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Good Sportsmanship: Here Are Some Good Examples

One Boy's Win Shared By All

Our kids have been involved in sports from the peewee to college level. There was one defining moment we all recall as when they first truly understood what good sportsmanship is.

It was during one of the last Catholic elementary school track meets. My son was 12 and my daughter was 9. Even at this level, track was taken very seriously. The end of the season was approaching and every win was important to qualify for the championships.

The focus was on the senior boys' relay race. Coaches were tallying points and it was obvious that the results so far were close. Our school - Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Berlin, N.J. - had a strong team, So I felt confident that they would win. I was holding the finish-line tape as the boys came to take their marks. Three of the boys were the usual eighth-grade runners, but along with them was a fourth grader who was taking the anchor position! This runner named Mike wore a prosthesis because he was missing a leg from birth. He had competed in sprinting events all season, but his dream was to anchor the boys' relay team. This last minute change was not lost on the fans. Everyone was confused and anxious about what would happen.

The gun went off and the first three boys seemed to literally bolt to pass the baton to each other and finally to Mike. He began in first place but as they entered the final stretch he was losing ground rapidly. It was then that I saw the opposing coaches signaling their runners to slow down. Mike crossed the line victorious!

But the real victory belonged not just to Mike. It also belonged to the boys who put him on their team, to the boys who slowed down and to the coaches who recognized the real purpose of sports.

Ellen Siers, Berlin

A Charge To Beat His Best Golf Score

When I was 11 or 12 in the late 1970s, my brothers and I used to play golf at a small, 12-hole course near Blue Bell called Siebel's. It was an apple orchard and was run by an old man who charged \$2 per visit.

One hot summer day, I was within one putt of beating my best score. But instead of sinking a 7-footer, I three-putted for an uneventful round. My competitive edge got the better of me, and I drove my putter into the green like a sledgehammer. This, of course, put a huge divot in the green -which drew a sharp comment from my older brother.

We walked off the green and all the way around the barn that separated us from the parking lot. On the other side of the barn sat the old man in an old, broken down car. He smiled and said, "Hey, fellas, grab a free Coke on your way out. It's Appreciation Day for -taking good care of the greens while you play." My jaw dropped to the ground as I stammered out a "Thank you."

I don't know if that old man saw my immature mistake or if Divine Providence played a role, but I've never driven a putter into a green since.

Brian Hanlon, Plymouth

Learn By Mistakes Of The Parents

Our 4-year-old grandson was a participant in an ice hockey team. As proud grandparents, we attended the very early morning games. On one occasion, a proud father sitting behind us shouted, "Trip him Jimmy, trip him."

A perfect example of how to teach children good sportsmanship.

Sylvia Soble, Philadelphia

Soccer Player In A League Of His Own

All through his years at Moorestown Friends School, our son Jeff's great interest was soccer. After he graduated and was accepted at the University of Denver, he entered the trials for the soccer team. The list of 25 accepted students was posted a week later, and Jeff was number 26.

In response, he organized a "losers' team" of the others off the list. For the next couple of years, this team went around challenging the city's teams and did so well that the university invited Jeff to join theirs. Our son declined because his whole team could not be taken on.

At the end of the year, the university recognized Jeff's sportsmanship and awarded him the "Player of the Year" cup. That, too, was proof of good sportsmanship.

Erica B. Miller, Moorestown

Lessons From Home That Stay With You

In Northeast Philly, it was typical to have neighbors play on competing teams in youth sports. Such was the case when I played baseball for the Academy Sabers Youth Organization.

My Little League team that year, the "maroon team," lost in the playoffs to the "purple team." The worst part was dealing with my neighbor, Jim, who played on the purple team and who liked to brag, as he had demonstrated all season.

While riding home from the game, my parents were giving me all kinds of ideas on what to say to Jim should he start teasing me. "Tell him he didn't play a good game, striking out twice," said my mom. My dad's idea was, "Remind him that your team won both times you played them in the regular season." Ideas were exchanged until we got home. I got out of the car and my parents continued talking. As I was about to enter our house, they called me back.

My parents were smiling as they explained they had the perfect solution. They told me to go knock on Jim's door right away, and, before he can say a word, congratulate him for his team's win and wish him luck in his next game.

If I ask my parents about, this event, I'm sure they wouldn't even remember it. What's most important, however, is that I never forgot.

Paul Nazarok, Egg Harbor Township

Parents Are Full Of Surprises

I have played many sports, but one part I have never liked and probably never will is -you guessed it - losing. It is one of the prime things that leads to another thing I hate: bad sportsmanship.

On a summer day when I was 4, I attended my first soccer game. At the beginning, I was expecting my parents to come up and say, "Do well." But when they did come up, they said, "Be a good sport." Not "Have fun," not "Do well," but "Be a good sport." It was like they didn't care whether I won or not.

All this time my friends had been telling me the most important thing about sports was winning, and here my parents just cared if I was good sport.

Billy Palombi, Grade 5, Taunton Forge Elementary School, Medford

After A Tough Year, Attitude Changes

When I was little, about 6 or 7, I was a bad sport. Because I'm good at sports, I used to get really frustrated when my teammates didn't perform well, so I put them down by saying, "Come on!" or "You stink!"

At 11 years old, I look back and see how mean I was, and wish I didn't act that way to others. This bad behavior went on until I was 9. In fourth grade, I made a basketball team with mean but good players and a tough coach. I was the youngest player and not as good as some of the older boys. Sometimes my teammates didn't show me the good sportsmanship I deserved, so I got frustrated. That year wasn't fun at all, but it was still a good experience. It made me realize how I made some of my fellow teammates feel when I didn't treat them with good sportsmanship.

I now know what sportsmanship is, and I use it whenever I am in group activity.

Kevln Brunetti, Grade 5, Taunton Forge Elementary School, Medford

Teacher Calls For A Timeout

During one of my daughter's third-grade class parties, parents were invited to join a game of "Math Baseball," in which a player first had to correctly answer a multiplication problem, and then toss a ball at a target in order to score.

It was an even match, and some sideline cheering started for whoever was "at bat." All of a sudden, however, the cheering went "Go, our team!" to "Lose, the opposing team!" Without missing a beat, the instant the teacher heard it uttered, as umpire, she called a timeout. She calmly but clearly explained that positive cheering could be motivating, but that negative comments were hurtful and unacceptable. Within seconds, play resumed on an even keel and everyone continued to enjoy the rest of the party.

Did the teacher have to do it? Was it part of her academic lesson plan? Could she have ignored it? Was it a risk to take a stand in front of parents? Was it a big deal? To me, it was. It's important for my children to hear consistent reinforcing messages from others beside me. By taking advantage of this teachable moment, the teacher gave us all a lesson in how to "walk the walk."

Thank You, Dorie Leahy, at the Episcopal Academy in Devon, for giving this good sportsmanship lesson to my child, and reminding me of some valuable lessons too.

Kathy Bowman, Berwyn

An Opportunity To Score A Goal

As a volunteer youth coach, I am painfully aware of how it feels to face an opposing coach who does not understand good sportsmanship. I have always taught my kids that when we dominate a game, we take measures to be good sports. We pass the ball more (in soccer), put defensive players up front, and, if that doesn't work, go to "Code 3," which means we stop scoring.

A couple of years ago, I was coaching in an "under 10" league when we took a quick lead against a team that had not won a game all season. Even using weaker players, we were leading 4-0 in the final period. I enacted our "Code 3" and shortly thereafter, my son -who had never scored a goal in three years of soccer - had a breakaway opportunity.

I could literally see the wheels turning in his head as he approached the net. Would he take the easy goal or support my decision not to score? My heart sank. As a father, I was thinking, "Go ahead, take the shot," but what would Joel do? Did he understand the lessons of sportsmanship that I had tried to teach? At the last possible moment, he intentionally shot wide. My emotions were torn between disappointment for Joel (who never did score that season) and incredible pride.

On the drive home I told Joel that I would not have been upset if he had scored, and he replied, "You know Dad, I really wanted to score. I even thought about it, but we were ahead and I didn't want the other kids to feel bad."

He learned the lesson well.

Michael J. Leventhal, Doylestown

Forever Haunted By Unkind Taunts

On a cool evening late in May; parents sit in lawn chairs and stand on the sidelines with video cameras in hand, waiting for their child's turn. It is the third inning and the T-ball game is in full swing, when a skinny 6-year-old girl with glasses and an orange team shirt three sizes too large walks slowly up to bat. Her teammates and parents cheer, and the other team is silent.

The coach gently throws a ball, underhand. In a most unathletic attempt, she swings wildly, missing. The next pitch, she swings too soon, and the third too late. As a fellow player's father brings out the "T," she confidently prepares to hit the ball. But with each consecutive miss, her self-esteem decreases. She hears the coach counting, 11 ... 12 ... 21 ... 22.

When the 7-year-old boy playing catcher heckles her with cruel kindergarten insults, embarrassment overcomes her. She attempts to hear nothing but her coach's kind, yet impatient, encouragement. "That's good. Aim a little lower," he says, "Concentrate." The number of futile attempts increases ... 32

... 33 ... she is mortified and ready to burst into tears. On swing 40, the bat skims the top of the ball, knocking it lightly off the tee, but no farther than 10 feet.

Throughout the remainder of the game, she hears the evil words thrown at her over and over in her mind. She has never insulted another player for making a mistake, and now she knows exactly why.

Jana Holt, Grade 9, Strath Haven High School, Media

Surprise Comment After A Close Game

I first learned about sportsmanship during a football game. It was a sunny day, and we were playing a strong, well-trained team. We were rivals. There was much tension between us, and we were both playing as hard as we could. A couple people were injured. It was very close, but we lost by a couple of points. I was angry at myself that I lost, and I was angry that they beat us. I was so sure we were going to win.

As I was walking back to the car, I saw one of the other team's players. I was about to say something like, "I'll beat you next time," but he said something first. He said, "You played a good game." Then he walked away.

I felt so much better after he said that to me. I went home feeling good. It shows how much one person can do for you. I hope that I do the same thing for someone else.

Ed Cashman, Grade 7, St. Mary Magdalen School, Media

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