

Victim Or Overcomer?

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The fall athletic season is about half over and in one sense it has likely been the same as in years past. Many parents have felt that their son or daughter has gotten a raw deal from a referee, coach or other players. Maybe it was a call that the ref completely blew or a coach that seems to favor some kids over others. Whatever it was, there have been adults who have booed the officials, criticized the coach, and said some unkind things about other players.

Unfortunately, the booing and complaining has often been done in a public format, in a loud way, and right where the teens or children can hear it. Adults often justify it as "trying to make something right" or "letting kids know that they are better than they have been treated" or "just part of the game".

It is true that bad calls by the officials sometimes change the outcome of games and that coaches do sometimes play favorites at the expense of other kids. But do parents and other adults really stop to think about the message they send to children when they boo the officials, scream at the coach, or complain that their child has received unfair treatment?

The message such actions give is this: "You are a victim! You are a victim of things outside your control. Life is unfair, and you are a victim of unfairness."

People who feel they are victims are less likely to enjoy life and more likely to struggle when faced with the problems that come to all of us. Overcomers, on the other hand, accept that life is unfair but seek to rise above unfortunate situations. Those who see themselves as victims often develop a fatalistic mentality that assumes the world is out to get them. But those who refuse to take the bad calls of life personally realize that they are not casualties of circumstances.

St. Paul could have felt like a victim. He was unfairly treated, unjustly criticized, and deprived of some of his rights. But instead of falling into a pity party, he wrote, "*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances*" (Philippians 4:11).

Athletics is not the only area that adults sometimes inadvertently teach their children that they are victims. Like referees or coaches, teachers do not always get it right. Then parents are tempted to quickly agree with their child, let their friends and family members know the teacher is inconsiderate or just plain wrong, and rush in to defend of their "poor helpless child". The problem is just that – the child gets the idea that he or she is poor and helpless – a victim.

How much better it would be if, instead of publicly vocalizing their displeasure, parents would encourage teens to calmly talk with their coach or teacher. Not only would they understand that they are not a victim, but they also might begin to develop the skills needed to be successful in an imperfect world. Learning how to respect authority figures we do not agree with is one of the keys to advancement in life. Occasionally there may be situations where the unfairness seems so great that an adult needs to step in to protect the interests of a child or teen. But, as much as possible, such visits to school officials, teachers or coaches should be in private. The child usually should not even know such a conversation took place.

We need to realize that demeaning someone in front of our children does not help them grow stronger. Believing that others can rise above adversity builds character. Teaching them they are victims only makes them weaker. But teaching them to rise above adversity makes champions.

The next time you are tempted to criticize the coach or boo the referee, think about the kids – are they victims or overcomers in your mind?

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