

Sportsmanship (First Place 2001)

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Three long, grueling months of training and preparation have brought us to this game upon which all the stakes are placed. After a season of eighteen games and countless practices, this team knows that their commitment and hard work has taken them the distance.

Numerous bruises, sprains, torn ligaments and pulled muscles have not stopped the driving force they have become. It's finally tournament time, the opportunity to prove that this team does not deserve to be at the bottom of the league like it had been in so many previous years.

The captain, backbone and leader of the team, has seen all the disappointment and felt all the pain of defeat. However, not this year, this year is different because she has climbed to the top and brought her team with her. They have fed off of her hunger and desire to attain perfection, and followed her every act to demonstrate sportsmanship and character.

The warm-up is quiet, quick and intense. Their time is finally here, the losers go home, and those who are victorious warrant another game. They have a chance to complete the season with a Cinderella fairy tale ending.

After taking their positions, the first touch is made and they are on their way. The captain is doing all she can to play to the best of her ability, but she is continuously shut down. Her mark is crafty, quick and skilled. However, there is no way that she would concede now, no way, she has worked too hard. Her most competitive juices pumped her adrenaline, but her sportsmanship attitude channeled it wisely.

There's only one minute left in the game, down by one. There is barely any air left in her deflated lungs, and her legs feel like jelly. The official looks at his watch, and then at her as she receives the ball; she is all alone, just she and the keeper.

Two more steps seem like an eternity. All eyes on the senior captain, and all have hope and confidence that she will lead her team away from defeat. The adrenaline is pumping and the sweat is

pouring, ankle locked, the shot is released, soaring toward the top corner of the net.

The crowd is silent, until... CLANG!! Tipped off the cross bar and directed out of bounds. Fallen to her knees. The official takes a final look at his watch and the terminating three whistles echo through the hearts of all present. Slowly, the captain raises her head and drags herself to her feet.

She congratulates her mark on a game well fought and shakes the hands of the opponents. Her teammates, disappointed and fatigued, follow her lead. Fighting back anger and sorrow, they decide it is more important to demonstrate good sportsmanship.

Teammates, officials and spectators respect the composure, and more importantly, the character in the heart of the captain. This is the character that overpowers adrenaline and understands how to accept the bad with the good. She knows how to compete with heart. A perfectionist who knows nothing other than giving one hundred percent effort at all times.

There is no looking back on this game with any regrets. She had done all she could, and deep down inside that is the satisfaction that counts. The respect that was gained during competition is a greater reward than the glory of winning, for honor as a respected person is the greatest glory that one can feel.

Winning moments soon fade away, but respect and admiration last a lifetime.