

Parentally Speaking - October 2007

In a recent World Series a player pretended to be hit by a pitch when the ball really hit his bat. The next player up hit a decisive home run. What are your thoughts about the responsibilities of professionals to kids watching at home in terms of playing by the rules and not trying to "sell" an umpire on a call? And what role do parents and coaches play when kids see professional athletes bending or stretching the rules?

For both coaches and parents, it is your responsibility to teach kids the difference between right and wrong. One of the invaluable lessons that baseball and other sports teach us is the importance of playing by the rules and practicing good sportsmanship. Coaches owe it to their sports to be good role models and to help instill character in their players. This is especially true for youth coaches.

Just as in everyday life, we are going to run into people in the coaching world who are more competitive or cut throat than ourselves as well as those who push the limits of the rules as far as possible. As kids get older, their teams and coaches become more competitive and it seems as though the stakes rise – even though we should keep in mind that these are still kids, that they are playing a game and that the number one objective should be having fun.

I like to talk about "teachable moments." These are times when there is a lesson to be learned, and the environment is conducive to a child being able to focus on and understand that lesson. For example, when a player makes a mental or physical mistake during a game, that is not the best time to point out the mistake, correct the technique or rehash what should have happened. The player already is embarrassed, is probably worried about what everyone thinks and is either thinking about the next play or hoping that the next play does not involve him or her. Obviously those distractions dictate that this is not a teachable moment.

Watching a World Series game with your child, especially when something like that has taken place, is an ideal teachable moment. As parents we should be monitoring what our kids are watching on television and explaining things that seem to confusing to them. In this instance, as a parent I probably would have told my son or daughter, "Wow, that was a close play. It looks like the umpire might have made the wrong call. I think the right thing to do would have been to tell the umpire that the ball had had hit the bat."

Remember, pro athletes cannot be counted on to be role models for our kids.

By Cal and Bill Ripken