



HILTON COLLEGE

A letter from The Director of Sport

16 May 2025

Dear Parents,

A Call for Healthy Parental Involvement in South African Schoolboy Sport

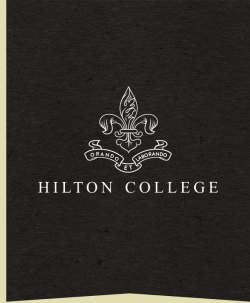
Since my appointment as Director of Sport at Hilton College, I have been struck not only by the remarkable talent, passion, and commitment of our boys but also by the complexities that surround schoolboy sport today – many of which echo global trends.

Two recent articles published by CatchMark Sports – [Understanding Unhealthy Parental Involvement in High School Athletics](#) and [Finding Balance: Promoting Healthy Parental Involvement in High School Athletics](#) – explore the growing concern around unhealthy parental behaviour in American school sport. While these articles focus on the American context, the themes they raise are equally relevant – and increasingly visible – here in South Africa.

At the heart of these reflections is a simple truth: while parental involvement is essential to a child's sporting journey, it can become counterproductive – and even harmful – when boundaries are crossed. The articles point to worrying patterns such as overbearing pressure to perform, sideline coaching, disputes with coaches, and using sport as a vehicle for parental validation. These behaviours, while often well-intentioned, can erode a young athlete's confidence, joy, and ownership of their sporting experience.

Sadly, these dynamics are not confined to America. I have seen, firsthand, similar tensions surfacing within the South African schoolboy sports arena, including at Hilton College. The passionate commitment of our parents is one of our community's strengths. However, when that passion turns into an obsession with performance or sideline interference, it risks undermining the very lessons we aim to teach through sport – resilience, humility, teamwork, and self-reliance.

In reflecting on this, I am reminded of a powerful message: "Be a cheerleader, not a coach." These words resonate deeply. The most valuable role a parent can play on the sidelines is that of an encourager – cheering for the effort, the team spirit, the bravery to compete, and the lessons learned, regardless of the scoreboard. As discussed in articles like [Cheerleader, Not Coach: Why Your Kid Needs You to Step Back](#), our sons need their parents to be supportive presences, not critical analysts, or sideline coaches. This is where the most meaningful sporting growth happens.



At Hilton College, we are committed to nurturing not just athletes, but young men of character. We do this well. This means creating space where they can fall, get up, and own their journey without the weight of unrealistic expectations or pressures that do not serve their long-term development.

I urge our parent community to reflect on the role you play in your son's sporting life. Celebrate his effort rather than his outcome. Let him drive his sporting ambitions. Trust our coaches to challenge and guide him. And perhaps, most importantly, allow sport to be the safe space where he can learn about himself, rather than perform for others.

There is a meme doing the around on social media that reads: "Your child's success or lack of success in sport does not indicate what kind of parent you are, but having a child that is coachable, respectful, a great teammate, mentally tough, resilient, and tries their best is a direct reflection of your parenting."

Together, we can ensure that sport at Hilton College continues to be a formative, joyful, and life-shaping experience for every boy.

Warm regards,

Burger Nel
Director of Sport