

14 Points on Being a Sports Parent – By Morgan Wooten

Morgan Wooten is a legendary coach who led the DeMatha High School boys basketball program in Hyattsville, MD, from 1956-2002. He won 1,274 games and has a winning percentage of 86.9%

1. **“I love to watch you play.”** Every time you watch your child play, that’s what you say. Don’t critique, don’t coach, don’t embarrass, don’t demean. Bruce Brown and Rob Miller, of Proactive Coaching LLC, conducted an informal survey of hundreds of collegiate athletes over three decades. The question they asked these athletes was “What was your worst memory from playing youth and high school sports?” The overwhelming response was “The ride home from games with my parents.” Those same athletes were asked what their parents said that made them feel great, that increased their joy during and after a game. The overwhelming response was “I love to watch you play.” This speaks volumes about how impactful a parent can be on their child’s level of enjoyment of sport.
2. **Don’t soften the blow for your child after a loss.** If they happen to lose, teach them not to make excuses. Teach them to learn from the loss and move on. We get better through set backs if we face our challenges head on. It also makes us mentally tougher and resilient. These are two valuable life skills.
3. **Teach them to be a part of something greater than themselves.** Teach them this by applauding their effort and coachability. Don’t coach them to look to break from the game plan of the team for selfish gains. If you teach them to be self-centered players they’ll miss the experience of being part of a team. Teamwork teaches humility and sacrifice for something greater than ourselves. All players, regardless of the sport, need to learn these lessons.
4. **Do not coach your child.** Coaching your child will likely confuse, rather than help them succeed. Allow them the experience of dealing with others in ideal as well as difficult circumstances. Encourage your child to listen to the coach. The #1 advice I could give a parent is find a program where you agree with the philosophy of the coach, and then allow them to coach.
5. **Do not approach your child’s coach about playing time.** Encourage your child to speak with their coach in person. A coach should be honest with their players about where they stand and what they need to do to improve. Your job is not to approach the coach about playing time. Your child needs to learn to advocate for themselves and learn how to communicate with others. Remember that a player being a valuable member of the team is important, it’s not all about playing time.
6. **Do not compare your child to others, but encourage them to be the best that they can be.** If a parent is constantly trying to have their child be better than someone else, the child will always be second best. However, if you encourage your child to be their best, and work to do that everyday, they will get better and they will reach their potential.
7. **Cheer for all.** Never speak negatively about your child, one of their teammates, or their coach. We would not want anyone to speak negatively about our child, so don’t speak of someone else’s child in a negative way.
8. **Be self-disciplined.** Sports can stir up a great deal of emotions, that’s a given. They can bring out the best in us, or the worst if we are not careful. Keep your emotions under control. Would you want someone yelling at you from the stands? Would you want someone yelling at you at work?
9. **Let it be your child’s experience.** We must acknowledge that we can’t control the experience of our child. That’s why it’s called an experience. When we experience something we will have good times and bad, great moments and average plays, we will deal with victory and defeat.
10. **Teach them to play for the love of the game, not a trophy.** Teach your child that they’re playing for the love of the game, for their teammates, and for the challenge created by competition. Being driven by an award, trophy, or accolade can prove to be hollow once they attain it. The things that are remembered over time are the stories, the experiences, and the relationships. Trophies don’t make us better people, but working to overcome obstacles by working with others does.
11. **Focus on the process.** Sports, like life, is a process. We need to be committed to the process everyday. We know that the process can be difficult. However, this process can produce in us the ability to work hard, persevere, sacrifice, and more. This is why sports are meaningful, because it refines us as people.
12. **Enjoy the journey of your child.** Don’t agonize over every play, a coaches decision, a good game, or a bad game. In just a few years, you will wish you could watch your child play another game. Don’t waste this moment wishing for something more or better. Just enjoy it.
13. **Be a parent, not a fan.** Under the most ideal circumstances, your child will make mistakes. Remember that when you withhold attention, show frustration, or criticize your child because of their performance in a game, you’re telling them that your love for them is conditional.
14. **Do not make excuses.** “My coach just doesn’t like me!” This is a common excuse for young players. However, coaches like children that work hard, are coachable, have a great attitude, show perseverance, know how to deal with success as well as failure. Teach your child to live out these attributes. Not to gain a coaches affection, but to be a better, more complete person. This will allow your child to be a success, both inside and outside of sports.