

This article featured in The Northern Ireland Soccer Post and was written by John McDowell, coach at Edenderry. info@nisoccerpost.com

PARENTS MUST SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

I HAVE to say that I am undoubtedly a huge fan of youth football and have been for many years.

I would encourage anyone who has an interest in the game and has some spare time on a Saturday morning to make the effort to attend a game or two and in no time they will become as addicted as I am.

This is not to say everything is rosey in the garden and I personally believe that while, yes there are so many positives to take from youth football and I also believe it would be foolish to bury our heads in the sand to the problems that definitely remain in our game.

One of the main areas of concern must surely be the conduct of parents. In my experience I believe there are three types of parents that attend games.

FIRSTLY – We have the parent who stands back, doesn't interfere with any coaching aspects and allows his or her child to go out onto the pitch and both enjoy and express themselves. Of course this parent should always be commended; unfortunately there are not enough of them.

SECONDLY – There are the parents who believe their child is the next George Best and no matter what he should always play every minute of every game or else he will move on to a club that will appreciate him. These parents are torturous for coaches who feel pressurised to play these kids and in many cases very good coaches end up giving it up because of the hassle.

THE FINAL PARENT TYPE - The one who continually shout at games. These are probably the worst type of parent. At best they can send out the wrong message to the kids but at worst they become aggressive and the atmosphere can quickly deteriorate at such games. Of course coaches should be able to stamp this sort of behaviour out but on many occasions they can often feel intimidated or worse still they can get involved themselves.

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While I have witnessed occasions of this kind a number of times the worst instance I have had the mispleasure of seeing occurred in a recent Under 12 game I was covering. The game was between two mid table sides so the stakes weren't too high and they didn't have any real history with each other. The events which took place were shameful.

One side was there to play football while the other clearly wasn't and it all came from their touchline. Every refereeing decision was queried while the language was atrocious, before we knew it this had transferred onto the pitch with the 11 year olds swearing at the opposing touchline and the foul play was horrendous.

The result of the game was obviously affected by their shenanigans also with a very young referee under fierce intimidation not to mention the opposition who were clearly shaken. Things got even worse when the footballing side equalised with a shot which had clearly crossed the line, there was a pitch invasion by parents and coaches who surrounded the referee.

When the game ended the harassment of the referee continued while abuse was hurled at their opponents who to their credit had most to complain about but chose to ignore it and get out of there.

I have never seen it so bad and I even decided to stay until the referee had got away safely from the ground, I felt that much for his safety.

Since these events I believe a complaint was made by the coach of the footballing side to the League but unfortunately the young referee was so intimidated he didn't send a report in so no action was taken.

Obviously the League cannot be condemned because of this, but the fact remains these situations do occur and I would appeal to all parents, by all means support your child, praise him or her when they've done well, explain where he or she goes wrong and most importantly stand back and enjoy yourselves and your child will too.

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