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HEADLINE: RIDING THE REF HORRIBLE EXAMPLE

BYLINE: By TOM KUYPER

From the mailbag:

Question: We recently went to watch our 7-year-old granddaughter play soccer, only to find the coach yell and belittle the referee all game. Needless to say we were very upset with this "role model." Are there guidelines youth coaches need to follow before they can become a coach?

Answer: Unfortunately, this is a nationwide problem. I have seen youth coaches "work" the refs way too much. Most youth organizations have coaches sign a code of conduct agreement describing expected coaching behavior. For the most part, this signature does not prevent the growing problem.

Two things happen as a result of "riding the ref." First, the atmosphere in the stands changes from enjoying the game to critical watching, resulting in lots of disgruntled and hostile parents. Second, the fun of playing turns into fault finding, making excuses for mistakes, bad plays and losing.

There are two ways that a coach can handle his disagreement with the official's call. The coach can yell, whine and complain. The message our kids get is that if things don't go the way you want, you can blame it on someone else, and maybe if you complain a lot it might alter your circumstances.

Or the coach can encourage the team to make adjustments. This is what a good coach does, taking difficult situations and teaching appropriate behavior.

And the kids learn how to adjust their style of play to a certain style of officiating. This is how kids become better at their sport - they learn how to change their game to fit the situation.

Now the purpose of youth sports comes to fruition. These young athletes develop better skills and learn how to deal with tough circumstances.

I remember one college game when I was really yelling at the referee, from tip-off until the horn sounded. The next morning I discovered our church's visiting pastor was that last night's ref. I slid down in my chair and prayed that he wouldn't



recognize me.

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