

Sitting on the Bench: No fun

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I'm a benchwarmer.

I'm a substitute on my high school team. I think I'm as good as some of the players who play ahead of me. I'd like to play more, but the coach decides who plays in the games.

I play hard in practice. Some of the players on the team, some of the good ones, don't, but that doesn't seem to help me. They still play the whole game. My parents say to work hard and be prepared and my time will come, but I'm not so sure.

I love the game. I like practicing on my own or playing pick-up with my friends. I've been to summer camps and played in youth leagues since I was a little kid. I've been preparing a long time for this chance and now I'm not sure I'm going to get it.

I try to be a good teammate, but sometimes it's not easy. If the player ahead of me screws up in a game, maybe the coach will put me in. I'm supposed to be happy just being on the team, but I'd like to play in the games.

I don't know about the coach. I think he has me pigeonholed, doesn't think I'm very good. I can have a great week in practice but I still don't get any more time in the games.

It's embarrassing to sit the bench. People think you're no good. Sometimes my friends yell to the coach to put me in. That's no help.

Sometimes I play at the end of a one-sided game in what they call “garbage time.” It’s a little humiliating really.

I’m the benchwarmer’s coach. I’d like to play everybody, but the fact is that some kids are better than others. You know, they keep score in the games we play – and people like it when we win. The whole community likes it.

I’m competitive too. I want to win. It’s the way I get evaluated as a coach. What’s the first thing people ask when they find out you’re a coach – “what’s your record?”

Some kids who ride the bench deserve to be there. They’re young. They will improve in practice and their time will come, later. Others don’t work very hard to improve, and their effort in practice is not what it should be.

Still others, I’d love to play more. They’re nice kids, they work hard, and they love the game, but, frankly, some kids are just not that good. They just don’t have that much natural ability and their development levels off at some point. I get them into games as much as I can.

I coach the team in addition to my other job. During the season I don’t get much time at home with my family. I don’t do this for the money, that’s for sure.

Parents can drive you crazy. They love their kids, so I expect them to be irrational. They think their kids are all terrific players, even when it’s obvious they’re not.

I try to have a good relationship with parents and appreciate their support when I get it. I’m cordial, but I won’t talk about playing time or the relative merits of one player over another. Those are lose-lose discussions.

When we're winning, I'm a pretty smart coach and I'm playing the right kids. If we're not, then I'm dumber than sand and I'm putting the wrong kids out there. Some years I'm smarter than others.

I'm the parent of the benchwarmer. I love my kid and it kills me to see him so discouraged.

I've spent a lot of time and energy in the last decade or so of my life supporting my children's interest in sports: summer sports camps, driving hither and yon to events, buying equipment. I've spent a small fortune.

I've enjoyed it, mostly, but it all seemed to be preparation for this time when his skills would be in full blossom, and he would be playing at a truly competitive level.

But he sits on the bench, and time passes so quickly at this stage. If not now, when? How can he prove he belongs if he doesn't play in the games? An athlete's career ends so quickly.

I know my role as a parent. I don't criticize the coach, or yell and scream at officials at games. I'll never embarrass my kid.

Sometimes in a losing game, though, I wonder why he's not playing. I think, "Heck, he can't play any worse than the ones you got out there."

I try to keep it positive. I listen to his complaints at home and don't undercut the coach. I tell him to be the best teammate he can and to enjoy the game in practice and he is getting better even if it doesn't show up in playing time.

I know it's hard being a benchwarmer.