

# Sharing the Fandom

Wherein a parent discovers the surprising rewards of attending events with children in tow

I've heard the fear expressed by many a new parent—"Well, I guess I'll have to get rid of my season tickets," or "There goes fun as I know it," or similar laments. While it is true from an economic perspective that it's not always easy for a family of four or more to attend a professional game in any sport these days, parents should not be so quick to give up on being spectators. On the contrary, parents should take the wonderful opportunity to view sporting events through a new set of eyes—those of their children. So, given that this is the May/June issue, during which both Mother's Day and Father's Day fall, I will take this occasion to pay tribute to my favorite sports fan: my 13-year-old daughter.

Sure, it would have been one option when I began to take her along to sporting events to strap a Walkman on her head and let her listen to the greatest hits of Radio Disney. But I would have denied both her and myself many a wonderful moment. Early in her sports-watching career we devised ways to get her to focus on the game and to get to know the players. For instance, she learned math by doing, as she called it, "hockey math." Example: Wayne Gretzky divided by Mike Modano times Darien Hatcher equals Brett Hull (Hull wore No. 22 when he scored the Stanley Cup game-winning goal for the 1999 Dallas Stars).

At the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002, she divided the four flights of skaters in the men's figure skating finals into the "not so good" (those who ranked 19–24 after the preliminary rounds), the "decent" (13–18), the "pretty good" (7–12) and the "very good" (1–6). In one notable moment, the skater who was in approximately 17th place after the preliminary rounds came out for his final routine, the music started, and for the first 20–25 seconds he performed hand movements in the center of the ice without really having taken a stride. "Come on!" she yelled. "Skate!"

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by Bob Latham

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It is amazing how the voice of a six year old could reverberate through a still-waiting-to-be-filled Delta Center.

She memorized the flags of the competing countries in Salt Lake City, which set her up well for subsequent school geography tests. She would repeat that feat at later international sporting events (which she describes as

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a "cool way to bring the world together") that my volunteer positions in sports allowed us to attend together.

She endured a day atop Alpe d'Huez to watch the Tour de France and was on the Champs-Élysées to watch Lance Armstrong win his seventh Tour in 2005. She shot some memorable video footage of the podium ceremony atop my shoulders that day—the soundtrack of our home video being "The Star-Spangled Banner" laced with a 10-year-old voice yelling "Daddy, stand still!"

That same year, she informed me at a baseball game that the triple, not the home run, is the most exciting play in baseball (thus agreeing with Hank Aaron and many others who have come to the same conclusion). Her explanation? "You get to see the guy race around the bases rather than doing that 'pride strut' after he hits a home run."

My daughter has always been able to put things into perspective for me when it comes to attending my favorite sporting events. Last year, we went to see the Texas Rangers play the Chicago Cubs when Sammy Sosa had 599 career home runs. I explained to her that if he hit his 600th home run, he would be only the fifth person in history to accomplish that. Her response "Oh, well, how many have hit 599?" "The same number," I

replied. "Well, then what will be different when he hits 600?" she asked. Hmm. What happened to easy questions like, "Where do babies come from?"

At the Baseball Hall of Fame ceremonies in Cooperstown in 1999, she wore a credential for Nolan Ryan's induction that was as big as her four-year-old frame—exceeded only by the size of the ice-cream cone she worked on as we spent a memorable afternoon at a sidewalk café watching the good and the great in the baseball world drift by us.

I have not always been aware of the full scope of her intake at sporting events. Last year, one Saturday night as she was getting ready for bed, I decided to buy the Floyd Mayweather–Oscar de la Hoya fight on pay-per-view. She asked me what I was about to watch and I told her. "Can I watch it, too?" she asked. I suggested that might not be a good idea. Since it was on pay-per-view, they wouldn't cut to commercials between rounds, and she was likely to hear bad language from the cornermen. "Daddy," she said, "how many sporting events have I been to with you? What word is it that you think I haven't heard?"

She was given the option of traveling with me to the women's Rugby World Cup in 2006 and the men's Rugby World Cup in 2007, and each time enthusiastically accepted. She was rewarded by being a ball girl at the women's event and by being present for a spectacular score by the U.S. men's team that she described as the "second-most-exciting thing" she'd ever seen in sports, "next to the Stars winning the Stanley Cup."

So fathers (and mothers), don't hesitate to share your interests, your passions and your sports fandom with your children. And may you be as richly rewarded as I have been. ■

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