

Can Ethical Behavior Compete With Prize Money?

NEWARK, Del. — An incident that occurred during state fair season has put the spotlight on the kind of behavior that gives competition a bad name. At a junior livestock show in the midwest, the grand champion was tampered with to make it show better. The deception was uncovered by the meat inspector at the processing plant. It didn't happen in Delaware, but according to Jay Sparks, state 4-H coordinator at the university of Delaware, the potential for this kind of abuse exists no matter where you live.

"Anyone who works with children — 4-H leaders, teachers, coaches and parents — has to be vigilant to make sure these unethical practices don't occur," says Sparks. "It's up to us to instill in youngsters the importance of playing by the rules, and of being good losers as well as good winners. Kids should be reminded to offer the winner a friendly handshake to acknowledge the achievement."

Adults have a responsibility to encourage fair play among children, Sparks adds: "Too often deceptive practices at competitions require the involvement and expertise of misguided adults. Make clear that a winning-at-all-cost attitude hurts everyone and obscures the real reason for the competition — fun and a great learning experience."

Her advice to leaders is to express directly that you expect ethical behavior and that recogni-

tion comes in ways other than first place.

"Recognition, not winning, is the key to giving a child the best experience," Sparks maintains. "Whatever the outcome, youngsters who try to the best of their ability and who complete the projects they start have achieved as much as the first-prize recipient."

Rewards come in many forms,

not just the blue ribbon and prize money that too many people have come to believe are the reasons for a project, Sparks notes. A warm smile, a pat on the back, a kind word of encouragement or a written note expressing pride in the child's accomplishments are the true rewards of competition.

In Delaware, 4-H'ers are encouraged in positive competi-

tion both on an individual basis and as teams. For example, in New Castle County horse clubs, the individual is challenged to reach structured levels of performance for which youngsters set their own goals. In regional and state team bowl contests, teens are encouraged to use their collective knowledge and skills to compete.

"Following the rules has its

own rewards. We have to teach children by defining what's expected in competition and by being good role models ourselves," Sparks says. "The best thing adults can do for youngsters is to encourage them to set goals, to complete projects, to aim for higher levels of competence and to strive for a personal best."

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