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My Favorite Games & Scoring Variations

- by Brian Whitney – Prepvolleyball.com

-- It can be as little as giving birth to a child and leaving them to fend for themselves through their club and high school careers. Or it can be being there every practice and match, and involved in every aspect of their play. It can even be much more than that! It is crucial that players know and fill a special role on their team each season, but the role of a parent is not much less important and is very often overlooked by coaches and parents alike. This article will try to help define the parent role in volleyball, while also giving some useful tips on what to do and not to do.

Regardless of what any parent says, they have one primary goal; their child's happiness. What's interesting is that with the millions of parents out there with children in youth sports all having that same goal, how differently we all go about achieving that goal! One simple example: *The crying child*. What should a parent do? The movie "Meet The Fockers" was a comical look at two families that had completely different goals for how to deal with a crying baby. Or another example: *Your child is not playing as much as she thinks she should be*. Both of these issues involve your daughter's happiness yet parents have an infinite number of ways they choose to handle this situation. A third example: *Your child's club program needs help with administration and also needs more volunteer coaches*. Can you help out while still remaining loyal and supportive to your own child? These are all three very common examples in volleyball. Before we delve deeper into the role of a parent, think about how you witness these issues being handled today.

Here are some fun and useful ways I've seen the role of parents defined:

"The role of a parent in team sports is to cheer at games and to take the team out for ice cream afterwards"

"The role of the parents is to be a support system for the players and coaches. This entails respecting the rules and decisions made by those in charge, staying positive about every aspect of the team and all of its players, and keeping any negative thoughts to themselves. It also entails thoroughly understanding the role of the coaches and knowing not to interfere with that role"

I particularly like both of these quotes. In examining them in more detail, we can come up with some of the primary types of roles parents play. Let's dive into these and other roles parents take on.

These are perhaps the most common roles in youth sports today:

1) **Emotional Supporter** – Perhaps the most important role a parent can play. It simply means a parent always being there to support his daughter emotionally. Cheering when the times are good and there to put an arm around her when the times are bad. It means listening when your child wants to vent about a bad day at practice, while remembering that running off and yelling at the coach isn't what this child really wants or needs. Only slightly less important is the need for parents to support the entire team and not only their child, although this can sometimes prove difficult. I have many great memories of parents of kids who were not playing, cheering like crazy for a huge play made by the player who was taking their child's playing time. In fact, I get downright choked-up and watery-eyed when I see it. That's the kind of unselfishness children need to see from supportive parents. Not the ugliness we've all seen from the angry, hateful parent who only cares about his own child. These

parents scare me since they will go as far as to emotionally stomp on other children and their parents. These parents can only be happy if their child is playing and the one making the great play.

2) **Financial and Transportation Supporter** – Club sports require money and kids need rides to practice/tournaments. For many families these are both difficult issues to overcome. Especially in families with more than one child. For some kids, getting this support is an expectation. While with others, it is a serious challenge. I personally couldn't play club ball when I was a freshman because my single mother couldn't drive me to practices. It wasn't until my junior year that transportation was an option, because of a good friend who didn't mind driving me.

3) **Administrative Supporter** – Many parents play a role within their child's program as an administrator. Volunteer support is an invaluable role to the success of clubs. Without help, coaches spend more time doing things other than coaching your child. Plus, coaches rarely get any enjoyment out of administration and the more they have to do, the less they are focusing on coaching and the less likely they will return the next year. Administrative roles can be as simple as helping with stats for the team up to serving as president or as an officer on the club's Board. Or they can be as complex as serving as High School booster club president or director for your club organization. Some roles may even offset your child's costs, so that is something you should investigate.

4) **Team Parent or Chaperone** – All teams need a team mom or dad. These parents take on the task of looking out for the team as a whole, while avoiding putting their own child above the others on the team. Many times team safety is in the hands of these people on away trips. Supporting your child by supporting your child's team is not as easy as we might think.

5) **Coach** – I've seen parent-coaches work wonderfully through the years. I've also seen it ruin their child's athletic experience as well as the experiences of others around. My club coach in HS coached both of his sons and it was never a problem. In fact, I loved seeing them get a little heated and snip at each other in Ukrainian during some intense practice sessions. It was endearing. However, I never questioned my coach's decisions regarding his child. I never had a need to since they were two of the top players on the team every year. Parent-coach is an extreme example of a parent taking on a role that requires them to look out for the team before looking out for their own child. It requires a special parent and a special understanding with their child to make this situation work out for both of them, and especially for the team. We've all heard of the coach who plays her own kid at the expense of others. What's sad is many times that kid deserved to play but was just the victim of the inevitable gossip resulting from a Parent-Coach situation.

Recommendations:

1) DO take on a role with your child's athletics. At the minimum, take on the role of "Emotional Supporter." Even if your child gives you grief at times, she will hopefully thank you for supporting her through athletics.

2) Be aware that when you wear the hat of a club or team supporter of any kind (especially Coach!), you will find it harder to be the kind of Emotional Supporter that you want to be. With your attention more focused on making the group happy, you will still need to attend and support your child. However, by being fair and giving your child individual support outside of the team environment, your child will learn great lessons about fairness and teamwork from a loving parent.

3) Make sure that the coaches, parents, and players on your child's team see you as a supporter of everyone on the team, through the good times and the bad. I don't mean to put on an act! I simply mean that feeling this way and making sure that everyone sees how you feel are two different things. Mom and dad's love is great, but Emotional Support for all of your team's players is a wonderful thing.

4) Teach your child that success is more than just winning. Team sports are an amazing thing to be a part of and have the potential for some incredible life lessons. A few of those key lessons can only be learned through tough defeats. At the younger age levels in volleyball, players making the mistakes and teams who are losing games are usually those that are attempting to play the game the right way. If you ride the emotional roller-coaster of winning and losing, it is easy to get caught up in the "agony of defeat" and let your emotions get away from you. Instead, be supportive and help your coach show your child how to bounce back and learn from those inevitable defeats.

5) Teach your child how to be more effective communicators with their peers and with adults. I firmly believe the most valuable aspect of team sports is learning more effective communication skills. Parents normally want to handle this communication for their child because parents are better at it and it is easier for kids to avoid it rather than deal with it. The vast majority of children are able to have a conversation with their coach. By talking to the coach yourself you limit the growth opportunities for your child to learn to communicate with her coach on her own. Many clubs and HS programs have clear rules on parent involvement because they know how important it is to player maturation. What I always tell my parents is that when their child goes off to college, mom and dad will not be able to help them when their child hasn't learned how to communicate effectively with their college coach (or their professors)!

Things to avoid:

1) Do not approach a coach after a match with a gripe or your solution on how to solve a problem, and especially after a loss. Follow the 24-Hour-Rule. This piece of advice is worth its weight in gold and is very frequently ignored by people who should know better. A great deal of issues in Juniors sports develop because of parents forcing a conversation with a coach immediately after a tough loss. Your child's coach will be better prepared to deal with your personal issue when emotions have leveled off. The situation may resolve itself naturally, too, or it may not be important to you once you've cooled down. If you want to approach the coach because you are angry, wait until 24 hours have gone by and see if you still feel the same way. But even at that point, give your child a chance to show that she can handle the situation on her own.

2) Avoid actions that will cause people to second-guess your child's playing time. The absolute worst crime a parent can commit is to cause players and parents to believe that someone is playing only because of mom or dad's whining or complaining. It is difficult to consider this when you are upset as a parent. However, for you to rob your child of her credibility, as a player, is a horrible thing. Some parents feel they must bully or question coaches so that their kid plays more. This behavior inevitably gets back to the rest of the team and opinions get formed. When those opinions get back to the child, it hurts. Avoid communicating with the coach about playing time. I personally will always talk to a player about her role and her playing time, but not my parents. Talk to your coach before the season to understand how they would like to address this issue when/if it ever comes up.

3) Avoid taking on too much. Some parents get so caught up in the aspects of club administration, team parenting, or coaching, that they fall short as the Emotional Supporter. Children that are needier or a little insecure will not do well if their parents are giving more praise, attention, or focus to everything else around.

4) Avoid gossip! Parents who attend every practice and game often have little else to do to fill the time except talk about players and coaches and their personal lives to those willing to listen. It is easy for parents to escalate into discussing personal opinions on the team and to speculate on decisions coaches are making. Let me tell you how destructive this sort of thing can quickly become. I've seen more feelings hurt in sports through gossip being overheard than through anything else. Every team has one parent who is the chief gossip-spreader. Nip that parent's gossiping in the bud early in the season. Always assume that if a parent is willing to gossip negatively to you about another child, that they will absolutely do the same thing to someone else about your child. Take responsibility here.

5) Avoid holding your administrative role over the head of your coach. Some parents take on a role within club organizations for very wrong reasons. It needs to be primarily to help the team or organization, not about your child. Yes, helping the group benefits your child, too, and that is fine. However, the parent who leverages their administrative position over making a team, or playing time, will cause serious problems for her child. Be aware that just by holding a position of power or influence in your organization will immediately cause people to scrutinize your daughter. You must be beyond reproach to avoid anyone second-guessing your child and her playing time. If your role puts you in a decision-making capacity with an issue regarding your child, you may want to offer to remove yourself from the decision. If you don't, your decision will automatically be questioned anyway, if your child benefits.

If you ever wonder what kind of a parent you may be, feel free to check out my other article on Prepvolleyball.com entitled "What kind of club parent are you?" (9/6/2003)

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