

**\*\*\*THIRD PLACE\*\*\***  
**For the Love of the Game**  
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The sound was deafening, with the chant “*Yankees suck, Yankees suck, Yankees suck*” reverberating throughout Fenway Park and feeding into the television broadcast for hundreds of thousands of viewers at home. These and other crude gestures, obscenity laden jeers as well as physical harm which were once confined to the schoolyard, have infiltrated high school, college and professional sports stadiums throughout the country. “Cheering on” our team and “booing” the opposition is as old as the warrior games in the Roman Coliseum. Unfortunately, we have hit a low point in expressing either. Countless incidents of fan violence in youth sports over the last several years have included threats and attacks on referees, coaches, parents and players as well as dire situations leading to fatalities.

The problem is threefold. First, it emanates from our culture. Today’s societal norms including media influences from television programs and movies, a greater abundance of news and sports stories that “spotlight” aberrant behavior, web sites that attract clicks and views by glorifying vulgarity and video games depicting explicit violence contribute significantly to the decline in fan sportsmanship in both a direct and subliminal way. This persistent barrage of negative influences outside of the classroom has seeped into our personal consciousness.

Secondly, players and coaches at all levels of sports that argue and brawl have become pure entertainment and a game within the game! A baseball manager kicking dirt on an umpire is pale compared to our sports “heroes” fighting with players and fans alike. We see it, we like it and we expect it!

Thirdly, parental interaction in youth sports is incredibly higher than in years past. Many parents have invested far too much money in their “future superstars”, raising the bar and fostering a keener competition with higher stress on the player and the parents.

Both the athlete and fan alike, would tell you the pain in defeat is worth risking for the thrill of victory. The game itself is a ritual, a celebration, a test of will, determination, strength, emotions, guts and glory “fought” and measured on the fields and arenas throughout the country. It is an interactive experience with the fan in mind.

Yet, we are at a crossroad. The challenge is for fans to restore the true meaning of sportsmanship including fair play, civility and respect on and off the field, or that experience is not complete. Some schools have enacted codes of conduct and training programs, which are great starting points. But first, we all must *want to* choose decency and respect in our homes, community and everyday lives by having zero tolerance for negative behaviors. Only then will we demonstrate the same at the sporting events we attend. A renewed sense of pride, passion and purpose in being a sports fan will be the resulting benefit. After all, we have to... *for the love of the game!*