

ENGLISH: LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

Sport

As it is instinctive for parents to want to protect their children from the poor behaviour of some members of society, spectators of sports matches who ruthlessly yell at their children from the sidelines would cause great concern to parents regarding their child's safety and development. In a newsletter distributed to the members of a local sports club, A word from our coach..., Coach Sam argues in a concerned and serious tone that the poor behaviour of spectators at sports games cannot be tolerated as it is not only leading to an increasing difficulty of attracting volunteers to the club, but also influencing the mental and physical development of the young team members. The accompany cartoon offers an exaggerated, but highly relevant outlook on the issue in addition to its overt satirical approach which furthers Coach Sam's polemic that parents who yell from the sidelines is detrimentally influencing the children playing. As parents are innately protective of their children, this issue will cause some controversy within the local community.

From the outset, Coach Sam adopts a concerned and serious tone to directly target a readership of parents of young children who participate in sports at local clubs. By using a newsletter format, with structured columns and several sub-headings, the writer subdivides his issue in attempt to focus on the areas that need to be tackled as well as suggesting methods that parents can use to help their child to "just have fun", which he believes is the ultimate meaning of sport. He begins with an anecdote to position children as victims of parents' reckless behaviour at sports matches, framing his argument around compassion and sympathy to those children who have been 'attacked' by parents. Emily, who is "just 8 year old", cared desperately that "her dad yelled at her...for failing to shoot the goal and save the game". By revealing the identity of the child, the writer immediately personalises the issue to encourage his readers to evoke sympathy towards children who are yelled at and embarrassed from their sideline parents. The repetitive use of "she didn't care" emphasises the irrevocable damage her father has inflicted upon her. As parents strive to be good role models towards their children, such a confronting example of poor spectator behaviour encourages them to not place own children in such a helpless, embarrassing situation. Throughout the article, Coach Sam constructs his argument by redefining the entire meaning sport by associating it with "good sportsmanship" rather than "winning". In doing so, he positions himself as a concerned, moral coach in comparison to "coaches who only care about winning". This is furthered by the words "if you want to have a go at anyone, have a go at me", in which he accepts culpability even though it is not necessarily his fault. In this way, Coach Sam is painted as a highly responsible and selfless coach determined to provide children with true experiences of sport, lending credence to his polemic. By the end of the article, parents are exhorted to see the immense influence they have on children at sports games, forcing them to question their own values and ethics towards sport and life as a whole.

In maintaining his stance, the writer establishes a dichotomy between the "toxic parents that are poisoning our club" and the parents who positively support their children from the sidelines. The use of the pejorative "toxic", calibrated with the metaphor of "poisoning", accentuates the influence that these parents are having on the club as a whole. He describes these parents as "the one who forget that the only goal...is the promotion of good sportsmanship" and poses the question "what sort of parent are you?". In this way, Coach Sam forces parents to question their own morals and what their true motive is for their children playing sport. By redefining sport as an activity where "children learn the fundamentals of true sportsmanship", the writers seeks to associate sport with a heroic dimension. The citing of precedent when the Olympic runner "stopped to help his rival" which was "truly heroic" encourages readers to see that sport is not about winning or losing, but rather about good sportsmanship, and by demonstrating this sportsmanship, heroism can be attained. As children always desire to be like a superhero and possess heroic qualities, the reference to sportsmanship including "small gestures and heroic efforts" exhorts parents to help their children achieve this. To lend further credence to his argument, the writer admits that "displaying good sportsmanship isn't always easy" to consider the implications of the issue. Nevertheless, he reveals

that sportsmanship will improve the life values as it will “be a triumph of the human spirit”. By posing the rhetorical ultimatum, “Isn’t good sportsmanship a model for life?”, parents are invited to see how their children will develop strong character foundations through displaying good sportsmanship. As it is the will of all parents to watch their children grow into adults with strong values and morals, the target audience are encouraged to see that sportsmanship “will benefit in many, many ways”. Under the subheading “Be reasonable”, the writer compares parents with the “coaches who...yell abuse at their own team members” by revealing that these parents are having “the same negative effect”. In a ‘cause-effect’ style, the consequences of their actions were “banned from attending” and volunteers leaving the club “disgusted by the parents’ behaviour”. As parents normally like to watch their children play sport, the ramifications of their poor behaviour – not being allowed to attend the matches – forces them to realise supporting their children is far more important. Furthermore, colloquial terms like “louts” are portrayed in the accompanying cartoon which depicts a basketball game stopped due to the yelling of a horse in the sidelines, symbolic of all parents who abuse from the bench. The aggressive, almost violent facial expression of the horse with its mouth wide open represents the destructiveness of yelling from the sidelines. Pictured on the horse’s shirt are the words “defeat is death”, suggesting that winning is more important than good sportsmanship. The parents around the ‘untamed’ horse are all looking at the horse with disgusted and embarrassed expressions, thinking “I wish these sports-aggressive parents could see themselves as we do!”. Thus, aggressive parents are forced to understand that their behaviour is not only damaging the mentality of the young children, but also embarrassing themselves with such poor behaviour.

In addition to this, the newsletter is rife with prolonged cannons of appeals to parental and social responsibility. The declaration that “parents have a responsibility to show their children what appropriate behaviour is” instils a sense of culpability within parents, forcing them to make the necessary changes required to help their children with developing good sportsmanship. By previously redefining sport as an activity that is ultimately for fun, the coach offers the rhetorical question “at what age do kids forget to just have fun” to insinuate that sport is no longer a matter of fun, but is now too involved with competitiveness and victory. He admits that winning has “taken over from the thrill of just being part of the team” to encourage parents to realise the transformation that sport has taken due to poor spectator behaviour. Moreover, Coach Sam continues by emphasising what a “good parent” would do, including supporting young athletes to take pride in their accomplishments and improving their skills, regardless of the score. In this way, by painting the image of the ideal, parents feel obligated to strive towards this goal that encourages their kids to “play fair, to have fun, and to concentrate on helping the team”. In a final bid to his readers, the writer uses the cliché “Actions speak louder than words” to remind parents the instrumental role and influence they have on their children. Hence, parents feel the need to act as good role models to the young team members, underpinning Coach Sam’s fervent polemic that poor spectator behaviour cannot be tolerated.

The crux of Coach Sam’s newsletter stems from his use of sympathetic ploys, juxtapositions and appeals to responsibility to encourage his readership of parents that their actions and behaviour on the sidelines has great influence on young athletes. The accompanying cartoon offers a confronting but satirical view on the issue, which, when placed in tandem with the newsletter, offers an unequivocal stance on the impact that parents and spectators have on children within the local community.