

## New Parent Primer

By Barbara Sharkey  
Special to *Play On!*

Soccer is a bit different from any other sport, and the parent who is new to the joys of the pitch may need a little counsel. If this is your first year standing along the touchline (official name for the sidelines), consider the following:

1. Nobody keeps score for the first umpteen years of soccer. This doesn't mean that you won't always remember that your child scored five goals at her very first game, but rather it won't be written down in the record books with a little asterisk beside it noting that no one else on either team would even touch the ball.
2. It's not only what you say, it's how you say it. Intensity is everything, and there should be none of it on the sidelines, at least coming from you. Even an innocent "Get the ball!" when yelled as if we are dealing with a sinking ship and life jackets is not helpful. Let the coach direct the play. Parents may cheer, "Go team!" and "Good play!" and "Good kick!" and "Nice pass!" and "Good save!" and that's about it. NEVER say anything to the opposing team's players, to their coach or to the ref, unless it is a cheery "Good game!" as you get into your car to leave. Obviously, if the opponents happen to be your next door neighbors, you can add "So what are you guys having for dinner?" before you close the door.
3. The Ref: It's never too early to start practicing this rule--only these people may talk to the referee: the coaches, assistant coaches, and the team captains. Anything you feel a need to say about the referee should be expressed to your assistant coach, who is well-versed in either explaining things like "play on--advantage" to you or carrying legitimate concerns on up the chain of command to the coach. In soccer we do not boo, hiss, yell or otherwise comment on the ref's calls. Doing so only annoys the ref and makes it more likely your team will be scrutinized more closely for foul play. (Please refer to my article "House of Cards" in the June issue).
4. Snacks are **the most important part** of any soccer event until the kids reach the age of--to be perfectly honest--about thirty-five. If someone forgets the snacks and arrives empty handed, he/she must make an emergency run to the nearest supermarket and have the requisite food back by the end of the second half. The team manager should watch for the snack parent at the start of the game and be sure the snacks are on the premises. Listen up, calendar-impaired folks: "My spouse didn't tell me" or "I forgot" isn't going to cut it here. Be up to speed about where you are on the snack list or risk your child's wrath for the rest of the season.

5. It's hard to believe, but you're not going to know much about the crucial time and place specifics of your child's new team until after registration has occurred. There's probably a space on the registration form to make some requests, but really, beginning soccer is simply a great leap of faith into the unknown. Be assured you will most likely be placed with other kids who live nearby, and carpooling will work out.

6. Pressure: your child just needs to be allowed to play. Offering monetary incentives every time your child makes a goal *does not really support* your coach's efforts on **TEAMWORK**. Soccer is an extremely LOW SCORING sport, so you might as well get used to the fact now that your kid could spend 13 years playing, have a wonderful time, but never score a single goal in a match. If you want to help, take your player out to kick the ball around a little every night after dinner. Advanced soccer coaches will tell you that "ball touches" are everything, so giving your kid a few more chances during the week to get his/her foot on the ball is a nice way to help build skills. However, if tears become involved, you can assume that this is *not* helping.

7. Shin guards do not need to be washed until they begin to stink or skin rashes appear. Excessive washing will wear out the elastic. When you do wash them, secure the Velcro in some way, otherwise everything in the load will be attached together and wrapped around the center post. No matter what your child says, yes, he or she needs to wear shin guards every time, no matter what. Stuffing an extra sock down the front of his/her knee highs doesn't count.

8. Good coaches make every attempt to evenly distribute playing time in the early years. Later on it will depend on how many kids at each position the coach has (another reason to teach your player to be versatile and be happy to play everywhere.) Stay in the coach's good graces by being cooperative, helpful, and un-annoying on the sidelines, and the coach will be more receptive to your inquiries about your child's time on the field.

9. Unless your child is joining a team where the coach has bought numerous identical and spectacularly colored balls for the team to use, your child should have his/her own correct-sized ball, with his/her name and phone number on it in indelible ink, and remember to get it to the car. Put a list on the back of the front door that your child can use as a reminder before she/he leaves for each practice: cleats, socks, shin guards, ball, water (and include the uniform for game days.) It's a short list, but it's amazing how many kids arrive at each practice without a ball or water or at the game without a major uniform part-- like their cleats.

10. Weather: soccer is played no matter what, except thunderstorms. While the safety of the players is always paramount, Washington State Youth Soccer does not recognize sun, wind, rain, sleet, hail or snow as hazardous to children. Field conditions have to mimic an ice skating rink to get a game cancelled. Mud and water, no matter how deep, usually won't stop a game. At any rate, both teams have to arrive at the field and wait for the referee to arrive and declare the conditions unsafe before a game is cancelled or postponed. This is why so many great outdoor accessory stores exist in Seattle. It takes clothing that will get you to the top of Mount Everest to get through a Pacific Northwest

soccer season. Your investment in decent sun/rain/wind/snow gear . . . from the newest in thermal underwear on out by layers, will pay for itself many times over in your personal comfort on the sidelines.

So if you're a new parent this year, relax. All will be well. As you watch your little player chase the ball then stop to do a somersault or investigate an interesting bug in the grass before taking up the chase again, *banish all thoughts of college soccer scholarships from your mind* and just enjoy the game. Your child won't know enough to appreciate your laid-back attitude, but his or her coach certainly will.

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