

## NCAA coach's advice to parents: You need to let your kids fail



Longtime Notre Dame women's basketball coach Muffet McGraw watches her squad's NCAA game against Harvard on Nov. 9 in South Bend, Ind. Notre Dame won 103-58. Robert Franklin / Associated Press Files

**Notre Dame  
Fighting  
Irish's Muffett  
McGraw, who  
has coached for**

**more than 35 years, says it's not the kids who have changed — it's the parents.**

The inaugural TCL Vancouver Showcase is dishing up unusual opportunities.

The eight-team women's basketball portion of the event tips off Thursday at the Vancouver Convention Centre, with the Notre Dame Fighting Irish as headliners.

They're the reigning NCAA champions. They're also the No. 1-ranked team in the United States right now, according to the latest Associated Press poll. You don't get many cracks to witness firsthand and up close what a team like that looks like without leaving your own town.

Notre Dame is coached by 62-year-old Muffet McGraw. She's been running benches in the collegiate ranks since 1982-83 and at Notre Dame since 1987-88. Last year's national championship win marked her 800th victory with the Fighting Irish.

The Showcase offers a chance to pick her brain, to get her take on where university basketball in particular, and youth sport in general, has been and where it might be headed.

Notre Dame opens the Showcase on Thursday at noon, facing the Gonzaga Bulldogs.

"I don't know if kids have changed. It's the parents who have changed," McGraw said when asked to compare and contrast her early days of coaching.

"Parents today don't want to give their child a chance to fail. The first time there's adversity, the kids don't know what to do. They are not able to fight through things.

“I think freshman year is hard. I think everybody has a tough time freshman year. For generations, freshmen have been calling home several times and saying how much they hate it and how things are not working and parents have been letting them vent before explaining that a commitment has been made and it’s going to be followed up on and ‘we’ll see you at your game next week.’

“Now it’s different. Now you’ve got some parents who I think are like, ‘You’re probably right.’”

The Showcase has also brought the South Carolina Gamecocks to the VCC competition. They won the NCAA title in 2017. They fell out of the top-10 in the AP rankings this week for the first time since 2014, a span of 89 weeks. They lost 85-61 to the Maryland Terrapins on Sunday.

They’re still relevant in the national picture, sitting at No. 13 overall.

The Gamecocks are coached by Dawn Staley, 48. She won three Olympic gold medals as a player and two collegiate player of the year awards. She, like McGraw, is a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. She, like McGraw, certainly has insight.

Staley was asked about kids spending so much time so early specializing on one sport. She picked out the solo training that can go along with that.

“I’ve seen where it’s hurt kids because you have to detox them from playing alone,” Staley said. “They’re working on their individual skills so much that when it comes time to play on a team, there’s a transition to having to play with somebody else who is equally talented or maybe more talented.

“It’s good that it can create a work ethic, but sometimes it’s at the expense of fitting in within a team concept. It’s a harder transition for some.”

We’ve heard before things similar to what McGraw had to say. The same goes for Staley’s opinion. We’ve heard it from the likes of UBC Thunderbirds men’s basketball coach Kevin Hanson and longtime B.C. high school boys’ basketball association president Paul Eberhardt and a host of others.

Some people may pay extra attention to it coming from a McGraw or a Staley, since there can be a certain cachet that comes with the letters NCAA.

It’s certainly further proof there are challenges with youth athletics today.

“Do I think we’re specializing at too young an age? Absolutely. I hate it,” said McGraw. “You don’t have to pick one sport when you’re 10 or 12 years old.”

She then circled back to her ideas about adversity.

“You learn so many things playing different sports. You may play something where you’re not the best player on the team. You learn what it’s like to be in that situation and how to handle it. It can help you down the line.”

Both McGraw and Staley talked about how social media has also changed the landscape.

McGraw says her players were already getting saluted on Twitter last season when they checked their phones in the dressing room after coming off the floor from their national championship win.

“There was so much more attention this time,” McGraw said, pointing to Notre Dame’s national championship in 2001.

“The girls could see that last (game-winning) shot on their phones. It used to be that you had to go back to campus and put the VHS tape in to see what happened in the game. You had to wait for the newspaper the next day or at least for the news on TV that night. Now, it’s right there.

“Now you worry about whether they’re looking at how many likes they have. Now you worry about whether they’re looking at how many people are following them. I don’t think it’s a good thing.

“When we go through the recruiting process now, we’re looking for kids who aren’t interested in that. We want to go with low drama kids.”

Staley believes social media is both positive and negative for today’s youth.

“They have a voice,” said Staley, whose team opens the tournament with a 6 p.m. game Thursday against the East Tennessee State Buccaneers. “Fictionally or non fictionally, they have a voice.

“I like it when social media is used to help them being more socially conscious, helping them to see what’s happening in the world and how they see themselves impacting that world.

“The bad is that half of it is false. What people post on their accounts is not them. It’s not 100 per cent them. You strive to have what people show you on their social media accounts, it sends the wrong message.”

The Showcase wraps up Saturday.

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