

Assessing Blame

So, there I am coaching third base for my nine year old son's little league team. Man on second, one out. The batter hits a ground ball to third, the fielder promptly boots it so I send the runner in to home plate. He's ahead of the ball then, suddenly, the KID STOPS RUNNING! He's tagged out. We lose by one run.

Now, I am old school. I played baseball for 15 consecutive seasons, winding up on an adult team called the New York Monarchs. We played Sunday doubleheaders under the scorching Long Island summer sun. I mostly pitched the second game because the majority of my working guy teammates were so hung over from Saturday night we usually got pounded in the first game.

When I was nine, I pitched for O.E. McIntyre, which I think was a furniture store near Levittown. Our coach chewed tobacco. We never stopped running. Too afraid of the coach.

But today it's a whole new ballgame. Most parents are so happy their kids are out of the house and away from the computer, they don't care what they do on the field. Just getting them out there is a huge victory.

I did not scold the kid who stopped running. But I did ask him why. He looked at me in a daze. I let it go.

The after game meal was at Friendly's, where a fried clam dinner will cost you nearly 2,000 calories. Add the free ice cream sundae that comes with the dinner and you're up around 4,000. It says that right on the menu. I ordered an "Asian Salad" and picked off a few clams from my son's plate.

Foolishly, I tried to make a lesson out of the play at home that went against us. I asked my son: "do you know why Ian stopped?"

He looked up from his “monster sundae” and said: “Dad, you shouldn’t be assessing blame.”

I swear he said that.

Immediately, I called the State Department looking to get him a job on John Kerry’s staff.

“I’m not assessing blame. I’m just talking about the play.”

“But, dad, he’s just a kid.”

I forged on: “the reason Ian stopped running is that he was afraid he might be thrown out. He hesitated because of fear. You can’t play anything afraid.”

My nine year old digested that along with his sundae, comprised of chocolate mint ice cream covered with hot fudge (3,500 calories).

“But, dad, it’s not his fault.”

And it really wasn’t Ian’s fault. We now live in a world where many parents micro-manage their children. Outcomes for the urchins are almost assured. So when a situation arises where the kid has to make a fast decision, there is almost always hesitation.

Way different than 1959 when I was making life-death decisions daily. Should I climb the “old oak” tree, which was 50 feet high? Of course I should. Right to the top. Did I ask my dad for permission to do that? Would Eddie Haskell have asked his dad? (Google that).

Protecting the kids is usually good. But it comes with a price. A lesson in life is don’t stop running if you want to score. And watch those calories at Friendly’s.