

Coaching From the Stands

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BY **MATT KRUMRIE** | MARCH 01, 2018, 7:51 A.M. (ET)

Just about every wrestler likes it when parents are in the stands, watching, cheering them on.

Just about every wrestler dislikes it when a parent turns into a coach, and tries to coach from the stands, especially during a match or competition.

It creates a lot of confusion, says Trevor Floerchinger, a coach with the North Montana Wrestling Club in Great Falls, MT, and Kids Director for Montana USA Wrestling.

“Teaching a young kid to work through the adversity that comes with wrestling is already hard enough. When he or she looks past coach to mom and dad, those moments of adversity become even more difficult,” Floerchinger says.

So mom and dad, uncle, big brother or sister, family friend—give your wrestler space for those six minutes on the mat and attention when they need it most, before or after the match as it fits, says Mike Clayton, National Coaches Education Program Manager for USA Wrestling.

“Many times, parents are well intentioned, but provide the right support at the wrong time,” Clayton says.

Preparing and heading out on a mat, alone for six minutes, can be nerve-racking for any wrestler. A loud voice from a parent telling them what to do, even if it means well, won’t calm the nerves. But it can add extra pressure, and confusion, especially if different than what the coach is instructing, or how they prepared prior to the match.

“Often times, emotional outbursts from an athlete are caused by fear of letting someone else down,” Clayton says. “Even if a parent doesn’t intend to put this level of pressure on their child, children can create a heightened sense of needing to please a parent in order to receive love.”

Some parents are new to sports, and have not been in the position of being in the stands before. Some feel they are invested in their child’s development, and that “coaching” from the stands is their way to help them develop and/or succeed. Some are just overbearing. The wrestler knows it. So do his teammates. The coach knows it. The opposing fans know it. The refs know it.

No child wants that parent in the stands.

“Some parents feel they know their kid as a wrestler better than anyone else and have an insecurity that leads them to the conclusion that if they do not coach from the stands, the actual coaches will not do what is necessary to win,” says Christina Young, Membership Director for Oklahoma USA Wrestling.

Young has a 16-year-old son who has wrestled since age 4, and she remembers being that new wrestling parent in the stands. She was excited, passionate, and cheering wildly for her son. But she left the coaching to the coaches.

“You need to trust your son’s or daughter’s coaches to know them well and provide the appropriate level of coaching,” Young says. “They see them every day in practice and know what they are capable of doing. Trust the process. Some parents seem to need to coach from the stands almost just to get all the angst and nervousness out of their system. Their internal dialog comes out through loud coaching from the stands. That may help the parent feel better, but does not help the wrestler.”

Young offers these tips for parents who may find it hard to resist coaching from the stands during a match:

- Understand your wrestler’s coach has their best interest in mind and trust that they know what they are doing.
- Coaching from the stands is ineffective because the wrestler typically cannot even hear what is being said. Even when they can, it just means they have multiple voices competing with each other to coach. Who should the wrestler listen to? The coach, of course. So, let the coach coach.

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- Understand that even if you could interject at the right moment and maybe alter the outcome of a particular match (unlikely), a single win is not important enough to disrupt the development process. Every great wrestler had to learn to think through positions, understand and know their own strengths and weaknesses, and learn to compete successfully relying on themselves—with the help of actual coaches, of course.

If you know you get a bit...excited...during your child's match, consider videotaping the match, says Clayton.

"You can often reduce your nerves by having something else to focus on, the camera," he adds. "If you still can't cope, have someone record the match and watch it after it happens. That way you'll know the result and then you can evaluate the performance in a calm manner. If you have a lot of energy after your athlete comes off the mat, consider giving them time to wind down before you comment."

Although sometimes difficult, coaches should establish boundaries (best done in a parent/coach meeting prior to a season) on how to act in the stands, during a match.

"When I coached young players, our club had a rule that from the time the parents dropped off their sons until the time that we released them after the game, we were in charge," says Brian T. McCormick, PhD, a professional basketball coach, consultant, and clinician who runs learntolovebasketball.com. McCormick has coached at every level of basketball —youth, high school, college and professionally. If it can happen in the stands, he has seen it.

McCormick says parents should consider this angle, next time they coach from the stands:

"Imagine that you are at your job," McCormick says. "Do you perform better with multiple people telling you to do different things at the same time? You are an adult presumably with a higher cognitive capacity and often with greater experience performing the tasks at work. A child is developing cognitively and often has less experience, less automated skills in the sport. If you do not enjoy multiple people yelling at you at work as you try to perform a potentially simpler task, why would a child respond better when multiple people yell at him or her while he or she wrestles?"

So...

"Be a fan," McCormick says. "Enjoy watching your son or daughter wrestle. Clap and cheer. Let the coaches coach."

Wrestlers are emotional. Coaches are emotional. Parents are emotional. Especially during a match. Manage those emotions for six minutes. Let the coaches coach and wrestlers wrestle.

"If you can manage emotions, everyone will have a better experience through our great sport," Clayton says.

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Shawn Kubiak · Green Bay, Wisconsin

If you ask any wrestler wearing headgear if they can hear parents coaching from the stands 99% will say they don't hear it. Wrestlers that I have coached have a hard time hearing coaches on Mat Side let alone the stands... Just Sayin....

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Mike Foy · Thornwood High School

I agree you can't hear much but if you are a coach and your kid is not listen to you...maybe he doesnt trust your advice. Maybe it is a coach issue. I always listen to my coaches however they were quality coaches.

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Joe Smith · Nome, Alaska

My daughter has said they hate it when parents try to coach because they do not know how and it's distracting.

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