

# Confessions of a Sports Mom

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By Judy Bodmer

## **Why I sit in the stands in the cold, in the heat, through victories and defeats.**

It's a chilly Saturday in May. I could be home curled up on the couch with a good mystery. Instead I'm sitting on a cold metal bench in the stands of a baseball park in Kirkland, Wash. An icy wind creeps through my heavy winter jacket. I blow on my hands, wishing I'd brought my woolen mittens.

"Mrs. Bodmer?" It's the coach my son Matthew admires so much that he gave up soda pop to impress him with his fitness. "I'm starting your son today in right field. He's worked hard this year and I think he deserves the opportunity."

I'm proud of my son. I know how badly he wants this. I'm glad his hard work is being rewarded.

Suddenly I'm nervous for him as the team members, in their white pin-striped uniforms, trot onto the field. I search for my son's number. It isn't there. Instead, Eddie, the most inexperienced player on the team, takes right field. I look again, unbelieving. How can that be?

I want to run over and ask the coach what's going on, but I know Matthew wouldn't like that. I've learned the proper etiquette for moms; talking to the coach is not acceptable unless he initiates it.

My son, gripping the chain-link fence in front of the dugout, is yelling encouragement to his teammates. I try to read his expression, but I know he, like most males, has learned to hide his feelings. My heart breaks because he has worked so hard and received so much disappointment. I don't understand what drives boys to put themselves through this.

"Atta boy, Eddie," yells his father, proud that his son is starting. I've seen this same man walk out of games in disgust when his son dropped a ball or made a bad throw. But, for now, he is proud of his son, who is starting, while my son is on the bench.

By the fourth inning my fingers are stiff from the cold, and my feet are numb, but I don't care. Matthew has been called into the game. He stands, chooses a batting helmet, picks up a bat and struts out to the plate. I grip the metal seat. He takes a couple of practice swings. The pitcher looks like an adult. I wonder if anyone has checked his birth certificate.

Strike one. "Nice swing!" I yell. The next pitch is a ball. "Good eye! Good eye!" Strike two. I pray. I cross my fingers. The pitcher winds up. I hold my breath. Strike three. My son's head hangs, and he slowly walks back to the dugout. I wish with all my heart I could help. But I know there's nothing I can do.

For eight years I've been sitting here. I've drunk gallons of terrible coffee, eaten tons of green hot dogs and salty popcorn. I've endured cold and heat, wind and rain.

Some people may wonder why a sane person would go through this. It's not because I want to fulfill my dream of excelling in sports through my kids. I also don't do this for the emotional highs. Oh, yes, I've had some. I've seen my two sons score winning goals in soccer, hit home runs in baseball, and spark come-from-behind wins in basketball. I've seen them make some incredible leaping catches in football. But mostly I've seen heartache.

I've waited with them for that phone call telling them they'd made the team. The call that never came. I've watched coaches yell at them. I've watched them sit on the bench game after game. I've sat in emergency rooms as broken bones were set and swollen ankles X-rayed. I've sat here year after year observing it all and wondering why.

The game ends. I stretch my legs and try to stomp life back in to my frozen feet. The coach meets with the team. They yell some rallying cry and then descend on their parents. I notice Eddie's dad has a big grin and is slapping his son on the back. Matthew wants to get a hamburger. While I wait for him, the coach approaches me. I can't bring myself to look at him.

"Mrs. Bodmer, I want you to know that's a fine young man you have there."

"Why?" I ask, waiting for him to explain why he broke my son's heart.

"When I told your son he could start, he thanked me and turned me down. He told me to let Eddie start, that it meant more to him."

I turn to watch my son stuffing his burger into his mouth. I realize then why I sit in the stands. Where else can I watch my son grow into a man?