



25th Annual Student Sportsmanship Essay Contest

**What Does Good Sportsmanship
Look Like From The Stands?**

*A collection of finalist entries
submitted by students
from MIAA member schools.*





***“What Does Good Sportsmanship
Look Like From The Stands?”***

This book represents the finalist entries in the 25th Annual MIAA Student Sportsmanship Essay Contest as voted by the MIAA Sportsmanship Committee.

Sportsmanship Essay Contest

First Place

Avery Sico
St. Mary's High School

Runner Up

Zahra Yeznasni
Pioneer Charter School of Science I

Finalists

Adriana Butland ~ Westford High School
Aiden Martin ~ St. Mary's High School
Annie Shi ~ Brookline High School
Brooklynn Thoin ~ Nashoba Regional High School
Grace Alatalo ~ Oakmont Regional High School
Grace Hill ~ Oakmont Regional High School
Hannah Li ~ Brookline High School
Isabella Daventel ~ St. Mary's High School
Levi Suiyanka ~ St. Mary's High School

Essay First Place

Avery Sico
St. Mary's High School

When I'm in net, the rink feels both loud and quiet at the same time. I hear skates cutting the ice, the puck hitting the boards, and the voices from the stands. Some nights, those voices lift us up. Other nights, they make it harder to focus. That's when I realized how much fans really matter. Good sportsmanship doesn't just happen on the ice it starts in the stands.

As a goalie in the MIAA, I've felt how the crowd's energy can change energy. When fans cheer for hard work, not just goals, it reminds us that effort counts. When they stay positive after a tough call or missed play, it helps us refocus instead of getting frustrated. But when people yell insults or argue with refs, it's like a wave of negativity that spreads through the rink. The best fans are the ones who know how to fire up their team without tearing anyone down.

Good sportsmanship from the stands means showing respect from everyone—the players, coaches, refs, and even other fans. It's cheering when someone makes a great block shot, or clapping when a goalie from the other team makes a crazy save. It's understanding that officials are doing their best, even when the call doesn't go your way. Those small actions show what real pride and respect look like.

These behaviors matter more than people think. When fans stay positive, it keeps players focused and motivated. Coaches feel supported instead of stressed and the game stays about competition, not conflict. A respectful crowd can turn a stressful and intense game into an unforgettable one, where everyone walks away proud no matter who won.

At the 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship Summit, people talked about how fans have the power to set the tone for every game. Their energy can create an environment of respect and fun. Fans can lead by example starting positive chants, thanking officials, or encouraging players who fall or miss a shot. It's the kind of place that reminds us all why we play: for the love of the game.

From where I stand behind the mask and between the pipes I see everything. The scoreboard, the players, and the fans. The best games I've ever played weren't just because we won, but because the crowd made it feel like something bigger than hockey. That's what good sportsmanship looks like. It's not just about playing fair, it's about everyone, in every seat, choosing respect.

[return to table of contents](#)

Essay Runner Up

Zahra Yeznasni

Pioneer Charter School of Science I

Pride, arrogance, and hate, those were the first things I noticed that day. The stomping of feet, the loud cheers that weren't filled with encouragement, but with satisfaction at another team's mistake. People always talk about being a "good person," but what about being a good spectator? I still remember my first time watching a volleyball game. As a cross-country and track runner, I wasn't used to having crowds or fans. Our meets rarely had an audience. So when I stepped into that gym, filled with people cheering for every play, it was exciting, until it wasn't.

The opposing team served the ball. It barely cleared the net before dropping to the ground. The crowd cheered, not in support or effort, but in celebration of failure. I looked over at the player who had missed her serve. Her face fell. For a moment, the joy in the gym felt heavy. I realized that behind every mistake, there was a human being, someone who worked just as hard, practiced, and showed up with the same heart and passion as everyone else. That moment stayed with me. I thought back to my very first track meet in sixth grade, when I missed third place by a single second. I felt disappointment, but I was the only one that felt that way. No one was cheering against me. In some strange way, I felt lucky not to have a crowd. That realization hit me hard, it shouldn't feel lucky to compete without people watching. Support from the stands should uplift every athlete, not break their spirit.

Good sportsmanship from the stands means being present with purpose. It means cheering respectfully, applauding all players for their effort, and showing appreciation for the officials and coaches who make the game possible. It means modeling empathy over ego. The 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship Summit highlighted the need for zero tolerance for negativity, and I saw exactly why. Every word, action, and attitude from the stands shapes the environment the athletes perform in. Spectators have the power to change the tone of the game. When fans focus on positive cheering, celebrating teamwork, effort, and improvement, they remind athletes that their worth isn't defined by one mistake. Respecting officials, avoiding negative comments, and making sure everyone feels included are all small actions that have a huge impact. Parents, coaches, and students can lead by example by clapping for great plays on both sides, thanking the referees, and holding themselves accountable for keeping the environment respectful.

After that game, I walked up to the player who had missed the serve and told her she did a great job. She smiled faintly, surprised. That moment reminded me: one voice can make a big difference. The real victory isn't just on the scoreboard. It's in the stands, where respect, empathy, and unity define what sportsmanship really looks like.

[return to table of contents](#)

Spectators can become so fixated on who wins a game that they miss the action. If the end result is all someone cares about, they will either get frustrated or cause frustration, which only ever leads to bad sportsmanship. Athletes don't want frustrated fans. They want fans with good sportsmanship, and good sportsmanship isn't about cheering for your team, or cheering for the other team, or cheering for neither team: it's about cheering for the game.

Someone who cheers for the game respects it. High school sports are fast-paced and competitive. That's what makes them entertaining, but it also warrants mistakes. Frustrated spectators are quick to turn against the people who make these mistakes. Fans who cheer for the game, however, recognize that mistakes happen: players panic, referees make bad calls. With this understanding, they'll encourage their players to stay focused and keep going without yelling or lashing out.

Cheering for the game also means appreciating adversity. A true fan of the game comes to be entertained. These fans view adversity positively because it is more fun to watch a team lose in overtime than it is to see them win twelve-to-nothing. They'll be excited when a team better than their own comes to town, excited by and cheering for amazing plays from both teams.

The biggest reason fans who cheer for the game illustrate good sportsmanship is because they want the sport to make people happy. Everyone finds it obnoxious when fans celebrate their team's fourteenth goal as enthusiastically as the first. It isn't fun for a referee to have to ask a parent to leave. No one on the bench appreciates fans who yell instructions to players. These acts of bad sportsmanship make the game less enjoyable, increasing the likelihood players will come home upset and wanting to quit. Fans who cheer for the game refrain from behaving disrespectfully or without class because they recognize the negative effect it can have on players, coaches, and referees. Fan's bad sportsmanship does have negative repercussions. Since I was five, I have been tuning out fans because I've always been told that nothing but distractions and negativity comes from the bleachers. I was told this again when I asked about getting my referee license. My parents told me no, scared of the effect spectators would have on my mental health. A precedent has been set that fans will act without class, without respect, and without appreciation for the sport. This precedent has caused me to miss out on fans' enthusiasm. It has caused a referee shortage by discouraging potential officials across all sports. It has made coaching youth sports a daunting task. However, when fans demonstrate good sportsmanship, they make the game more fun. Fans with good sportsmanship supplement and share an athlete's love for the game, which is why we want them cheering us on. The more we all love the game, the longer it will be loved for years to come.

Spectators play an important role in creating a positive and respectful environment at school athletic events. Good sportsmanship is not just for the players it starts in the stands. Fans can influence the game by cheering in ways that support all athletes and by avoiding negative behaviors. Respectful cheering includes applauding good plays by both teams, encouraging your own team, and staying positive even when your team makes mistakes. Fans should avoid yelling at officials or coaches using offensive language or insults and should never physically threaten or throw objects. When spectators act positively, it motivates athletes to do their best and helps coaches and officials feel respected and supported. It also sets an example for younger students and teaches them how to enjoy sports while showing respect for everyone involved. Coaches play a big role in modeling good sportsmanship, but spectators can also lead by example. Fans can show respect by not interfering in the game and by letting coaches coach. Parents and students should not give instructions to players during the game or enter the field unless invited. Fans can support athletes in positive ways, like cheering for good effort and teamwork instead of only focusing on winning. Positive support includes recognizing accomplishments, celebrating plays, and showing appreciation for officials. When spectators focus on encouragement instead of criticism, it creates a safe and respectful atmosphere where everyone can enjoy the game. Spectators can also build community and school spirit by participating in game day activities like pep rallies, themed games, halftime events, and school fundraisers. Attending games and showing support not only helps athletes perform better but also strengthens the school community. Fans can include everyone and make sure no one feels left out. This helps create an inclusive environment where all athletes and students feel valued. Spectators should also remember that their actions affect more than just the game they are watching. Positive behavior in the stands teaches respect, teamwork, and cooperation, which are skills students can use in school and in life. Good sportsmanship matters because it helps athletes, coaches, and the community. Athletes perform better when they feel supported and respected. Coaches can teach more effectively when fans are positive. The community benefits because everyone enjoys games more when there is respect and safety. Spectators who lead by example can encourage others to behave well and create a tradition of sportsmanship at school events. Everyone has a role to play in making school athletics positive. Fans can do this by cheering respectfully, supporting all athletes, showing appreciation for coaches and officials, and being role models for younger students. In conclusion, spectators are a vital part of any athletic event. By showing respect, avoiding negative behavior, supporting athletes, and encouraging school spirit, fans create a positive environment where everyone can succeed. Good sportsmanship starts in the stands and sets the tone for the entire game. Spectators who lead by example help athletes, coaches, and the community enjoy sports in a safe and respectful way. Everyone can contribute to making school athletics a positive experience by choosing to act with respect, encouragement, and pride.

Annie Shi
Brookline High School

Athletes dedicate hours every day after school to practice and to prepare for game day. For them, the moments under bright lights and loud cheers are where their efforts pay off. What happens in the stands can change that experience dramatically. Fans and spectators have the power to make a game inspiring or frustrating. From the stands, good sportsmanship means uplifting the athletes, respecting the officials, and creating an atmosphere that includes everyone.

At numerous MIAA basketball games, I've seen how much the crowd shapes the energy. When the crowd cheers for a great play from either team, the energy stays positive and it feels like everyone in the gym respects the game itself. But when fans start yelling at referees or taunting players, the tone shifts immediately, and the negative energy starts to impact the players. It's easy for spectators to forget that words from the stands echo onto the court.

Good sportsmanship for fans means showing universal respect and professionalism. That means that there should be no profanity, no slurs, and no personal attacks. It also means that fans need to understand boundaries by not coaching from the sidelines or arguing with officials. Everyone has their own role in games: coaches coach, players play, officials officiate, and fans support. Respecting these roles keeps the game fair and focused.

Positive fan behavior is simple. Fans should cheer when their team makes good efforts, be respectful to the opposing team, and show appreciation for officials. When student sections cheer in unison, they can bring the energy up with creative and positive cheers rather than taunts that target others. Schools can help contribute to positive game environments by encouraging themed games, pep rallies, halftime activities, and other community spirit building activities.

Respectful and uplifting spectator behaviors matter because they directly impact everyone involved. Players compete better and enjoy the game more when the crowd stays encouraging. Coaches can focus on game strategy instead of managing fan behavior. Officials can feel confident making fair calls without the fear of being shouted down. At the end of the game, the community can walk away proud of how its school represented itself.

Outside of the stands, courts, and fields, communication and accountability continues to be important. Team meetings, announcements, and signage can set early expectations for athletes and fans that respect isn't optional, but an essential part of the game. When spectators act without prudence, they should be held accountable for their actions to highlight that good sportsmanship is taken seriously.

Ultimately, good sportsmanship doesn't just happen on the field or court. It starts in the stands, with every word and cheer from spectators contributing to the atmosphere that athletes compete in. True fans don't just root for their team. They focus on positivity, respect, and inclusiveness that elevate the spirit of the game itself.

[return to table of contents](#)

When someone is asked to think of “sportsmanship”, oftentimes they might picture typical athletes on their various athletic fields shaking hands at the end of their game, match, or meet. After the 7th inning of a baseball game, the match point of a tennis match, or the last leg of a track meet, spectators witness teams showing respect towards their opponents. While these visible moments of respect on the field are important, good sportsmanship is not only limited to the players in the contests, but their spectators too. The act of good sportsmanship can often begin in the stands. Spectators have the ability to create a lasting and prominent tone for every competition. A respectful and positive crowd can inspire athletes and strengthen a team’s community pride, while in contrast, a negative or hostile crowd can make a game uncomfortable and distract from the spirit and the joy of the game. Don’t be mistaken into thinking that spectators are mere passive observers; they are true active participants whose behavior influences athletes, coaches, their peers, and the overall environment of athletic competitions at every level.

To me, a spectator or fan who has good sportsmanship looks like someone supporting the athletic event with respect, encouragement, understanding, and fairness. Sportsmanship is not only about cheering confidently for your own team (that’s easy), good, or even great sportsmanship is shown by respecting your bitter rival opponent, being patient with the occasionally mistaken official, and tolerating your fellow spectator who brings that excessively loud cowbell and blowhorn to show their support for their team. Fans who show good sportsmanship build up, rather than tear down.

There are many ways spectators can demonstrate positive support that builds up their team’s players, coaches, and fans. For me, when I hear respectful cheering, it’s one of the most significant behaviors that makes me feel supported on the court and field. When fans clap for my team’s strong efforts, even if our play isn’t fully executed, it makes me feel encouraged that fans can recognize, not only a good performance, but a performance of persistence from either team.

Creative and spirited chants can build energy, as long as they do not target or mock opponents. Applauding officials for their role in managing the game is another simple yet powerful behavior, reminding everyone that referees are essential to fair play. Parents can model sportsmanship by staying calm when calls do not go their way, while student sections can show leadership by choosing cheers that celebrate their school without putting others down.

These behaviors matter because they directly impact athletes, coaches, and the community. Athletes often feed off the energy of the crowd, and a supportive environment can help them stay confident during difficult moments. Coaches are better able to guide their teams when they do not have to worry about negative fan behavior. Referees, who already face pressure, can focus on their duties when they feel respected rather than attacked. On a larger scale, positive fan behavior helps shape community pride. Games become opportunities for schools and towns to come together in ways that teach younger generations about respect and integrity.

Grace Alatalo
Oakmont Regional High School

Sportsmanship means many different things to many different people. But it's hard to capture the meaning of the word in a simple definition, because it doesn't reflect how people truly feel. The handshakes after a hard loss, even for a player who was rude to your teammate, that's where real sportsmanship lies.

To me, sportsmanship means respect for the game, whether you're playing or watching. It's making sure everybody is safe and cheering for the effort players put in, no matter the outcome.

To my parents, sportsmanship means being kind, and rooting for their daughter no matter what. They hope other adults share the same appreciation for the game, and stay mindful of what they yell onto the field. My parents have seen others shout in frustration, but they have also seen fellow spectators comment on the great plays of the opposing team.

To my teammates, sportsmanship means acting as a family. No one player is better than anyone else, and everyone puts in the same amount of effort. A team wins and loses together, then improves to make everyone better players.

To my coaches, sportsmanship means valuing the game, and wanting to try your hardest. They teach their players to evolve, both on the field and off, in hopes they become better people overall.

To the fans, sportsmanship means rooting for your team. Still, you are civil to everyone on the field, and you don't belittle the refs over one bad call. You have universal respect, with no direct comments, yelling, arguing, or challenging officials, as stated in the MIAA Sportsmanship Summit Summary. How the fans act matters: athletes play better when the sideline shows respect. Emotions can run high, but making the choice to encourage the players rather than criticize them can be the difference between a win or a loss.

Some people have only started to learn what a good sport looks like, and that's okay too. Players and coaches alike are there to teach, to show everyone how to embody the respect for the ideal that has driven sports for centuries. Far too often, people choose to be bad sports because it is easy, rather than putting in the effort to be a team player.

It's important to remember, sportsmanship doesn't end when you step off the field or leave the stadium, and wins don't feel like wins unless you earned them through positive behavior. It defines who you are as a person, far beyond the points displayed on the scoreboard.

But we can all agree, sportsmanship is more than just the game, it's the heart of the people who participate, both in the stands and on the field.

[return to table of contents](#)

At the beginning of every season, fans get reminded of how to be appropriate and supportive spectators at sporting events. However, do these messages really get through? Or are they forgotten in intense games as the season progresses, playoffs near, and every score matters? This leads to the question, what is good sportsmanship from the stands?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, sportsmanship is defined as “conduct (such as fairness, respect for one's opponent) to one participating in a sport”. For spectators, good sportsmanship means cheering on the team they came to support, whilst showing fairness and respect to the opponent. Fans attend sporting events to enjoy the game and root for the team they want to win.

There is a fine line between supporting your team positively and not denigrating the opponent. This balance determines the atmosphere of the game. If we didn't have fans, sporting events wouldn't be as exciting as they are today for athletes. For this reason, spectators' sportsmanship matters so much to these players, coaches and officials. If spectators are making remarkably negative comments, the mood of the game will shift. These negative comments and remarks about one's identity can affect the way an athlete, coach, or official performs on and off the field.

To avoid this level of discord amongst spectators, the 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship Summit Feedback Summary came up with a Zero Tolerance for Negative & Offensive Behavior and Universal Respect and Professionalism. In the stands, this will look like no “profanity, racial slurs, sexist/homophobic comments, taunting and personal attacks... no physical aggression and unsafe behavior... no direct comments, yelling, arguing or challenging officials or coaches... respecting calls, avoiding negative comments and showing empathy for all, and finally maintaining composure and acting professionally”. By following these guidelines and suggestions, this will create a positive atmosphere for athletes, coaches and officials. This will allow the players to play, coaches to coach, and officials to officiate. This will also reflect positively upon both schools' spectators.

To improve the game experience for everyone, spectators can passionately cheer for the team they came to support, and even the other team. Spectators can be mindful and choose their words carefully, as if they were on the field. Fans can clap and celebrate when the official makes a good call, but not argue or talk back if they disagree with one. Spectators can also show supportive and positive behavior by respecting a coach's decisions throughout the entire game. Ultimately, good sportsmanship from the stands means being there only as a positive influence on the game by providing an encouraging and supportive atmosphere for players, coaches and officials to thrive.

Hannah Li
Brookline High School

During many athletic events, people often hear the word “good sportsmanship” passed around left and right. When people hear this word, they picture athletes being respectful towards one another, congratulating their opponents, or playing by the rules. Many would even go as far as to say that sportsmanship takes place on the playing field, and has nothing to do with spectators and fans. In reality, sportsmanship in the stands is the most important yet least acknowledged part of an athletic event. The actions of the crowd has the power to determine the outcome of entire games; and is the best fuel an athlete can feed off of.

However, what is sportsmanship? The Oxford dictionary defines it as “fair and generous behavior or treatment of others, especially in a sports contest”. Simply put, good sportsmanship is the positivity and respectfulness any person can exhibit, despite the outcome of an event. For fans and spectators of sports events, good sportsmanship can be as simple as displaying positive and respectful energy throughout a game; setting the mood and energy of the events they are attending.

It is natural human nature to copy what others are doing. According to *The Science behind Why People Follow the Crowd* by Rob Henderson, people are largely influenced by the actions of others. They tend to subconsciously “follow the leader”, and learn how to act from environmental clues. This is why it is so important for fans and spectators of any sports event to always demonstrate good sportsmanship and show positivity. When fans react positively to good plays, most people will subconsciously follow along, which creates a positive environment for the whole game. According to MIAA feedback, fans should emphasize “maintaining composure and acting professionally, even when faced with tough situations.”

Feedback from the 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship summit highlights the importance of staying respectful to coaches, athletes, and competition, and maintaining composure even when facing challenging situations. Fans, athletes, parents and coaches all believe that spectators should “put a strong emphasis on positive cheering, encouragement, and support” for athletes. Fans and spectators can do so by cheering for a good play; no matter who scored it, encouraging not only their favorite athletes in an event; but also any player who needs it, and listening to the directions of coaches and officials. By doing so, fans and spectators can help lift up the energy of an event, and discourage negativity at the same time.

Such behaviors mean a lot to athletes and coaches, because they work hard and dedicate many hours to train. By showing positive support, athletes and coaches feel appreciated and are encouraged to try their best. The next time you attend an athletic event, lead by example by cheering for good plays, encouraging athletes, and respecting coaches. These behaviors will not only make you stand out, they can also lift the energy and set the mood of entire games, and inspire others to be the best version of themselves.

[return to table of contents](#)

Respect and sportsmanship aren't just for the players on the field—they start in the stands with the fans. Good sportsmanship for spectators means cheering positively, respecting all players, coaches, and officials, and creating an atmosphere that shows pride without putting others down. It's about supporting your team while also recognizing the effort and skills of the opposing team. Fans who show good sportsmanship help set the tone for the whole game.

Positive fan behavior can be as simple as cheering respectfully, clapping for good plays on either side, and showing appreciation for officials even when you don't agree with every call. It means avoiding negative actions like yelling insults, using offensive language, or arguing with referees. The feedback from the 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship Summit made it clear that things like profanity, taunting, and disrespectful comments have no place at athletic events. Instead, fans should focus on positive encouragement, keeping emotions under control, and remembering that everyone at the game—players, coaches, officials, and other spectators—deserves respect.

These behaviors matter because athletes and coaches perform better when they feel supported, not attacked. A positive crowd can boost players' confidence and show them that their hard work is valued. Coaches and officials also deserve respect for the difficult jobs they do. When spectators behave in a respectful way, it helps the entire community by making games fun, safe, and welcoming for everyone. It also reflects well on the school and builds pride in representing it.

Fans can lead by example in many ways. Parents can model good sportsmanship by staying calm, letting the coaches coach, and focusing on encouragement instead of criticism. Students in the stands can organize positive cheers, pep rallies, and theme nights to bring energy without being negative. Communities can hold events like senior nights, youth nights, or charity games to promote school spirit and unity. Small actions, like thanking officials or supporting fundraisers, also show respect and pride.

In the end, spectators have a powerful influence on the atmosphere of a game. Their words and actions can either create a negative, hostile environment or a positive and uplifting one. If fans focus on respect, encouragement, and pride, they help players perform their best and remind everyone that sports are about more than winning—they're about teamwork, respect, and community. Good sportsmanship truly starts in the stands.

Levi Sulyanka
St. Mary's High School

When we think of sportsmanship, we imagine players shaking hands after a game or coaches encouraging their team. Good sportsmanship doesn't only happen on the field; sometimes it occurs in the stands. As fans, we can make every game enjoyable for everyone involved.

Good fan sportsmanship means supporting all athletes respectfully, promoting fair play, and realizing that there's more to sports than just winning. You can cheer loudly for your team while still respecting the other team, referees, and coaches. According to feedback from the 30th Annual MIAA Sportsmanship Summit, spectators need to show respect to everyone, players, coaches, officials, and other fans. Everyone has a choice: lift someone up or tear someone down.

Positive fan behavior takes many forms. It includes cheering loudly when your team makes a good play, but also applauding when the other team shows skill. It means chanting your team's name rather than mocking your opponents. Good fans appreciate referees and officials, even when they disagree with calls, because they understand these individuals are working to keep the game fair. Another important thing is "letting the coach coach." Parents and fans shouldn't yell instructions from the sidelines or interfere with the game because that's the coach's job. It also involves being gracious when things aren't going your way, you should cheer for your team even when they are losing not just when they are winning.

Summit attendees emphasized zero tolerance for negative behavior. This means no profanity, taunting, or personal attacks toward anyone. No yelling at officials or arguing with their calls. No trash-talking or throwing objects at people. These actions mean more than most people realize. Players perform better when they feel supported. Feedback from the MIAA Sportsmanship Summit shows that negative fan behavior can distract players, increase their anxiety, and even discourage them from playing. Coaches have reported that mean spectators complicate their jobs and set a poor example for young athletes learning what competition should look like. For the community, good sportsmanship creates an atmosphere where families feel comfortable at games and where sports unite people instead of dividing them.

How can spectators set a good example? Be the fan you want to see when you're on the field. Participate in themed games and pep rallies to build school spirit. Cheer positively for your team without making hurtful comments. If you hear someone being disrespectful, don't join in, silence can have an effect. Thank referees and coaches after games, even if you're team lost. Upperclassmen and captains should model good behavior because younger students look up to them and want to be like them. Celebrate good sportsmanship when you see it whether it's from your team or the opponents.

Remember that everyone in the stands knows how to be a good sport and the athletes on the field are also watching the stands. Our words matter beyond the game. When we choose encouragement and respect, we improve sports and communities. The stands have power, let's use that power wisely.

[return to table of contents](#)