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Let the youngsters have fun

Sports administrators note a growing number of parents get caught up in the emotions of their youngsters' games

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
 CORRESPONDENT

As children of all ages take to the arenas, ball diamonds and soccer pitches in record numbers, interference of parents is posing a growing threat to minor sport.

That's the opinion of several Stouffville area minor sport officials.

These people are fearful that a blatant disregard for game officials and coaches shown by some parents, along with an obsession with their own offspring's achievement level, could do lasting damage to well established minor sport organizations.

"It's getting worse in all sports," insists Alfons Rubbens, veteran soccer coach and charter president of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club.

"Parents keep ranting and raving on the sidelines. They don't know they're taking the heart out of the game."

Rubbens said veteran soccer referees are being driven from the game at house league and rep levels because of abuse hurled at them by parents.

"More and more officials are saying it just isn't worth it."

Long-time Whitchurch-Stouffville Softball Association umpire-in-chief Al Piette agrees.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Administrators of various local sports organizations fear a growing number of parents get emotionally caught up in the action that takes place in their youngsters' games.

He says even the youngest levels of softball aren't immune, citing the case of his son, Keith, who gave up umpiring after one season partly because of abuse he was forced to endure from parents while officiating a T-ball game.

"Some officials leave and don't ever get back into the game because they just don't want the hassles of the parents."

Piette said the example set by some parents could set their children off on the wrong course.

"The kids hear this and they think it's okay to scream and holler at umpires."

While official bashing by parents takes its toll on umpires and referees, some say the damage can be even more serious when parents zero in on their own children.

"I've seen it all. I've seen parents hanging over the glass screaming at their kids on the ice," said Anne Salvagna, a former Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association house league conven-

er who has coached select and rep boys teams.

Salvagna cited a recent case of a parent of a visiting minor atom rep boys team who denied his son a drink after a game because his line was on the ice for two goals. She suggested some parents expect too much of their children athletically.

"It's as if their child is reflecting them," she said.

"I tell these parents that they have to accept their child's abilities as they are. I think some people

take hockey far too seriously. It's supposed to be fun."

Rubbens said parents who misbehave during games can actually hurt their child's chances of making a rep team.

"More and more coaches are trying out the parents as well as the players. I know of players who were not picked for a rep team because the coach didn't want to deal with their parents."

Stouffville-Markham Girls Hockey Association president Dianne White feels parents of female hockey players can be guilty of copying what they see at boys' games.

"They can get on the coaches and the referees," said White. "There's a certain tendency to mimic the boys' minor hockey system."

White recalls suffering embarrassment at an out of town girls hockey tournament when she was called upon by officials to eject a Stouffville parent from the arena after the man twice hurled himself at the glass to try to get a referee's attention.

White said a new regulation introduced by her association last season could result in penalties being assessed a team if a parent harasses game officials.

Rubbens thinks the answer to the problem of misbehaving parents is retraining the offenders.

"We don't just have to educate the players, we have to educate the parents as well."

He suggests special sessions be held where parents view videos and listen to professional speakers. He suggests that allowing offending parents to continue is a disservice to the young players.

"It's the biggest handicap we've got. It's holding back our youth."

Spirit live by power play and die by it

The power play was a mixed blessing as the Spirit of Stouffville took to the road for a pair of Provincial Junior A Hockey League games over the weekend.

The Spirit scored three times with the man advantage on their way to a convincing 9-4 win over the Durham Huskies Friday night.

The power play accounted for another

pair of markers Sunday in Wexford, but the host Wexford Raiders netted a quartet of shorthanded goals to edge the visitors 6-5.

Kevin Edgar and Phil Barski each picked up two goals to help the Spirit keep the Huskies at bay Friday.

The win snapped a three-game Spirit losing streak.

Dave Zelasko, Brad Clubine, Brendan

McCann, Jesse Johnston and Mike Tucciarone rounded out the Spirit scoring. Edgar added a trio of assists, with Barski, and Jeff Cochrane each setting up a pair of goals.

The Spirit, who led 3-1 after the first period and 5-2 heading into the third, aimed 54 shots at the Durham net, while Stouffville goalkeeper Andrew Harper faced only 23 shots.

On Sunday, the Spirit led 2-1 after 20 minutes.

They carried a 5-3 lead into the third before their power play self-destructed, enabling the Raiders to come back to steal the victory with three shorthanded markers.

Will Chang, Edgar, Zelasko, Barski and

See BAD, page 20.



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