

A senior athlete's letter to Dad and Mom

Editor's note: Parents always offer their sons and daughters advice — some sound, all of it well-intentioned — as their young athletes navigate their high-school sports careers. Times reader Frank Workman imagines the advice a senior might give to parents in a letter that serves as a primer for how to make the prep experience truly special.

Dear Mom and Dad,

As I've gotten older you've always been there to offer encouragement, advice and good wishes. It has helped mold me into the athlete and student I am today. This time, I want to turn the tables and do the same for you, especially since this is my senior year, and likely to be my last time playing organized sports.

There have been times before, during or after games when you've said or done something that has annoyed me. I realize you've meant no harm, but I want to spell things out for you so the memories we take from this last year will be good ones.

First, I want to thank you for respecting my wishes, letting me play a variety of sports, and not making me specialize in one.

The money you spent for me to play on various select teams wasn't a guarantee that I would ever become good enough to play college ball. Look, I know I'm not going to get an athletic scholarship. I've learned something about genetics in biology class. I have your genes, which explains why I'm not 6 feet 10, 275 pounds and can't run the hundred in 10-flat. Don't blame me for not playing at the next level — look in the mirror.

Just kidding. I wouldn't change a thing about me — or you.

Try to see the season from my point of view.

The perspective the two of you get is going to be entirely different from mine. I'll be learning life lessons in the "nontraditional classroom" high-school sports represent. I'll be learning what dedication and commitment means.

I'm also going to experience the fun times, too, moments you can't be any part of, like the 10 minutes in the locker room right before and after games, the bus rides to and from games, and the silly times in the dugout or locker room when I'm just being a kid.

Get the other parents on the team to sit together at our games.

You and the other parents get to have fun, too, as you root for us all season. It's sort of like getting on a ride at Disneyland, with all the ups and downs, thrills and spills.

Here's a golden opportunity for a couple of old fogies like you to make some new friends, and when was the last time that happened?

Cheer for my teammates, not just me.

Go out of your way to get to know some of the others on the team. I am not the only story. Every player has their own story.

They're just our opponents — they're not our enemies.

It's OK with me if you acknowledge a good play or effort by an opponent. You know, those kids are just like me, they just live in a different town. They probably like the same music and movies we do, and there's not much difference between us, other than the color of the uniform.

The team comes first. Not me.

Our coaches do a great job of instilling team values in us, to put aside any selfishness in favor of our common effort. If any of us are unhappy about our playing time, the position we're playing, or the way we're being treated, they want us to come to them and talk about it.

Just because you disagree with the coach, doesn't mean he or she is an idiot.

My head coaches have earned the right to decide who plays. They probably spend 750 to 1,000 hours a year on their sport — planning practices, watching game film, game-planning for each week's opponent, running practices and coaching games, not to mention attending coaching clinics, dealing with paperwork and keeping in touch with players all year. They spend more waking hours during the season with us than their own families. I see more of them each week than I do you during the season.

Dad, I know how much you love sports, and how much you think you know about them from your playing days and watching games year after year. You know a little about a lot of sports. My coaches are the world's greatest experts on one subject — my team.

If you want a relationship with my coaches, make sure it's a supportive one. Thank them for their hard work, be appreciative of all they do and be thankful (as I am) that we have them on our side.

After the game, give me some time to regroup.

If you want to analyze and rehash the game in-depth, I'll do it with you, but won't it keep until the next morning?

When the game is over, don't expect me to be all chatty and happy to talk, at least not right away. Games are physically, mentally and emotionally draining. Everybody's nerves are raw right after a game. Give me time to decompress, to think through what happened and what the coaches said afterward before you start peppering me with all sorts of "what happened?" questions.

Playing in games with my buddies might just be the most fun I'll have in my life.

We've talked about what it's like for me during high-pressure situations, about how your stomachs get twisted into a knot, and how mom sometimes has to hide her eyes.

But I'm so busy playing, so locked in and focused on what I'm doing, that I don't have time to think about what happens if I drop the pass, miss the shot, or strike out.

What you call pressure is fun for me.

Everybody says playing sports builds character. You've told me that yourself. My coaches say that, while it's true, there is a greater truth to be said about sports.

Playing sports reveals character.

My final season has just begun. I hope the character I reveal makes you proud of me. I hope that I, too, can be proud of you.

Now I have to go, it's time for practice.

Here's to a great season.

Love,

Your Child

Frank Workman, 59, started attending high-school games in the late 1950s. The Lake Forest Park resident roots for Shorecrest when he's not announcing their games or watching other schools play.

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