

Parents and performance...

When I travel attend competition with the Welsh squad it's always great to see parents in attendance supporting their children on their journey to fulfilling their ability in sport. Our parents are hugely influential in defining our perceptions of sporting success and our attitudes to competition. Supporting a young player through their table tennis development can be costly both in terms of time and finance which brings additional pressure in some cases to both the family and the player. Without question, if the support of parents stopped then the TTAW would struggle to continue producing successful players. So, thank you all for your ongoing support of both our players and our organisation.

But what is the point of this article? I suppose my question to any parents reading this is WHY do you continue to support your children in their table tennis development? This may seem a very peculiar question! Some answers can be very obvious such as I do it for my child, they love the game, I want them to achieve all that they can. Others may be harder to reflect upon such as I want my child to achieve what I didn't, seeing them win reflects well on me, and they HAVE to be the best. Some, none, or all of the above may apply to you.

What is important to think about as a parent is how your 'WHY' influences your attitudes in relation to your child's sport. In turn, which of your attitudes and beliefs reflect back at you when you watch your child play? I would just like you to think back to the last time you picked up your child from a competition and the first question you asked when they got into the car. Was it, "did you win"? Or more open questions such as, "did you enjoy yourself? Was that fun? What did you learn?"

It is at these times that we shape our children's attitudes to sport. There is a huge difference between the child that is desperate to win at all costs and the child that is desperate to learn. The child who has learnt that winning is the most important measure of competence is at risk. They are at risk of focusing too much on the end goal (the win) and not the journey (skill development). By not being encouraged to learn from their performances (such as in the car on the way home) they lose an opportunity to improve. But the biggest risk is that they stop having fun. Players that measure success only in results during the developmental phase are probably missing out on much of the fun factor. And if there is no fun in sport then what is the point?

What we want is to help develop players with a passion for table tennis and a drive to be the best that they can be. If we can encourage our players to strive to develop their skills and accept that winning isn't the only measure of success we will produce better players, more competition and see more people get involved with the sport. As a consequence of a focus upon skill development the 'winning' will begin to take care of itself.

So, parents, your influence is vital in terms of the attitudes that our players will develop. The questions that you ask your children before, during and after competition can have a huge impact upon how they perceive success and their development. Did you enjoy training? What did you learn from that match? What do you want to improve in your game? The value of these kind of questions can lead to some fantastic dialogue between you and your child and really enable you to get involved with their development.

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