



Benching My Own Son To Teach A Life Lesson

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“I am coaching my son’s middle-school basketball team, and we were off to a 6-0 start. Then, to discipline my son for getting in trouble with a teacher, I benched him for a game, even though there was no rule that I had to do so, and we lost that game. Now the other players’ parents are upset with me for costing the team a win. Did I make a mistake? And what do I do now?”

PCA Response by Eric Eisendrath, PCA Lead Trainer

There is no question in my mind that you did the right thing. I applaud your courage to follow through, when it would probably have been easier to have chosen a different course.

At PCA, we believe that teaching life lessons through sports is the number one responsibility of a coach. Clearly, you were making that choice when you elected to bench your son. You have helped him to grasp the importance of respecting others (teachers, coaches, and teammates alike) and to recognize that there are repercussions to any action.

The parents’ reaction is troubling, as they seem to miss the long-term benefit -- for your son and theirs -- of a coach who puts life lessons first. When speaking to parents at PCA workshops, I encourage them to look at the “big picture” versus the “little picture” associated with youth sports. Being 7-0 instead of 6-1 in middle-school basketball is an extremely “little picture” concern. However, teaching your son (and theirs) respect and accountability is an invaluable life lesson that will serve well beyond this basketball season!

If parents continue to question your decision, use this as an opportunity to communicate Double-Goal values to them. Use “narrated modeling,” a PCA tool, to tell them why you did what you did. Send them an e-mail explaining the Big Picture-Little Picture as you saw it with your son’s behavior.

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BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE



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Encourage them to seek you out to talk with you about it. You've got their attention now so use the opportunity to dialog with them. Empathizing with them can help ("I know it is hard to lose a game. Believe me, I wanted to win that game, too, but I want my son to grow up to understand responsibility more. Do you understand why I think that is more important than winning a game?").

But whatever you do, stand your ground. In our Double-Goal Coach workshop we state, "It takes moral courage to uphold a positive culture." Your stance is a great example of that credo!

Eric Eisendrath is a former Division One hockey goalie at Brown University, and has coached soccer, lacrosse and hockey at a variety of levels.

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