I let you play for him or her by watching to see if he or she kicks the ice bucket after a loss or smiles regardless of the score, yells at players through the game or offers quiet but clear help from the sidelines; challenges you with real [sport] situations in practice or sticks you in lines and runs drills for hours; makes you do cold stretches and run laps at the beginning of practice or creates excitement and energy with the first activity at practice; makes you sit and listen to long speeches after games or insists that you go and have pizza; gives you a hard time for arriving late at practice (even though it is my fault) or seems excited to see you when you arrive; arranges practices and scrimmages on Sundays or tries to keep that a family day.
4. I promise that we will never skip a family holiday for a [sport] game, come back early from our summer vacation so that you can attend tryouts or miss the opportunity to see relatives over Thanksgiving, Christmas and other important holidays because of a tournament.
5. I promise that I will never lose sleep or get anxious over [sport], call other parents to discuss the coach, arrange a meeting with the coach to discuss your "development" (this isn't spiritual, emotional or academic education we are talking about after all, it is a game), or spend time writing page long emails to the coach about you or "the team".

6. I promise not to be that unhappy parent who makes the other parents on the sideline equally unhappy. You'll find me most of the time watching your games from my chair in the quiet corner of the field wearing my iPod, smiling at your errors and your skill. I've been there a thousand times.
7. I promise to skip many of your games, and in doing so show you that my life does not revolve around your ability to play or perform. In fact, I'll spend many of your practices and games hanging out with your mama, who arrived on the scene before you guys, or I'll use the time to exercise myself.
8. I promise to watch many of your games, especially the ones that you ask me to attend.
9. I promise I will never make a choice between family needs and [sport]. The former will always get paid first. (Sorry, you can wear your brother's old cleats for the rest of the season).
10. I promise that I will ground you from [sport] for a month if I ever hear you say, "practice was boring," "this player on my team stinks," "I'm better than this player," or "I deserve to be on that team." This is the greatest game ever invented! If you need to be on an A team, need to have an overpaid coach train you, need to receive constant cheerleading to feel motivated and continue with the sport or just have to be with certain friends to enjoy the beautiful game, you don't get it and if I ever act like one of those sappy dads who spoil their children by fighting their battles for them, the kind that you hear me complain to mama about every now and then, have mama hurt me, she knows how.
11. I promise that if you turn out to be a pretty good player and start getting recruiting calls from other coaches or parents, that I will treat the calls the way you've heard me treat telemarketers: "Thank you. I'm not interested. Please put me on your 'do not call' list. Have a nice day." I will not run tryouts into the NBA draft, courting the superficial advances of other club coaches, shooing you around to different clubs, reinforcing the illusion that you are a superstar. More important to me is your modesty and the appreciation of a good thing.
12. I promise that if I arrive at a team meeting and realize that your coach hasn't been invited and that parents are there to talk about him behind his back that I will voice my disapproval at this tactic and leave immediately.
13. I promise you that you will play on a team where you will play most of the game. That may mean you are on the F team but so what, [sport] is meant to be played, not watched from the bench.
14. I promise you that if you treat this game well and use the gifts you are given with humility that the game will repay you for a lifetime. And I will try my best to leave it in your hands. "I've already had my time."

I love you,
Papa