



Volker K. H. Sonntag, MD
Barrow Neurological Institute,
Phoenix, AZ

As my wife and I, as well as our 9-year-old son, Stephen, gathered the soccer equipment such as balls, clipboard, and empty water containers, one of the shyer boys came up to me and said, "Thanks, Coach." Since we had lost the game, I immediately responded: "For what?" He very quietly replied: "For teaching me soccer."

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

"Thanks, Coach"

The annual meeting of NASS in New Orleans is behind us and, again, it was a tremendous success. The number of participants, both physicians and spouses as well as exhibitors, made this one of the most outstanding meetings to date. It was great fun to see many old friends again. It was educational to attend the multiple symposia and presentations. It is always with awe that I enter the exhibit room with all the new technical advances. As usual, New Orleans was a great city for a convention. The restaurants did not disappoint. The people were great.

My wife and I left New Orleans Saturday night and I returned to the office on Monday only to be met with the usual piles of paper work, e-mails, and phone messages, and, of course, patients. Monday primarily consisted of seeing patients and answering phone calls and e-mails, discussing projects with residents, making patient rounds, and reviewing manuscripts. Tuesday followed with a heavy load of surgery. The rest of the week was filled with the usual number of surgeries, outpatient clinics, conferences, and work associated with local and national medical organizations.

Many, if not all of us, have special hobbies or enjoy sports activities with family and friends to give ourselves a break from the daily hectic life-style of a physician. These extracurricular activities also serve as a way of dealing with the frustrations and anxieties associated with our profession. An alternate way to help balance our life-style is to be involved in community work—be it fund raising for a local charity, volunteering at a weekend event, participating at a local church, helping out at the school, or for example becoming a boy scout leader or a coach.

I chose the latter and have been coaching soccer for the last 12 years. In Arizona soccer season is in the fall and, consequently, I try to limit my travel in the fall as much as possible. Practices are Monday and Wednesday night,

6:00 to 7:30 PM, and the games are played on Saturday. I find coaching an extremely satisfying way of spending time away from the office. It also, of course, serves a very important function, that is, being together with and coaching our 9-year-old son. There are 12 nine-year-old boys on the team. When I walk onto the practice field with the bag of balls, they all meet me with incredible energy and excitement. Each boy gets a soccer ball and then we proceed with the warm-up drills. That leads into practicing specific techniques such as throwing the ball onto the field, passing the ball with the outside or inside of the foot, heading the ball, and so on. At this age, we also stress the concept of teamwork, which, of course, is important in all sports. In fact, it is important in many of our nonsport activities as well. Then we proceed with a rest period during which I usually review the rules, discuss the previous game, discuss the upcoming game, draw some diagrams on a drawing board emphasizing particular positives or even negatives from the previous game, and review the specific plays and duties of each position. We usually finish up with 20 to 30 minutes of scrimmage either among ourselves or against another team that practices adjacent to us.

Game days are always Saturdays. Last week's game was at 10:00 in the morning and the weather was perfect. The air was brisk, the grass was slightly wet, the sun was shining, the parents were excited, and the children were ready for the game. We played a very good opponent that day; in fact, we lost 1 to 0. We had several excellent chances of tying the game or even taking the lead. However, two of our shots hit the posts and during our three or four breakaways we missed the goal badly. At the end of the game, I encouraged the players and told them that although we played a hard game, we nevertheless lost to a very good opponent. I said I hoped we would improve

with hard practice until we meet the same opponent again and have a better outcome. As my wife and I, as well as our 9-year-old son, Stephen, gathered the soccer equipment such as balls, clipboard, and empty water containers, one of the shy boys came up to me and said, "Thanks, Coach." Since we had lost the game, I immediately responded: "For what?" He very quietly replied: "For teaching me soccer."

Monday morning I was back in the

office trying to clear my desk from the mountains of paperwork, reviewing manuscripts, answering e-mails, and, of course, seeing patients. On Tuesday, one of the surgery days, several surgeries were done, and indeed it turned out to be a long day. The rest of the week followed with more surgeries, conferences, meetings, resident teaching rounds, writing papers, reviewing manuscripts, phone calls, e-mails—basi-

cally consumed with all the daily activities of a physician. There were highs and lows in both the week and the work. It is often satisfying but can also be frustrating and, at times, disappointing and sad. When these latter feelings seem to dominate my daily routine, I cope somewhat easier when I remember those two simple words: "Thanks, Coach."