

Why Parents Must Stop Coaching from the Sidelines

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Usually teams have one coach.

But it turns out this isn't always true on most youth basketball teams...

Enter your nearest gym and listen closely during any game and you'll quickly find out most youth sports teams actually have 8 - 10 coaches surrounding the court and the same number, if not more, of "officials".

Unfortunately, only one of these is the real coach and only one or two are the real officials.

The other 90% are parents who have tagged themselves with an assistant coaching role and an additional official's role and now feel the need to shout out their own instructions to the players on the court and criticism of the officiating.

Don't get me wrong...Most of these parents do have good intentions.

They sincerely believe they're helping their child's performance on the court when they're yelling out commands from their seats on the sideline.

But, they're not.

And the parents coaching and officiating from the sidelines epidemic needs to stop.

Here's what you need to know...

Understand and Respect Your Role at Every Game

Let's start with the basics...

There are four main roles at every youth basketball game:

- Coach
- Player
- Referee
- Spectator

Every person who attends a game can fill only one of these four roles.

- If you're the coach, you coach the team.
- If you're a player, you play the game.
- If you're a referee, you officiate the game.
- If you're a spectator, you watch the game.

Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it?

It's incredibly important that every person who attends a basketball game understands and respects the role that they're required to play throughout the game.

Where some people get confused is they don't understand that their role can change at different games...

For example:

Some parents will assume that because they're the coach of their child's U16's team, they have the right to coach from the sidelines during their child's U12's game.

Nope. Their role changes between coach and spectator depending on which game they're attending.

And while we're on that topic...

Your Coaching and Playing Experience is Irrelevant

Unfortunately, some adults feel entitled to voice their opinion from the sidelines if they have previously coached or played at a high level.

But previous basketball experience doesn't change your role.

You're still a spectator even if you were good enough to play division 1 college basketball 25 years ago...

You're still a spectator even if your daughter's coach doesn't have the same level of coaching experience as you do...

You're still a spectator even if you claim to 'have been around basketball for 40 years and you know what you're talking about'...

Parents must understand this:

If you're not the team's coach during the current game, you still have no right to coach from the sidelines. If you're not one of the officials officiating the game, you have no right to officiate.

With all that said, let's break down the main reasons why parents coaching from the sidelines is hurting youth basketball players...

4 Reasons Why Parents 'Sideline Coaching' Must Stop

1. Confusing Players with Conflicting Instructions

Put yourself in your child's shoes for a minute...

Before the game and during timeouts, the coach will talk to the team about strategy and may give each player specific instructions to give the team the best chance of success.

And then as soon as a player gets out on the court, parents start screaming out conflicting instructions that go against the team's strategy and the player's role on the team.

This leaves the child in a tricky situation...

- Who should they listen to?
- Which adult do they choose to make happy?
- Which adult do they choose to disappoint?

Players are forced to choose.

And since they don't want to get yelled at on the car ride home, most players will listen to their parents and go against the team's strategy.

This will lead to poor team performance and could even lead to the player receiving less time on the court.

Check out this video by Kevin Eastman where he teaches parents how difficult it is to have many different instructions being shouted at you.

2. Stealing Their Decision-Making Opportunities

Learning how to make smart basketball decisions through experience is crucial for basketball development.

To give specific examples of basketball decisions, this includes:

- When to pass.
- Which teammate to pass to.
- Which pass type to use.
- How hard to throw the pass.
- The exact spot to pass to.

When a parent screams out instructions from the sideline, they take away the learning opportunity from the player.

Here are the type of phrases I'm talking about...

- "Shoot!"
- "Pass to Jimmy!"
- "Attack the paint!"

When adults are constantly feeding players this "do this, do that" information, players can quickly start to rely on their input instead of thinking for themselves.

Instead, parents should sit back and allow their child to make decisions, which involves allowing your child to make mistakes.

Each player must know that they're not going to be criticized when their decisions do result in mistakes.

If a player knows they're going to be yelled at each time they commit a turnover or miss a shot, their anxiety levels will shoot through the roof.

There's no way they'll be able to make decisions and then learn from their mistakes in that environment.

3. Takes Authority and Respect Away from the Coach

If a coach is willing to volunteer their time to coach your son or daughter, please let them do the coaching.

A parent screaming out instructions from the sideline just makes their role even more difficult than it already is.

If you absolutely need to voice your opinion all game, wait a few months and put your hand up to coach the team next season.

But most aren't willing to do that.

They'd rather voice their opinion without the extra responsibilities of:

- Arriving 15 minutes before practice to set up.
- Spending several hours each week running practices.
- Taking the time to plan out each practice.
- Researching effective drills and basketball plays.
- Struggling to teach players the team's offense.
- Trying to remember substitutions throughout the game.

Coaching youth sports takes up a large chunk of time and to do it well is much harder than it looks.

Appreciate and respect those willing to devote their time and effort.

4. Makes the Referees Worse

When coaching from the sidelines, some parents do more than scream out instructions to the players on the team...

There are many who decide to yell at referees, too.

Here are a few of the main negatives to doing this:

a. You're teaching your child to make excuses

When your child notices you complaining to the referee, they'll feel like they're allowed to do the same thing.

Instead, teach them to immediately move onto the next play.

b. The referees will get worse

With a bunch of angry adults yelling in their direction, you can guarantee that the game's officiating will quickly deteriorate.

c. Just like players, many officials are still learning.

They need time and experience to develop the decision-making skills that are necessary to be a competent referee. Stop expecting your children under 10's referee to be perfect.

Parents (and coaches) must understand that a referee will never change their decision just because you angrily let them know your opinion from the sidelines.

Lead by presenting a positive example and keep your thoughts on the officiating inside your head.

Parents Should be Supporting New Coaches

Have you ever heard a parent say this?

"My child's coach has no idea what they're doing!"

Well, for the moment, let's say they're right...

Maybe your child's coach doesn't make perfect substitutions every time and the players don't get exactly even court time...

Maybe your child's coach doesn't understand the minor details of every offense and defense the team comes up against...

Maybe your child's coach isn't familiar with all of the advanced basketball lingo and they fumble their way through timeouts...

Just like players, many coaches are still learning.

In fact, tens of thousands of parents with very little basketball background step up each season to coach simply because there's no one else to do it.

Stop expecting your children under 10's coach to be perfect.

Stop sitting on the sidelines shaking your head and rolling your eyes.

We have to do our best to support new basketball coaches as they gain experience and develop their coaching knowledge.

Everyone has to start somewhere.

So, What Should Parents Do Instead?

A parent's role as a spectator is very simple...

Watch the game and encourage the players on the court.

Watching the game is self-explanatory and doesn't require further explanation.

But perhaps 'encouraging' does...

Encouraging does not mean:

- Giving coaching advice.
- Yelling out to any of the players or referees.
- Over the top celebrating.

It means enjoying the game and occasionally clapping and cheering for the team.

Here's a rule of thumb to remember....

As soon as you stand out from the crowd, you're doing something wrong.

Conclusion

Overall, here's the point:

When parents are yelling out from the sidelines, they're making each player's youth sporting experience less enjoyable.

Don't get me wrong...99% of youth sports parents are fantastic.

But, as with every sport, there are a few bad eggs amongst the parents who need to read this.

Parents who continually confuse their child with unnecessary coaching advice, embarrass their child with over-celebrating or complaining about the officiating. Parents may even slow down their child's basketball development by making them nervous about committing a mistake.

To improve the youth basketball experience for players everywhere... parents need to take a step back and do a better job of understanding their role.

And remember...Your kids aren't going to be playing youth sports forever.

Sit back, enjoy the game and stay positive! Let the coaches do the coaching and the officials do the officiating. Your spectator experience will be all the more enjoyable in the end.