

***** THIRD PLACE *****
My Role In Sportsmanship
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In this time of on-field brawls and courtside melees, I am an exception. While some take pride in talking trash or hitting players after the whistle is blown, I'm also almost guaranteed to be talking to the other team or getting in their face after every play. The difference is that in my case, I'm saying, "nice play" and extending a hand to help them up. Aside from the obvious leadership responsibilities that all captains on any team have, I've taken it upon myself to make sure that any games that I am involved in are as clean as possible.

One of the factors that helped me is that growing up, I was never the most talented or flashiest player on any team that I played on. Instead, I was the one sprinting, plowing, bumping, and doing anything I could to set up my teammates for glory. I was the one about who coaches and parents would always make the comment, "he plays the game the right way." In other words, I spent most of my years as a role player. If you've ever seen a role player on a team talking trash, chances are that they are well-known for being a hothead, because other than those blatant and ridiculous-looking exceptions, we keep our mouths shut.

The only thing that the transition from role player to senior captain, leading rusher, and marked man has changed about me is that now more people are looking to me as an example of how to act on the field. As I continue to respect my opponents I'm beginning to see that I'm not the only one doing it anymore. Every time that I see a teammate of mine help another player up or pat them on the shoulder, I know that I'm doing my job and making my mark on the program.

All of this is not to be confused with a lack of desire to win. If someone has the ball in their hands on a football field, I'm going to hit them as hard as I possibly can, but you will never see me taunting them afterwards. Aside from keeping my own mouth closed, I have to be on the lookout for my teammates as well. If there are two players on my field arguing and someone in between them trying to usher his teammate away, chances are that I'm the mediator in the situation. I understand that people's tempers flare up at times and they do or say senseless things, but that's why I put myself in charge of getting them out of the situation before they have a chance to do anything really stupid.

With three other captains on my team, I'm allowed to stay within my quiet mannerism and not be in charge of the whole rah-rah aspect of the game. However, while I don't lead with my mouth, I'm the one who leads by example. My role is to give my teammates and any other kids watching me a model to follow in how to play as hard as possible while staying within the rules of the game and respecting my opponents and referees. Obviously everyone loves winning, but it makes it better for me because I know that I'm winning the right way.