Education Support

American Dance

Life is Not Always a Fair Game

by D.L. Stewart, courtesy of Tribune Media Service

In Wisconsin, a high school girls basketball coach announced that he was quitting his job at the end of the season. He had guided his team to two state championships, but parents complained that he made some players cry. In Virginia, another basketball coach is starting over. Shortly after she coached her girls team to the state championship, she was relieved of her duties because players–and their parents–complained that she was 'verbally abusive.' According to the unhappy player, "A sport...should be fun and coaches shouldn't interfere and make life miserable." With increased frequency the players–and their parents–want to run the locker room.

An article in USA Today cited 11 recent cases in which high school or college coaches faced open rebellion from their players. Along with 'verbal abuse' and 'making them cry,' the coaches were accused of 'favoritism,' 'poor communication with players and parents.' In my career as a sports parent, four of my kids were on high school athletic teams. I'm not sure how many of their coaches played favorites. I can't say whether or not they had poor relationships with their players. My communication with their coaches was pretty much limited to trying to find out what time they thought practice might end, if ever. Which doesn't mean I wasn't interested in my kids' athletics.

I went to every one of their games and plenty of their practices. I sat in rainstorms and watched them roll around on muddy football fields. I stood at the edge of lumpy soccer fields and watched them kick each other in the shins. I drove through hail to find basketball courts that had not heat and no zip codes. Just about the only place I never went was into the coach's office to fight my kids' battles for them. Not because I didn't care about my kids. But because I did.

My feeling was that there comes a time when parents have to let their kids learn about life. And high school sports and activities are a great time to start. High School activities do a lot more than teach kids how to pass, dribble, dance or play an instrument. It has a lot of other valuable lessons. It teaches them that not all coaches are fair. Which might ease the shock when they find out that not all bosses are fair. It teaches them that coaches don't always have the time, or inclination, to worry about whether something they say might bruise a student's feelings. Which might prepare them for a world that does not always have the time, or the inclination, to worry about bruising their feelings. It teaches them that, no matter how wonderful mommy and daddy have told them they are, there are plenty of other kids just as wonderful. Which might make it easier for their egos to handle the blow on the inevitable day they discover that mommy and daddy were wrong and they are not the center of the universe, after all.

Some parents feel high school is too early for their kids to learn lessons like those. I think it's almost too late.