



EXEMPLIFYING GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

The best coaches teach kids not only the fundamentals of the sport and help them elevate their skills to the next level, they also teach them the importance of being a good sport – win or lose – and they back it up by being a model of it themselves at all times. When you went through the *Coaching Youth Sports* portion of your NYSCA training you may recall hearing University of Georgia football coach Mark Richt, who said: “Players listen to what you say but they remember what you do.” And those words couldn’t ring more true.



Think about it this way: If you’re telling your players about the dangers of tobacco, your words would be pretty meaningless if they saw you put a cigarette in your mouth at some point during the season. The same applies here. If you spend time talking to your team about the importance of being good sports (and hopefully you do) your words will mean absolutely nothing if your team watches you blow a fuse and yell at an official over a call or get into an argument with an opposing coach or parent.

Legendary Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski shared this insight during the course of your training when he said: “I think the best way a coach can teach youngsters about sportsmanship, whether it’s after a win or after a loss, is by how they act. You know what they say – you lead them by the hand a little bit and I still do it with my Duke team. If we have a big game I say ‘be humble.’ I have said it with our Olympic team, ‘be humble.’ When you win other people will say good things about you and if you lose don’t make excuses. Take responsibility and give credit to the winner. Give credit to the team that won.”

Good sportsmanship is vital to Coach K, who has won more games than any other Division I men’s basketball coach ever, so it should carry the same importance with you and your team, too!

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

- ▶ Children are bombarded with images of poor sportsmanship during the games they watch on television, so if you don’t step up and be a model of good sportsmanship at all times and teach it to your players, how are they ever going to learn how important it truly is?
- ▶ As a volunteer coach you are a role model, so your players are going to copy your behavior. So, if you are yelling at officials over calls or throwing things in frustration when games don’t turn out the way you had hoped, then you can’t expect your players to do the same. That’s certainly not in the spirit of what youth sports are all about, or what you want your players to be known for, or you as a coach to be known for teaching either.
- ▶ Players are often remembered more for how they behaved during and after games than how they played.

TIPS FOR EXEMPLIFYING GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

The following are tips to keep in mind to exemplify good sportsmanship to your players and others involved in the program:

► **Never run up the score:** During the course of the season chances are pretty good that mismatches will occur where one team simply has more skilled athletes than another. If you find your team dominating an opponent that doesn't have the talent or skills to compete with your players, do everything you can not to pile on the points and embarrass them. That type of approach reflects terribly on you and your team and serves no purpose in the development of your players. You can use these opportunities to shift players around and give them experience at different positions, for example. Remember, you want to respect the game and your opponent, and burying them because your team happens to be far and above better that day isn't what being a good sport is all about.

► **Set the tone early:** Before the game begins shake hands with the opposing coach and the game officials and wish everyone well. It's a great tone setter and helps establish that while your team will compete hard, they will do so within the rules and respect everyone else involved.

► **Post-game handshakes:** Regardless if your team wins or loses always lead your team out to shake the hands of all the opposing players and coaches. Sure, this display of good sportsmanship may be difficult for some players at times who just gave their best effort and came up short. Yet teaching your team respect for their opponents is important for their overall development. By being gracious in both victory and defeat your players will be more likely to emulate your behavior.

► **Get the parents on board:** Make sure you communicate with your players' parents on what type of behavior you expect from them during games, too. Emphasize how important it is for them to model good behavior at all times and let them know that if they are behaving inappropriately – yelling at officials or arguing with parents supporting the opposing team – it goes against everything you are trying to teach the kids.

NYSCA MEMBER BENEFIT: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COACHING FORUM

The NYSCA Coaching Forum is a great resource to gain insight from other volunteer coaches worldwide that may have already encountered – and resolved – any type of issues revolving around being a model of good sportsmanship. All you have to do is log in to your Member Area, click on “Coaching Forum” and ask for suggestions on how to pull it off on days when calls aren't going your way or spectators are shouting at you with inappropriate comments. Coaches that have dealt with similar experiences, or have ideas on how to address any challenges you are having, will post responses for your review. Plus, while you are there, take a look at the wide variety of questions posed by other coaches – you may have some helpful insight that you can share to assist them regarding their situation, too.

LEARNING POINTS

Being a constant model of good sportsmanship for your team is one of the most important parts of your job. In conclusion:

- ▶ You have a responsibility to provide your players with a well-rounded experience. So beyond the sports skills you must also focus on life skills, and that involves being a model of good sportsmanship at all times, and requiring the same behavior from your young athletes and their parents.
- ▶ Remember, as a volunteer coach no one will remember how many first place trophies your teams won, but they will most definitely remember how you and your players behaved before, during and after games.
- ▶ Simply put, you are a role model so don't neglect your responsibilities to set a standard of behavior that you adhere to all season long, and hold everyone associated with your team to as well.



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