

World Class Parents

"So, you want to offer your child the opportunity to be a world-class athlete...."

By John Leonard

The fact is, a number of parents DO, without being raging lunatics, wish to offer their child the best possible chance to be a great athlete...in the same way that they'd like to offer them the chance to attend the most prestigious University, visit the best doctors, be a world-class musician or artist, etc. etc. etc.

The key word is "OFFER". Not "force". Not "Make". Offer. The issue, if you take the words "world class" out of there...is that MOST parents want to "de-limit" their children and "offer them the chance for the best opportunities in life.". Put that way, it doesn't sound so bad. In fact, it sounds like "most of us".

As every coach knows, the devil is in the execution. (or the details, if you prefer.)

I was asked this question twice on a recent trip to Africa....where the topic came up because of the perception that African children who aspire to be swimmers are considerably limited on their continent. Overall, I thought it a fair question. Here's my answer...I'd love to hear other people's thoughts.

#1. ***It's all about the coaching.*** Led by the great researcher, Dr. Anders Ericsson, we know that expertise comes from 10,000 hours of focused, purposeful practice, guided by a "coach" of skill, knowledge and understanding of the learning process providing top quality feedback. So the number one task of the parent on the track of great opportunities...do your homework, research the coaches available to your child, spend time in conversation with them, reach a mutually satisfying understanding of "who is doing what" and then get out of the way, and TRUST THEM to do right with your child. You can "oversee the process" but let the coach, Coach.

That's answer 1, 1A and 1B.....nothing else comes close in importance. Here are a few other ideas, however.

#2. ***It's about RESILIENCE!*** Your child, all children, are going to hit some rough patches in their development. Teach them to persevere, don't get the roadblocks out of their way FOR them, let them learn to struggle with it and overcome. Everyone gets knocked back/down. The child has to get good at getting back up...ON THEIR OWN.

"Curling parents" are those rushing down the path ahead of the child, trying to clear every obstacle out of the way for them.....and never letting the child gain the satisfaction of overcoming challenges. Don't be one.

"Helicopter parents" are those who hover over their child at every moment, so intent on making sure the child "gets it" that they become the biggest distraction to the child ever "getting it". Go sit down. Relax. Read a paper. When the child's done, love them, don't make them replay every moment of practice for you. Don't be one.

#3. ***It's about personal responsibility.*** Make sure you teach your child that "if it's to be, it's up to me." If they want to be a world class athlete, only their effort will take them there. Effort. Not talent. Tons of people have talent to achieve great things. Few do. Often because their proud parents forgot that effort is the only way to achieve. Teach effort.

#4. ***Be a Motivation Machine.*** As the great swimmer Michael Phelps was on his steady, effortful rise to the top of the swimming world, his coach Bob Bowman described Michael as a "Motivation Machine". Something good happens, he got up the next morning with the mind-set, "I want more of that." And he went off to practice. (not staying in bed congratulating himself..)"I earned some more sleep this morning...I'll sleep in..") When something Bad happened, Michael got up and went to practice with the mindset "I'm NEVER letting that happen again". (not staying in bed and having a mini-pity-party.) One of the greatest things I have ever heard that separates a great individual from the rest of us...Be a Motivation Machine.

Parents, you can teach that to your child and it will be a life-gift of importance.