

SPORTSMANSHIP— THE TRUE MARK OF A CHAMPION

by Mike Mastandrea

In our world of advanced technology, instant gratification, and reality shows which encourage deception and a “winner take all” philosophy, it is no wonder why the idea of sportsmanship has been lost in the shuffle. It has become all about winning and not about developing character. The real winners in sports and in life itself are those who know how to persevere and to behave with dignity. Whether it is a sporting event, a dance team competition, or a marching band contest one thing is for certain—the only way you can lose your dignity is if you choose to do so. No set of judges or officials can take away your personal dignity.

Sportsmanship, like everything else, trickles down from the top. The attitude of directors and coaches helps to shape the attitude of their students. Parents and students take their cues from you, the educator. Your decorum, facial expressions, body language, and comments will determine how your team or group behaves. Whether you like it or not, you are a major player in the socialization process of our youth. Your responsibility, above all else, is to demonstrate good character and teach acceptable social behavior.

It is interesting to me when I see directors acting just like the students and parents they complain about! What ever happened to, “It wasn’t our day, but we’ll do better next time”? Or, “You girls did a terrific job and I could not be prouder”. Or, “Let’s listen to the judge’s comments and see our score sheets. They may have some excellent suggestions.” Instead, some directors take their disappointment and begin finding fault or laying blame.

It is perfectly natural to be disappointed but it is unacceptable to channel that disappointment into an angry tirade. Monkey see, monkey do is an old but appropriate adage. When your students and parents see this sort of behavior, they join right in. This can never be productive. And, once this type of behavior is demonstrated and condoned, it tends to snowball. Soon, the parents will give you the same display of anger and poor sportsmanship at your team and/or officer tryouts that they witnessed from you at competition.

Good sportsmanship is the mark of a true champion and a quality that should never be compromised. There are ways to promote good sportsmanship. Keep in mind it is just as important to nurture the development of one’s character as it is to teach them skills. When they look back years from now and recall their experiences on your team, it will be the life-skill qualities you instilled in them they recall and not how many awards adorned the trophy case. If you do not believe this, sit back and recall the educators that made an indelible impression on your life. What are the qualities they possessed that made the difference? Make the choice to be different.



THE DO'S OF SPORTSMANSHIP

- ☑ DO create an atmosphere on your team that rewards good sportsmanship. Actually discuss with your students how to win and lose gracefully. People will always remember how you and your team reacted at an event much more than whatever you won or lost! Sportsmanship and “having class” go hand in hand.

- ☑ DO set reasonable goals for you and your team. High hopes usually lead to hard falls. It is natural and important to compete to win at anything you do. However, winning should not be the only goal. Make sure to point out all of the positive features that result from competition other than winning first place.

- ☑ DO avoid being presumptuous. Do you really believe that no other groups could possibly be better than yours at a competition? It is one thing to be self-assured, it is another to be arrogant and condescending. Humility and humbleness are revered by others, especially other competitors at the event.

- ☑ DO emphasize the importance of sportsmanship and maintaining decorum when meeting with parents.

“THE MAN WHO COMPLAINS
ABOUT WAY THE BALL BOUNCES
IS LIKELY THE ONE WHO
DROPPED IT.”

-LOU HOLTZ

Helping Parents

Understand Sportsmanship:

- ◆ Make sure they get to know you and understand your philosophy.
- ◆ Make sure their expectations of their children and the team are realistic.
- ◆ Discuss acceptable behavior at a sporting event or competition.
- ◆ Have a plan in place for disruptive parents and make sure everyone knows it will not be tolerated. This would include yelling at their children, an official, judge, or other participant.
- ◆ Encourage them to remain positive following every performance. Point out the importance of using encouragement for their children
- ◆ Reiterate the need to concentrate on the ELM method—effort, learning, and the ability to bounce back from mistakes.
- ◆ Give them a plan for voicing a grievance or concern. However, reemphasize that the time and place for this is not during the event or in public.

