

To: All Parents

January 7, 2008

**This is an important document about the upcoming season and the “Mandatory Parent Meeting” on January 9th and 10th. Please take the time to read it carefully.
Thank you.**

Our organization is committed to the principles of Positive Coaching Alliance and against a “win-at-all-cost” mentality. PCA calls a Positive Coach a “Double-Goal Coach®.” A win-at-all-cost coach has only one goal – to win. A Positive Coach shares that goal (wants to win) but has a second goal that is even more important – to use the sports experience to help young people learn “life lessons” and positive character traits that will help them be successful throughout their lives.

Help us promote the three PCA principles that have the power to “transform youth sports so that sports can transform youth.” The three principles, explained in this letter, are:

**1 Redefining “Winner,”
2 Filling the Emotional Tank, and
3 Honoring the Game.**

1 _____ REDEFINING “WINNER”

In professional sports (which is entertainment), there is only one goal – to have the most points at the end of a contest. However, in youth sports (which is education), there is a second goal: to produce young people who will be winners in life.

To help our children get the most out of competitive sports, we need to redefine what it means to be a “winner.” Winners are people who:

- Make maximum effort.
- Continue to learn and improve.
- Refuse to let mistakes (or fear of making mistakes) stop them.

This is called a Mastery Orientation. PCA says that the Tree of Mastery is an ELM Tree where ELM stands for **E**ffort, **L**earning, and **M**istakes.

If our athletes keep these things in mind, they will develop habits that will serve them well throughout their lives.

There is an added benefit. Athletes who are coached with a Mastery Orientation tend to have reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence. And when athletes feel less anxiety, they are more likely to have fun playing their sport and to do better!

Here’s how you can help:

1. Tell your child that it’s OK to make a mistake.

2. Let your child know you appreciate it when he tries hard even if unsuccessful.

3. Ask rather than tell. Try to get your child to talk about her play rather than telling her what you think about it. Ask open-ended questions to get her to talk (e.g., “What was the best part of the game for you?”)

4. Recognize that Mastery is hard work. Let the coaches criticize your child’s play. Tell your child you are proud of him regardless of the outcome of the game.

2 ___ FILLING THE EMOTIONAL TANK

Research shows that the home team wins about 60% of the time because of the emotional support a team receives when it plays in front of its own fans. Like gas tanks in cars, athletes have “Emotional Tanks” that need to be filled to do their best.

There will be times when you need to correct and criticize. Research has shown that a “Magic Ratio” of 5:1 (praise to criticism) is ideal. Help us achieve this Magic Ratio with your child.

Here’s how you can help:

1. Your #1 job is to fill your child’s Emotional Tank. Encourage him regardless of what happens in the game.
2. Try not to give your child a lot of advice (which after a tough game can seem like criticism, which drains a person’s tank). Remember, it’s difficult to do well with a low tank. When she makes a mistake, you might say, “Don’t worry. Let’s get the next one. You can do it.” After tough losses, it’s often helpful to acknowledge feelings of disappointment. For example, you might say “I can imagine you must be disappointed to have lost.”

3 ___ HONORING THE GAME

Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTS of positive play, where ROOTS stands for respect for

- **Rules:** We don’t bend the rules to win.
- **Opponents:** A worthy opponent is a gift that forces us to play to our highest potential.
- **Officials:** We treat officials with respect even when we disagree.
- **Teammates:** We never do anything that would embarrass our team on or off the field.
- **Self:** We live up to our own standards regardless of what others do.

3. Use the “3-Pluses-and-a-Wish” technique. Before you give advice, find three good things about your child’s performance. Phrase the advice as a wish:

- You really tried hard in the game today (Plus #1).

- I also saw you filling your teammate’s Emotional Tank after he made a mistake (Plus #2).

- And that play you made toward the end of the game shows how much you are improving (Plus #3).

- I wish you wouldn’t get down on yourself when you make a mistake.

If you can’t come up with three pluses, don’t say the wish because then it may drain his emotional tank rather than fill it.

4. Remember the Magic Ratio*. Praise your child about 5 times for every time you criticize. If you do, she will be better able to hear your criticism without becoming defensive.

** It’s called the Magic Ratio because great things happen when we get close to it with our children.*

Here’s how you can help:

1. Let your child know that you want him to Honor The Game. Discuss the meaning of each element of ROOTS with your athletes.
2. Be a good role model. Honor the Game when you attend games. Cheer both teams when good plays are made. If, in your opinion, an officiating mistake is made, be silent! Use this as an opportunity to think about how difficult it is to officiate a game perfectly.
3. Encourage other parents to Honor the Game.