

APPENDIX

Suggestions for Teaching Sportsmanship

Throughout the book we've punctuated our discussions of the principles of sportsmanship with questions about how you might go about teaching and promoting these principles in your coaching. In the end, as we have stressed, the application of these principles to your day-to-day coaching is something you will have to do for yourself. The application of principles requires good judgment, and you're the one who has to develop and exercise that judgment. Nonetheless, we thought it might be helpful to provide some suggestions for how you might go about putting these principles into practice.

Throughout this book we think we have offered something that is largely missing from our contemporary sport culture: an articulation of the principles of sportsmanship that is grounded in an understanding of the nature of sport. Here, based on our experience as coaches, athletes, and fans—as “students of the game” with regard to at least a few sports—we will throw out some ideas for how an understanding of these principles might show up in the practice of coaching. Let's say you agree that teaching young athletes to respect opponents is an essential part of your responsibilities as a coach. What, then, can you do when you walk onto the practice field or court, when you talk to players before or during or after a game, to fulfill that responsibility?

In chapter 7 we argue that one of the principles of sportsmanship is the respect between players and the coach. The coach must demand respect, and the players owe respect to the coach. But the coach who merely demands respect won't get it. You have to earn it, deserve it, by virtue of the respect you show to your players. One of the coach's obligations toward the players is to exhibit and to teach them the principles of sportsmanship. We included three approaches to the teaching of sportsmanship: (1) teaching by explicit instruction, (2) teaching by example, and (3) practicing sportsmanship. How much you depend on explicit instruction and how much you depend on having your players practice sportsmanship is a function of the age of the players (the older they are the more you can explicitly explain to them) and your own abilities and personality. Regardless of your personal-

ity, as you try to get players to form the habit of sportsmanship, you'll have to depend on a variety of approaches. The most obvious device is the use of rules and punishments for the violation of rules. But remember that respect for others, the cornerstone of sportsmanlike behavior, requires first and foremost the *perspective* to see things from the other's point of view. And many of the activities that promote the habit and perspective of sportsmanship—say, the postgame handshake—are not activities required by rules, but by custom and tradition. They take on the character of meaningful rituals that become as much a part of the sport as the rules. Remember that you can develop, even invent, rituals that can become a part of the sport—or at least a part of your team's identity.

First we'll offer a series of general guidelines for teaching sportsmanship to young athletes. These guidelines would apply to any sport that you might coach within a scholastic setting. Then, to illustrate how these guidelines might be applied to a particular sport, we'll offer concrete suggestions for one of the sports we've coached.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING SPORTSMANSHIP

1. Be a good role model. As a coach you must constantly keep in mind that your actions do, in fact, speak louder than your words. No matter what you say, what you do will have an effect on your players. You must do everything you can to show your players what it means to be a good sport by treating opposing players and coaches, officials, team members, and the sport in which you participate with respect. An obvious corollary: Admit to your players when you fall short of your own sportsmanship ideals.

2. Emphasize sportsmanship from the beginning. The process of "coaching for character" should start early, from your first contact with players. If you're recruiting a player to come out for the team or a player comes to you to discuss trying out, what you say will set the tone for your relationship with that player. At the first team meeting with your players you should explain how much you value sportsmanship. Tell them what your expectations are, how you understand the basic principles of sportsmanship, and why these principles are important.

3. Talk about combining seriousness and playfulness. Since the principles of sportsmanship are based on the very nature of sport, and sport is a form of competitive play, explain to your players that sport is "serious fun." Help them understand that bad sportsmanship is often a matter of being "too serious," of forgetting that there's more to sport than winning, and, in some cases, a matter of not being serious enough, of forgetting that striving to be excellent and striving to win within the rules and customs of the game are essential parts of competition. Try to show this balance in your own attitude and in your comments. Be serious when it's called for; cut up, kid around, and have fun when it's called for. How you express this balance

will in part depend on your own personality, but the need for a balance between playfulness and seriousness is not a matter of personal preference or personality. It comes from the nature of the activity you're engaging in, competitive play. Take your responsibilities seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.

4. Talk about the relationship between sportsmanship and success. Make sure your players understand that "success" in sports is not merely a matter of achieving victory, and that victory without sportsmanship, dignity, and honor is hollow. At the same time, try to show your players that respect for the team and your sport, as well as respect between the players and the coach, might help develop habits and talents that will improve your chances of winning.

5. Regularly use the language of sportsmanship. The language of sportsmanship should become a regular part of your coaching vocabulary. Don't leave this language behind after the first team meeting. The language of "respect" should be heard by your players often. If you earn their respect, the language you use around them will become a part of their way of looking at things. Never underestimate the power of language. The right words make it possible to understand things we couldn't otherwise understand.

6. Expect sportsmanship in practice as well as in games. Since we are encouraging you to develop the habits of good sportsmanship in your players, don't reserve instruction for games only. Expect good behavior—the habit of showing respect—in practice.

7. Establish team rules, customs, rituals, and traditions that reinforce the principles of sportsmanship. While it is crucial to talk about the basic principles of sportsmanship, it is probably even more important to be specific about your expectations. Establish specific team rules that promote good sportsmanship. It's a good idea to list the rules and place them in the context of the principles of sportsmanship. If you demand 100 percent effort at all times, then explain this demand with reference to respecting your opponents, your teammates, and the game. As much as possible, be specific about how you expect your players to relate to opponents, officials, and each other.

When the opportunity arises, try to develop customs, rituals, and traditions that will promote sportsmanship. Some customs and rituals you can simply demand, like the postgame handshake. Others develop out of the special relations and situations; some of them the players develop on their own. Take advantage of those developments.

8. Encourage players to take the perspective of other participants in sports. Since sportsmanship demands proper *perspective*, help players to understand and imaginatively to appreciate others' points of view. This is

analogous to the moral education of a child, when a parent sometimes says something like, “How would it make you feel if someone did that to you?” Talk about the “silver rule.” Talk about how opponents and officials might look at you and your players.

9. Develop clear guidelines for dealing with unsportsmanlike behavior. Make it clear to your players from the beginning of the season how you will deal with actions that violate the principles of sportsmanship. If you decide not to allow taunting, showboating, or arguing with officials, tell the players what the specific penalty (or gradations of penalties) will be if the rules are violated. You can spell out the sequence of possible punishments and explain that you will decide how serious the violation has been—in other words, you don’t have to decide in advance what the penalty for every possible violation will be—but you do have to be clear that there are consequences for violations. Be clear about the process. If you’ll make the decisions, say that. If you’ll allow the team to be involved, say that.

10. Reinforce good sportsmanship. If good sportsmanship matters to you, show the players, parents, and fans it matters by rewarding good behavior in some manner. The most obvious way to do this is through praise, respectful behavior, and playing time. At the end of the season, make sure that team awards include sportsmanship, either as a separate award or as a necessary condition for all awards.

11. Communicate the importance of sportsmanship to parents. Before the season starts meet with parents and explain to them the value you place on sportsmanship. Enlist their help and support in reinforcing your expectations with their children.

12. Communicate the importance of sportsmanship to fans. Depending on the situation in which you coach, some kind of public announcement concerning sportsmanship is important. You might address this issue over the public address system at a game, or in a printed handout. You can encourage your school or league officials to adopt rules concerning the misbehavior of fans at home games or matches. Try to develop an educational campaign at your school or in your league or organization promoting the ideals of sportsmanship among fans. Rituals at the beginning of a game showing respect for the opponents can help set the tone for the fans. Your remarks at social functions, postgame interviews on the radio, and so on can also set the tone.

13. Talk about news stories concerning sportsmanship with your players. Since most of your players are probably sports fans, use current sporting events as an opportunity for discussing sportsmanship with them. When a famous athlete does something controversial or especially laudable, ask your players what they think about the event. Ask them what they would do if they were the coach. Discuss with them how you would deal

with that sort of behavior. To some extent, you can help them to see which famous athletes deserve our respect and which do not.

14. Talk about specific incidents with your players. Encourage your players to bring up incidents that happen to them in sports. Take advantage of things that come up to discuss sportsmanship with your players.

15. Promote reflectiveness by asking questions. Remember that you are a teacher and that good teaching often involves asking the right questions, rather than giving the students carefully packaged answers. Encourage players to think for themselves and make their own reasoned judgments about their experiences or examples you call attention to.

16. Talk about the history of your sport with players. Talk with your athletes about the historical traditions, innovations, and heroes of your sport in order to broaden their perspective and enrich their sense of participating in something bigger than themselves. Tell good stories. Encourage players to read about the history of their sport in order to develop a respect for the fullness of the game.

17. Expect players to know the rule book. To encourage players to respect the game as well as the officials, encourage them to study the rule book. Ask them questions about the interpretation of difficult situations if they were officiating. Play “You make the call.”

18. Show by your actions and your words that you care, that what you’re trying to teach is important. No matter how much your players may seem to resist you, many of your values will become theirs. Let them know that it matters how they behave, what kind of human beings they will be, whether they do things well or poorly.

19. Don’t forget to have fun. Remember it’s a game. It’s serious, it matters, but it’s play. Show your players that what they’re doing matters, but don’t take yourself too seriously. If no one is having fun, you’re not playing a game anymore.

AN EXAMPLE OF TEACHING SPORTSMANSHIP: BASEBALL

It would be impossible to list specific suggestions for teaching sportsmanship in every possible sport in which a young person might participate, but it might be helpful, as a model, to offer suggestions for one particular sport. Of course, there are decisions you must make as coach about how to apply the principles of sportsmanship that will not be encompassed by a rule, custom, or tradition—or by any suggestion we might make here. That’s why we’ve emphasized the concept of good judgment throughout the book. But a few concrete examples of how we’ve emphasized the various principles

of sportsmanship in coaching a particular sport might make the principles more meaningful for you. These suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive, but they are extensive and specific enough to give you an idea of how you might apply the principles of sportsmanship.

Suppose you are coaching a youth-league or high school baseball team. Here are some things that we've found useful in teaching good sportsmanship to young baseball players. Some of them are based on long-standing tradition, and some we've come up with based on our own experiences.

Respect for Opponents

- (a) Don't allow your players to yell at opponents from the dugout.
- (b) Teach your players that it's all right to cheer when your teammates do something good but not when your opponents make errors or can't throw strikes.
- (c) Have your players shake hands meaningfully after the game. Win or lose, they should take this ritual seriously.
- (d) If you lose, you and your players should offer sincere congratulations after the game. To show they mean it, they should praise the opponent in a specific manner (e.g., "Way to hit the ball!").
- (e) Treat the opposing coach with respect and demand that your players do the same.
- (f) Don't allow players to act cocky.
- (g) Don't allow players to change their attitude or approach to the game whether you're winning or losing. If you're winning, don't allow them to get "chirpy." That is, don't allow them to start laughing and making wisecracks. The same goes for the coach.
- (h) After an away game be sure to have your team clean the dugout.
- (i) Insist that players avoid displays of emotional immaturity when they strike out, make an error, and so on.
- (j) In postgame discussions, especially with opponents, don't whine or make excuses, and don't allow your players to whine or make excuses. Insist that they accept defeat gracefully, acknowledging their opponents' excellence.
- (k) If you're winning by a large margin in late innings, don't run up the score. You can't ask your players not to swing at the ball or to quit playing good baseball (which would be insulting to the opposing team in its own way), but you can abide by the customs of the game that apply to this situation. Don't hit and run, try to steal bases, and so on.

Respect for Teammates and Team

- (a) Require your players to concentrate on the game. Every team member should know the score, inning, and count at every moment in the game.
- (b) Teach players to support their teammates. They should yell for them at appropriate moments. Players should congratulate teammates for doing things well, especially “little things.” If a player successfully sacrifices a runner into scoring position, the entire team should get off the bench and congratulate the player when he or she returns to the dugout.
- (c) Don’t allow parents or friends near the dugout during the game. Players should talk only to members of the team during the game. Allowing the interference or involvement of parents during a game will break down the unity of the team.
- (d) During the game players should talk to each other only about the game.
- (e) Players should be allowed to leave the dugout only for game-related reasons or for emergencies. Every player is part of the team effort to win the game.
- (f) Insist that every player help his or her teammates become better in practice. Every member of the team should be willing to throw batting practice, hit fungoes, work with younger players, and so on.
- (g) If possible, require players to travel together to and from away games.
- (h) Never allow young players to seek advice or instruction from their parents, relatives, or friends *during* practice or games.
- (i) Expect all players to conform to the same team rules and customs. The quickest way to destroy team unity is to play favorites when applying rules.

Respect for Officials

- (a) Players should address umpires in a formal manner (e.g., “Mr. or Ms. Umpire,” “Sir,” or “Ma’am”).
- (b) Insist that players be polite or civil when talking to an umpire.
- (c) Don’t allow players to argue with umpires—the coach should address the situation.
- (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, and have your players apologize if they did.)
- (f) After the game don’t allow players to blame umpires for a loss. Stress the idea that acceptance of the human judgment of umpires is part of the game.

- (g) Talk with players about umpires, especially those who are good. Help players appreciate excellence in umpiring by praising good umpires. Perhaps require your players, depending on their age, to umpire lower level competition so that they will learn to see the game from an umpire's perspective.
- (h) Teach your players the cardinal rule of respect for officials in baseball: Don't show up the umpire! Teach them the customs of the game regarding behavior toward umpires, for example, catchers holding a missed call way beyond catching it, catchers or batters turning around toward the umpire to disagree with a call, and so on.

Respect for the Game

- (a) Teach your players the cardinal rule of respect for the game: Play hard! All the time, ahead or behind, early inning or late inning. That means they should run out every ball, back up teammates on throws, and so on.
- (b) Players should hustle on and off the field. Explain to them that this shows enthusiasm for the game.
- (c) Require players to wear their uniform in an appropriate manner. For example, a cap should not be worn backwards in a game or in practice.
- (d) Expect your players to learn the nuances of the game. Teach them about the game. Ask them questions about strategy.
- (e) Respect rules. Don't break them yourself and don't allow players to break them. For example, make sure all equipment (bats, balls, gloves, etc.) is legal. Explain to your team that breaking the rules means you're not playing the game.
- (f) Help players understand and abide by the traditions and customs of the game. For example, don't allow players to steal bases, hit and run, squeeze, and so on, when your team is beating an opponent badly. Running up the score is clearly disrespectful to the opponent, but it also shows that you don't respect the game you're playing enough to abide by its customs.
- (g) Talk about and promote the heroes and innovators of the game. Tell good stories about them.
- (h) Talk about the history of the game. Insist that players study the history of the game. (You might emphasize this point by having baseball history quizzes on the van during road trips.)
- (i) Require all players to *act* like they love the game. For example, don't allow players to act "cool," as if they are above the game. Explain to them that acting cool is nothing but a way of protecting yourself against the disappointment of defeat. It hurts more to lose if you've given your best and acted as if you cared, but there is no other acceptable way to play the game.

- (j) Attempt to instill in players a sense of being *thankful* for the opportunity to play the game. Remind them that a lot of people have gone to a great deal of trouble and expense to make it possible for them to play the game.

Respect Between Players and Coach

- (a) Tell the players specifically how they may address you. “Coach” is highly recommended; calling you by your first name is not. It shows their acceptance of your role, and, of course, it commits you to live up to being their coach.
- (b) Expect players to listen carefully to your instructions. In team meetings, don’t allow players to talk while the coach is talking.
- (c) Be clear about who makes the various decisions on the team. It is the coach, for example, who fills out the lineup card, not the players, parents, or fans.
- (d) Use an appropriate model or analogy to explain how you understand your authority and the responsibilities of the players. For example, you might suggest that your players treat you as they would a parent or a respected teacher.
- (e) Be specific about little signs of disrespect that will not be tolerated: eyes rolling, moping, lack of hustle, questioning decisions at inappropriate times, and so on.
- (f) Show players that you respect them by expecting mature behavior from them and by treating them, as much as possible, as adults who are capable of understanding your and their roles on the team.
- (g) Reserve some time during the season to talk to each player individually. Talk about how the player thinks things are going on the team. Ask for suggestions, and discuss them.
- (h) Exhibit the principles of sportsmanship in your own behavior, and teach them the principles of sportsmanship through example and explicit instruction and by developing practice routines that instill the character traits of sportsmanship.
- (i) Don’t forget that your players need to have fun. Reserve some practice time for drills or activities that are strictly for fun.