



“All-Star” Parenting

By Michael J. Smith, ForeCollegeGolf

Since the inception of ForeCollegeGolf in 2014, I have been on a quest to help parents better support their junior golfer. To truly understand the complex landscape of junior golf and the inherent challenges when parenting your junior golfer is a daunting task. I’ve had many parents come to me distraught, confused, overwhelmed, and some so oblivious, they had no idea what type of emotional harm they were causing their child.

To my dismay, in many of these Coaching interactions between parent and player, I found myself playing mediator. Many conversations tended to be very touchy, emotional, and some even uber-sensitive. This was difficult for me to manage because I was speaking with parents about how to be there for their children and manage communication, especially during tournaments. It’s now very apparent to me that each parent/child situation is inherently different.

Surprisingly, to this day, I still encounter players/parents who have never opened up to each other about their strong feelings about a specific subject or how they act in certain situations.



At ForeCollegeGolf, we encourage each player to think of their supporters as important members of their “Team”. Then, we assist them in setting up a plan for success so that everyone can function well as a Team.

The art of becoming a great junior golf parent, starts with you, the parent, and your selflessness.



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The middle school and high-school years can be the most challenging years in parenting. During this time, tournaments, homework, tests, personal growth, and new relationships are adding stress, expectations, pressure, and panic to their lives. This is when young people start to understand that almost everything they do is being judged solely on outcome or performance. Their golf scores, their report cards, their social media posts...the list goes on and on. This is also true when it comes to parents feeling the need to take control and instinctually believe that if they aren't doing everything, then they aren't contributing. This is where the problem lies.

Here are my *rules of thumb* to assist you in better parenting your young student-athlete.

ForeCollegeGolf “Parenting Rules of Thumb”

Rule #1: Keep expectations low

- Lower expectations by separating EFFORT from OUTCOME, especially before competition. Efforts are under our control, outcomes are not.
- DO NOT say “*I think you will win today*” or “*Today has an under-par round written all over it*” ... This could increase expectations and add unneeded pressure, tension, and panic.
- DO say “*Give it your best effort*” or “*Keep going, you got this*”

Rule #2: Know your child & support them unconditionally

- Supporting your child financially is NOT the be-all-end-all. Even if your child has all the material “bells & whistles”, it does not give you a free pass from supporting your child mentally and emotionally. Your child needs true, unconditional love and support to be successful.
- DO NOT act as your child’s biggest critic or take your momentary frustration out on them if you feel like they aren’t showing progress.
- DO support your child and be their biggest cheerleader. **No-Matter-What.**
- Competitive golf can be stressful enough so it’s important to empathize with them and help eliminate what makes them sad/mad/uncomfortable and encourage whatever helps them be happy/driven/confident.

Rule # 3: Enjoy the car ride home

- The car ride home is sometimes the most dreaded part of a junior golfer’s day; don’t make it that way.
- Always let your son/daughter initiate the conversation in the car after a competitive round!
- To truly support them, we need to leave them feeling confident and ready to attack the next day. Additional statements like “*Did you have fun today?*”, “*I loved watching you play*”, “*I’m proud of you for having the courage to compete*”



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and battle it out today”, and “I love you” are all you will ever need. Keep it simple.

Rule #4: Perspective is key

- Being a good person > being a good player.
- Your child’s ability level does not reflect on your level of parenting but their behavior or attitude and the way they carry themselves does. Players should strive to be good people first.
- Even if your child’s end goal is collegiate golf or a professional tour, golf will always just be a game. Make sure golf and life are put in a healthy perspective.
- Find time to ask questions that will help your son/daughter be more confident about their identity.
 - For example, ask “Who are you and who do you want to become? What are your principles and values? Are your personal habits matching up with this vision on a daily basis?”
- DO say things like “You are much more than just a golfer; your identity isn’t in golf.

Rule #5: Struggle, pressure, and frustration are healthy, and needed, in practice and competition

- The majority of the “struggle” in junior golf should happen in the practice environment, but it should also be expected and welcomed in the competitive arena.
- True learning begins when your junior has an opportunity to “figure it out” on their own. Therefore, you can let your child ask for help but don’t run to help them at the first sign of struggle/failure.
- *Allow your child to fall, wipe themselves off, and get back up. “Failure is learning, and learning is progress.”*

Rule #6: Adopt a “growth mindset” for the long haul

- Too many families focus only on a score, outcome, or certain results. Don’t create this type of narrative, it will affect your child negatively.
- For example, if your child finishes a tournament and they obviously chipped the ball poorly, telling them their chipping is bad will only crush whatever confidence they had. Also, don’t even tell their Coach it’s a problem or continue to bring it up as the first issue of conversation. It’s simply an area that needs work. I’ve seen simple frustrations manifest into larger problems for this reason.
- The idea is to focus on the process, their effort, and what they can control. “1% better every day or Brick by Brick.”

Rule #7: “Be Conscious of your comments and tone”



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- Whether you think you are being discreet or not, your child will hear what you say and how you say it, so be aware of what you say.
- If there are constantly negative things or outcome-based conversations, this will directly add more pressure on the player.

Rule #8: Parental success can be developed...

- Here's the good news, over time you can *learn*, *develop*, and *master* the skills it takes to be a better parent to your junior golfer!
- Just like a junior golfer works on his/her competitive skills, I believe parents should work on their body language, emotional reactions to outcomes, and teen communication skills.

I'd also like to outline the characteristics of the **BEST** parent/player relationships and the pitfalls of some of the **WORST** relationships I've seen firsthand.

Characteristics of the **BEST** Parent/Player Relationships

- Parents praise “the process”, hard work, and independent creativity
- Junior Golfer is in charge and takes center-stage
 - Takes ownership of their entire game
 - Always speaks for themselves
 - Organizes and takes ownership of their weekly schedule
 - Feels comfortable and willing to lead conversations and make their own decisions
- Unconditional love & “Parents just being Parents”
 - Supportive, patient, and unemotional on the course
 - Parents focused on “finding the fun” in every situation
 - Reinforcing patience and proactiveness
 - Adopt a growth mindset and understand there is no straight line to success/performance; golf success is a confidence builder and golf failure is an opportunity to learn/grow

Characteristics of the **WORST** Parent/Player Relationships

- Parents praise intelligence, ability, or performance outcomes
- Parents visibly showing their disappointment – vocally or via poor body language
- The parent is more vocal or emotional and visibly cares more than the player
- Parents gossiping about performance
- Parents overstating their child's true athletic ability while trying to live vicariously through their child
- Relationships where the player and parent are almost inevitably on “different pages” – mentally and emotionally



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My best advice for junior golf parents is to stay on the sidelines, allow your junior to take center stage and put golf in a healthy perspective in your household by not getting tied up in outcomes, rather focus on personal character, personal habits, and actionable goals to make consistent progress. This is much easier said than done, however, but I believe that if you practice the *characteristics of the best relationships* defined above and apply the *Rules of Thumb*; you too can be an “All-Star Parent”.

Now that you’ve heard from me, let’s see what College Coaches have to say...

“Parents are a great asset in the recruiting process to their junior. The need to point the child in the right direction, but allow their child to do the research and communication with the programs they are interested in. Help them with their options, but ultimately, it’s best to let them do the work!” **Coach John Sjoberg, Head Coach, Emory University**

“In college golf, we are recruiting the parents as well as the players”, “solid parenting absolutely lays down a solid foundation for future college golf success and beyond”
Ryan Jamison, Former Head Coach, Florida Atlantic, now PGA Tour Caddie

“Parents need to be parents, not friends. Be an example for your son or daughter on how to conduct yourself through both the good times and tough times that golf will inevitably present” **Coach J.C. Deacon, Head Coach, University of Florida**

Thanks for reading!

Michael J. Smith

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Mike Smith is the founder of ForeCollegeGolf, a college placement and recruiting business where he aims to apply his background in competitive golf and recruiting education to help educate players, their families, and coaches about the college recruiting process.

If you have any questions about the article above, any feedback, an article idea you would like to provide; you can find me at mike.smith@forecollegegolf.com or www.ForeCollegeGolf.com.

Thanks for reading!

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