Lalley: Dear softball parents, shut up

The chirping, chattering and rolling commentary from the stands isn't helping your kid, the team or the game. Young women deserve better.

By Patrick Lalley

June 07, 2025 at 2:07 PM

Like a lot of parents, Miss Ohio and I are deep into youth sports.

Did not see this coming, if I'm being honest.

In fact, if you'd have asked me a few years ago if we'd ever find ourselves plopped in camp chairs next to a softball diamond in various spots around the Upper Midwest for hours on end riding the emotional roller coaster of elation tied to the success of a 14-year-old young woman... well, that's just not a reality that could have been imagined.

We were a bike racing family.

And yet, here we are, deep into softball.

Tournaments, practice, extra hitting, whacking fly balls and grounders, strength and agility.

Plus catching a few games at the South Dakota high school tournament in Sioux Falls this weekend.

And watching the Women's College World Series on TV.

And replays of college games all winter.

All in on softball.

It's truly been the experience of a lifetime and we wouldn't change a minute of it.

Except...

You probably know where this is going. That's right, it's the adults.

We also have the unique perspective in that the young lady with whom I share a residence – and serve as general transportation manager – is also an umpire.

We don't watch her ump that often – it's her job – but I've been in the stands enough times to get highly irritated, if not angry, at what I hear from the people sitting around me.

Shut.

The hell.

Up.

Look, I've been there, suffering through balls called strikes and strikes called balls.

I've seen the obvious out called safe.

I've been the frustrated coach and the tortured parent.

It's hard. You want to scream like you do at home in front of the TV.

Go ahead and roll your eyes, exhale aggressively or hum a happy tune.

Just suppress the urge to speak.

I don't think there's anything worse than hearing an adult in the stands berate a teenager for balls and strikes calls. Or even recently at the state tournament, ongoing commentary about the adult umps.

The young women deserve better from you.

For generations, girls' sports were treated as the other, the lesser.

We know that wasn't ideal and as a society have made incredible progress toward remedying that inequity.

Guess what? It's good. It's fun. It's exciting.

The Women's College World Series was great. The atmosphere looks amazing and we're already planning a trip to Oklahoma City to watch the Olympic softball competition in 2028.

Viewership for the World Series was up by 25 percent – about a million a day – according to ESPN.

Bringing it back to Sioux Falls, our daughter is a good umpire. Trust me, she knows the rules, probably better than you do. She's got a good eye.

She's not perfect and she'll admit that. Nobody is.

So again…

Shut.

The hell.

Up.

Here's a suggestion. Instead of chattering away about the strike zone, how about you strap on the chest protector, put on the mask, and trot your dad bod out there for a few innings.

Yeah, that's what I thought.

The thing is, you're not helping your team or the coaches with your "expertise."

It's certainly not good for your kid.

And it's terrible for the game.

None of this is particularly new to youth sports. It was the same thing on the Bantam Baseball diamonds at Covell Lake back in the 1970s, though nobody had delusions of scholarships or superstardom.

If you're this invested in a 10U softball game on a Tuesday night, it might be time for some serious self-examination.

In the meantime… you know.