

How You Can Stand Tall at Your Kids' Games

How do you handle your kids' sports endeavors?

It's a common struggle. Our own ego can be so tied up in our children's performance on the field or the court that we lose the bigger picture of what's really going on.

That's one of the story lines portrayed in the new movie *When the Game Stands Tall*, which opened in late August. It's based on a true story of a high school football team in California, but calling it a "football movie" would sell it short.

There's one dad in the film who is over-the-top. His son is chasing a record that has been in the books for years, and as the season goes on, the father gets more and more obsessed. He's clearly trying to live through his son.

Here's a scene that gives you a glimpse into that father-son relationship. Coach Ladouceur, who is also a teacher at this Catholic high school, is interacting with a player and his father.

One thing this movie definitely got right is how relationships can be changed forever *when we dads go too far* in this area.

Usually, it starts out totally positive: A father encourages his son or daughter to pursue something fun and challenging. Dad gets involved. The child gets encouragement. It's an opportunity for the child to grow and learn some great life lessons, not to mention how it can be a bonding time for the dad and child.

But *all that good stuff goes out the window when we dads cause drama*. We make our children's performance more about *us* than about the child having fun, or developing skills, or any of

the other benefits of sports.

Dads, we need to have the right perspective when we take a seat in the stands. I know some guys believe they have every right to evaluate the coaches, the referees or umpires, the cheerleaders, the band, the administrators, and anyone else involved. Maybe that attitude carries over from when they're sitting in a pro sports stadium.

But we must remember that this is different. *These are kids, and it's not about us!* Our attitude should be that we're privileged just to be able to watch our children do something they enjoy, and we're savoring each moment. They'll be gone before we realize it.

So, I encourage you to see *When the Game Stands Tall*—and do all you can to *not* be like that dad.

What's your approach at your kids' games or competitions? Please join the discussion below.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Make it clear to your child that he or she doesn't have to win in order to earn your love and approval. Say it point blank.
- Go ahead and cheer for your child, but remember, there's a lot more at stake than a win or loss. You have nothing to prove except that you love and support your child—win or lose, home run or strike out.
- Do sports and other kids' activities dominate your family schedule? Is it too much? Have that talk with your kids' mom.
- According to one study of college athletes, there's 6 words they most appreciated hearing from their parents. Not constructive criticism or re-hashing all the plays in the game, but simply: "I love to watch you play." Try it.
- In a letter to little league parents, St. Louis

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny encourages parents to be “a silent source of encouragement.” Check out his Matheny Manifesto and see if you agree.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization seeking to improve the lives of children and establish a positive fathering and family legacy that will impact future generations by inspiring and equipping fathers and father figures to be actively engaged in the life of every child. We encourage you to help us change the culture of fathering in America by joining the Championship Fathering Team.

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