



*Check back each week for MASK's Dad Dialed In and Minute with Mom series.*

Sports are fun and should always be fun. It really is that simple.

My experiences as a father, a professional athlete and now as a coach for the Arizona Diamondbacks have affirmed that belief. Along those same lines, my parents always encouraged me to "do what you love and love what you do." To this very day, I live my life with those two basic principles in mind.

The pressure and expectations on kids who play sports, recreationally or competitively, is incredible these days. In addition to one's own drive and determination, pressure comes from many different angles including parents, coaches, teammates and opponents. From my experiences, I've learned the importance of managing those expectations for the betterment of the kid's experience. Youth sports are a very important part of a child's development, teaching them many aspects of life from team dynamics to healthy competition.

The exciting part of being a parent is watching your children grow through their sports experiences and being able to support them along the way. I was blessed with parents who made it a priority to be at my sporting events along with those of my four older brothers. With their love and support, I was fortunate to be able to pursue my passion and turn it into a career.

My high school coach always preached if you were fundamentally sound, you would have success. He said it was about being the best you can be and understanding your talents.

As I got into the professional ranks, baseball legend Dusty Baker served as a great mentor. He taught me to know myself and what I was capable of instead of trying to be something I'm not. He encouraged me to use my abilities to be competitive while realizing no one is going to be perfect. He taught me to strive for excellence and to give my all each time I competed. To this day, I've been able to apply those lessons to my personal and professional lives.

Just like my parents, my wife, Erika, and I have always been mindful of encouraging our kids to partake in activities they wanted to. Luckily, I've been able to share an amazing experience with my son. He grew up in the clubhouse and from the first day he asked me to play catch with him, it was evident he had a passion for baseball. However, I knew it was important to support him as long as he wanted to play and not because I wanted him to play. His love of the game fueled his drive to succeed and ultimately, he achieved his dream of playing professional baseball when he was drafted by the D-backs in 2011.

I believe it is important to support your kids in pursuing their true passions. Recognize their talents, identify their strengths and help them overcome their weaknesses. They must enjoy what they are doing, otherwise they won't have the passion to fuel the desire for improvement and ultimately enjoy success.

As a parent, the best thing you can provide is support and encouragement every step of the way. If they ask you to do it with them, they truly are enjoying themselves. At the end of the day, sports are a great experience best shared together with memories you may cherish forever.