

# Enjoying the Game of Hockey

By  
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Does your child enjoy playing the game of hockey? Enjoyment is far more than just having fun or even more than satisfaction of achievement. Enjoyment, to a certain extent, is psychologically measurable. An athlete can find enjoyment in the satisfaction he derives from seeing the results of his hard work. He may enjoy challenging himself and pushing himself beyond his limits. He may enjoy competition. He may enjoy the camaraderie of being part of a team. He may enjoy the atmosphere of ice rinks. He may even enjoy that hockey brings his family closer together. In the end, your child will answer the question of whether or not they enjoy playing hockey: If he does not enjoy it, then he will stop playing as soon as he can (or is allowed).

This past hockey season, I started to wonder if the question shouldn't be directed at the parents of hockey players. Do you enjoy watching your child play the game of hockey?

A 2005 University of Maryland study found that over 53% of parents (not including coaches or officials) leave their child's games angry. The parents in the study claimed that the referees made them most angry, followed closely by their anger being caused by the play of their own child. The 53% only includes those that admitted that they were "really" angry. It doesn't include those that considered themselves to be only feeling "anxious" or "irritable". These findings suggest that the majority of parents do not truly enjoy watching their children play.

Although I have witnessed a number of fist fights, shoving matches, and even a wife-beating between parents at hockey rinks over the years, this past year I probably witnessed more yelling and screaming at players and referees than ever before. Most of the increase I chalk up to the added pressures and concerns that have been brought on by the economic hard times that many families have faced recently. It is hard for a father or mother that has spent their whole day worrying about paying the bills to not bring their troubles to the rink.

Even still, how do you think the player feels when their red-faced parent is screaming at them in front of all of their friends? This past season I was behind the bench with players whose parents called them out by name and screamed, "(name of player), you suck," "(name of player) what the (expletive) are you doing out there," "(name of player) that goal was your fault." After one such episode, a fifteen year old boy came back to the bench, put his hands up on the boards and let his head drop down to his chest. Noticing, I went over to check on the player to make sure he wasn't injured. When I was behind him I leaned over and said, "are you okay (name of player)...what's wrong?" He simply answered, "My dad." Honestly, the kid had been playing well, so I told him, "you're doing great out there, keep it up."

It was not the first time that I have had to try and lift a player's spirits on the bench after their parents publicly dispirited them. More kids than I can remember have told me that they were dreading the ride home because they knew that they would get

yelled at all the way. Do parents honestly think that that experience adds to that player's enjoyment in playing the game of hockey?

Just to make it clear, I think that hockey is a great family sport. Most hockey parents are great. They are encouraging and supportive of their children. This is especially true for parents of children that are part of the Buffalo Prospects. That said, I would hope that everyone that reads this article honestly asks themselves if they truly enjoy watching their child play and whether their emotions and actions encourage their children to enjoy playing the great game of hockey.