



Positive Coaching Alliance Guide: Discussing Sports Incidents with Children

This companion to PCA's annual release of the "Bottom 10 Moments in Sports" and "Top 10 Moments in Sports" answers a frequent query in the thousand-plus workshops PCA presents each year for youth sports leaders, parents and coaches:

"How can we encourage youth athletes to Honor the Game when they see so many poor examples from their college or pro sports idols?"

This question is critical in light of the Mitchell Report on steroid use in Major League Baseball and the proliferation of negative youth sports incidents, including on-field adult violence against youth athletes, which routinely appear on TV newscasts and web-based video. The answer is to capitalize on the "teachable moments" those negative examples provide.

Teachable moments occur when a child tries to process an experience or an impression, and a parent or coach has the opportunity to turn a potentially negative incident into a springboard for discussing and teaching positive behavior.

Casting light on negative behavior and discussing it -- rather than ignoring it and hoping children do the same -- can help children avoid emulating the negative behavior. PCA hopes our list prompts media outlets to discuss these incidents in a way that educates youth sports leaders, parents and coaches who work with children.

Using as an example the Mitchell Report, which implicates the heroes of many youth athletes for cheating through the use of dangerous, illegal performance-enhancing drugs, PCA suggests several steps to youth sports leaders, coaches and parents:

Do NOT let it go by without comment. Children who learn of their heroes' behavior without comment may take it as tacit approval from the adults. You might ask your child open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered "Yes" or "No") such as:

- What do you think would cause these players to use steroids when they knew it might cause health problems?
- Is using steroids cheating? Why/why not?
- Have you ever wanted something so badly you were tempted to cheat?
- Would you be more inclined to cheat if you believed others were cheating?
- If a player set a record while using illegal drugs, what should happen to that record?
- If you were ever offered steroids, what would you do? What would you say to the person offering them?

Once you get the conversation going, you might add your thoughts at an appropriate time:

- I don't like steroid use both because it is dangerous and because it provides an unfair competitive advantage.
- These players are short-sighted. When they get older they will pay a price for doing this with their health.
- I have lost a lot of respect for these players because they cheated.
- I hope you will have the strength to say no to anyone who tries to get you to cheat in any way.

And don't forget to use the positive incidents from PCA's Top 10 list. You might say something like:

- Earlier this year Cal Ripken, Jr. and Tony Gwynn were inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. I really admire them because they excelled at the highest level without resorting to cheating.

Coaches and parents also have the opportunity to reinforce specific positive values such as "Honoring the Game." PCA promotes the ROOTS of Honoring the Game, where ROOTS stands for respect for Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates and Self.

Talking about ROOTS and continually reinforcing it with your children will help them internalize these values and make it less likely they will do something that will dishonor the game. Incidents like those on PCA's Bottom & Top 10 Lists can strengthen bonds between parent and child and get conversations going that will enrich the relationship.

Remember, kids love sports so much they will even talk about it with their parents!