

Sportsmanship

The Value of Sport - Putting Sport in Perspective.

Sport provides an arena in which good character may be developed and practised. Sport and life are connected because good character matters in both, and the lessons learned in one may be practised in the other.

Coaches, administrators, parents, fans, officials, and everyone else involved in youth athletics are role models and moral educators, whether they wish to be or not. As a moral educator, one provides an arena in which players may develop good judgement.

We can't expect children to do what's right if we don't teach them. We can't expect children to become good people unless we attempt to instill good habits in them and help them develop good character traits.

Athletic competition can provide an opportunity for individuals to improve and to excel. One of the most rewarding athletic experiences is overcoming apparent limits. Players can learn that they are capable of far more than they realize. This applies to players at all skill levels.

In sport, it's not whether the game is won or lost, but how the game is played. The problem with the "winning-is-everything" attitude is that it diminishes the importance of all the other good things about sport. What really matters is the excellence we achieve in doing our very best.

What Is Good Sportsmanship?

Sportsmanship is not just about following rules. Sportsmanship primarily involves respect - for the opponent, for teammates, for officials, for coaches, and for the game. Respect for others requires first and foremost the perspective to see things from the other's point of view.

Being a good sport also requires the proper perspective - about what sporting activity is and what its central values are. Sportsmanship involves a wisdom that requires insight, right attitudes, and good judgement, as well as appropriate conduct. Sport can and does teach these lessons.

How we conduct ourselves as players, coaches, parents, and administrators will make its mark upon the kinds of human beings we become. Our behaviour does matter. Virtue, said Aristotle, requires practice. One can and must practice good sportsmanship, just as one must practice a base-running situation.

The Five Principles Of Sportsmanship

1. Respect For Opponents

Respect for an opponent is a fundamental part of competition. An opponent's effort to beat you provides you an opportunity and challenges you to do your best. All athletes need good opponents to challenge them to excel.

Find the middle ground between viewing your opponent as "an enemy" and making no effort to beat your opponent (playing "just for fun"). Both these extremes exhibit a disrespect for opponents that misconstrues the very nature of competition.

Showing respect for opponents:

- Give your best effort. Anything less is nearly as disrespectful as trying to win by cheating.

- Avoid displays of disrespect (taunting, trash talking, etc.).
- Celebrate victory respectfully.
- The Silver Rule. "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."
- Abide by rituals of respect, such as the post game handshake. Do it properly. Thank your opponents for the competition. Acknowledge excellent play. Mean it. Shake hands with conviction.

2. *Respect For Teammates And Team*

Respect for teammates is more than co-operation. Admire and respect excellence wherever you find it. When a group of players truly becomes a team...a chemistry develops, everything comes together, gels, becomes magic. The whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

Showing respect for teammates and team:

- Your excellence as a "team athlete" will help your teammates become better ballplayers themselves.
- Be truthful about your abilities and the contribution you can make. (Not everyone can hit home runs; perhaps you're better at stealing bases).
- Make individual sacrifices and be willing to play a role. An unselfish player can see the larger picture and focus on the team's success.
- Emphasize the little things that make team success possible.
- Respect team rules. Promote team spirit and team unity.

3. *Respect For Officials*

Sport depends on the contributions of opponents, teammates, coaches, and officials.

Showing respect for officials:

- Do not make officials the scapegoats for disappointing outcomes.
- Showing respect does not mean that you must always agree with officials or think they're always right. The tone of your response is crucial.
- Practice The Silver Rule: Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."
- Keep your expectations of the officiating consistent with the level of play.

4. *Respect For The Game*

To play a sport is to become involved in a tradition. Respect for the game must be understood in the context of both the written rules and the unwritten customs that have arisen in the development of the sport. Someone who shows disrespect for an opponent, a teammate, a coach, or an official is at the same time showing disrespect for the game.

Showing respect for the game:

- Respect the rules.
- Respect fair play. Cheating shows lack of respect for your opponent and for the sport. Cheating disrupts the equality provided by the rules of the sport.
- Respect the spirit of competition; attempt to play as well as you can (even if the teams are mismatched).

- Respect the spirit of play; don't forget that it is a game.
- Respect the game's traditions and customs.
- Respect achievement and excellence. Give credit where credit is due.

5. *Respect Between Players And Coaches*

Coaches earn respect from players by virtue of the respect they show to the players. Coaches owe players (in order to be worthy of their respect) knowledge of the game, a willingness to teach the game, and to understand, teach and exhibit the virtues of good sportsmanship.

- Show your players that they can love competition and have an intense desire to succeed and win...while exhibiting good sportsmanship.
- Talk about sportsmanship. Discuss displays of sportsmanlike or unsportsmanlike behaviour, both in local games and that exhibited by professional athletes.
- Sportsmanship can be learned and must be practised - develop the habit of respect. Teach what is meant by treating others with respect. Make this a part of every practice, every team meeting, every game and every celebration.
- Teach by example and be a good role model.
- Take the responsibilities of coaching seriously, but don't be too authoritarian. Place importance on the education of players.
- Respect the potential of players to learn, to improve.
- Help players develop the good judgement required in difficult situations.
- Do not attempt to intimidate officials in order to get a favourable call in the future. Don't get into heated arguments with officials in order to try to motivate the team.
- Never allow players to make officials the scapegoats for disappointing outcomes.

Players earn respect from coaches by virtue of the respect they show to coaches. Players owe coaches (in order to be worthy of their respect) a willingness to learn the game, to become team players, and to learn the principles of good sportsmanship.

- Understand your responsibilities as a player and team member.
- Exhibit mature behaviour and co-operation.
- Watch for positive examples of good sportsmanship and set a good example for others.
- Learn about the balance needed between seriousness and having fun that athletic competition calls for.

Teaching Good Sportsmanship (For Coaches)

Coaches: Whether you choose to be or not, you are a role model and a moral educator. The issue is whether you will convey the values of good sportsmanship and whether you make this teaching a conscious part of your coaching. One of a coach's obligations toward players is to exhibit and teach them the principles of good sportsmanship. There are three approaches to the teaching of sportsmanship: (1) teaching by explicit instruction, (2) teaching by example, and (3) practising sportsmanship.

Coaches: Have you thought about what your players are learning from you besides the fundamentals and strategies of your sport? Does your behaviour reflect the kind of person you want each of your players to be? Think about the values you are conveying to your players.

General Guidelines For Teaching Sportsmanship

1. Be a good role model. Your actions speak louder than your words. Show what it means to be a good sport by treating others with respect.
2. Emphasize sportsmanship from the beginning and sustain it throughout the season. Explain your expectations from the outset and reinforce them periodically.
3. Talk about the combination of seriousness and having fun in competitive sport. Explain that poor sportsmanship is often a matter of being too serious (of forgetting that there's more to sport than winning), OR a matter of not being serious enough (of forgetting that striving to do your best and striving to win are essential parts of competition).
4. Discuss the relationship between sportsmanship and success. Explain that respect for others (opponents, teammates, officials) may help develop habits and talents that will improve the chances of success.
5. Show by your actions and words that you care, that it matters how players behave. Regularly use the language of sportsmanship (the language of respect). Keep your comments positive, whether directed to your own players or players of the opposing team.
6. Expect sportsmanship in practice as well as in games. Develop habits of good sportsmanship in your players at all times.
7. Establish team rules, customs, rituals, and traditions that reinforce the principles of sportsmanship. Be specific about your expectations. Treat all players equally regardless of their role on the team.
8. Encourage players to take the perspective of other participants (opponents, teammates, officials). Emphasize The Silver Rule: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."
9. Develop clear guidelines for dealing with unsportsmanlike behaviour. Decide not to allow taunting, showboating, or arguing with officials and tell the players what the specific penalty will be for violations. Make it clear there are consequences for misbehaviour. Watch for evidence of bullying and unsportsmanlike behaviour, especially amongst younger players.
10. Reinforce good sportsmanship. This may be done through praise, respectful behaviour and playing time. Make sure that team awards include recognition of good sportsmanship.
11. Communicate the importance of good sportsmanship to parents.
12. Communicate the importance of good sportsmanship to fans. Set the tone with positive remarks before and after games.
13. Discuss news stories concerning sportsmanship with your players. Some high-profile athletes deserve our respect, others do not.
14. Discuss specific incidents with your players. Encourage discussion of sportsmanship. Challenge players to think for themselves.
15. Resist the temptation to overcoach. Remember that part of your responsibility is to educate players, to help them make responsible decisions for themselves. Let them make some decisions themselves and let them make some mistakes. For example, resist calling all of the pitches from the dugout.
16. Expect players to know the rule book.
17. Don't forget to have fun. Remember, baseball is a game.

Learning Good Sportsmanship (For Players)

1. Respect for opponents
 - a. Don't direct negative comments toward your opponents.
 - b. It's all right to cheer when your teammates do something well, but not when your opponents make errors.
 - c. Shake hands meaningfully after the game, whether you won or lost.
 - d. If you lose, offer sincere congratulations after the game. To show you really mean it, praise an opponent in a specific manner ("That was a great hit!" "Your curve ball was really working today!").
 - e. Don't be cocky.
 - f. Don't change your attitude or approach to the game whether you're winning or losing. In both cases, treat the opposing team, teammates and officials with respect.
 - g. Avoid displays of emotional immaturity after striking out, making an error, etc.
 - h. After the game, don't whine or make excuses. Accept defeat gracefully, acknowledging the opponent's good game.
 - i. If winning by a large margin late in the game, don't run up the score. Continue to play good baseball, but abide by the customs of the game.

2. Respect for Teammates and Team
 - a. Every player should help his or her teammates become better in practice. Take turns working with younger players, etc.
 - b. Concentrate on the game. EVERY team member should know the score, the inning and the count at every moment in the game.
 - c. Support your teammates. Congratulate teammates for doing things well, especially "little things." If a player successfully sacrifices a runner into scoring position, the entire team should congratulate the player when he or she returns to the dugout. Offer encouragement to teammates not having a good game as well.
 - d. Remember the observation: "The best team doesn't win nearly as often as the team that really gets along best." (Dr. Rob Gilbert)
 - e. During practice or games, do not seek advice or instruction from parents, relatives or friends. Only talk to coaches and team members during games. Parents and friends should stay away from the dugout during games.
 - f. During the game, players should only talk to each other about the game. Stay focused.
 - g. Players should only leave the dugout for game-related reasons or for emergencies. Every player is part of the team effort.
 - h. If possible, travel together to and from "away" games. This will give you more time to discuss strategy, get to know each other, etc.
 - i. All players should conform to the same team rules and customs. Don't weaken team unity by expecting team rules to be ignored just for you.

3. Respect for Umpires
 - a. Address umpires in a formal manner (e.g., Mr./Ms. Umpire or "Blue")
 - b. Be polite or civil when talking to umpires.
 - c. Practice the cardinal rule of respect for officials in baseball: Don't show up the umpire! Don't argue judgement calls. Have the coach address any concerns.
 - d. Shake hands with the umpires after the game.
 - e. Congratulate the umpire if you think the game was officiated well. Apologize if you lost your cool during the game.
 - f. Consider what it's like to umpire a game. Consider umpiring lower level competition to learn to see the game from an umpire's perspective.
 - g. After the game, don't blame umpires for a loss. Accept the human judgement of umpires as part of the game.

4. Respect For The Game
 - a. Practice the cardinal rule of respect for the game: Play hard at all times! Run out every ball, always back up teammates, etc. Continue to do your best even if your team is behind.
 - b. Hustle on and off the field. Show enthusiasm for the game.
 - c. Wear your uniform appropriately. For example, don't wear your cap backwards.
 - d. Learn all you can about the game. Have your coach teach you about strategy.
 - e. Respect rules. Breaking the rules means that you are not playing the game and don't respect the game.
 - f. Learn and abide by the traditions and customs of the game. For example, don't steal bases, hit and run, etc., when your team is beating an opponent badly. Running up the score is disrespectful to the opponent and shows you don't respect the game.
 - g. Learn about the history of the game and its heroes and innovators.
 - h. Be thankful for the opportunity to play the game. Remember that a lot of people have gone to a great deal of trouble and expense to make it possible for you to play!
 - i. After both home and away games be sure to leave a clean dugout.

5. Respect Between Players and Coaches
 - a. Find out how your coach would like to be addressed. "Coach" or "Coach (surname)" is highly recommended, rather than the use of first names.
 - b. Listen carefully to your coaches' instructions.
 - c. Acknowledge that the coach makes the decisions on the team.
 - d. Understand your responsibilities as a player and your coach's as the team leader.
 - e. Do not use the little signs of disrespect: eyes rolling, moping, lack of hustle, questioning decisions at inappropriate times, etc.
 - f. Your coaches shows respect for you when they expect mature behaviour from you and treat you as an adult capable of understanding your role and their role on the team.
 - g. Be willing to give your coach constructive feedback about how you feel things are going on the team.
 - h. Learn the principles of sportsmanship taught by your coach and exhibited in your coach's behaviour. Learn sportsmanship by practising good behaviour and thinking about the examples you are exposed to and are setting for others.
 - i. Have fun. Get your coach to reserve some practice time for drills or activities that are strictly for fun.

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