



YOUTH SPORTS. THERE CAN BE A DARK SIDE

By Kerry Schmidt 06-19-2005

Unfortunately, there sometimes is a Darth Vader like aspect to youth sports. Fortunately, the dark siders are a tiny minority, but even one single incident is one too many.

I have written a number of columns on youth sports, including the one recently wherein I told of the joys of watching my granddaughter play softball.

But today I talk of a problem that resonates throughout the country involving kids playing sports.

And sadly, the problem(s) can be stated in one word. Parents.

Now I repeat, probably only one, maybe two percent of the parents get out of line, but those that do really stand out, and the messages that the kids receive from their actions embarrasses them and can ruin the fun of youth sports

It may simply be an overzealous parent living vicariously through their children whom they are sure is the next pro superstar, or it can go to the far end of the dark side, where violence can erupt.

You may remember three years ago when a father of a young hockey player bashed the coach's head into the concrete and killed him, right in front of all the 10-year old players. His reason? His son wasn't getting enough playing time!

Regardless, these one-percenters are a major problem and an embarrassment to both themselves and certainly to their children.

What reignited this sad commentary was an incident that occurred Wednesday night during my granddaughter's playoff softball game (9-10 year olds).

I will not mention the city he represented –but if you think “water and beer” you locals can figure it out – but his behavior was as shameful as it gets.

Virtually from the first pitch, he started berating the umpire on his ball/strike calls.

It escalated into the final inning, wherein the coach's language turned vulgar and he made several hand/arm gestures to the umpire which all knew meant “blank you.”

The umpire twice went to the coach and warned him to stop or he would be ejected from the game. When he kept it up, he was ejected and, under league rules, was told he had to leave the field. When he loudly refused, he was warned that if he did not leave, his team would forfeit the game (they were down 4-1, but the top batters were up). Profanely, he stated they would forfeit, and that was it.

This idiot put his own anger and personal problems ahead of the goal of these innocent young girls, which was to win the game on the field.

Plus, this coach had incensed his team's parents to the point that some feared there would be violence, so the coach of my granddaughter's team quickly gathered his girls and left the area.

I was told this particular coach was the same last year.

So, why is someone like this allowed to be in charge of young kids? You could see the utter embarrassment on the faces of the girls on his team. Some were in tears.

What a great example to make to impressionable youngsters.



In all the year's I was involved in youth sports with my two sons, I can honestly say I never had a real "problem child." Yes, a few were borderline, but you could immediately know why when you saw the actions of their parents.

Six or seven years ago, with the purpose of a column in mind, I contacted the local youth sports umpires association and arranged for me to be a "third" umpire for a 13-year old boys summer league game.

I was behind the plate, and when one team was way ahead, I told the other two real umps that I was going to call a strike on the next pitch that was clearly a ball, and I did.

Well folks, you thought I had shot their Pastor! One mom jumped against the chain link fence and began yelling words questioning everything from my eyesight to my ancestry, and using words certainly not heard in church.

It was her son's team that was way ahead, and my sole reason for doing what I did was to gauge parent's reactions.

When I looked at the young man at bat, I could tell immediately he was her son, as he blushed, hung his head and turned away from her.

Some 20 years ago, when my kids were involved, there was this father who was about as bad as it got. His son was the star QB on his 9-year old football team. On one play, the kid was really nailed for a loss. It obviously hurt and he began to cry.

The father raced onto the field, yanked his son's helmet off and twice hit his son in the face, hard, as he yelled, "you act like a sissy (other words were used, but cannot be herein). Take it like a man. You are an embarrassment to me."

Embarrassment to the dad!?! As he should have, he was banned from coming to further games, and his reaction was to sue the league.

This particular dad continued his awful behavior throughout his son's high school and college days. Not surprisingly, the boy ended up with some real psychological problems. Another time, as president of Malibu (California) Little League, I once had to chase actor Gary Bussey into the snack shack and physically restrain him from going after an umpire. I'm sure every parent who has ever been involved in youth sports has stories of their own Darth Vadars, so they can relate.

I have read a number of studies on the actions of these one percenters, and most agree that the parent(s) are angry and often have very low self esteem. Income and education are not a factor, but the majority of these pathetic individuals were found to have unhappy lives and considered themselves a "failure," or at least wanting in many emotional areas.

Furthermore, the studies show that today's children who are continually subjected to this abhorrent behavior, sadly, often end up like their parents.

Mom and dad, this is a child's game, played by the kids because they want to play, and to enjoy this aspect of youth, not for you to force them for your own vicarious reasons or to endure your profane actions.

These kids may be only 9 or 10, but they act more mature than you malcontents.

Cheer for your children, but leave it at that. Do not become a one percenter.