

TEACH YOUR PARENTS WELL

There are times when basketball is not the answer.

I am, and this might be obvious, an extreme basketball enthusiast. I am also the father of three daughters. You may deduce from those facts that my children were, you might say, coaxed into playing basketball. My children might use other terms to describe my methods of encouragement. They're grown now, successful women and mothers.

When I think back to when they were kids, I hope I didn't put too much pressure on them to be basketball players. I mean, just because basketball is my whole life, they

shouldn't have felt obliged to play. After all, it didn't cost that much to pave the yard and put in the full court with two glass backboards and three-point lines.

The truth is, I encouraged the girls to play basketball, and our family placed a lot of emphasis on practice and discipline and performance. That's why, to me, the story I'm about to tell is all the more remarkable.

The three daughters are Ashley, Lacy, and Delta. Ashley is the oldest and, at fifteen, was the most intense and skilled competitor in the family. Delta, the baby, was twelve, and dreamed of the day when she'd put it in her big sister's face. She had very nice form for a youngster. Lacy, the middle child, was thirteen, and she loved the spirit of the game. But Lacy had been a little slower than her sisters in developing the skills of basketball.

Ashley and Delta made their respective traveling teams that year and Lacy made the B squad. She didn't see much action even at that. She attended all the practices and tried mightily. When she'd boot a pass or get beaten on defense, she'd turn to me with a look of embarrassment. I could sense that she was pained, but she kept on going. I knew that I needed to say something, but I had no idea how to start. Lacy, on the other hand, did.

One night, when I came home from work, Lacy was waiting up for me. Because I worked nights, the house was dark and everyone else was in bed. I was startled when I heard her voice coming from the darkened living room. “Dad, could I talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure,” I said, and sat down on the sofa with her. “What’s up?”

“Dad,” she began, “I have to tell you something that I know will hurt your feelings. I know you will be disappointed in me. But I want you to know that I love you very much and that I’m not doing this to hurt you.”

“Doing what?” I asked a little shakily. I had never seen Lacy so serious.

“I have thought about it a long time, Dad,” she said. “And I’ve got to tell you that I don’t think I’m ever going to be a very good basketball player. I’ve tried as hard as I can and I just don’t think I’m all that good.”

A lump gathered and began to burn in my throat.

“I know how much basketball means to you, Dad,” she continued. “I’m sorry if I’m a disappointment to you.”

I just stared at my feet, afraid to say anything. The tears welled up in my eyes. You sit there with your heart in your throat, feeling very small about yourself, and wondering

where such a child came from. You wonder who taught her to be so gentle and caring. You just sit there.

I finally found enough voice to tell Lacy that I doubted if she could ever disappoint me. I tried to tell her how much I loved her and how proud I was of her, but it must have sounded feeble. I always sound feeble when I have important things to say.

“I like diving,” she said, saving me from myself. “I think I could be good at that.”

She gave me a hug and ran off to bed. I sat in the dark for a good long while after she left, thinking to myself that there would be no end to the things this kid could be good at.