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northeastern Sports

by DAVE GRIFFITHS

ATHLETIC COURTESY?

There are rules and regulations governing every branch of sports. When you violate the accepted standards you're penalized. And that's as it should be.

But those who follow the various teams seem to operate under an entirely different code of ethics. In essence it says "my team right or wrong."

Yet the very fans who will talk about sportsman-ship for hours at a time will condone any of the practices that are out of line with the accepted rules of athletic courtesy.

A few years ago, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association published a list of principles that was to serve as a guideline for the high schools throughout the state.

So, here they are: Section 1—Athletics should foster clean sports. It is the privilege and duty of every person connected with athletics to exemplify these principles in his own actions and earnestly advocate them before others.

A. The rules of the game are to be regarded as mutual agreements, the spirit or letter of which no honorable person would break.

B. No advantages are to be sought over others except those in which the game is understood to show superiority.

C. Unsportsmanlike or unfair means are not to be used even when they are used by opponents.

D. Visiting teams are to be honored guests of the home team and should be treated as such.

E. No action is to be taken nor course of conduct pursued which would seem unsportsmanlike or dishonorable to one's opponent or the public.

F. Remember that a student spectator represents his school the same as does the athlete.

G. Any spectator who continually evidences poor sportsmanship should be requested not to attend future contests.

H. Decisions of officials are to be abided by even when they seem unfair.

I. Officials and opponents are to be regarded and treated as honest in intention. In games when opponents conduct themselves in an unbecoming manner, and when officials are manifestly dishonest or incompetent, future relationship with them should be avoided.

J. Good points in others should be appreciated and suitable recognition given.

K. The practice of booing is regarded as discourteous and unsportsmanlike.

There they are the rules of conduct, the principles of athletic courtesy as outlined by the PIAA. Check them over carefully. Then answer truthfully and note how many of these guidelines are violated in every game played throughout the entire school year.

I've been covering the area sports front for more than 33 years and I can't remember when I attended a game that the visiting team wasn't booed as it came on the field. The better the team the louder the chorus of boos. It seems to be an accepted practice in every village and hamlet throughout the land. Respect an opponent? Treat a visiting team as a guest? Certainly not! That would be the courteous thing to do.

Abide by the decisions of officials even when they seem unfair? No wonder the PIAA listed that principle under the letter H. For any arbiter will tell you that officiating in some of the areas in Northeastern Pennsylvania is hell! That's the same word used by General Sherman to describe war.

And perhaps that's what takes place between spectator and official. All-out war. An official can make the right call but if it goes against the home team he's sure to be criticized by the boo-birds who in most cases don't even know the rules.

To abide by and accept the verdict of an official is another principle that looks good in print but in actual practice it just isn't done.

Good points in others should be appreciated and suitable recognition given. That's what the principle of athletic courtesy dictates. But how often have you heard the championship team that has just beaten your favorite club cheered? Usually they're given the old razzberries and to add insult to injury those self-styled experts who have all the answers describe them as lucky.

Of course, the code of courtesy for athletic conduct hasn't overlooked the followers of the teams. A special principle devoted to the students is included among the courtesy suggestions. And it is so worded as to make the fan a part of the team.

A student spectator represents his school the same as the athlete. What a wonderful suggestion. But alas—it's all in vain. Simply words that for the most part are forgotten in the heat of competition. I'd hate to think that some of the student spectators I've met over the years were representing their team. The athletes whom they support will often tell you they'd like to forget about them, too.

For the harm they do by their lack of understanding often is the measure used to judge a school's overall athletic courtesy.