

***** SECOND PLACE *****

The Role of the Coach in Promoting Sportsmanship

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My team is only one win away from clinching a spot in the state tournament. We are leading 3-2 in an intense soccer match against North Cambridge Catholic. Both of my parents, my two siblings, my grandfather, and two of my cousins are there in the pouring rain to cheer us on. This is, by far, the biggest game of the season. The game has been a battle so far, with the teams evenly matched, and the tension escalating between the two teams is palpable in the humid air. With each footstep pounding into the muddy turf, the emotions are intensified a bit more on each side. Suddenly, one of the opposing players steals the ball from a midfielder on my team, and charges downfield towards the goal. As the team's sweeper (the last line of defense) I rush to meet him. After he fails on several attempts to get past me and score, I emerge with the ball. Relieved, I clear the ball out of our defensive zone, and think to myself, "Yes, another fifteen seconds closer to the playoffs." A whistle shrieks. The referee signals a direct kick penalty shot. I am dumbfounded – who committed the foul? Before I even realize that the foul was called on me, the opposing player sets the ball, and kicks it just past my goalie's diving hand and the game is tied. I am livid! Foul? Impossible! The whole play was clean! I look towards my coach, expecting her to share in my outrage, but instead she just gives me a look. In one look she tells me *do your job, the referee will do his. Games are not lost because of calls, they are lost because people get caught up in them and don't focus on the game.* The game ends up a tie, and afterward I see my coach go up to the referee to thank him. Not once in the game did my coach lose her temper, not once did she yell at the officials. Likewise, because of her example not a single player from my team has ever argued a call during our soccer matches. I walk over to my family after thanking the referee myself, and they all rush to congratulate me on the game, even though we didn't win. Suddenly it is clear to me. Nobody at the stadium will remember the score of the game in years to come, but they will all remember the players' conduct. We acquitted ourselves as gentlemen, and it all started with my coach.

In my third year playing varsity high school sports, I have learned many invaluable lessons from sports about attitude, teamwork, and leadership. However, I would not have learned half as much without the tutelage of my coaches. They have taught me not only the athletic skills to play basketball and soccer, but also about how to play, win and when necessary, lose with grace.

A good coach is one who helps his players advance in their sport, and leads his team to victory. A great coach, however, is one who not only focuses on the game, but how it is played, and how it affects the lives of his players. In my school, the athletic director and baseball coach, Coach Genuardo, has set the tone for the entire sports program. He not only serves as a role model for the players on the baseball team, he also leads the other coaches in the school. Before every season, he addresses the teams and shares his insights. He tells us that "Every time you (the athletes) make a good play and do not gloat, or don't get a call yet keep your composure, you reflect positively on everything you represent. Every time you go up to the referee and thank him at the end of the game, or shake the opposing coach's hand, you send the message that respect comes before winning. When you compete against other schools, you are given the privilege of having the opportunity to represent your team, your school, your family, and most importantly yourselves." These words ring true to me everyday, both on the field and off.