

Lessons for our kids from Bryce Lawrence

By [Mary Ann Dove - Performance Coach](#) | Published: October 17, 2011



For the past week much of the sporting public's attention has been on the poor reffing of Bryce Lawrence in the World Cup quarter final match last Sunday. There have been allegations ranging from bias to "match fixing". As a professional referee in the game's most prestigious tournament, there is certainly a case to be answered for based on his lack of addressing certain aspects of play, not penalising high tackles, dubious decisions regarding forward passes and line-out infringements as well as general inconsistencies. Hopefully the appropriate authorities will review the performances of all referees at the World Cup in order to improve their competence going forward.

Despite our deep disappointment at the Springbok's loss perhaps we as parents can put it into perspective and use this debate in a positive manner to teach our kids some valuable sporting and life lessons.

So what are these lessons?

Respect

Most importantly, I believe, is that all who participate in sport at whatever level; school, social or professional; need to respect the decisions (good or bad) of the officials during the duration of the match or event. Should there be a need to dispute a decision this should be done discreetly by the captain at an appropriate break in play as was done by John Smit last week. Thereafter, further discussions can take place after the event to improve the officiating going forward.

Furthermore, officials (referees and umpires) as well as coaches, other players, spectators and parents should be treated with respect and dignity at all times. Parents and coaches have an important role to play in teaching children the value of respect for officials and other stakeholders in their sporting lives.

Parents, in particular need to act as a role model for their children by displaying respect, fairness and maturity towards officials, coaches and other players on and off the field. We all know that children copy how we as parents behave. If we constantly disagree with decisions made by referees and umpires (even whilst watching a Saturday afternoon rugby or cricket match) what message are we sending to our children? I am not saying that the refs are always right. We all make mistakes, but how we act and react to those mistakes is what sets the platform for our children in both sport and life as they absorb the information needed to develop into mature, dignified and respectful adults able to win and lose graciously.

A survey by the USA National Association of Sports Officials in 2001 found that 76% of survey respondents (60 governing bodies for high school sport) listed poor sportsmanship by parents as the single biggest reason officials quit. It is important to remember that the majority of officials, particularly at school, club and provincial level, are volunteers who give up their time for the love of the game that they have chosen to participate in.

Play by the rules

All participants in whatever sporting event have an obligation to play by the rules of that particular sporting code and not to take matters into their own hands to resolve conflicts through aggressive behaviour.

Play to the whistle

Even if you disagree with the decision or interpretation of the rules by an official, continue to play to the whistle and don't try and disrupt your own game by constantly questioning the decisions. In the end you are only likely to upset you own game. The ability to adjust to decisions and get on with the game often separates the winners from the losers.

There does seem to be a trend that certain teams do not perform at their best when particular referees are in charge. It is interesting to note that the Springboks have lost 18 of the 20 matches reffed by Stuart Dickinson and the New South Wales Warratahs have lost 80% of matches reffed by Jonathan Kaplan.

Focus on your own performance

This is perhaps a very good time to emphasise to our children the importance of focusing on their own performance during a game or event and not on what they cannot control. There are many things in sport that are out of control of the participant – the weather and conditions, the officiating, the behaviour of the spectators, the venue, the performance of the opposition and even the result.

Focus on what you can control, i.e. every aspect of your own game – doing everything you can do in order to give you and your team the best chance of success and winning. There will be times when you do everything to the best of your ability and you still do not win, because factors outside of your control take over – your opposition play better or adapt to the conditions better. But with a mind-set of focusing on what you can control, the disappointment of defeat is easier to accept.

Compliment officials

Children should be taught by their parents and coaches to always thank the officials at the end of a game or event whatever the result (win or lose) for your child. This is true whether or not the official has done a good or in your opinion a bad job.

Life is not always fair

Sport is a wonderful vehicle for teaching our children that life is not always going to go the way we want it to. Mistakes will be made that may influence outcomes negatively but how we teach our children to handle these situations is vital to their on-going growth and development into responsible and moral adults of future generations.

Let us remind our children that sport is not about life and death, but about participating to the best of our own ability. The Springbok's dignified behaviour in their defeat last week is an important beacon for our children to follow as they continue with their own sporting endeavours.