

Sportsmanship
By: Libby Melbert

Knute Rockne, the famous Notre Dame football coach once said, "One man practicing good sportsmanship is far better than 50 others preaching it." "What is sportsmanship?" you might ask. To me, sportsmanship is the positive attitude of the athletes participating in a competition and their reaction to the win or loss of the game. While winning isn't everything, our society makes us think otherwise.

Legendary Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, is well known for his speech on winning. One of his famous quotes is, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." Our society embraces this "winner take all" attitude. Our country is very competitive by nature and with competition there is always a winner and a loser. While winning is much more fulfilling than losing, and yields a greater sense of accomplishment, defeat is equally important in helping to build character.

Last October, the Notre Dame football team fought a tough battle against Stanford University. Notre Dame Quarterback, Jimmy Clausen, played one of his finest games to lead the Fighting Irish to a 28-21 victory over Stanford. After the game, Clausen crossed the field to shake hands with Stanford coach, Jim Harbaugh, only to be ignored by one of his childhood heroes. We expect sportsmanship at the college level to be exemplary, especially from a coach who should serve as a role model. Harbaugh's lack of sportsmanship displayed after the game is unconscionable, and left a bad impression about his character and that of his program.

One of the worst displays of sportsmanship in recent memory took place during a 2004 NBA basketball game in Detroit, Michigan. On this night, former Indiana Pacer, Ron Artest, fouled Piston forward, Rasheed Wallace, as he went in for a lay-up. Wallace shoved Artest in the face and a bench-clearing brawl erupted. Poor sportsmanship continued when a Piston's fan threw a full cup of beer, striking Artest in the back of the head. The situation escalated when Artest entered the stands, and attacked multiple Detroit fans, creating near riot conditions. This terrible act of unsportsmanlike conduct was not only humiliating for our state, but resulted in serious consequences for our players—including suspensions and lawsuits.

While some competitors conduct themselves in an unsportsmanlike fashion, there are others who represent themselves admirably and leave us with heartwarming and inspirational stories. One of the greatest acts of sportsmanship from a losing team took place on a college softball diamond last spring. Western Oregon senior, Sara Tucholsky, hit her first career home run over the centerfield fence. In the excitement of her victory lap, Sara missed first base and had to reverse directions to tag the bag. In the process, she tore a knee ligament and collapsed. NCAA softball rules would not allow the homerun to count if one of her teammates replaced her; and if coaches or trainers assisted her, she would be called out. Central Washington opponents, Mallory Holtman and Liz Wallace, came to her aid. The two players lifted Sara off of the ground and carried her around the bases allowing her to tag each one along the way making her homerun valid. Sara's Western Oregon team won the game, but Holtman and Wallace

won so much more—the admiration and respect from fans everywhere and an ESPY award for their honorable display of sportsmanship.

The conduct of U.S. gymnasts Nastia Liukin and Shawn Johnson is a prime example of good sportsmanship in both a winning and a losing situation. Each defeated the other during the Beijing Olympics to win gold medals; however, spectators could never tell who was winning or losing because they were so happy for each other. Their rivalry never seemed to interfere with their friendship and support of one another. They both represented our country with grace and maturity in spite of their youth.

Sportsmanship doesn't always take place on a field, in a gym, or an arena. Sportsmanship can take place in any setting. In his concession speech to Barack Obama during the recent U.S. Presidential Election, John McCain graciously accepted his defeat, complimented Obama on his campaign, and asked his supporters to come together and support Obama as our President. Barack Obama was also very gracious in his acceptance speech, thanking McCain for his tremendous service to our country over the years. This display of sportsmanship among our country's leaders makes me proud to be an American.

Sportsmanship can take place in many aspects of life. It is possible to win or lose with grace and dignity—no matter what the competition may be. Some of life's greatest lessons come from losing. It is easy to be a good winner during "the thrill of victory." Being a good loser during "the agony of defeat" is more challenging, but it can be every bit as rewarding in the long run. My grandpa always tells me to remember my ABC's—Adversity Builds Character. Building character is a vital life lesson and it is this character that leads to good sportsmanship. American sportswriter, Grantland Rice, summed up sportsmanship with his quote, "It's not that you won or lost, but how you played the game."

In America, the spirit of competition is highly valued, whether it be on the playing field, within the political arena, or in the classroom. This spirit is part of what has made our country great. The spirit of good sportsmanship—winning with grace, losing with dignity, and respecting our opponent—no matter the outcome, puts each of us on the road to becoming not only great competitors, but great role models as well.

My first experience with organized sports began at First Baptist Athletics when I was five years old. During my nine years as an FBA athlete, I learned how fun sports can be, what teamwork is all about, and the importance of maintaining composure in both a winning and losing situation. I have carried these lessons with me through my participation in CYO sports and club volleyball as well. First Baptist Athletics provided a wonderful foundation for me, and as I begin a new chapter of my life in high school, I will always remember those lessons learned at First Baptist.