**Pushy parents take the fun out of school sport: Mothers and fathers making exhibitions of themselves 'damage their child's confidence'**

* **Headmaster Leonard Blom said they have lost sight of ‘sportsmanship’**
* **Cited a mother yelling at her daughter who 'never excelled at sport'**
* **Urged parents to be proud when their children performed well**

By [SARAH HARRIS](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Sarah+Harris)

**PUBLISHED:** 20:24 EST, 8 January 2014 | **UPDATED:** 09:46 EST, 9 January 2014

Competitive parents are stripping the enjoyment from school sport, a leading headteacher has claimed.

Leonard Blom, headmaster of St Aubyn’s School, Woodford Green, Essex, said that pushy mothers and fathers are making exhibitions of themselves and damaging children’s confidence.

They are losing sight of the importance of ‘good sportsmanship’ and setting a poor example to others, he said.+3

Mr Blom said everyone has seen ‘the hysterical parent pacing up and down the sideline, shouting instructions to the player on the field who is already doing his or her best for the team’.

He cited a mother at a swimming gala who paced the swimming pool, yelling encouragement to her daughter who ‘never excelled’ at the sport.

The woman did this ‘to the extent that she would collapse in a heap at the end of each race, exhausted at the attempt to get her daughter across to the other end of the pool’.

Writing in Attain, the magazine for the Independent Association of Prep Schools, Mr Blom said he had no doubt that the girl would ‘never swim another stroke again’ as soon as she hit puberty.

Another ‘over-excited’ father embarrassed himself at a rugby match by ‘hysterically’ shouting instructions and then throwing the ball to the player himself when a boy didn’t respond.

Mr Blom, whose school has 500 boys and girls aged three to 13, urged parents to be proud when their child does well and ‘make sure that, win or lose, you love them and are not disappointed with their performance’.

In a bid to tackle the problem, Mr Blom has written a series of top tips for parents on how to act at school sporting events, stressing they are ‘not the World Cup’.

This includes making an effort to support sons and daughters more, accepting the team they are placed in and not yelling at other players, coaches and officials when they make a mistake.

In an article entitled Parents Behaving Badly, he said: ‘You may not even realise that you’re doing it but do make sure you aren’t comparing your child to their team mates.

‘This can start to eat away at their self-confidence. Comments like, ‘You need to run your lines more like James’ or ‘Jane practices all the time, that’s why she’s better’, might not be meant as harmful but it can give the impression that you aren’t proud of what they have achieved.’

Parents should also be ‘realistic’ about their child’s physical ability and stage of development.

Mr Blom said: ‘Always remember that children play sport for their enjoyment and not yours. Emphasising improved performances, not just winning, positively reinforces improved skills.

‘It is important that parents control their emotions at games and events - don’t yell at your child, other players, coaches and officials if they make a mistake. Rather be a cheerleader for your child and the team.3

‘Respect all coaches and do not question their selections.

‘Accept the team your child is selected to play in. They can’t all be in the first team. He/she might be a late developer and, as a result, could make higher team later on at senior school.

‘More importantly, try and be a positive role model - enjoy sports yourself.’

Parents should avoid ‘becoming wrapped up’ in how well their child performs and must remember the need to develop good sportsmanship.

He said: ‘By all means shout encouragement, not directions, from the sidelines.

‘Only make positive comments, never bad mouth players, coaches or game officials. If you have a legitimate gripe, discuss it privately with those involved.

‘Always applaud good plays without regard to who makes them and set a good example by congratulating parents of the opposing team when they win.’

Mr Blom’s intervention comes just months after former World Cup footballer, Gary Lineker, warned that families screaming abuse from the sidelines are killing their children’s love of football.

In an article in the New Statesman, the Match of the Day presenter hit out at the ‘utterly depressing’ culture of pushy parents attempting to turn their children into footballing superstars.

Meanwhile, in December, the football coach of a under-10s village boys’ team in Buckinghamshire was fired after insisting that boys weren’t there to have fun as he was ‘only interested in winning’.

Justin Byrne, 42, outlined his views in an email to parents at Chalfont St Peter’s Football Club in Buckinghamshire and was sacked four days later.