TEACHING SPORTSMANSHIP

Let’s face it, no one enjoys losing. But, in youth sports there is going to be a winner and loser every game. Teaching your team how to win and lose with class and dignity is just as important as teaching them the skills of the sport they are playing. Players who abide by the rules at all times and are gracious in both victory and defeat exhibit the types of wonderful qualities that will help them be respected and admired adults throughout their life.

Considering all the examples of poor sportsmanship kids see from professional and collegiate athletes on television, teaching them how to be a good sport all the time may be one of the more challenging tasks you have as a coach.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT
► Players are remembered for not only how they played in the game, but how they behaved in it, too.

► Children who learn to be good sports will carry that trait with them throughout their lives, and it will serve them well when they are competing for jobs, some of which they’ll get and others which someone else will be chosen.

► The overwhelming majority of your players will never play at the collegiate or professional level, but they will learn life values from you, and there is no better quality that you can teach than being a good sportsman or sportswoman.

TIPS FOR TEACHING SPORTSMANSHIP
The following are tips to keep in mind for teaching the importance of being a good sport at all times to your players:

► Discuss: Ask players how they feel when they have won or lost games; how they want to be treated when they’ve lost; and how they should treat their opponent when they’re the winning team. Opening the door to these types of discussions lays the foundation for behavior that makes you proud.

► Proper celebrations: Sports are emotional and kids are naturally going to be excited when good plays are made to help the team, so you don’t want to curb that enthusiasm. But, you do want to make sure it doesn’t cross the line into excessive celebration, or turn into taunting the opposition. So the key is to make sure all that energy and excitement is funneled toward your team. For example, in a football game when a player makes an interception he can high-five his teammates and receive congratulations for making a big play – but it becomes poor sportsmanship if he stares at the opposing quarterback while celebrating or says anything to players on the opposing team.
Recognize good displays: Be on the lookout for instances of good sportsmanship and make mental notes when they occur during the course of play so that you can acknowledge them during your post-game chats. When players continually see how important this aspect of competing is to you they will strive to earn that recognition in future games. You can even give out some type of award after each game for the best display of good sportsmanship.

TV talk: Your players watch games on television so when you see examples of both good and bad displays of sportsmanship talk about them with the team during your practice sessions. While the kids are stretching is a great time to reinforce the importance of good sportsmanship, and citing real world examples is a great way to pull youngsters into the conversation.

Don’t ignore the bad stuff: In a perfect youth sports world all volunteer coaches would be models of good behavior and exude good sportsmanship all game long – but we know that’s not always the case. Because you will probably come across opposing coaches from time to time that don’t display good sportsmanship you can capitalize on these opportunities to help your own players. Pretending the behavior isn’t going on accomplishes little, because your players can hear and see the antics on full display, so point out to them that they have to rise above that behavior and demonstrate that they can play hard and be good sports while doing so. The same applies if opposing players are being bad sports; you must teach your players to rise above that behavior rather than sink to that level.

Team award: If you give out end-of-the-season awards, like Most Improved or Hardest Worker, make sure that you’re handing out a Good Sportsmanship award, too. And, make a big deal out of it because if you’re teaching its importance to your team this is something every player will covet.

NYSCA MEMBER BENEFIT: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COACHING FORUM
The NYSCA Coaching Forum is a great resource to gain insight from other volunteer coaches worldwide that may have already encountered – and resolved – any type of issues revolving around teaching and enforcing good sportsmanship among the entire team. All you have to do is log in to your Member Area, click on “Coaching Forum” and post the problem you are having. Coaches that have dealt with similar experiences, or have ideas on how to address any challenges you are having, will post responses for your review. Plus, while you are there, take a look at the wide variety of questions posed by other coaches – you may have some helpful insight that you can share to assist them regarding their situation, too.

LEARNING POINTS
Teaching young athletes how to be a good sport is one of the most important parts of a volunteer coach’s job. In conclusion:

Your job involves so much more than simply teaching sports skills – you are in the position to teach life skills – so do not neglect this special opportunity to help your youngsters develop into athletes who respect the game, the rules, the opponents and the officials and model good sportsmanship at all times, regardless of what the scoreboard says.

Talk about the importance of good sportsmanship every chance you get: During pre-season meetings, during practices, before and after games, you name it. By continually talking about and stressing its importance players will soak in that it really is a crucial element of competing.
How many games your team won last year or the year before will be long forgotten once the next season rolls around, but how your team behaved during those contests will be firmly entrenched in everyone’s mind. How your team behaves is a direct reflection on you and your values, so do the right thing and make good sportsmanship a staple of your team.