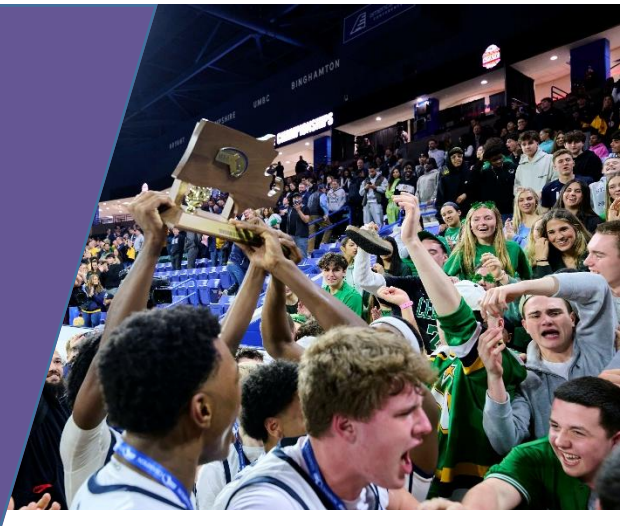
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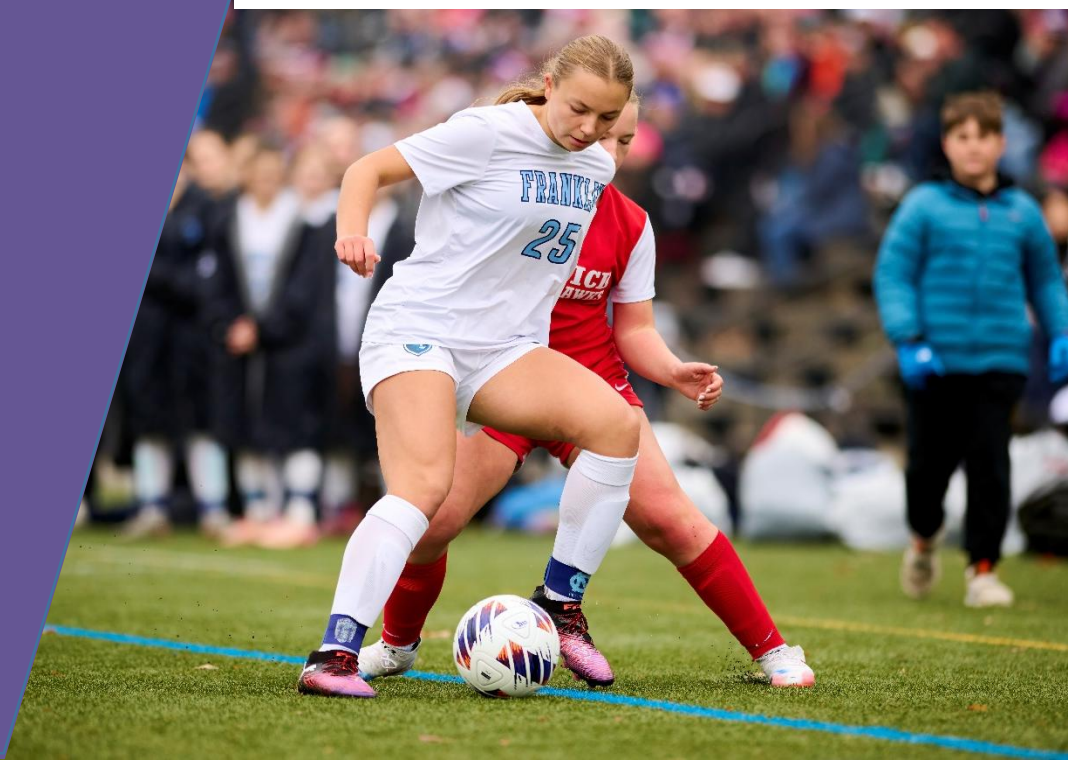
26th Annual Student Sportsmanship Essay Contest

The Stands Standards: Honoring the Game as a Spectator

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







"The Stands Standards: Honoring the Game as a Spectator"

This book represents the finalist entries in the 26th Annual MIAA Student Sportsmanship Essay Contest as voted by the MIAA Sportsmanship Committee.

Sportsmanship Essay Contest

First Place
Emily Jansons
Milford High School

Runner Up
Laura Weber
St. Mary's High School

Finalists
Amber Antonio ~ St. Mary's High School
Amisha Arora ~ Arlington Catholic High School
Benjamin Bochnak ~ St. Mary's High School
Eniyan Vijay ~ Westborough High School
Preston MacDonald ~ West Bridgewater High School
Tanyon Forish ~ Boston College High School
Taylor Roberts ~ St. Mary's High School

Emily Jansons

Milford High School

Grade 12

4 October 2026

A sharp blow of a whistle can elicit an array of reactions in a sporting event: a player abruptly halts in confusion, the crowd erupts in divided outrage and excitement, and an official stands firmly on a split-second decision amid the noise. As an athlete, spectator, and former referee, I've experienced the whistle from each angle and seen how spectators, though outside the lines of play, shape the atmosphere in which athletes compete and officials make decisions. The MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations protect the integrity of high school athletics by directing school spirit toward supporting one's own team rather than diminishing opponents or officials, while reinforcing that athletics serve as an extended classroom where athletes learn from the behavior modeled around them.

The relationship between school spirit and mutual respect is not a tradeoff, as made clear by the MIAA. Part of the beauty of high school sports is the spirit that fills the bleachers, as families, town residents, and students invest in their team's success. That loyalty can produce frustration over plays or calls, but it does not need to become disrespectful. Respect is easy when nothing is at stake, but the MIAA challenges spectators to extend that respect when emotions make it easy to forget. Instead of criticizing an official's ability or belittling an opponent, spectators should channel that energy into supporting their own team. They don't have to agree with every call or cheer for both teams; they simply need to recognize that their perspective is only one part of a shared experience.

Beyond the emotion of a single competition, the MIAA emphasizes how an athletic environment shapes what athletes carry beyond high school. Athletes are students first. High school sports serve as an extension of the classroom, where athletes learn not only from coaches, but also from the behavior modeled around them. When spectators respond to frustration with restraint, athletes learn that intensity and respect can coexist. But when hostility is normalized, they learn that competition excuses it.

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Protecting the integrity of high school athletics means preserving a space where intensity can exist without cruelty. Years later, scores may be forgotten, but the goal is for the character, perspective, and pride developed through competition to remain.

Promoting sportsmanship at school requires more than posters or announcements, because reminders without action can fade into the background. I would propose a preseason meeting among members of our athletic community to assign responsibilities for reinforcing the MIAA expectations at games. Student-section leaders could redirect negative chants, captains and coaches could reinforce team behavior, and staff could respond when spectators overstep. A midseason check-in could review incidents and adjust what is not working, while conversations with other schools could share successful strategies. Having experienced sports from several perspectives, I've seen how quickly tension spreads, but also how respect can shift the tone. When responsibility for reinforcing sportsmanship is shared, it becomes part of the culture and ensures that the emotion surrounding a game strengthens what makes high school athletics meaningful.

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Laura Weber

St. Mary's Lynn

16 September 2026

Beyond the Score: Honoring the Game as a Spectator

The environment within a high school's stadium or gym is full of energy when we compete against an opposing team, nonetheless, the real environment of the school is that of making a good environment among the audience. It is so because the MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations emphasize the need for the audience to show respect towards the student-athletes, coaches, and high school sports. Whenever the stands are occupied by enthusiastic people, we bring out the best in all of us. With our dedication to high school sportsmanship standards from the spectators, we can make an inspiring, safe environment for every athletic event.

The rules set forth by the MIAA provide practical guidelines for spectators that enhance the entire high school athletic experience. Rules like lead by example, stay in designated spectator areas, and be courteous spectators guarantee that spectators' energy will go towards encouragement of the players on the playing surface. When the fans cheer enthusiastically for their team and honor all the participants, including coaches, game officials, and opponents, a welcoming atmosphere is created, reflecting real respect and community pride.

The acknowledgement of the audience helps foster the spirit of good sportsmanship, where the student-athletes are able to participate as they know that all the effort and hard work

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they put into it is appreciated by everyone in the audience. This is because as long as the audience behaves in an acceptable manner, the student-athletes feel appreciated.

In order to facilitate the success of this positive change in my school environment, I can make suggestions for student-led programs that can turn these principles into a reality. First of all, I would collaborate with our athletic directors, student council and team captains to create a "Superfan Pledge" campaign at the beginning of each sports season. Students will be encouraged to sign the pledge and support their teams positively. Before the game, our student leaders will have the opportunity to speak to the crowd through the public address system to welcome our guests and to start a family chant that will allow us to unite our entire crowd. Also, I can make a student spirit squad whose major job would be to display high energy enthusiasm, welcome guests, and focus the attention of our crowd towards supporting our team with dignity and respect.

High school sports give us the unique chance to build character, toughness, and relationships. The fans present a great opportunity to make the educational experience a memorable and joyful one for the students, coaches, and referees who participate in the sports. Through implementing MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations, we play with dignity, show true leadership, and cheer for our team.

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Amber Antonio
St. Marys Lynn, MA

Lessons: Beyond the game

Countless roars are heard from the crowd. The jumps, cheers, and disrespect all blended together to create a tense atmosphere. The breeze hits my face as I watch the players– hands on their hips, all huddled up into one complicated team around their coach. I looked around the stands, and through the sea of boo's, I noticed the kids staring. Not only at the yelling coach, but watching us. I first noticed the reactions on each of their faces: some perseverance, determination, exhaustion, and some uncertainty.

At that moment, I finally put myself into their shoes. I thought about how easily a little child could mistake the behavior around older high schoolers for what sportsmanship is supposed to look like. Sportsmanship is supposed to be something not only respectful but fun. You respect all participants by not commenting on anything negative, but also by bringing fun. This includes signs, music, and cheer– things clearly stated by MIAA are allowed. You continue to show respect by staying in your area, not storming the court/field, and most importantly, showing spirit. These actions may seem small and unimportant to the person making them, but to the children watching, it sets examples.

These examples do not end when the game does; they continue to shape how these younger athletes understand competition, respect, and how to treat each other. As high school students, we have multiple opportunities to create an atmosphere and an environment where the children feel safe and respected– as well as ourselves. A safe environment doesn't mean removing the excitement from a game; it means creating a space where the athletes can compete without feeling attacked, targeted, or embarrassed. The crowd is the place where players should be hearing encouragement and support– no matter what happens. When the spectators create that kind of atmosphere, the game becomes more than a competition; it becomes a connection between the athlete, spectators, and the younger group of people watching from the stands. It allows everyone- athletes, coaches, parents, spectators, and fans– to experience the excitement of the game while still being supported, included, and feeling the fun.

As students, we can make a difference by changing what we choose to encourage. Instead of joining in when a referee is being insulted, or an opposing player is being mocked, we can redirect that same energy towards bettering our own team. We can cheer for a good play, support when someone messes up, and show perseverance through our own actions. These choices may seem small in the moment– especially to younger spectators- but they can become the moments that stay with them. The game may end with us losing or winning, but the cheers and comments we leave behind can last far beyond the game.

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The Stands Standards: Honoring the Game as a Spectator

Amisha Arora Arlington Catholic High School, Grade 12

Cheering at Arlington Catholic games taught me that the stands are not background. From the sideline, I face the crowd more than the scoreboard. I can hear exactly when a student section stops cheering for our team and starts talking about someone else's.

That shift is what the MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations are built to stop. "Respect All Participants" bans negative comments that use names, numbers, or personal characteristics. That rule matters because a player on the field can hear their own number being shouted. An official can hear it too. A sixteen-year-old does not stop being a student just because they are wearing the other team's jersey. When spectators make it personal, the game stops being a game and becomes something the athletes have to survive.

The expectations are also practical. Staying in designated areas and staying off the playing surface keeps a close finish from turning into a safety problem. Spirit items like pom-poms and rally towels are welcome, but taunting with flags is not. The message underneath every line is the same: be loud for your team, not against people.

What I have learned from running Connor's Kindness Club is that a vague message changes almost nothing. An announcement that says "be kind" does not fill a volunteer shift. A reminder that names the day, the time, and the job does. Sportsmanship works the same way. "Be a good fan" is easy to ignore. "Cheer our numbers, never theirs" is something a student section can actually follow.

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Here is how I want to support the Expectations at Arlington Catholic this year:

First, I will ask our athletic office if students can share a short pregame reminder, on the morning announcements and on school social media, that lists three expectations in plain words: cheer for us, never at them; stay in our section; no personal comments, ever.

Second, I will work with the cheer team on chants that are only about our school. If the loudest voices in the stands have something positive to say, the negative ones have less room.

Third, after rivalry games, I will propose that Connor's Kindness Club write a short thank-you note to the officials and the visiting school. It costs a few minutes and a card, and it reminds everyone that the people across the field are part of the same game.

Finally, I will lead by example, because the first Expectation asks for exactly that. If I hear a comment cross the line, the most useful thing I can do is start a better cheer, louder.

High school sports belong to the athletes, but the atmosphere belongs to all of us. Honoring the game from the stands is not about being quiet. It is about being loud for the right reasons.

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Benjamin Bochnak

St. Mary's Lynn

Being a spectator means watching others play a sport and/or game, but like the people playing, you are held to a certain standard. It is important to hold people to that standard; without it, the game or match would be a joke, and it is our job as spectators to make sure that doesn't happen. As spectators, we also need to make sure we create a good environment for our team to play in; we should also respect other spectators, even if they are our rivals. It does not matter who they are; we need to show them respect

The Sportsmanship Expectations outlined by the MIAA remind us that the essence of any sport goes beyond the points scored on the scoreboard. The spectators in the stands influence the players on the field or court. When the fans encourage the players constructively by shouting and making noise, waving pom-poms, or painting their faces, they create a joyful atmosphere for the participants. In contrast, when the audience resorts to insults and foul words directed at players and referees, the essence of the sport as such gets undermined. To make sure that the competition is safe, fair, and fun, respect for all involved in the process, including opponents, coaches, and referees, is essential.

For the effective promotion of these principles at St. Mary’s, the student leaders must show their dedication to these values. In our school community, we can contribute to the promotion of the good culture through organizing spirit rallies before the match, where we would teach the student how to cheer properly and explain to the crowd the safety rules established in MIAA, like staying in the spectator zones and not going on the field after the game. By demonstrating proper behavior, holding the audience responsible for their actions and welcoming the visiting teams properly, we will help St. Mary’s to become a leader in sportsmanship.

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Eniyan Vijay *(Grade 9)* **Westborough High School**

When student-athletes look back on their high school years ten years from now, will they remember the number on the scoreboard or how they were treated in the game? Real school spirit is not just yelling "You got this!," to an athlete during the game. It is a genuine support, a shared sense of pride, belonging, and community among friends, classmates, teachers and families that goes beyond just attending athletic games. The MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations are important for ensuring high school athletics stay a safe and respectful environment; I can support this initiative by encouraging the team whether they win or lose using spirit items, to prove that true school spirit is about lifting the team up rather than tearing them down. By actively championing these expectations both in the stands and through community initiatives, I can help make our spectator culture a powerful force of respect and integrity.

The energy created in the stands directly affects the athletes on the floor by encouraging them to play better, win and represent their school better to opponents. When the audience focuses on encouragement, athletes feel empowered to compete at their highest level, demonstrating team spirit and making them feel supported while playing their game. However, energy that is negative creates a terrible vibe between the players and the audience, demotivating athletes and distracting them from focusing on the game. Bringing spirit items like pom-poms, flags, posters and carrying what matters most beyond physical objects–the support, encouragement and positive team spirit is really important. By establishing clear boundaries for spectator behavior, these guidelines ensure that athletic events remain a positive environment where integrity takes priority over winning.

Supporting the MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations requires active leadership and participation rather than just passive agreement among the audience. From the student section

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during athletic events, I can support this initiative by organizing and leading positively, setting strict rules against jeering, and encouraging positive chants that focus only on supporting our athletes. Beyond the game, I can work with the student council and athletic teachers to establish a “Sportsmanship Pledge” where fans promise to treat everyone, including our team and our opponents, with respect and encouragement. By showing an example of respectful enthusiasm to my classmates, like shaking hands with opponents, respecting referees’ decisions during the game, I can build a strong community in which my peers and classmates are respectful to everyone and proud to uphold these standards.

Finally, high school sports are not just about wins and losses; they are defined by the culture we all build together in the stands. By implementing the MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations and launching our student Sportsmanship Pledge, we can actively encourage both teams and individuals. These intentional steps ensure that games remain safe, competitive, encouraging and create a positive vibe for everyone involved. While the scoreboards and trophies fade over time, the respect, integrity, and sportsmanship we practice today will be the true, lasting legacy of our school community.

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Preston MacDonald

West Bridgewater

When people think deeply into high school sports, you can usually just think about the athletes. We see how much work they put into their sports, and the pressure they feel on the field, and the excitement you can see when they succeed. There are two groups of people that can make the game better, the players and the people in the stands. The cheers that can make a player feel better, the words and actions of the people watching can either affect the team or just take them down. Personally, I think sportsmanship starts in the stands.

MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations are important because it will always remind us that supporting our team does not mean to disrespect the other team. Being loud and excited for you school isn't a bad thing at all. Having a good student section can give the players the extra boost they need. The problem is when certain things get led out of hand like trying to embarrass certain opposing players, mocking officials, and insulting the other team. It completely turns the focus away from the game and just makes it straight negativity.

If you really look into it the people watching the games really have more influence on people then they realize. The players on the field are just kids and can hear everything that is said, younger students watch how the older students act, and the enemy team will remember what your student section was like towards them. When things are always positive it creates a good atmosphere where athletes can still play hard against each other but still respect each other. Sportsmanship shows that winning is important, but it also shows how we act while facing off matters too.

I feel like I can support the MIAA proposal at my school by making positive sportsmanship part of our student section. I am already apart of my student section, and I help run it with a couple other kids in my class. I can encourage the people in my student section by having the right cheers for our team without it verbally saying something rude towards the other

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team. Another good idea is celebrating when a player does something good on the field like helping an opposing player up from the ground. Those are the types of things we can cheer for and be happy about. Not attacking the other team in any way.

High school sports are so much more than just what is happening on the field. It is also about representing the school you go to, creating those great memories on the field, and in the bleachers. If we want our school to be known for more than the wins we get, we need to respect how we act as spectators. The game may start on the field but the sportsmanship starts in the stands.

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Tanyon Forish | Grade 12 | Boston College High School, Boston, MA

The Stands Standards: Why the Crowd Is Part of the Game

Goalies hear everything. When you stand in the crease, the student section is often just a few feet behind the glass, close enough that every chant lands on your back. As a goaltender at Boston College High School, I have learned that the people in the stands do more than watch a game. They help decide what kind of game it is.

That is why the MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations matter. "Lead by example" and "respect all participants" are not just rules for adults; they are a description of what a good student section looks like. The rule against negative comments that use "names, numbers or other personal characteristics" is especially important to me. When fans single out a player by his number or call a goalie names after a goal, they are not cheering for their team anymore. They are trying to make a teenager feel small. A rink full of energy can lift both teams to play their best. A rink full of insults turns a game into something nobody remembers fondly.

The safety rules matter too. "Do not storm the court or field" can sound like a buzzkill after a big win, but the ice is slippery, players are still wearing skates, and handshake lines are one of the best traditions in hockey. Protecting that moment protects the people who earned it. Staying in your own section and keeping signs school-appropriate help visiting families feel welcome.

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Some people think sportsmanship means a quiet crowd. I disagree. The Expectations allow spirit towels, face paint, flags and loud, creative cheering. The goal is not less noise. It is better noise: cheering for our team instead of against the other one.

I know how much encouragement matters. As a sophomore, I was cut from my high school hockey team. I spent the next year training, and I came back to earn a spot as a JV goalie. The people who supported me during that year did not do it by tearing anyone else down. They did it by believing in me. A student section can do the same thing for a whole team.

Here is how I plan to support this initiative at BC High. First, I will talk with teammates and friends about the Expectations before big games, especially rivalry games, so everyone knows the standard before emotions run high. Second, I will help keep our chants positive by starting cheers that celebrate our players' effort and big saves rather than mocking opponents. Third, if someone in our section crosses the line, I will say something, because the most effective reminder usually comes from a peer, not an adult. Finally, I will make a point of clapping for good plays by the other team.

High school sports belong to everyone in the building. When the stands honor the game, the players can too.

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Taylor Roberts
St. Mary's High School

High school sports go far beyond the final buzzer. They are shaped by the energy and atmosphere created by the fans. Picture this, a gym, filled with energetic chants and claps, the athletes feel inspired and energized. However, when school spirit and pride crosses the line into hostility and personal attacks, the unity of the game breaks down. The MIAA Sportsmanship Expectations are essential because they preserve school athletics as an extension of the classroom, as an environment built on respect, competition, and character.

The MIAA expectations demonstrate clear guidelines for spectator behavior. Guidelines requiring fans to show respect to all players and those around them, to remain in designated areas, and avoid taunting and artificial noisemakers exist for underlying reasons : safety and honor. When spectators yell profanity or targeted remarks at athletes and game officials, athletic performance and excellence is replaced by bullying and aggression. Referees are essential to the game, and athletes spend months practicing and preparing for competition, both deserve an environment free of crowd conflict. Furthermore, rules against court storming protect players, coaches and fans from injury. Showing respect in the stands reminds us that athletic competition should unite us rather than divide us. Supporting this initiative requires active student leadership. As a student athlete, I can defend positive sportsmanship through clear communication. First, scheduling short pre-game meetings with the sports department and student leaders helps set positive standards and review approved spirit items before big games. Next, starting a social media and poster campaign that highlights great fan behavior and fun theme nights, guiding students away from the inappropriate actions that are strictly prohibited. Finally, student leaders leading by example in the front row of the student sections, steering away from negative chants and toward supportive team focused energy.

Real school spirit isn't about tearing down your opponents but about bringing a community together. By following the MIAA Sportsmanship guidelines, we can protect the spirit of high school athletics and ensure that its legacy is built on respect, positivity, and integrity.

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