

## **“Sportsmanship” What Can You Do?** – *Mark Kryka, Verona High School*

### **“Sportsmanship” What Can You Do?**

Sportsmanship and citizenship is as much a part of an athletic contest as the game itself. The number one threat to high school sports today is the lack of sportsmanship. At Verona area High School we believe that athletics play a vital role in the student athletes' total education. We believe that sportsmanship and citizenship are taught everyday in our lives including in athletics. Verona Area High school, along with the rest of the Badger Conference, are working hard to promote good sportsmanship and citizenship among our students and athletics. We now need the support of our adult spectators in this effort.

Last year we attended the first ever WIAA sportsmanship summit. We also expanded on that with the first ever Badger Conference sportsmanship summit. We came away from both learning environments with different ideas that we might try. The students who attended the summits with me made a big difference in the stands throughout the season. Peer pressure seems to work the best and I thought our students did a great job. During the playoffs in boy's basketball two out of the three schools we visited complimented us on the behavior of our students. Its good to hear that the hard work we put into sportsmanship seemed to pay off. Our next goal was to get our adult spectators to support our sportsmanship plan. To do that I tried a number of different approaches. This was an ongoing process and something that I could not let up on throughout the season.

At the beginning of each season I have a mandatory code of conduct meeting for the athletes. They must bring at least one parent/guardian with them. At the meeting I not only discussed the code but we discussed sportsmanship. I covered the general guidelines, which include: 1. Be a gracious host and show respect for your opponent, 2. Respect the decisions made by the contest officials, and 3. Be an exemplary role model by positively supporting both teams in every manner possible, including content of cheers and signs. **Be A Fan...Not A Fanatic.** I also talked about the fundamentals of sportsmanship which include, Gain an understanding of the rules of the game, exhibit respect for the officials, display openly a respect for the opponent, display pride in your actions at all times, and recognize and appreciate skilled performance regardless of affiliation. At the conclusion of the meeting I handed out a list of acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior for sportsmanship. Acceptable behavior included, applause during introductions, shake hands with the opponent, accept all decisions of the officials, positive cheers only, treat competition as a game not war, applause the end of the contest for the performance of the athletes, show concern for an injured player, and encourage surrounding people to display only the best sportsmanship. Unacceptable behavior included, taunting or other intimidating actions, not admonishing those sitting around you who are engaged in the practice of poor sportsmanship, yelling during the opponents free throw attempt, disrespectful or derogatory yells, booing or heckling an officials decision, criticizing officials in any way, yells that antagonize opponents, blaming loss on the officials, laughing or name calling, and use of profanity.

As the first game approached I wrote a letter in our schools newsletter to remind parents of our sportsmanship concerns, our guidelines, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and what our consequences would be if they were not followed. This was a reminder of what we had discussed during the code of conduct meeting. I followed that up with a letter to all spectators that were handed out at the first few boys and girls basketball games. I also developed a sportsmanship newsletter that was handed out at a few games. Much of the information that was issued to the parents came from the WIAA or other state athletic association. We still have our work cut out for us but I believe we made great progress last year. I intend to follow much of the same program this year and hopefully add a few new ideas. I did get a copy of a videotape from the Michigan State Athletic Association titled “What Kids Wish Their Parents Knew About Sportsmanship.” If you would like copies of any of the letters or materials I use please feel free to contact me at Verona Area High School. These were all intended to be a proactive ways to gain positive sportsmanship at games. In the past we were more reactive and dealt with concerns after they occurred. This way seemed to work much better and when issues did arrive they were easier to deal with. We still have concerns and feel that we must continue to teach students and adult’s proper conduct at games. We must remember that these are high school kids not professional athletes. **If we really care about sports, we’ll care about sportsmanship.**

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