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Twinkies, Ho Hos and Mini Oreos

Kids' sports have a long-standing tradition of being a place for children to develop athletic skills and sportsmanship. And for developing parents' ability to find playing fields within a 20 mile radius of their home, to drive between appointments without missing a beat, and to cheer on even the most sorry of teams with unflagging optimism.

But what I realize is that it also affords me to live vicariously—not in terms of being a great child athlete (my kids were blessed with brains but not much brawn or even coordination). No, I get to relive the snacks of my childhood.

One might think that the highlight of the weekly soccer game is the first goal of the game or the great block as a defender. But really, the highlight is right after doing the parallel reception line walk to congratulate the other team (or be congratulated, as the case may be). The real reason to practice twice a week and to get beaten by kids twice your size is.....Soccer Snack Time.

The parents rotate the responsibility of bringing snacks for the post-game celebration. Last Saturday was my turn to bring snacks. I look in the cupboard and am able to come up with a variety of granola bars—peanut butter, honey and oats, raisins and nuts. I think about the look on my son's face when I tell him what I have available for his teammates. No, granola bars, especially a mish mash of types, will not do. We must go to the grocery store.

My son agrees to go with me, partly I think because he doesn't trust me to pick out something good. He has no idea that there is a little kid in me that loves to pile on the sugar and fat calories with all kinds of additives and preservatives. The Damn Good Mother in me has hidden this part well. When we get to the grocery store, I have an overwhelming urge to go directly to the aisle where they have Twinkies and Ho Hos. There's something appealing about the idea of buying classic junk food and not having it in your house afterwards. I can hear my soccer mom friends now, observing that I have brought treats with a longer shelf life than our current combined life expectancy.

I resist the impulse and instead, we go to the aisle with granola bars and that sticky gelatinous stuff that is marketed as fruit-based snacks. My eight year old son knows better. He says there's more to look at in other aisles. Yes, we are going to the Aisle of No Return—the SNACK AISLE! Okay, this was serious. We pass the beef jerky, crackers, cookies. Whoa, Bessie. Let's take a look at those cookies. Yes, this was good. There was a slight problem, though. These were large containers of cookies. Not individually wrapped packages. I imagined ten sweaty boys reaching into the bag, germs mixing instantaneously, to get their share of the gold. My stomach was turning. No, we needed to find the individually wrapped stuff. Finally, at the end of the aisle, there it was. Twelve individually wrapped packages of Mini-Oreos, with not the regular filling but a special chocolate filling. My son is particularly pleased, as this is a "10" on the Ross junk food scale. Little does he know that my childhood food experiences make the Mini-Oreos pale in comparison. Not only

were there Twinkies and Ho Hos but also Ding Dongs and Cupcakes. And let's not forget all those Little Debbie snacks.

I joked with my son about what it would be like if we brought something healthy for snack, like carrots and celery. Would the kids say, "Oh, there goes Mrs. Ross, buying that healthy stuff, again." My son assured me they would not say that, only that they wouldn't like it. I decided to test this out on his teammate as we drove to the game. So I said, "By the way, boys, I'm bringing snacks today. And I was thinking about bringing something healthy, like carrots and celery." My son chimes in, joining in the fun, "And don't forget the broccoli, Mom." I wish I had eyes in the back of my head. All I heard was a small, "Oh" from my son's friend. I decided not to prolong the torture. "But instead we're bringing Mini-Oreos." There was whoop and a sigh of relief. Life was going to turn out okay after all. My son proceeds to tell his friend the intricacies of Mini-Oreos, including his guess on how many are in a bag.

You might think this was the end of the Soccer Snack experience. But the best was yet to come. Oh, the game was good. And the boys played great. But the real reason for being there starts when another parent reaches into a cooler and tosses out juice packs to the kids. He reminds me of a Red Cross worker, throwing out bags of rice to needy children in some third-world country. And then I step up, feeling more generous than Rockefeller, and more powerful than The Donald, handing out Mini-Oreos. The boys gather around me like piranhas at a feeding frenzy. But instead of baring their teeth, they are holding out their hands.

One kid asks for two packages. I tell him to wait until everyone on his team gets one. I am secretly hoping that he will forget to come back and there will be a package of Mini-Oreos left over for me. It was looking good until I see the siblings of teammates, looking at me with pitiful eyes. I cannot look away. I give away more packages. There's still one package left. And then the "Can I have two?" kid catches my eye. He is determined to have two. Okay, okay, you can have it, I say.

Well, I didn't get my Mini-Oreos. I didn't even get my Twinkies or Ho Hos. But I did get the experience of feeling like both Rockefeller and The Donald at the same time, if only briefly. Thanks, kids.

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