

## SPORT

# Tom Millar talks to visiting lecturer Danny Massaro about his 'winning parent' seminar – a guide on how to help, not hinder, your child's sporting career

AS everyone knows, parenting can be a difficult skill to master. There's a fine line between offering support while not molycoddling, protecting while also allowing independence – and achieving that balance can become even tougher within a sporting environment, where winning is seen as everything.

Lecturer Danny Massaro, who visited the Island last weekend, is someone who is acutely aware of just how difficult it is to support a loved one appropriately within sport.

The 40-year-old, who works at the University of Central Lancashire, is married to – and coaches – former women's squash world champion Laura Massaro. Although he now prides himself on the strength of his marriage, the relationship became strained several years ago by the way he was supporting his wife's career.

Discussing his experiences, Massaro said: 'In the early years, as much as I was supporting her, I did cloud it a lot.'

'I was doing too much – thinking for her, reading into her results, feeling let down if she didn't do well and not allowing her to go and do it on her own.'

**'What I know as a coach is that those guys and girls are going to crumble under pressure because they've been fast-tracked'**

## Danny Massaro

'I realised one day that every time Laura went to work, I went with her and she didn't have that room. I got very emotional because I felt I deprived her of her opportunity to be independent.'

'I didn't mean it and it was all through support and love but then I thought, am I looking to feel fuller about myself by jumping on some of her potential success?'

'It scared me and that's when we brought other coaches in. I went away and learned a few more skills and now I go in when she invites me, so



Danny Massaro runs seminars to help parents establish the best way to support their children

Picture: ROB CURRIE.

# The parent trap

it's on her terms. That way she has the space she needs to develop herself.'

Having learned from his own set-backs, the 40-year-old now runs seminars to help parents establish the best way to support – and, in turn, get the best out of – their children.

Speaking at the Jersey Squash and Racketball Club in St Clement last Sunday, Massaro's message to those who attended his Winning Parent Rational seminar was 'less is more'.

He says children must be allowed to develop on their own and claims that often, too

much input from parents can cause long-term psychological damage.

'We think we're helping by doing more, and being more concerned but actually what we're doing is telling the kids that they lack more,' he continued.

'We're communicating that they lack things because they need help with them and the kids end up lacking the ability to think for themselves.'

'I'm trying to let the parents know that less is more ... let children go down that journey. It's not abandonment; it's incisive support when you're invited in.'

'They can't make their own way if mum and dad help them every step; they need the room to run back and say "look what I did on my own over there".'

'Otherwise, even when they achieve, they don't really achieve because the parents have done it in their mind. When they've done something on their own, that's much healthier and more motivating.'

The lecturer claims that often parents focus on results, which can ultimately be un-

controllable. Instead, Massaro says parents should set goals which can be achieved no matter what the outcome of the match.

'Parents should demand effort and enjoyment and they can say "if you're not doing that, we're not going next week" but they shouldn't focus on results. It all tends to be about the result but you have to set tangible goals that the kids can control.'

Massaro also feels it's very important not to fast-track talented juniors by forcing them to play over and above their maturity or ability.

'What I know as a coach is that those guys and girls are going to crumble under pressure because they've been fast-tracked. They've not made their own way and they don't have those hardened experiences to deal with a match, so what can happen is the difference between the practice level and their performance level is massive.'

Jersey director of squash Nick Taylor says Massaro's first seminar was a success and hopes to bring the lecturer back to Jersey in the not-too-distant future.

**'They can't make their own way if mum and dad help them every step; they need the room to run back and say "look what I did on my own over there".'**



Danny Massaro talking during the recent seminar at the Jersey Squash Club



Danny Massaro's wife Laura Massaro, pictured with the world squash singles trophy

**'Danny's observations all rang true and it was so helpful to have tools to go back home with to try to set boundaries and focus on a new more "grown up" footing'**

Rachel Lucas, who attended the seminar