

From a Father

Dear Coach,

We hardly know each other, and yet very shortly we will have quite a lot in common, namely, my son Mike. Now that your season is about to begin, we are "loaning" you one of the greatest possessions the Good Lord has seen fit to give us--our son--and make no mistake about it, Coach, during these next few months he is yours!

To his mother and me he is still a little boy in many respects, but of course we wouldn't dare let him know we felt that way since he thinks he's quite grown up at age 15. To most coaches, he and his buddies are looked upon as young men because they have the backbone to come out for the team and to stick with it. Little boys couldn't do this, only "men" can take it, according to the coaches. But I guess most parents are hesitant to want to see their sons in this light because these youngsters seem to grow up so quickly anyway.

Some of us have only one son to guide and enjoy, but you, Coach, will literally have hundreds of "sons" to guide and enjoy over the years. In this respect, especially, you are a very lucky man indeed. Now, I'm not naive enough to believe that our son and his teammates won't keep you awake nights, make mistakes, frustrate you, lose some, win some, and cause you other kinds of problems; but in the final analysis, it might be that this is because they are boys, not men. This might come as a surprise to you, but in some ways these things hurt the boys more than it hurts you since they are so anxious to please you. It might not show, but deep down they are disappointed when these things happen because they feel that they have let you down.

We hope, too, that our boy will not only learn the fundamentals of the game from you, but also a respect for authority, the necessity of following rules, and the penalty for violating them. He needs to learn that discipline is important to an individual and to a group in order to prevent chaos. He needs to develop an appreciation for hard work and the fact that this is still a good guideline for success in any endeavor. We think he should learn that loyalty is not a bad word and that being loyal to his team, his coach, his school, his family, his church, and his country is good and necessary. Through athletics he should develop an understanding of the importance of taking care of his body and not abusing it by using tobacco, alcohol, or drugs. His experience with you in athletics should also teach him to accept his fellow man for what he is and what he can do rather than the color of his skin or his nationality. No one enjoys losing, but youngsters need to get a taste of it in order for them to learn that the important thing is the necessity of "getting off the floor" and trying again. These are the little things that begin to make young men and good citizens out of little boys, and I'm convinced that they can be taught through athletics without sacrificing any mechanical aspects of the game.

I realize that every community has its corps of "super-critics" who only have eyes for the scoreboard. But I am suggesting to you, Coach, that if you teach "boys" instead of just a "sport," the boys and the parents will rarely, if ever, be numbered among the leather-lunged experts in row X, and your personal scoreboard will record so many young men out of so many boys.

Good luck to you and the team.

Sincerely,

A father

***This is a shortened version of an actual letter that was read at a high school sports banquet. It should be read not only by coaches, but also by many parents. This father shows a healthy perspective on the importance of athletics.