



Tim Weah: Allowed to Thrive

I recently heard about a dad who, at every meal, took the fork out of his son's right hand and put it in his left hand. Why? Because he wanted him to become a left-handed baseball pitcher. They get drafted higher and paid bigger signing bonuses. Does that sound a bit manipulative? What if his son was destined to become the greatest shortstop in baseball? There are no left-handed shortstops! Let's talk about allowing our children to thrive through our guidance, not manipulation.

George Weah is a dad who took an approach completely opposite of the baseball dad. If you've spent any time in the world of soccer then you probably recognize his name. He was the 1995 FIFA World Player of the year. As a soccer star at the highest levels, he became a national hero and eventually went on to become president of Liberia—his birthplace.

Carrying the name "Weah" in soccer comes with certain expectations that might be hard to understand—unless you are his son, Tim Weah. The blossoming 19-year-old forward for the US Men's National soccer team has a surprising perspective. Here's what he said in an interview with USA soccer.

"A lot of players are scared because they think that I am this fierce player, because of the last name that's on my back. For me, it was just normal. I'm just like any other player. I work hard for what I have. Skills don't come just like that. You have to work on it."

So what did Tim's parents do to give him such a healthy outlook?

They started by allowing him to pursue what he was interested in—and not with a hardcore training approach that you would expect from the World Player of the Year. His Dad said, "I wanted Tim to enjoy soccer and I knew that I would be a tough coach, so his mother and sister trained him."

George Weah let his son's natural appetite direct his course AND he trusted that if his son loved it on his own, that he would do what he needed to reach higher levels. In other words, he provided the opportunity and then just stepped aside to allow it to happen, without manipulating the outcome.

Head coach of the FIFA U-17 USA team tells of another positive step that Tim's parents took: **"They instilled a lot of values in him from a young age. The thing that always struck me is that he didn't want his last name to be what made people talk about him. He wanted them to talk about his first name, Tim."**

Tim's work ethic directs his attitude. He's not interested in what opportunities his name brings. His dad also values Tim for the person that he is, not for what he does as a soccer player. In fact, Tim gets just as much encouragement about his other passion... writing and producing R&B and hip-hop music.

When it came time to wrestle with the decision of playing for the US or Liberia, Tim had the support from his father regardless of what he chose. Ultimately, he chose to play for America because of the pride that was nurtured growing up in the US.

It's refreshing to find families that figure out the balance between guiding, yet allowing freedoms, between counseling and supporting choices, all this, while encouraging excellence. It can be a tricky balance to find. How's the balance point in your family?





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Discussion Guide for Parent and Athlete

1

In what ways have you ALLOWED your athlete to design and live out his/her sport journey without taking control?

2

What opportunities do you see for yourself to let go and demonstrate more “allowing” so your athlete can make more choices?