

SIDELINE ETIQUETTE

Tactics are what allow our players to make full use of their technical skills, their creativity, their intelligence, and their unique personal characteristics. Tactics are the methods or strategies with which players employ their skills. Choosing whether to pass or keep the ball and initiate a 1 v. 1 is a tactical decision. These are decisions they make as the game progresses and unfold with regard to their given experience. *The way that these boys see the game on the field is very different than the way you as spectators see it.* From the sideline, the view has fewer dimensions from north to south on the playing field, as you mainly see east to west. It is difficult for you to comprehend the angles the player sees in which to combine with other teammates in possession or to shoot. Knowing where and when to stand still to hold a position or move into space is something you cannot understand or see that clearly from the sideline.

For spectators, soccer is the athletic theater. Spectators don't just observe the actions of the players; they also predict outcomes, envision potential successful game sequences, and analyze results, especially if they have some personal experience in the game. A strong appeal of the game lies in comparing the products of one's own imagination with the real events unfolding on the field. *What we as coaches don't want is the spectators verbally making the players aware during the game of passes that were not to their satisfaction, shots that were missed or not taken, or when the player should have turned with the ball, etc. We DO, however, want positive cheering!!!*

Being able to link the play by receiving and holding the ball, where appropriate, before distributing it accurately to teammates when pressured by opponents is not an easy task. It is even more difficult when parents are yelling instructions from the sidelines. *The coaches should be the only ones giving the players instructions. What we would like to ask is that when you want to yell instructions whenever the players don't make the play you think is correct, please count to ten before verbalizing it out loud.* For the games, objective criticism and evaluation should be left to the coaches and players, and hopefully this will keep the moral of these boys up. Ultimately I feel this will create an atmosphere of high moral, suspense, and excitement between players and spectators.

So with this new soccer season around the corner, here is a primer, a reminder, of little things that we can do on the sidelines this spring to make this soccer season more pleasant for all concerned - most importantly, for the kids.

1. Let the coaches' coach. If you are telling your son or daughter, or any other player for that matter, to do something different from what their coach is telling them, you create distraction and confusion.

2. It is very unnerving for many young players to try and perform difficult tasks on the field on the spur of the moment when parents are yelling at them from the sidelines. *Let*

the kids play. If they have been well coached, they should know what to do on the field. If they make a mistake, chances are they will learn from it.

3. Do not discuss the play of specific young players in front of other parents. How many times do you hear comments such as, “I don't know how that boy made this team..” or “she's just not fast enough.” Too many parents act as though their child is a star, and the problem is someone else's kid. Negative comments and attitudes are hurtful and totally unnecessary and kill parent harmony, which is often essential to youth team success.

4. Discourage such toxic behavior by listening patiently to any negative comments that might be made, then address issues in a positive way. Speak to the positive qualities of a player, family or coach.

5. Do your best not to complain about your son or daughter's coaches to other parents. **Once that starts, it is like a disease that spreads.** Before you know it, parents are talking constantly in a negative way behind a coach's back. (As an aside, if you have what you truly feel is a legitimate beef with your child's coach - either regarding game strategy or playing time, arrange an appointment to meet privately, away from a soccer field.)

6. *Make positive comments from the sideline. Be encouraging.* Young athletes do not need to be reminded constantly about their perceived errors or mistakes. Their coaches will instruct them, either during the game or at half-time, and during practices. You can often see a young player make that extra effort when they hear encouraging words from the sideline about their hustle.

7. Avoid making any negative comments about players on the other team. This should be simple: we are talking about youngsters, not adults who are being paid to play professionally. Besides being tasteless and classless, these kinds of comments can be hurtful to the young person involved and to their family as well

8. Try to keep interaction with parents on the other team as healthy and positive as possible. Who's kidding whom? You want your child's team to win. So do they. But that should not make us take leave of our senses, especially our common sense.

9. Parents on the other team are not the enemy. Neither are the boys or girls on the other team. We should work to check any negative feelings at the door before we hit the field.

10. What is the easiest thing to do in the youth sports world? Criticize the referees. Are there times when calls are missed - absolutely. That can, unfortunately, directly affect the

outcome of a contest. That said, by and large those who officiate at youth soccer games are hardly over-compensated, and give it an honest - and often quite competent effort. At worst, they at least try to be fair and objective.

11. On that note, outbursts from parents on the sideline made toward the referees only signal to our own children on the field that they can blame the refs for anything that goes wrong. Blaming others is not a formula for success in sports!

12. Yelling out comments such as "Good call, ref" or "Thanks ref" may only serve to alienate an official. The ref always assumes they made the proper call, that's why they made it. Trying to show superficial support because the call went "your" way is simply annoying to the officials, and to anyone within earshot.

13. Walking up and down all game long along the sidelines, following the play, is unnerving to players and totally unnecessary, particularly so if you are trying to yell out instructions to various players, including your own son or daughter. It is likely embarrassing to the player/players involved and simply counterproductive.

14. We all feel things and are apt to be tempted to say things in the "heat of the moment." But we don't excuse athletes for doing inappropriate things in that same "heat of the moment" (there are penalties, suspensions, etc.), so we should apply similar standards to our own sideline behavior. *Quickly check yourself and ask: Will I be proud of what I am about to say or do when I reflect on it tomorrow?*

15. The parking lot is not the time to "fan the flames." Whether it is a coach's decision, a referee's call, a comment that was made, let it go! Don't harass the coach, or an official, or a parent on the other team after the game is over. Go home, relax, and unwind. *Talk positively with your child! For youngsters the ride home is often as important as the game itself! Make that time a good memory for your son or daughter by discussing as many positives as you can about him/her, her coach, her teammates, etc.*

Thanks for taking time to read this document and have a great season!

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