

Down, Set, Hike!

Neither of us has ever been particularly athletic, though we've always enjoyed watching football since we're both from Clemson families. When you have a lot of boys, though, the question of sports comes up pretty quickly. Here are some advantages of doing sports with your boys:

- **They need the exercise.** God made boys active. They'll need that energy when they are working all day to support their household and need to come home and lead their family, church and community.
- **It's good to be part of a team.** There are important lessons in being dependent on others and having them depend on you, even when sometimes you don't get along.
- **They need to learn how to win and lose gracefully.** Both take some self-control and learning it now will help later.
- **It's a healthy outlet for that natural aggression and competitiveness** – and will often make for a more peaceful time at home.

There are some things you need to watch out for, though, to keep sports in the right place in your lives.

- **Family life is more important than sports.** One year we played community baseball. All our boys were in different leagues, so we spent the entire season running from game to game, Hal attending one, Melanie another, a grandmother a third. We about didn't have a family meal the entire time. There's got to be a better way. Try to find things your family can do together – whether on the same team, or supporting the ones that are playing. That's why we love the Homeschool Football League – every level practices on the same set of fields at the same time, and all our team's levels (mighty-mite to varsity) play on Saturday at the same place – we make a

day of it for the whole family.

- **Don't let the lockerroom culture rule.** There's an attitude pretty prevalent in sports that coarseness and crudity is just expected, and sometimes even hazing is tolerated. Talk these things through with your guys, making sure they understand the importance of behaving like a Christian, how to resist peer pressure, and when to get an adult's help. Ask – frequently – how things are going. The culture is in decline and things have gotten worse among young people. You need to really keep an eye on how your son is handling it. This is a good reason to find, or start, homeschool and Christian leagues. Don't let your son be a victim. Make sure he's prepared to stand.
- **Keep perspective.** It's tempting sometimes to think we all live in Lake Woebegone, where all the kids are above average. Don't make sacrifices you'll regret just in case you've got a **Tim Tebow** in the family. An official with our state athletic association once told us that only one half of one percent of high school athletes play college team sports of any kind – even intramural. It's fun, there are benefits, but if the chances are *that* low they'll even play in college, we all need to keep sports in perspective. Don't make bad compromises over something fleeting. Besides, it sounds like the Tebows kept their heads on straight – if your son is that talented, it will come out no matter what!
- **Whose goal is it?** There are times to insist, "You need to do this," especially when they've just had a set back or when it is a family activity, but sometimes you need to look for an activity that fits your child's interests. Sometimes athletic parents get sports-hating children or sedentary parents get sports-fanatic children. Show grace to your children who are different than you are.
- **Stay off the field.** We were stunned in one of our first forays into sports, to see a father in the stands

screaming and cursing at his *seven year old daughter* when she made a mistake on the field. Kindly remember this is not about you. The competition in the stands can be worse than that on the field. Watch out for this and avoid this kind of thing! Parents need to learn how to win and lose gracefully, too.

- **Know when to comfort and when to encourage. Here's how we put it in our book, *Raising Real Men*:**

It may be that mothers have a hard time discerning between when sons need comforting and when they need bucking up. Here's a rule of thumb: If he hasn't faced the trial yet, or he's in the midst of it—encourage him. If he's been to the wars and is limping home wounded—comfort him. Once the wounds are bound up, encourage him to rise and face the fight again.

- **Seek out alternatives.** If there are no team sports in your area that fit into your family life, you can start something of your own, or check out the many sports that can be done alone or with one or two others: biking, running, climbing, kayaking, racquetball, squash, tennis, golf and more. There are tons of ways to get out and get active!