



Step Up To The Plate
GET INVOLVED!

Building Ethics, Character and Sportsmanship in Today's Athletes

Marvin E. Stoner

Major discipline problems from my soccer athletes made it apparent that I had to address the areas of character, sportsmanship and ethics both on and off the playing fields. In 1996 I began to search for ways to address these issues. My first step was to begin a program that became known as "A Positive Statement A Day". After several years of using this program, I did notice an improvement in the sportsmanship and ethics of my athletes but, more work still needed to be done. As a member of the Pennsylvania State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (PSAHPERD) I was able to ask the Division of Mens' Athletics within this association to help solve this dilemma. The Division of Mens' Athletics (DMA) directed me to a coalition of coaches and athletic directors from across the country. This group was meeting in Arizona to address the issues of sportsmanship, character and ethics in athletics. Through my involvement with the D.M.A. and this coalition, and by employing concepts offered by this group, I began to make a positive impact on my athletes. Because of the help afforded to me by the D.M.A. I felt it was now my turn to help address these same issues. In December of 2000 and again in December of 2004 I was elected Vice-President of the D.M.A. It was now my turn to "Step Up to The Plate" and become involved. It now became my responsibility to address the issues of sportsmanship, character and ethics, not only for myself, but for the larger group of PSAHPERD.

Whether we like it or not, parents, educators, and coaches are role models. These individuals must strive daily to model a disciplined atmosphere if children are expected to be disciplined and of good character. These role models must live up to the principles of discipline, respect and good ethical character in order to expect it from our youth for whom they are responsible. The old adage "Do as I say not as I do" is not effective for dealing with character, ethics, and sportsmanship.

Being a parent of two children, a physical education instructor, and coach for the past 32 years has caused me to realize the importance that parents play in building a solid foundation of character traits in their children before the children enter school. In many instances trait building by parents does not happen to a degree that would prove beneficial to students in an educational or competitive environment therefore, it becomes the responsibility of educators and coaches.

Educators and coaches must try to create an environment in classes and on the playing fields that support ideal notions of ethics, character, and sportsmanship.

To do this, parents, educators, and coaches must improve the students' ability to concentrate and stay focused, creating safe environments where students treat each other with respect, and developing strong character and confidence in all students.

However, it is necessary to define character, ethics, and sportsmanship before attempting to find solutions to improve these traits in students. Docheff defines character as "learners being able to 'know and do' and having the wisdom to know what is right and having the courage to do what is right." (1997) Doing the right thing seems to be a gray area in most peoples' minds today. Many individuals have their own idea of what doing the right thing is. Furthermore many parents, educators, and coaches knowingly or unknowingly encourage the philosophy of cheating when they promote winning at all costs.

If character is "Doing the right thing" (1997) as Docheff suggests then sportsmanship must somehow explain what these right things or actions are.

"In its most ideal conception sportsmanship has been defined as the ability to value athletic competition as a moral practice. That is, each athlete tacitly agrees to play respectfully, honestly, and fairly. More than this, sportsmanship is the practice of generosity, amicability, and compassion towards one's opponent." (Aronld,1994; Biller & Stoll 1993). "If, we can teach young athletes how to be fair, respectful, courteous, and even generous individuals, perhaps we legitimately can claim that sports build character."(Rudd, A.& Stoll 1998).

If character is 'Doing the right thing' and if the embodiment of sportsmanship builds character, and doing the right thing, then where does ethics fit when discussing physical education and sports? If we define ethics as the code of conduct or behavior governing an individual or group then parents, educators, and coaches need to understand that ethical principles are ground rules of decision-making, not just facts to consider. It is O.K. to lose; in fact, it is preferable to lose rather than win at any cost by lying or cheating. Athletes unable to deal with losing sometimes find themselves doing whatever it takes to win. For example, sometimes athletes must choose between what they want and what they want to become. In this case, ethics may be compromised in an effort to reach the desired outcome. It is the value of ethics that make self-restraint and sacrifice, as well as service and charity, worthwhile.

With the concepts of character, ethics, and sportsmanship in mind, what can be done specifically in the area of physical education that might help students? In the elementary years educators can help students develop better listening skills. Students can also be taught the concept of sharing of equipment and space. Teaching students the concepts of proper play teaches them to get along with each other and understanding individual differences. This enhances student's concept of 'doing the right thing'. In middle school and high school the concepts of teamwork, respect for others, and responsibility for themselves become major themes that physical educators need to help students learn. If what Plato says is true, "You can discover more about a person in one hour of play than in one year's worth of conversation"(Saback,1998), then physical educators need to be the driving force in teaching all children how to play.

The connection between sportsmanship and ethics taught on the playing field is often lost when athletics are played after the regular school day or on week-ends. Compounding the problem is the fact that more and more coaches are not part of the educational program. To make a positive impact on student athletes, athletics must remain an integral part of the educational program. Principals and athletic directors must hold their coaching staff to higher moral and ethical standards. Coaches, likewise, must hold character, ethics, and sportsmanship above winning if they expect the same from the athletes.

"Recent surveys on sportsmanship suggest that the display of sportsmanship is a rare occurrence. A survey conducted by ESPN showed that 81% of those surveyed believed that sportsmanship has declined in the last decade and that most professional and collegiate players care only about winning." (Hawes,1998) While some believe this, it is not what coaches want from their athletes. In another survey done by Shape Magazine of some 658 coaches of 43 sports, noted a variety of expectations. Coaches listed having a positive attitude, among the top five qualities of a winner. (M.M.A.). These two surveys seem to contradict each other. One survey suggests that sportsmanship is declining while the



other suggests that coaches want their players to exhibit a positive attitude demonstrating good sportsmanship. A clear distinction must be made between what sportsmanship is and what sportsmanship should be. This dilemma has been argued and discussed over many decades, with no evident solution. It is the job of physical educators and coaches to continually strive to create a better understanding of character building and sportsmanship by creating programs and joining associations which emphasize these principles. Arizona has already begun the process. Coaches, educators, and administrators from across the country have come together in Arizona to develop what is known as the Arizona Sports Accord. In this accord, the number one principle states: The essential elements of character building and ethics in sports are embodied in the concept of sportsmanship and the six core principles. These principles are: (A) Trustworthiness (B) Respect (C) Responsibility (D) Fairness (E) Caring (F) Good citizenship. The highest potential of sports is achieved when competition reflects these "Six Pillars of Character".

In conclusion, it is necessary to get back to one of the core principles of society. —doing the right thing. This is best summed up by the American Sports Institute and the Character Counts program. Whether being titled, 'The Golden Rule', or the 'Rule of Reciprocity', doing the right thing has a prominent place in all major culture, societies, and religions. The nearly universal acceptance of the golden rule by persons of considerable intelligence and divergent outlooks, provides evidence that it is a fundamental truth.

The rule simply stated, 'Do unto others as you would have them do

unto you.'

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Recruitment Development and Retention of Officials Our Responsibility in the Process

Bridget Roun

As coaches, we willingly and enthusiastically mentor athletes and assistant coaches who play and work within our programs. We spend endless hours and energy developing young people as athletes and productive members of our society. Many of us enter coaching and teaching as a way of giving back to a sport or organization that has enriched our own lives. As we look at ourselves in that light, I urge all of us to extend that view beyond our own programs to the sport itself. In order for our sports to continue to grow and for us to continue to reach lives in a positive way, we must consider another aspect of the game — officiating and the people who do it. Without qualified officials our games cannot grow and without trained and motivated people who are willing to serve the sport in this capacity, our games cannot be played.

How many times have you heard a coach, player or fan yell abusive and disparaging remarks at an official? Have you ever wondered why anyone would want to put him or herself in such a position? The number of officials and the quality of officiating must be a concern for all of us. As a coach, we have a responsibility to ensure that those who are willing to serve our games as officials are given every opportunity to develop and succeed. Every sport is dependent upon the recruitment, development, and retention of quality individuals who are willing to serve as officials. "One of the greatest problems facing officiating today is the number of people who are quitting the avocation compared to the number of people who are coming into the ranks." (Rooff-Steffen. 2001, p. 44) As coaches, we need to be proactive in the process and be willing to look at our own attitudes and behaviors toward officials. Do we treat officials in a respectful manner? Do we make it inviting for former players to enter the ranks of officiating? Do we help develop young officials and do we encourage people to stay involved in officiating or do we help drive them away? In the following article, I would like to

explore attitudes and behaviors that discourage young people from entering the ranks of officiating and offer some ideas to develop an environment that fosters a more positive relationship with officials.

The recruitment and education of young officials must be a coordinated effort that includes coaches in a positive manner. Jane Hansen, a field hockey official since 1963 with international experience, addressed the shortage of field hockey officials in the article *Recruitment, Development and Maintenance Keys to Field Hockey's Future*. (Hansen, 2000, p. 8-9) Hansen envisioned a collaborative effort by coaches, current officials, and players to bolster the supply of qualified committed officials and create a supportive work environment free of abuse and harassment. In the area of recruitment, Hansen looks to former players who already have an understanding and passion for the game. She points out that coaches themselves "have the greatest access to this target group," (2000, p. 8) Hansen challenges us to look at our own treatment of officials as well as how we allow our athletes, parents, and fans to treat umpires. We encourage disrespectful treatment by modeling abusive behavior or failing to discourage it among our athletes and fans. "Disagreement of decisions is inevitable in sport, but we all have a choice in how we react and the example we set" (Hansen, 2000, p. 8). We are role models. We teach people how to treat the officials. Charles Barkley is well known for his quote, "I am not a role model." Most of us would agree that he is a role model regardless of whether he chooses to accept it or not. We sometimes forget that we too model appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

The state of Ohio recently found they lost seventy-eight percent of their basketball, football, soccer, and volleyball officials in the first three years of work (Rooff-Steffen, 2001). In an attempt to rectify this loss, they instituted a 30-hour educational program that includes classroom

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