

*****THIRD PLACE*****
What Does Sportsmanship Mean To Me?
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According to Webster's Dictionary, sportsmanship characterizes one who plays fairly and wins or loses gracefully. But as an active participant in multiple sports, I have come to believe that sportsmanship means much more than that. A sportsmanlike athlete doesn't play exclusively to win, but also strives to bring fellow athletes along the way to sportsmanship, which includes putting others before yourself and caring more about the team than winning or losing. Although the high levels of competition and the overpowering pressures from schools and family can put a strain on maintaining sportsmanship, it's still the more important attribute of every sporting event.

Sportsmanship creates that comfortable feeling that athletes love. It's inclusive like a family. If we all do our part, the job gets done faster and better. If everyone gave words of encouragement and spent more time on the positive rather than dwelling on all the mistakes that were made, the world would be a more pleasant place to live. Therefore, what better time to start promoting sportsmanship than at a young age? My hope is that someday the world will have sportsmanship, not just in athletics, but in everyday life. If this is ever going to happen, it needs to start now.

On my cross country team, we include seventh grade runners to seniors. I'm a senior, captain, and lead runner on the team, who wants to pass on the traits of true sportsmanship to the younger, less experienced runners. But what exactly is sportsmanship? Is it telling your competitor, running ahead of you, that they took the wrong turn, causing you to be beaten by 2 seconds? Is it rousing the crowd to cheer for the last runner? Is it stopping to help a fallen opponent up? Is it congratulating the boy's team even though they just lost by forfeit, because they don't have the minimum number of runners? Is it pointing out everyone's strengths and achievements rather than their failures? Could it possibly be wishing the other team good luck and congratulating them after they leave you in the dust?

If the answer you chose was "D – All of the above," you'd get a gold star. Sportsmanship is certainly about the team, though not only the team you play for; it's about the team of athletes. As runners, we're all breathing the same air, feeling that same pain while running and we all just want to succeed and improve ourselves. Why knock each other down when you help each other up? If your teammate has a goal, don't tell them "that's impossible." Rather, help them achieve it: lead, support, and pass on your wisdom. Sportsmanship contains more than one quality; it's a whole cluster of them, including leadership, honesty, selflessness, integrity, and many, many, more. Take sportsmanship back, start a trend, and pass it on.

What do a smile, a yawn, laughter, and sportsmanship have in common? They're contagious.