

The Parent Trap

by Rick Reilly

I WENT OUT to get my paper this morning and found my neighbor Dalton instead.

He was slumped on my stoop, looking as though he'd slept under a marching band. His eyes sported five-pound bags, his right hand was bandaged and bloody, and his face was sunk like a bad soufflé.

"My God!" I said. "What happened to you? You look like a 20-car funeral!"

"Youth lacrosse happened to me," he grumbled. "The Competitive Elite Lacrosse League. My little Ashley made one of those 'travel teams.' Pray it never happens to you, dude."

He explained. "See, I really never thought Ashley was all that hot at lacrosse, and she's only 14. But when she made this competitive team, all the parents said it was a big honor. They said it's the only way to make your high school varsity, and it's the road to a scholarship, and it looks great on your résumé.

"I'm not even sure Ashley wanted to do it. But all of her friends made it, so she just *had* to do it. What was I gonna do? Tell my little girl no?"

"Next thing you know, I'm writing a check for \$1,500. Then it turns out, they practice or play seven days a week on these things. And it's clear across town, so pretty soon I'm standing on the sidelines every day of the week.

"My wife can't do it 'cause she has to take Justin to hockey every day. Why an eight-year-old nearsighted kid needs a 42-game schedule is beyond me. What is he, Wayne Gretzky? Plus there's pylon camp and forecheck camp and backward-skating lessons with his personal coach, Hans.

"So pretty soon I got no life. Family dinners? Forget it. Every meal is in the car—righthanded Taco Bell. I almost *never* see my wife awake. When I do, I have to ask for I.D.

"Then this lunatic lacrosse coach schedules an extra 6 a.m. practice every day. It's like the old bottle-feeding days. I'd be like, 'I got her last time. You get her.' And Denise would moan, 'I had to stay up for Midnight Madness last night. Your turn.' Then, at night Ashley is so tired, we end up doing her dang homework! And we're gettin' C's!"

"Anyway, Ashley and I started flying to all these stupid tournaments—Dallas and Baltimore and, my God, Ottawa!—and every one is billed as 'the recruiting event of the year!' And do you know who we see at these tournaments? The same damn girls we used to play in our *neighborhood* league! Essentially, we're flying across the country to get our ass kicked by the same exact people!



"Since this loony lacrosse coach scheduled an extra practice at 6 a.m. every day, our little Ashley is so tired at night, we do her homework. And we're gettin' C's!"

"So I start talking to these girls' parents, and it turns out *they* don't really want to be there either, but *their* kids were saying *we* were going to do it, so *they* had to!

"But then my wife gets to talking to some other moms at Justin's slap shot workshop, and they say we're crazy if we don't have a 'performance-enhancement specialist' for our kids. So she signs them both up with one. Then she finds out most of these girls have 'recruiting consultants' who make highlight reels of kids and send them to college coaches. I'm like, 'She's 14!' And my wife is like, 'You're gonna tell our little girl no?' Then we add a rating-service guy and a sports psychologist and a webmaster.

"Well, what with me working half time and all this crap I'm paying for and all these trips, I had to take out a second mortgage. Denise can't work because she's spending every waking moment in a freezing ice rink, which makes her joints stiffen up. Luckily, Hans knows some New Age massage technique that makes her feel better.

"So now I'm getting no sleep, turning my stomach into a Dumpster and having less sex than a dead monk. But before I can put my foot down, my boss does. He fires me! And as he's firing me, he adds, 'By the way, the average lacrosse scholarship is \$1,000, you putz!' So I punch him, and now I think my hand might be broken.

"I stomp out and go find Ashley to say, 'It's over.' And she goes, 'Whatever. I quit today anyway. My sports psychologist says you guys push me too hard.'

"Nice. So I go home to tell Denise, but she's not there. Three days go by. I figure she's at the Elite Competitive Hockey-palooza in Cheyenne. Turns out she moved in with Hans. Says she wants to be with someone who 'knows' her. Oh, and she *really* likes massages.

"So now I get home and somebody changed the locks! Probably the mortgage company, since I'm *way* behind.

"And do you know what I learned from all this, man? I learned that the most viciously competitive sport in the world is parenting.

"Anyway, what I wanted to ask you is—you wanna buy some lacrosse sticks?" □

PETER READ MILLER