

We recently received an invitation for one of our ODP teams to participate in a prestigious tournament in England and were surprised to learn, upon reading the fine print, that said tournament was a 'scout and parent free zone'. Imagine that! A sideline without parents. Could it be that the reputation of the American parents' sideline behavior has spread all the way across the great pond? Or is it a case of 'parents-are-the-same-everywhere' syndrome. Regardless, the bottom line is this: The Director of the Tournament does not want any parents on the premises when the players are engaged in play. Having had the opportunity to study first hand the sideline behavior at youth games across Georgia, I can see his point. I am a parent myself and I enjoy watching my daughter play on Saturdays. It's safe to say that the vast majority of parents and youth coaches are reasonable, well meaning, well adjusted people. Most of us look forward to attending our children's soccer games, where we can spend a relaxing afternoon enjoying the outdoors in the company of likeminded adults who share a common interest. We know that parents and coaches don't actually step out of their cars into the soccer complex with a pre-meditated plan to cause trouble to anyone. And yet, the facts tell a disturbing story. The majority of soccer players quit playing soccer somewhere in their teen years. Why do so many players quit? Some quit because they develop other interests but many quit because playing soccer stops being fun. Recent statistics are another source of great concern. They show a significant rise in red card offenses and referee assaults. Every Georgia Soccer-Youth playing division reports an increase in violent behavior on the fields and on the sidelines. Just as alarmingly, the majority of referees quit refereeing in their first year. In 1999, of the 3,000 referees in Georgia, a whopping 1,700 had less than one year's experience!! Only 600 had more than 4 year's refereeing experience. It's a catch 22 situation. Refereeing standards can only improve if referees stick with it for a few years. But the sideline behavior of parents and coaches scares the rookie referees away. What exactly are the parents doing on the sidelines? Many parents, without any malicious intent, unknowingly send inappropriate messages to the players or the referees on the field. Messages from the parent's side usually fall under one of the following categories: Sideline Coaching: A big no-no, since the parent's instruction could contradict the team coach's instructions, not to mention that parents are not qualified to coach. Sarcasm: Parents and coaches often aim sarcastic remarks at the referee. We have heard them all before so no need to elaborate. These sarcastic remarks serve no useful purpose other than to sour the experience for the referee. If that's not bad enough, parents and coaches do not limit their sarcasm only for the referee. Players are also the target of sideline sarcasm. I heard a typical comment recently while watching a team struggle to get out of their half against better opponents, one of the struggling team's parents shouted "come on guys, the field has two halves!". These kinds of comments do not help the weak team solve the problem, but deflate and irritate the players. Vocal Reaction and Body Language: Often, parents get emotionally involved in the game and are unable to suppress the (according to psychologists) sub-conscious desire to kick every ball and tackle every tackle. The "oooohs!", "aaaahs!" and "oooyys!" that emanate from the parents' side seem harmless enough but there is a fine line between disappointment and disapproval and young players often cannot tell the difference. When an open goal is missed, the cry of disappointment carries a certain level of 'culprit-player-let-parents-down' undertones. Young players are very sensitive to the feedback coming from the sidelines and they tend to pick up on the negative comments. If you don't believe me ask the players. Incurable Behavior: Unfortunately, there are a few isolated individuals who are unable to control themselves in a competitive environment such as a sport event and become mad lunatics. These individuals must not be allowed to coach young players or even attend games. The onus is on the Leagues to weed out such lunatics through a careful and methodical monitoring program using the club Director of Coaching or Coaching Coordinator and appointing field marshals for game days. There is no room for shouters and whiners on the sidelines. What, you ask, is an acceptable behavior by parents? This might sound revolutionary and unrealistic but I firmly believe that parents can best serve their children by sitting quietly, and remain seated, throughout the game. Parents can show their appreciation of good play. - See more at: <http://www.georgiasoccer.org/coaches/epidemic-of-sideline-misbehavior.aspx#sthash.LJdyhWEZ.dpuf>