

Sportsmanship (First Place 2002)

*By Matthew Baron
Monson High School*

What is sportsmanship? It lacks the tangible characteristics and dimensions that can define most things in life. It cannot be measured by its owner, rather, it is determined by public opinion. Most consider it a positive asset, only defined through time. What category of things fit under such requirements? These things are values, sportsmanship their sum. Sportsmanship can be judged most readily on the athletic field, its testing ground. Although wins and losses determine the record, most important is how one plays the game.

Sportsmanship is rooted in its father value, respect. All true sportsmen have devout respect for all competitors. No team is below them and the folly of underestimation is never their downfall. The fact that every individual is giving everything he has, whether it be running, swimming, throwing, or jumping, demands respect. In winning, a sportsman is always gracious because he knows what it takes to compete. In losing, a sportsman is never short on applause because he knows his competitor gave a little more. The only bond greater than that between athletes is the bond between parent and child. To work, to sweat, to compete with one another produces something special. Respect builds winners and leaves no one a loser.

Another key value of sportsmanship is fairness. Neither cheating nor cheap shots are in a sportsman's game plan. Respect for the game breeds fairness in a competitor. A sportsman would rather fight and lose than have to live with the shame of cheating to win. Referees are the products of poor sportsmanship. They are never seen when sport is at its greatest art form, backyard sandlots and unmarked playing fields. A true sportsman can in no way understand foul play, even when given the definition. It is a foreign concept, like trying to explain sight to the blind.

Sportsmanship leaves no room for regret when the final buzzer sounds. Regrets are for the spoiled talents that train half-heartedly, play half-heartedly, and lose full-heartedly. Sportsmen love the game and give everything they have in that love. When all is spent there is no need to look back and say "What if?" Sportsmen may fail, but they never regret. One may die one hundred meters before the finish line, but only because he gave everything he had to get there. The buzzer sounds, the game is done, win or lose, his job fulfilled.

Sportsmanship is a learned physical and emotional state that travels well beyond the boundaries of athletics. What makes someone a great competitor also produces greatness in business, home life, and relationships. The full prism of values that make up a sportsman are applicable to all areas of life. Ambition, class, determination, love, optimism, persistence, respect, fairness, and unity don't simply define someone as a sportsman; they define them as a person. When records are long forgotten, what will be remembered is the person, the embodiment of virtue.