

MEMBERSHIP  
PERSPECTIVE

# Sportsmanship is about winning

When I first began speaking to groups across the country about sportsmanship years ago, I focused on the value of fair play and the educational/lifelong benefits of character traits molded through athletics participation. Invariably I found myself preaching to the choir while the naysayers smirked, thinking that a fierce competitor cannot also be a good sport. I felt great about the message but realized it was not changing the views of the nonbelievers.

Now I emphasize a different approach: Sportsmanship is about *winning*.

Every collegiate athlete, regardless of division, is a fierce competitor who wants to win. If the goal is to win, then why is it acceptable to retaliate against opponents, talk trash, abuse officials or cheap-shot competitors? Why commit an act that puts the team at a competitive disadvantage? How does drawing a yellow card, sitting in the penalty box or being thrown out of a game help the team win? It doesn't. These acts merely show that the offending athlete believes he or she is more important than the team.

Coaches are competitive, too, of course, but how many times have coaches verbally abused a game official and had a call overturned? Some coaches question most of the calls, adding verbal abuse throughout the game – and for what? They don't get the call back. In fact, they put themselves in a position to be penalized. How does that help the team win?

The more productive path, and the one that leads to victory, is “coaching your players up” and putting them in a better position strategically to be successful. That is not to say don't talk to the officials at all, but be constructive in the demeanor and be selective with the interaction. If the players see their coaches complaining, screaming and yelling all the time, they will follow that example. Soon they'll be blaming everyone except themselves for the loss. Conversely, if coaches are calm and collected in the face of adversity, the players are more likely to be equally unfazed in pressure situations. A coach's leadership is reflected by how his or her team conducts itself in competition.

Being a good sport – and winning – is also

about discipline. Disciplined student-athletes don't retaliate. They don't let an official's call or an opponent's comment deter them from the team's goal. You will never hear a coach say, “I wish we weren't so disciplined.”

Discipline expands beyond sportsmanship, too. Highly disciplined teams conduct practices that are far more productive and efficient. The pace is fast, reps are plentiful and players master all facets of the sport more quickly. That kind of

discipline sets a high standard for work ethic and an exceptional team culture.

Too often in pursuit of victory or a competitive advantage, people are willing to sacrifice their integrity. Allowing a star player some leeway because you believe his or her athletic talent gives you a better chance to win is risky. Sooner or later you will face a crisis because of that athlete's

decision in an adverse situation, an outcome that you perpetuated and allowed to have happen by your lack of emphasis on discipline and accountability. Permitting players to cheat or be undisciplined doesn't just set them up for failure in a game, but also in life.

Preaching team over self in the sport culture can be a foreign concept, but a rewarding one. Being able to work well with a group of people,

to strive for high expectations and contribute to a greater good – whether that be with an employer, a community or society in general – are things that define a person in life.

Student-athletes, hold your teammates accountable. Don't allow boorish behavior or selfish acts to destroy what you have worked so hard to accomplish. Coaches, demand discipline from your team and model the way. Establish a high moral standard and exceptional work ethic. Nurture and foster the important values that will help student-athletes succeed in sport and in life.

It's the new sportsmanship message: Don't just tell us you are about winning; show us.

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**Chuck Mitrano**  
Guest Essayist

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## the pulse

As competitive as the 68 teams in this year's Division I Men's Basketball Championship were on the court, the student-athletes on those teams also are competitive in the classroom. A look at the academic progress rates and graduation success rates for the field reveals the following:

# 963

The average APR for the 68 teams, which is higher than the national average for Division I men's basketball of 950.

# 70%

The average GSR for these teams for the 2002-05 cohorts is 70 percent. The national average for men's basketball for the same cohorts is 68 percent.



NCAA PHOTOS ARCHIVE

# 30

Number of teams that boast GSRs at or above 75 percent, including three of the four No. 1 seeds (Louisville, Gonzaga and Kansas).

# 3

Teams in the field with perfect APR and GSR scores (Belmont, Kansas and Notre Dame).



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