Winning Isn’t Everything!

BOYS AND GIRLS WANT TO WIN AT THEIR GAMES, BUT IT’S EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO PLAY FAIR.

Jennifer Moore-Mallinos
Illustrations: Marta Fàbrega
Hi, I’m Tom
And your name is ...
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Mom and Dad are always reminding me to be a good sport; I hear it a lot, probably everyday. It doesn’t even matter what kind of game I play; a board game, a card game, a video game or even a sport like soccer. As long as I’m a good sport, Mom and Dad are happy!
I know that I hear it all the time but I never really thought about what it means to be a good sport until last week during the last soccer game of the season. That’s when I learned that being a good sport not only included the players but everybody else too!
THE MOMENT HAD ARRIVED!

It was almost game time! And not just any game either; it was the championship game! Everybody was so excited! We all wanted to win, especially me!
While our families and friends were busy looking for a seat on the sidelines, the team was on the other side of the field getting ready for the game and talking about winning. Just like always, Coach stood up, cleared his throat and waited for everybody to stop talking. As usual Coach reminded us about playing by the rules and playing fair.
Coach said that it was okay for us to want to win the championship for our school but it was more important that we stayed true to ourselves by being good sports. Coach reminded us that it wasn’t about winning or losing but how we played the game and trying our best and having fun was part of the game. Everybody agreed.
It was finally game time! I couldn’t wait to get out into the field. We gathered in a circle, sang our team cheer then ran out to the field to get into position. But just as I was about to run out to the field, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and saw one of the parents from the other team wagging his finger in my face.
The parent told me that our team better watch out because no matter what it took, his son’s team was going to win the championship. Just then Coach showed up beside me. Coach told me to take my position on the field then turned to the parent whose finger was still wagging in the air and asked the parent to go to his seat.
But first Coach warned the parent that just like the players, all spectators were expected to be good sports. Coach told him that if he continued to make threats and behave unsportsmanlike that he would be asked to leave the arena. The parent laughed then disappeared to the side lines.
The game was tied at two! There were five minutes left in the game! The crowd was out of their seats clapping and cheering. I looked over at the crowd, and spotted that same angry parent walking around the field. He went straight over to the kids on the other team. He looked really mad and he started yelling; “take them down!”, “get ‘em!”
Up until then both teams were playing fair and everybody seemed to be having a good time, then everything changed. First the pushing started then the shoving then some of the players started tripping and jabbing each other with their elbows. The louder the parent yelled the harder the pushing and shoving got. I stopped having fun.
With seconds left in the game, the referee blew his whistle. At first the crowd “booed” then there was total silence. At the far end of the field, a player was lying face down in the grass. He wasn't moving! With all the confusion nobody; including the parent from the other team, noticed that his son was hurt.

A TERRIBLE OUTCOME! AND THE GAME WAS STOPPED
While the parent sat on the field clinging to his son and waited for the ambulance to arrive, we all gathered round. We all agreed that it was okay for us to want to win but it wasn’t okay for us to try to win by cheating and playing rough. With tears in his eyes, the hurt player’s father apologized for his behavior and agreed that maybe winning wasn’t that important after all that perhaps it was more important to try your best and just have fun!

At the end, we all agreed.
After the ambulance arrived and the player was taken to the hospital, the referee blew his whistle to let us know that there were still a few seconds left in the game but nobody moved, we just kept staring at the floor. Winning the championship wasn’t important anymore.
The game stayed tied at two. Nobody won the championship and it didn’t matter. What mattered most was that a player had broken his arm because we forgot how to play fair. We wanted to win so badly that being a good sport wasn’t important anymore. It’s not always easy being a good sport and sometimes we all might forget, including our parents but as long as we have somebody like Coach to help us remember, then all we need to do is have fun.
Do you have a good idea for a game? It could be a board game, a card game, or even a different way to play a game or sports activity that already exists. All you need is your imagination and creativity! Once you have an idea for a new game, you are ready to get started.

Write down the objective of the game and a set of rules or instructions of how the game is played. If you are designing a new board game, make a list of all the materials (player pieces, dice, and so on) that you will need to make a good game.

First, make a board game out of cardboard. Starting from beginning to end, draw each space onto your board. It's always fun to add directions for some of the spaces. For example, if you land on the third space you may ask the player to move ahead two spaces.

Designing a new card game or sports activity can also be fun. Remember to play fair when you play your game!

When a person or a team is given a trophy or a medal, it means that they have done a great job. Parents, grandparents, teachers, and coaches all love to be reminded that they have done a good thing and that they are appreciated. What better way to show those special people your appreciation than by giving them their very own personalized trophy or medal!

To make a medal, look for a piece of cardboard and, with an adult to help you, cut a circle. Look for a piece of aluminum foil and cut it into tiny pieces. Glue the pieces to the cardboard until it is shiny all over. Next, with a marker, write something special on your medal. It can be as simple as "#1." Poke a small hole in the top of your medal. Cut yarn or string to desired length. Put the yarn or string through the hole of the medal and tie a knot. You may want to decorate your medal with glitter or sparkles. And for extra fun, you might want to make a trophy or medal for yourself, too!

Being part of a team means spending a lot of time practicing and playing games. How about decorating the locker room with life-size posters of each member of your team? Or you could make a poster of yourself and hang it in your bedroom.

To make the poster you will need a roll of paper, about 3 feet wide and 5 feet long, which you can buy at an arts and crafts store. Roll out the paper onto the floor and lie down on it. Ask a friend to trace around your entire body, and cut out the figure along the traced line. Complete the poster by drawing your hair, eyes, and so on. Dress the figure by drawing on your team uniform. Color the figure with markers, crayons or colored pencils.

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We all have a desire to win. Winning feels good! There is a sense of accomplishment when we win, and when our children win we feel more accomplished as parents. Perhaps this is why many of us are sometimes overly enthusiastic when it comes to “supporting” our child’s participation in a game, especially when the team is winning.

No matter what kind of game we play, whether it’s a card game, a soccer match, a hockey game or even participating in a raffle, we all want to win. For many of us, our initial intention of playing any game is solely for enjoyment. However, our competitiveness can sometimes take over in a negative way. For both players and spectators, the consequence of behavior that lacks sportsmanship takes the enjoyment out of the game. It only takes one poor sport to ruin the game!

Most of us have experienced, at some time of our lives, the feeling associated with losing. We would probably all agree that losing never feels good; it’s unpleasant, disappointing and often disheartening. Knowing that we tried our hardest to win does not always make us feel better, and that is why it is so hard to convince our children that competing with honesty is more important than winning. It may be hard, but it is necessary.

If the desire to win becomes overwhelming and affects our sportsmanlike behavior, it’s time for some self-examination! After all, our children model our actions even more than our words! We are not only teaching them the rules of the game, but also the rules for living.

The purpose of this book is not only to remind parents about the importance of good sportsmanship, but to teach children that good sportsmanlike behavior includes everyone… players, coaches, and spectators alike.

We know that we can’t win all the time, but it’s certainly fun trying. As long as everybody is having fun and playing fairly and safe, nobody loses!
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