

# Dad, son meet pressures of Little League

Last week I received my indoctrination as the parent of an 8-year-old starting his first year of Little League baseball.

Tuesday night we had a meeting of all parents at the coach's home. Friday evening we purchased baseball equipment. Sunday afternoon was the first practice.

The meeting at the coach's home — a meeting I originally felt was unnecessary to attend — stressed "his" philosophy of Little League:

"You think these kids don't feel bad when they strike out or miss a pop fly. In this league, the parents should never criticize the coach, the umpire and, above all, the child. These kids have enough pressure on them. If you can't live by these rules, don't sign up your child!"

"I want these kids to have fun, to enjoy the game and, above all, to improve their skills throughout the season. Winning is nice, but as far as I'm concerned, improvement is the key. Furthermore, every boy will play — regardless of his skill."

I NEVER had realized the extreme pressure parents can put on their children. It was apparent the coach was very serious and sincere in his plea. I vowed that evening that all my comments and interactions with my son would be positive — encouragement, motivation, never criticism.

The coach informed us each player would need a baseball glove made of real leather, not cheap synthetics. Each boy was also to bring a baseball to his

first practice to bolster the league's equipment arsenal.

Finally, each boy was to have a jockstrap. "A kid wearing a jock automatically feels like a big league baseball player," the coach explained.

On Friday night we went shopping for the equipment. A Rawlings baseball glove, all leather, set me back \$19.95. The salesman suggested we buy a leather softener for the glove — another \$1.75. Big league baseballs were on sale at \$2.99, and the jockstrap cost another \$2.95.

At home that evening, my son decided to try on his athletic supporter. It took him a minute or two to figure out how to put on this strange new garment. Indeed, he soon realized he had put it on backwards.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON was the first practice. I arrived slightly early with my son only to find many other dads already on the field.

I was rapidly enlisted to help coach. My job was to hit easy ground balls to several infielders. I tossed the first ball up in the air, intending to hit a grounder to second base. Swing — miss!

I was embarrassed. Indeed, it had been many years since I played hardball, and even in my prime I was never great. "Guys, that's what happens when you take your eyes off the ball," I called out.

Fortunately, I soon began to hit with regularity.

I watched my son field pop-ups and ground balls. One fly ball he misjudged by a mile. "Good try," I yelled.

Later a hard grounder bounced up and hit him in the shoulder. He winced, apparently in some slight pain. "Great stop. That's getting your body in front of the ball," I told him.

LATER THE coach had all the boys run bases. Just once around and many were fatigued, breathing deeply. Clearly they had a great deal of physical conditioning ahead before they would be in shape for the season.

As my son and I left practice that day, there was a unique closeness between us that previously I hadn't experienced. Although he played only reasonably well, it was apparent he enjoyed the afternoon.

A Farmington Hills resident, Barry Franklin teaches physiology at Wayne State University's medical school, co-directs the cardiac rehabilitation program at Sinai Hospital and teaches in the physician assistant



**fitness**  
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ant program at Mercy College of Detroit. (An earlier column incor-

rectly placed him at Marygrove — the editor's error.)



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