

The Do's and Don'ts of "Daddy Ball"

By Amanda Scarborough

"Daddy ball" – slang term in athletics for a team that is perceived by players and players' parents on the team to have coaches who give more playing time to their own daughter than to other players on the team.

How do you or would you approach a "daddy ball" situation with your daughter?

A question can arise of what to tell a player who is losing confidence in her playing ability because of "daddy ball?" The question that comes to MY mind first is, "How does your daughter even know what 'daddy ball' is?"

Every situation is different and in various situations, "daddy ball" may or may not be *actually* happening. But regardless, I feel like there is a right and a wrong way to handle this situation where playing time is at stake for a player. **In any situation, there are always things that you as a family can control with your daughter and there are things that you can't control.** Remember these lessons you are teaching your daughter now are making an impact on her 20 years from now. Consistently be teaching her about things that you *can control*, even as difficult as it may be in some situations for you. Blaming is instant gratification. Taking the high road pays future dividends that leave a lasting impression for everyone involved.

Do's

- Give your daughter **ownership** in herself and her effort.
- Give her a **voice** by talking to her coach about playing time.
- Encourage her to be a **good teammate**.
- Encourage her to **work even harder to earn playing time**.
- Stay **positive**.
- Focus on what you *can* do.
- Teach her other ways to **stay involved** throughout the game if she is not playing.
- **Evaluate** at the end of the season if the team you are on is fitting your needs as a family.

Donts

- **Quit** in the middle of a season.
- Be **negative** around your daughter about her coach.
- Get your **daughter involved** in "Daddy Ball" parent politics.
- Make **excuses**.
- Get **other parents involved**.
- **Complain** to other people outside of your family.
- Make everything about **playing time**.

In my opinion, the word "daddy ball" should never be communicated by the parents to the player.

To me, that just puts a negative connotation in a player's mind and brings resentment to her teammates, who have nothing to do with the problem. A young player doesn't know how to handle emotions as well as an adult. All she knows is what her parents put in her head.

So if her parents are telling her that she is not getting playing time *because* of another girl on the team getting preferential treatment, then that can call for resentment of that particular player. This is going to hurt the lesson being learned of building team chemistry and being a good teammate. These are such critical lessons for an adult later on down the road to be able to work with other people and not blame others. Always remember **why we play TEAM sports** – to learn TEAM lessons and to win championships as a TEAM. No one player wins a championship, it takes a complete team effort. **By causing negative emotions throughout the team because of politics, you are hurting the efforts of the entire TEAM!!**

The coach's daughter in the "daddy ball" scenario has NOTHING to do with making the lineup, so she *never* should be brought up around your daughter in a negative tone. She is just doing her own thing, minding her own business, playing the sport that she loves. It is wrong to bring her into it, and it's not fair to the team or to the player.

So, what *can* you do?

Stay positive towards your daughter!

Support her by encouraging her to work even harder! Put more emphasis on work ethic than blaming.

Keep every conversation positive (as hard as it may be for you); do not make negative comments around your daughter about the coach, how he makes the lineup or about his daughter. When you discuss as a family her playing time, do not make negative comments about the coach, then it is easier for your daughter to question the coach during practice and games, sometimes even players will lose respect for their coaches. This will only make your daughter appear a bad teammate and un-coachable. At the end of the day, he is the coach, he makes the decisions, and he is the “boss” of the team. From a very young age it is important for athletes to respect their coach’s decision! **A lesson learned that will continue to impact a girl decades down the road.**

Instead of focusing on playing time, discuss with your daughter what she can be doing in the dugout to help the team and herself. Study hitters. Learn pitch calling. Chart pitches. Keep energy in the dugout for the team. Try to pick signals. Notice anyone warming up in the bullpen and what she throws. Notice patterns the other pitcher is throwing to your hitters. **Teach her other ways she can be contributing instead of teaching her coaches who have daughters on the team give more playing time to their daughter.** If you don’t *know* things that your daughter should be doing, ASK.

The way that I would discuss playing time is by telling your daughter (depending on age) to have a meeting with the coach and see what she can get better at in order to *earn* more playing time. Have a discussion with the coach instead of just blaming and assuming the “daddy ball” philosophy. 90% of parents think that their daughter should be in the starting 9 and are blind to what their daughter needs to get better at in order to become a part of the starting lineup. Every parent thinks their kid is the best (as they should!), but it’s also very important to be *real* about if your daughter actually *is* the best.

If your daughter is high school aged, she should ask the coach to meet with just her. At the high school age she is old enough to take this meeting on her own. If she is younger than high school, then the player can be with her parents meeting with the coach, but I would still encourage the player to ask questions and do a lot of talking. **It can be intimidating, but what an experience to give your daughter to speak to someone of authority!** It also gives her ownership and responsibility in her own playing time, and it gives her a voice. I would recommend writing down a list as a family of the questions you want to ask going in. This will help your daughter speak up and give her comfort in not feeling like she is going to forget what she wants to ask.

Here’s how a few of the questions could be worded, “Hi coach. I feel like I am not getting as much playing time as I would like. I was wondering if you could tell me a few things I need to work on in order to get more time in the lineup.” or “Hey Coach, what are some things that you would like for me to get better at so that I can more consistently find time in the lineup?” Listen to the things that he tells you. Write them down. Bring them to your private coaches and work hard on them at home. **Give it time, the changes won’t happen over night.**

The worst thing you can do in that meeting is blame! “Coach, you give your daughter way more playing time than anybody else and it’s just not fair!” This meeting will not go well and it will only leave with resentment. He will feel like he’s being attacked. No one likes to feel attacked. No one. Put it on you not on him.

Then, when your daughters gets her chance to show her coach how hard she has worked and the changes she has made, she **HAS** to show him and prove it to him come game time. **You have to NAIL it when you get your big opportunity to prove yourself.** If it’s innings of relief pitching or a pinch hit opportunity, you have to believe in your preparation and make the most of it!! Once again, another lesson learned of taking advantage of your opportunities. Something that will stick with her FOREVER.

Hopefully this can work if your daughter is able to prove to her coach that she has worked hard and has gotten better at the things she needed to work on. If it doesn’t work, then I encourage you to encourage your daughter to keep working hard and making the most of her opportunities she is given. These two things can go a LONG way.

Even if she is not getting the playing time (which you can’t control) tell her to focus on things that she can control: attitude, work ethic, being a good teammate. There are many things she can be learning, even if she is not in the starting lineup.

At the **END of the season**, if you feel like the team is not the best fit for you, it is then that I would suggest making a change and finding a team that may better suit your needs. **But until that moment comes, it says a lot about a player and a family that they take the high road and stay positive towards other parents and teammates.** Almost to the point where at the end of the season, people may be surprised that the player is leaving.

Blaming is instant gratification, and it can be a tease to make us feel a little bit better immediately. We want lessons that will take your daughter further into the future and help her become a leader through sports. "Daddy ball" is one of those teaching situations you as a parent come up against. Teach the lesson that work ethic is everything and blaming is never the best option. And remember; don't refer to "daddy ball" around your daughter. Your daughter may not have even known what the word "daddy ball" meant if it weren't for you.