The *Bad-Game* Reset

What to do in the car, that evening and the next day after a game that went badly. It takes three minutes to read and it's worth keeping in the glovebox.

STAGE 1 · THE CAR

Say less than you want to.

- → Let them speak first. Silence or music is fine, even for the whole ride.
- → Don't replay the game, the goals or the coach's decisions.
- → Deal with the basics first: food, water and warmth.
- → If they want to vent, listen. You don't need to fix anything tonight.

ONE LINE THAT WORKS

"I loved watching you play today."

STAGE 2 · THAT EVENING

Ask three questions, once.

- → What's one thing that went well?
- → What felt hard out there?
- → What do you want to try next time?
- → Let their answers stand, even if you saw the game differently.

IF THEY SAY "I DON'T WANT TO TALK"

"That's okay. I'm here when you do."

STAGE 3 · THE NEXT DAY

Pick one small thing.

- → Turn their "try next time" answer into one thing to focus on at the next training session.
- → Keep it about effort or a habit, not a result: "first touch away from pressure," not "score."
- → After the next session, ask how that one thing went. Nothing else.

THE POINT

A bad game becomes something to work on, not something that defines them.

THINGS THAT TEND TO BACKFIRE

- → Criticising the coach, the referee or teammates in front of them
- → Comparing them with a teammate or a sibling
- → Tying treats or privileges to how they played
- → Bringing the game back up days later

WHEN IT'S MORE THAN ONE BAD GAME

- ! They've stopped enjoying soccer for weeks, not days
- ! They talk about quitting, or dread going to training
- ! Changes in sleep, eating or mood that carry on past the weekend

Talk to them calmly, and to their coach. If you're worried about their wellbeing, speak to your pediatrician.

Mentora pairs competitive youth soccer players with current Division 1 players for one-to-one mentoring on the mental side of the game: the bench, the tryout, the bad game. **mentoramentorships.com**

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