

BasketCases: How Youth Basketball Parents Can Lower Their Blood Pressure and Keep Their Sanity

Chapter 1

Can't We All Just Get Along?

You are a youth basketball parent, a Weekend Warrior who spends Saturdays and Sundays sitting in a gymnasium watching your sons or daughters play basketball.

I am a basketball referee, a Weekend Whistleblower who calls fouls and violations against your offspring. Despite our proximity, we watch the same game from polar-opposite perspectives.

Each group blames the other for ruining youth basketball. If your child's team loses the game, it's often the referees' fault. From a referee's perspective, a good game is ruined by adults who believe it's their right to question every call, or noncall, that didn't go their way. Both groups leave the gymnasium frustrated. This system of frustration repeats weekend after weekend, month after month, year after year until your eldest son or daughter is out of the house, and you are replaced by the next generation of basketball parents.

As Rodney King once asked, "Can't we all just get along?"

We can't live without each other. Without referees, your children would play scrimmages, not games. Without parents, the referee income stream that flows every time you drop five bucks at the door and claim your courtside seat in Parents Row would evaporate.

In theory, parents, coaches, and referees should work in concert to make youth basketball games a positive experience for our children. In reality, we play the role of adversaries who often criticize each other directly or indirectly on the court or after the game.

Parents believe referees are incompetent, biased, and lazy. Referees think parents are uneducated. At times, both factions are correct.

So, How Can We All Get Along?

The best way for basketball parents to lower their blood pressure—and disdain for officials—is to watch, and analyze, the game of basketball from a referee’s perspective.

Russell Sonneveld, a retired big-city cop who survived harassment and death threats during his stint on the force, told me one of the worst hours of his life was his one-and-done youth basketball officiating experience. His son, whom Russell described as the next Charles Barkley, was playing on a middle-school traveling basketball team. The officials never showed up, so Russell reluctantly volunteered.

“Never again! I hated it,” said Russell, who didn’t respond well to criticism after years of dealing with criminals. “I use to be one of those @%&\$ parents who berated the officials for bad calls. I admit it. Not anymore. Now I just sit there and keep my mouth shut during the games.”

When belligerent BasketCases lose control on Parents Row, perhaps a more appropriate punishment than kicking them out of the game would be to force the offenders to referee four consecutive weekend tournament games. Would they view the game differently after watching it from a different perspective?

I think they would. Unfortunately, most parents won’t buy a whistle or put on the uniform anytime soon even though they still will make “calls.” That’s why reading *BasketCases* cover-to-cover is critical to improving your youth basketball experience. If you do so, I guarantee your knowledge will increase, your blood pressure will decrease and you won’t throw your sanity out of bounds.

Then an odd thing might start to happen. Perhaps we all can get along.

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