

ESSAY

Eight Again

There's nothing sweeter than seeing your kid win. So why do we feel so guilty?

BY BRUCE HANDY AND GLYNIS SWEENEY

Guess what? You *can* live vicariously through your children. Especially if, like me, you stank at sports when you were a kid. And especially if, like me, you have kids who don't.



*Reed Vickers—the kid who scored five times on me the day Coach Verwest forced me to play goalie in seventh-grade P.E. and who once pinned me in 10 seconds in wrestling.

O.K., I'm exaggerating for comic effect, I hope. I'm not really a horrible soccer parent. I've never even punched another dad. Or mom. But I have been surprised at how my ego can get wrapped up in my kids' successes. And not just in sports...



Warm glow of parental pride undercut by hyper-self-awareness.

The issue came to a head—did I mention my son is also an avid chess player?—at a national chess tournament we attended recently. (His idea.) It was the last match in a three-day tourney. My son was paired against a cocky-looking kid from Wisconsin.



*Not his real name, but it was something Swedish-y.

The games were played in a big hotel ballroom. The parents had to wait outside. One of the moms at my son's school, who was paying attention to the pairings, realized that Lars Andersen had already beaten two other kids on my son's team.



The pressure! Not only was the team's fate in my kid's hands, but so was my ego vis-à-vis the other parents, who could probably smell it on me. If he won, I'd accept their congratulations with the easy grace that comes from siring a champion. If he lost ...

The wait was agonizing. Finally I saw Lars Andersen leaving the ballroom, ahead of my son. I could tell immediately from the look on his face that my son had won. Yes, yes, YES! Of course, my kid had way more equanimity about the whole thing than I did.



Palpable anxiety spiked with shame for being so anxious in the first place.



And I was instantly ashamed of having taken so much pleasure in Lars' visible pain. After all, he was only 8. And after all, I knew that face. It had been mine often enough when I was his age.