

The Value of Sportsmanship

Richard Ricketts
Athletic Director

The late journalist Heywood Broun penned the famous quote, “Sports don’t develop character; they reveal it.” Today’s culture is proving to make it increasingly difficult to instill and promote traditional Christian values in our youth. Constant reminders are necessary to keep us all from drifting from these values and to help us remain different from the world.

This is especially true in sports. The value of good sportsmanship is being attacked at all levels: the pros, college, high school, and even in youth recreational sports. It is important for us to refocus on the basic ideas of sportsmanship to keep these values from slipping away like so many other values have in our culture.

As Christians, it is even more important for us to commit ourselves to helping our children understand what sportsmanship is all about, reward them for showing good sportsmanship, and most importantly, model good sportsmanship.

Here are a few tips for us to follow as we try to develop good sportsmanship:

Play fair. This sounds overly simple, but it is becoming common for competitors to cheat to gain an advantage. A player with good sportsmanship does not want a hollow victory that comes as a result of cheating.

Avoid arguments. A big part of sportsmanship is learning to control one’s anger. A good sport knows that anger can cause them to lose focus on the game and interfere with their performance. Constant arguing with referees, coaches, or opponents is a misguided effort in dealing with anger.

Be a team player. A good sport realizes that their behavior reflects on the entire team. Poor behavior often puts focus on the individual rather than the team. A team player reminds his or her teammates of this, does not condone unsportsmanlike behavior and shares the responsibility of promoting good sportsmanship with them.

Respect your opponent. In the field of play, respect for the other team’s effort is central to good sportsmanship. Recognizing extraordinary effort or the great performance of another team’s player does not lessen your own accomplishment. If you are out performed, don’t make excuses that try to diminish your opponent. Learn from it and move on. If you out perform your opponent, don’t gloat and try to minimize their effort.

Encourage your teammates. Praise your teammates when they do well and encourage them when they make mistakes. Being critical of a teammate in the heat of battle shows a lack of unity and distracts the team from working together, which often gives the opponent a sense of confidence.

Respect the officials. Players, coaches, and fans show good sportsmanship by realizing that game officials are in a position of authority. Just as all other humans, they will make mistakes. How we respond when we feel like we have been wronged is a choice of being a good sport or being a bad sport. The player or coach with good sportsmanship may be upset, but they have learned to focus their energies back on the game and on controlling what they can control for the rest of the game. Always remember that sometimes bad calls go your way, too.

Respect your fellow fans. Nobody likes to sit next to the guy who loudly gives his armchair perspective about what went wrong with each play and how the coach and referees are morons. It grates on the nerves. Also, be respectful to fans who are rooting for the opposing team. Their allegiance to a set of guys wearing different uniforms does not mark them as arch enemies or make them less human. Don’t give opposing fans dirty looks or hurl crass insults in their direction.

End the contest with good sportsmanship. Always be gracious and congratulate your opponent at the conclusion of a game. Pouting, threatening, or cajoling the opponent should never occur in players that are good sports. Win with class and lose with class.

As coaches, players, parents, and fans of Prince Avenue Christian School it is extremely important that we always try to demonstrate good sportsmanship. For a large number of the people we compete against, we are the only thing “Christian” they will see. The important question is this: Does our sportsmanship reveal the true Christian character of Christ that we want others to see?

Go Wolverines!

