

To my fellow board members, umpires and the DYB community:

My love of the game has given me the great privilege of umpiring Little League Baseball every spring and summer. As an umpire, I have seen it all. I have had my fair share of cold early season 20-5 blowouts, as well as a number of riveting pitchers' duals.

Regardless, the position of umpire is a tricky one at any level of competition. When I am dressed in blue, I am supposed to be impartial and represent justice. The umpire is to be the final arbiter between the two teams, ensuring that the game is played fairly and the rules are enforced. You cannot show favoritism to players and coaches you know. And when you make a disputed call, you are the most hated person in the park.

But I am fine with those parameters. When I agreed to become an umpire I understood that my responsibility was to uphold the integrity of the game. And for the most part, this arrangement goes without any hiccups. In fact, two hours after most games I umpire, I could not tell you who won or what the score was. If a game does not feature a controversial call or an exciting play, it just blends in with the rest of my umpiring memories.

But there is one situation from games that never leaves my mind, a problem that is acute to Little League — when a parent or coach screams and berates one of his/her players. To be clear, the overwhelming majority of parents and coaches treat their players as any Little League coach/parent should — with dignity, respect and —most importantly — encouragement. After all, we are dealing with boys and girls between the ages of nine and twelve. No matter what anyone says, skill and character development should be more important at this level than winning.

When I see coaches act as they should, as an umpire I am overcome with a sense of faith that these parents get it. But far too often, a coach will scream his head off at his son in a regular season game as though it were the 7<sup>th</sup> game of the Major League World Series. In these moments, I wish I could rip my mask off and yell at the coach. But alas, as an umpire I am confined to ruling between the two teams, not among them.

I've thought a lot about these different circumstances, both when I've been proud to be part of youth baseball and embarrassed when I see parents act in these childish ways. Last summer, I was driving with a friend who helped his uncle coach a team. As a coach who treats his players the right way, I shared my concerns with my friend. I told him I did not think I could be a coach for my daughter one day because I did not want to be associated with something that denigrates youth athletes and shatters their confidence. Why would I want to be part of something that causes boys and girls to be afraid of their parents simply for striking out, or missing a fly ball?

A few days later, I relayed this conversation with another friend who gave me a completely different perspective. He said if I feel this way, we should make sure to coach our sons or daughters one day because I could be the parent who treats the players the right way, instilling within them the virtues of character, courage and loyalty. Who knows? Maybe I could take our team out for ice cream after a win—or a loss. I bring this internal dialogue about coaching our children to your attention because it is something that has or will touch most of our lives. Because all of us are parents.

A simple reminder: You will never do anything more important than raising your children.

I am fortunate to have a family of my own, I know I will struggle—like all parents do—to provide the most nurturing and loving environment for my children so they can have the same experiences I've had. As all parents say, they want this for their children more than anything else. For so many of us, we are here today because of the dedication and sacrifices made by our parents. And many of our most memorable moments with them involve playing a sport, performing on stage or excelling academically. Nothing felt better than when they said they were proud of us, no matter if we won or lost.

As you leave the fields, think about what made you thrive as a child. Ask yourself what attitudes of your parents allowed you to become the person you are today. After contemplating that, I think most of us will realize the type of coach we ought to become, for our children.

It has been a privilege and an honor to serve for 10 years as the UIC with Dillsburg Youth Baseball. The time has come for me to step aside as your Umpire in Chief and help coach my child in her life experiences, even if it doesn't involve baseball. I leave you with this one parting thought and ask you to remember it as you deal with the youth of our community and our future. The last line of the parent/volunteer pledge: "I will praise a good effort despite the outcome of the game".

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