Education Support

American Dance

When Children Play, Parents Should Just Adjust

by Hershel Walker

Parents generally give some thought to deciding when their children are ready for organized sports. They don't want to rush them, but they don't want to hold them back, with either. So they look for the right team, the right sport, the right league, the right coach.

Parents, too, should consider the effect on their own lives. In many ways, organized sports can demand a bigger adjustment for parents than for children. If parents have problems with it, it can affect how a child views sports and competition in general for a lifetime.

Al Rosen, a Hall of Fame baseball player, developed seven questions that parents can ask themselves to judge whether they are ready. Parents should be able to answer "yes" to all questions.

Can you give your child up?

This is like the first day of school. You have to be able to turn your child over to another person, a coach, and trust that coach to be your child's guide in sports. You have to accept that coach's authority. You also have to realize that the coach may gain some of the admiration your child has reserved for you.

Can you admit your shortcomings?

You have to be able to admit to your child that you don't have all the answers. But, you should be willing to discuss that with your child.

Can you accept your child's triumphs?

The answer to this is not as obvious as you might think. Some parents compete with their children although they may not realize it. Even in victory, they might find fault with some small mistake their child made. They may just say they think teammates played better.

Can you accept your child's disappointment?

Some parents are angry and embarrassed when their children do not perform well. They may yell or humiliate them in some other way. Even in defeat, parents should offer encouragement and stress the positive elements.

Can you show your child self control?

Children take their cues from their parents, their most important role models. Children are not going to learn much about sportsmanship if their parents lose control in the stands.

Can you give your child some time?

Parental involvement is important in youth sports. With both parents working in many families, that is not as easy as it used to be. But you should ask your children about their sports and try to attend at least some games. Do your best to be supportive but don't promise more than you can deliver.