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Parent Involvement: Children are Paying to Play ~ by Gunner Garrison

I wake up two hours before school to do the morning workout my father forces me to do every day. I do it to the best of my eleven-year-old abilities, but it is never good enough for my dad. He wakes my little sister with his screams of tough encouragement. When I finally finish I am forced to drink a protein shake that is absolutely disgusting. It taste like cat food and there is not a day that goes by that I do not have trouble getting it down. I just want to enjoy sports, but if I am not playing perfect then I get punished. All of my friends love playing soccer and baseball, but my dad makes me hate it. This is not just a illustration of how awful a dad or a mom can be in a young athlete's life, but these type of situations are happening throughout America every single day. I try and put myself in a situation like that and to be honest I would not be able to handle the pressure mentally or physically. The fact of the matter is that parents are being to hard on their young athletes and are ruining some of the greatest time in these children's lives by treating their own child like a slave of whatever sport they choose. Parental guidance is appropriate in all children's lives, but some parents are crossing the line when it comes to athletics or other extra curricular activities.

I currently just finished watching the "Friday Night Lights" television series on Netflix. In this television series there is a new quarterback in town to take over the Panthers starting job. This new athlete is J.D. McCoy and with his role he shows how overbearing parents can really be. His father wants only success for his son and will not allow J.D. or anyone else to stand in the way of that. J.D. is not allowed to go out after a win and is up to workout every morning with his private quarterback coach. The producers of this show correctly portray the effects on athletes with parents like J.D.'s in showing us how detrimental it can be to a child's mentality towards everything they do. J.D. ends up running away for a weekend and getting a girl pregnant and maybe if his dad would have allowed him to enjoy his high school experience with his parents support a mistake like this would not have been made. J.D. is a very good quarterback in the show, but is shown to not enjoy the game he loved anymore further into the series. This growing dislike for football is made known to be his father's fault and the forceful nature of success being shoved in his face whenever presented. When a major television series points out a problem like this. It is obvious that the topic is not just a fictional one. A non-fictional example of parents going overboard was written about in Sports Illustrated in 1975. "Within what has been described as this "rat's nest of psychological horrors," it is not unusual for a child to

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have his parent and/or coach falsify his birth certificate to get him into a favored division, one in which he might excel. Or submit to starvation diets to make a weight. One coach in Florida says that he sees these kids, "flying around so high on diet pills they can barely tell you their names." (Underwood 92) This was forty years ago and parents were going to the extreme to make sure their child succeed. Imagine parents now as athletics has just grown more and more into the way to be apart of the upper class of children or what it takes to make their child cool. Parent involvement does not have to be directed at the child in some circumstances. In the same Sports Illustrated article it says, "With so much riding on the outcome-bowl bids, adult egos, bragging rights at the local pub—it was predictable that violence would creep into kids' football, and last month in Kissimmee, Fla. a mob of adults attacked four coaches of a winning team of 12-year-olds with clubs and pipes, sending one coach to the hospital. A cry from the crowd, "He's dead!" apparently satisfied the mob and it withdrew just before the police arrived."(Underwood 95) These events truly capture the extent parents will go for their children's success and in most cases in youth sports it is not positive.

The amount of negativity around a child and an athletic event can have different effects on different children. A great example is Mickey Mantle and the experiences he overcame to become a Hall of Fame baseball player. Kelsey Crouse wrote, "Centerfielder and first basemen Mickey "The Mick" Mantle, who played for the New York Yankees from 1951 through 1968, experienced the repercussion of an overbearing sports parent. Mantle in a 1970 television interview shared how he wet the bed until he was 16. He later developed emotional problems that led him to become an alcoholic. He couldn't handle the inappropriate amount of pressure placed on his shoulders. Mantle succeeded and became a professional athlete, but the chance of this happening for most athletes is next to none."(mobridgetribune.com) It is known that Mick's father was the source of his pressure and once his father was out of his life Mickey went on to become one of the all time great hitters in the history of baseball. The facts show that overbearing parents have negative effects on children of all ages.

Why do parents act in such ways? "...in response to the important and legitimate question, "why do some parents behave so poorly at their child's sporting event," the often parroted answer has been, "because no one told them they couldn't." Such simplistic analysis fails to provide direction for reforming youth sports, in terms of preventing sports rage, because it doesn't address the underlying reasons for poor parental behavior."(youthsports.rutgers.edu) If parents realized what immature ac-

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tions they were partaking in affected their children parents would probably stop. The fact of the matter is that parents acting out are usually the ones in control of the situation and spectators are not brave enough to explain to a fellow parent how to raise their own child in such a way to not be rude or antagonizing. I think the child needs to step up and tell the parent that the way they are treating them is causing negative affects. If the child is willing to do this then the parent would realize what is happening and possibly give in and become a supportive "its just a game" parent, which through time will end up having the most positive effect.

There is not a right or wrong way to be involved as a parent, but there is a detrimental and non-detrimental way. A non-detrimental way of being involved is explained by Lisa Heffernan in her article about parent involvement. Lisa states, "... Wanting to win is human, it always feels better than losing. But our larger job as parents is not to teach our kids to do what feels best, but rather to equip them for life without us. We are charged with taking the longterm view and teaching our children what is important rather than what is expedient. It is our job to teach them that they can only control their own effort, preparation and focus and not the outcome..."(theatlantic.com) She also mentions how her son always wants to win, but just the fun of playing with his best friends is enough. The way her son feels about athletics is a young child's way of looking at everything. The young athletes will get better with time and work, but the pushing and the pressure could push them down a path of failure and parents need to realize what they are causing in their children's lives.

I love to use the way my parents treated me as a young athlete as a great example of parent involvement. My mom would baby me just like any other mother, but she also taught me to not give up on something just because I was not very good at it. My dad is a coach and now educator so he had an abundant amount of knowledge about athletics, but yet he was never a coach of mine or tried to tell me how to do every little thing whatever sport I was playing involved. His only words before every game I ever played were, "run fast, jump high", and good jobs waited from him after the games. The simple fact is that my parents were involved in everything I did, but they found a happy medium between not caring and pushing me to my limits. All parents need to take a deeper look into their relationships with their children and how well they are treating them. Then find that happy medium before it is too late and their children's athletic careers they wanted so badly are cut short because of them.

John Wooden is a famous coach and his players admire him as a father figure as well. Wooden would always tell his players,

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"Consider the rights of others before your own feelings, and the feelings of others before your own rights." (goodreads.com)
If parents would take a look at this quote and quit trying to relive the past or make the future then young athletes would have time to grow and prosper before the pressure of parents and competing at a high level causes hate for such beautiful games. Young athletes need support and love not pressure and anger. Across the nation young athletes are being caused pain and suffering because of the pressure of their parents. The crisis will only grow and what could the rest of America do to stop it?

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