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## The Sacrifices We Parents Make – Even When We Don't Understand Why

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## The Sacrifices We Parents Make – Even When We Don't Understand Why

**By Yolanda Hood**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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One recent night I sat in a stadium – being eaten by mosquitos – with my 14-year-old daughter and watched a women's soccer game. Last summer, after saving for a year, I took my daughter to Canada two weeks for the FIFA Women's World Cup. I walked a mile from parking to the stadium every day, stood in long lines at security to have bags checked and, at times, even sat in the rain – all so I could watch the pure joy on my daughter's face.

She fell in love with soccer when she was in the second grade. I don't know why to this day. She had never watched a game. It was not played at school. And, as I would later find out, none of her friends played. She came home from school and simply asked if she could play soccer.

I admit that I made a face, a *eww* face. I immediately thought of the thickly muscled thighs of soccer players and then suggested ballet, tap, cheerleading. No. No. And, no. She didn't know why she wanted to play soccer. She just did.

So, I did what all good mothers do. I found a soccer club and registered her. She loved it. She loved running, dribbling the ball between her feet and kicking it into the goal. During the cold Iowa winters before we moved she wanted to play indoor soccer. She loved that too.

Here in Florida, soccer is still my daughter's first love. It's what she wants to do in high school, in college, as a career (as well as speak six languages). Soccer is her life. And, I'm there to support her because that is what parents do.

But as I continue to transform into a full-fledged soccer mom, attend tryouts, games and team meetings with her, I gain more and more discomfort.

In Florida, club soccer seems to be a serious thing. Parents fight for their children to have the best spots on the best teams even if their children don't deserve those spots. Coaches care so much about winning that they rarely think about the consequences of ripping out the hearts of the young soccer players that they yell at, ignore or outright reject.

In the United States, soccer is a sport of privilege. According to Doug Andreassen, chairman of U.S. Soccer's Diversity Task Force, it has evolved into a white pay-to-play sport that excludes children of color and lower-economic households.

I have made a number of sacrifices so my daughter can play. As a single parent, a majority of my time outside of work is devoted to taking her to practice and conditioning, and traveling to away games on the weekends. Much of my money is devoted to her, as well: club fees, team fees, tournament fees, uniforms, cleats, balls, gas and tolls.

In the 2015-16 soccer season I spent \$3,000 for her love of this sport. The 2016-2017 season promises to cost more. Not many single parents can foot that bill.

She said she knows how blessed she is, even if I didn't remind her often of the sacrifices I make so she can live her dream.

Andreassen also notes that almost every other women's 2015 World Cup team had more players of color than the United States and predicts we will see the same for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

I scan the field during tryouts for the new club soccer season. I am disappointed to see so few African-American girls, four including my daughter out of close to 100 girls. I am disappointed to see so few African American women professional soccer players. She has noticed the disparities, but this is her passion. She wants to be in this place like a fish who needs water to breathe.

For these past few years I have tried to understand her passion for soccer. Do I even need to understand it? She gets plenty of exercise, is learning focus, discipline and time management. Isn't that all that matters? I decided that I didn't need to understand, really, as long as I am there giving her the financial and moral support she needs to persevere in this sport where she sticks out like a sore thumb.

Then one day she asked me a question.

“Mom, do you know how you and Emma love to talk and giggle and get so excited when you talk about books and authors?”

Of course! We all know how much I love books. I get giddy just thinking about the *possibility* of talking about books. And, I *do* love talking with Emma about books and authors.

“That’s what I wish I had. I want a friend who I can talk with the way you do with Emma, only about soccer.”

Wow. Now, I understood. I really understood what soccer means to this kid.

I have a newfound appreciation for my daughter and her love of soccer. I can feel what it means to her. So until she finds that soccer buddy, I’m going to laugh and giggle with her and listen to her whenever she wants to talk about soccer.

I’m going to stop thinking about how much of a sacrifice I make, and I will just bask in the joy on my daughter’s face.

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