

## **Sportsmanship – Week 1**

What is sportsmanship? Sportsmanship, by definition, is the qualities or conduct of a good sportsman, especially insistence on fair play accompanied by the capacity to win or lose gracefully, without arrogance in victory or whining in defeat.

So what's involved in good sportsmanship? Start with a sense of fair play, instead of playing dirty or trying to beat the rules. Show respect for others, rather than putting them down, finding fault, or promoting yourself at their expense. Humility fits into the picture, too. This comes down to not bragging or getting a big head when you score, not showing off, being big enough to ask for help, admit your mistakes, walk away, or just say I'm sorry. The good sport also can take criticism without taking it personally.

Sportsmanship requires that you show grace - for example, forgiving teammates who foul up, and sharing the spotlight when you're the hero. You also have to remember it's not always important to be the hero, you just gotta play and work with your team, not in front of them. It calls for a sense of humor. Instead of taking yourself too seriously, make sure you can take a joke and laugh at yourself. To be a good sport you must compromise and share, rather than having to get your way. You face many moments of truth on the sportsmanship issue. Like when you lose. When you win. When you don't get your way. When you're under pressure. Even during the daily routines of just doing your job and dealing with others.

## **Teachability – Week 2**

No matter how much an athlete accomplishes, he always has room to grow. To excel, he must be eager to learn and willing to accept instruction.

The bigger issue here is humility and respect for authority. The coach might make decisions your child doesn't agree with; the referee or umpire might make a bad call. Still, your child needs to learn to deal with his frustration in a positive way. Learning this on the field or in the gym can translate into respect for other authority figures: teachers, bosses, police officers and church leaders.

When things don't go well for your child, be willing to speak the truth. That might mean saying, "Your coach is testing your character." Or you might say, "You can't control what the coach decides, but you can control how hard you work to get better."

## **Integrity – Week 3**

Martin Luther King Jr. used to talk about an "11th commandment" that prevails in America: "Thou shalt not get caught." Many people still live by that tenet. But we must call our children to honesty and integrity, and sports provide opportunities to do that.

I remember playing a game of touch football at a summer camp, where I was leading a group of boys for the week. When I threw a long pass to one of the boys and he caught it for a touchdown, our players celebrated wildly. But just as I was throwing the pass, I had felt one of the opposing players poke me on the back with his finger. The referee never knew, but that other player knew it, I knew it, and God knew it.

So I had to tell the ref and take a loss instead of a touchdown. The kids on my team couldn't understand why I did that, but I think it was an important lesson for them — and for the other team. Our kids need to know that if they have integrity, they will be winners — no matter the outcome of the game.

Modeling is the key to teaching your kids integrity. No matter what you say, your kids will remember your actions more than your words. Your integrity is reflected in the way you cheer at your child's game and the way you talk about the game afterward. Would you give back a victory in order to do the right thing? What is your attitude about stretching the rules in order to win?

## **Hard Work & Discipline – Week 4**

Sports teach young people that you need to work hard to improve and reach your true athletic potential. They learn that this mentality can make up for natural athletic talent when it comes to being an effective part of a team. They learn that you can extend your potential by just making up your mind to outwork the other kids. Outwork the competition

Sports can teach a child discipline in a palatable way while they participate in an activity they deeply enjoy. They need discipline to learn the skills—the discipline to put in the time and preparation so they can maximize their performance. They learn that if they have the discipline to what it takes to improve and excel—performance rewards can follow. Often, they need discipline while participating in the sports themselves to maximize their chance of success. They learn the lesson quickly—without that discipline they do experience the joy of victory.

Practice Makes...Better. It's not about being perfect. It's about getting better and improving. One of the life lessons we hope our children learn through sports is that their effort will be rewarded.

## **Overcoming Adversity & Perseverance – Week 5**

Life isn't fair and much of it involves overcoming setbacks and other adversity. Youngsters can learn how to overcome adversity and temporary failures through the many situations they face in athletics, both in their preparation and during the competitions. They can learn the mentality they need to both overcome and learn from adversity they face as they strive for their goals. The goal can be just winning the particular game...or attaining a particular athletic goal. Learning to overcome adversity is a mental skill that will serve them well for the rest of their lives

In the heat of competition, your child will face defeat and failure. In football, he'll fumble the ball or miss a tackle; in softball, she'll strike out; in soccer, he'll let an opponent past him for the game-winning goal. Whenever there's a winner, there is also a loser — in track or swimming, there are many losers.

I can remember a game in high school where I ran the wrong direction and messed up a play for our team. My coach took me out of the game. That night, my dad explained to me, "He couldn't put you back in because you had lost your poise. Son, you've got to forget that play and move on. You've got to learn how to deal with disappointment."

It's important to teach your child how to deal with failure in a positive way. That lesson, learned under pressure, will help prepare him to succeed — in sports and many other areas of life.

## **Teamwork – Week 6**

When your child grows up there is an excellent chance that he or she will be participating in a shared, group working environment that will require teamwork to be a success. Team sports is a great model in which to learn the basics in meshing your efforts into a team format as one piece of the puzzle that must fit with the other pieces in order to create a environment of success. They learn how the importance of the team supersedes the recognition of individual accomplishments — that by working together as a part of a group with a common goal, things can be accomplished that otherwise would be out of the reach of individuals.

Sports should teach our children what we mean by a true team player – someone who contributes 100 percent, and at the same time cooperates and collaborates with teammates to help bring out their best, too. A Triple-Impact Competitor: making yourself better, making your teammates better and making the game better. It's this lesson we hope our children bring to their adult relationships.

## **Positive Attitude – Week 7**

Being positive moves us further. PCA's "Emotional Tank" analogy to a car's gas tank is a good one. Just like a car's gas tank, when our Emotional Tanks are full, we can go further. In a Responsible Sports environment, while coaches and parents fill our young athletes' tanks, one life lesson for athletes to learn is the need for them to fill their teammates' tanks.

Gifted athletes don't necessarily make the best players. Often, a coach will keep them on the sideline because of their bad attitude. The coach knows a prima donna can bring down the whole team. Likewise, the best teams are not always made up of the greatest athletes, but when they accept their role on the team and have a positive attitude about it, they can win. These players focus on the team and the greater good, not their own concerns.

Have your players work on encouraging one another to spur each other on to accomplish great things both on and off the field.

## **Respect – Week 8**

As you know, there's a lot of posturing and "trash-talking" in sports today — even in kids' games. In the heat of competition, your child may be tempted to put another player down or pump himself up. He's trying to feel important. But it's vital that we teach our kids to show good sportsmanship even during on-the-field battles.

They need to learn to redefine what "winning" means. If they win a game but disrespect or humiliate other players, that is not winning. Ask them to look for what God might want them to accomplish during that game. Talk about specific ways they can live out their faith even while they're trying to beat their opponent.