



Give 'Em LESSS

Last week I had a wonderful conversation with an earnest young male parent who loved his young 11 year old son and wanted me to know all the things he did for the boy to help him be a great athlete.

The list was long. Monitored diet, monitored sleep, “protection” from other parents with “aggressive attitudes” towards their child’s improvement, private coaching to make him more “explosive” off the starting blocks, making sure he understood all the pop psychology concepts of self-image and “paid attention” to his inner self talk...and on...and on...and on. I did notice that the poor kid didn’t smile much.

Wow. I was immediately carried back to a very relaxed mother I met of a young musical prodigy about 15 years ago. When I asked how much time a day the child practiced, the mother said, “about 10% of what she wants to.”

I was so impressed. In a world where helicopter parents are now passe and its “Velcro” parents and “curling parents” that are the new paradigms of the over-involved set, this was news.

The mother went on...“I figure if she really loves something, she can figure her own way to get there...that way, she owns it and it’s not the “nagging mommie” driving the train. I tell her she can practice about 30 minutes a day if she wants and then she better pick up a book and read and relax. I do notice that when I leave the house and come back a couple of hours later, the instrument has been moved. My neighbor says I’m not gone 5 minutes when the strings start up. “

This of course is genius. Nothing will replace a child’s love of an activity, IF that love is there. If it’s the parents love, instead of the child, the child will hit 12-16 years of age, rebel, walk away and go find something mommie or daddy want nothing to do with.

Because the purpose of life at ages 12-20 is to become our own person. Not the person mom or dad envisions.

The fastest way out of swimming is to have Mom or Dad want your success more than you do. Hence the dropout rate in all of youth sports.

The simple take-aways for the wise parent?

- 1) Give them less “everything” than they want. If THEY want it, they will find a way.
- 2) Let the sport or activity they chose be THEIRS. You stay away and know as little about it as you can and still be “aware” of dangers and issues.
- 3) Do NOT think you “Control” anything with your child. The more you try to exert your influence, the less you have. Conversely, if you behave like an adult you ARE their role model and they Will follow your lead.

All the Best, John Leonard

