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The Role of the Media in Promoting Sportsmanship

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The media has a profoundly negative effect on sportsmanship. In this day and age, the media glorifies individuals, violence, and the big play. The good sportsmanship of the majority is overlooked in favor of the negative actions of the minority. The indifference of the media to an athlete's morals on the field is threatening the very existence of proper sportsmanship in the world today.

A true sportsman or woman tries to play a sport in the way that most benefits his or her team, regardless of personal glory. The media does not support this philosophy. The media is in constant search of a hero, wishing to capture viewers or readers with tales of tremendous individual feats. The focus comes to lie on a single athlete's accomplishments rather than the team's. Undoubtedly, there are professional athletes who, though their team has lost a game, can sleep easy knowing that the highlight of their monstrous homerun or flashy goal will be on SportsCenter that night. This is the wrong message for young athletes, who now measure success not in victories but in personal batting average or touchdowns scored. Winning is not everything, but athletes should hold a team victory in higher esteem than a personal one.

Not only does the media downplay good sportsmanship, it actually encourages conduct that is clearly unsportsmanslike. In hockey, rules allow players to fight on the ice without interference from referees. This seemingly strange rule exists to draw television viewers to the sport because, like sex, violence sells. Is it possible to expect a young athlete to act in a dignified manner when that athlete sees professional "role models" brawling on the field of play? Excessive celebrations, taunting, and arguments with officials have become commonplace and are played over and over on networks such as ESPN. If poor sportsmanship continues to be portrayed as acceptable on the national stage there is little hope of good sportsmanship surviving into the next generation.

Overall, the media has done great harm to the integrity of athletics in the United States. By glorifying the individual over the team, the media is breeding a nation of showboats, prioritizing their own image above all else. It would be for the good of all athletes, as well as fans, if this nation's media covered sports as they were meant to be covered, as a contest between two teams, not a showcase of individual players.