

Competing With Character: Sportsmanship in Interscholastic Athletics

Dana Johnson, CAA
Paul Laurence Dunbar High
School
dljohnson@bcps.k12.md.us



Goals of our session

- Where does Sportsmanship Start
- Ways to celebrate/acknowledge good sportsmanship with your scholar-athletes, coaches and parents.
- Creating a Sportsmanship Action Plan



Ice Breaker

Stand Up If..." Sportsmanship Edition

How it works:

After a statement is read, stand if it applies to you:

- You've had to eject a fan in the last year.
- You've seen an athlete display exceptional character.
- You've dealt with an irate coach after a big rivalry game.



WHAT IS SPORTSMANSHIP?!

- Respect for opponents, officials, teammates, and the game
- Playing fair and following rules
- Displaying positive attitude and effort



WHY SPORTSMANSHIP MATTERS!!

- Promotes lifelong values: respect, integrity, teamwork
- Creates a positive environment for all
- Reduces conflict and promotes healthy competition



CORE ELEMENTS OF GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

- Respect – For officials, opponents, teammates, coaches
- Responsibility – Owning actions and decisions
- Integrity – Doing the right thing even when no one is watching
- Humility – Win with class, lose with dignity



WHAT DOES SPORTSMANSHIP LOOK LIKE?

Hello,
My name is Michele. I'm a parent of a Spalding JV football player. We played against your JV team on Friday.

I just wanted to say that during the game I was watching player #53. I wasn't watching his play, but I assure you my son said he definitely played well. I happened to see him on the sidelines. He was such a team player and had such a positive energy about him, whether it was grabbing the helmet from an injured teammate or helping stretch his teammate while on the sidelines.

What really blew me away was that he came up to my husband and I after the game as he was walking back to the school and shook both of our hands (even looking us in the eye while he did!). He was an absolute breath of fresh air and I'm sure such a positive and helpful presence on the team.

So often we only recognize the negative in our children or the highlight reels from the field. I think it's also helpful to highlight the positive ways off-the-field actions can positively impact the team. I can only imagine the impact he will have in the years to come, both for Dunbar and the community as a whole.



WHAT DOES SPORTSMANSHIP NOT LOOK LIKE?

Ms. Johnson,

Greetings! I am writing to address a sportsmanship concern that was raised following the varsity football contest between Dunbar and [REDACTED] on Friday, November 7, 2025. After reviewing the information shared and available footage, I would like to better understand several decisions made during the game, including:

- The onside kick with a 36–0 lead
- The second-quarter timeout to fake a punt
- The third-quarter onside attempt with a 52–0 score
- The third-quarter touchdown pass
- The apparent use of starting players (line) for the duration of the contest



WHERE DOES SPORTSMANSHIP START?

ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATORS

- Recognize good sportsmanship publicly
- Provide workshops and leadership training for both coaches & student-athletes
- Develop department standards and contracts



WHERE DOES SPORTSMANSHIP START?

Coaches

- Teach and model sportsmanship
- Set clear expectations and consequences
- Promote team culture of respect and accountability



WHERE DOES SPORTSMANSHIP START?

Parents and Fans

- Cheer positively
- Respect officials and opponents
- Avoid negative comments or sideline coaching
- Remember the game is for the students





Coaches

Respect the Game



- **Respect** the rules by teaching athletes to play fair.
- **Respect** the important leadership role you play within the dynamics of high school athletics. Fans, players and parents mimic your behavior.
- **Respect** officials for their efforts in keeping the game within a set of boundaries. Recognize that a neutral observer of an event will not always agree with your perception.
- **Respect** the language you use in communicating with athletes. Would you talk to their parents the same way?
- **Respect** that high school athletics is based on an education model. As teachers you are entrusted with impressionable young people. Your responsibility to your athletes begins by respecting every player and his or her set of life experiences.

Never Forget To Respect the Game



Players

Respect the Game



- **Respect** your opponents as fellow athletes and worthy competitors; like you, they have worked hard to represent their school.
- **Respect** your teammates. Everyone makes a contribution to the team in his or her own way. Respect everyone's effort.
- **Respect** your coaches for their efforts in molding the team that represents your school.
- **Respect** officials for their efforts in keeping the game within a set of boundaries. Recognize that a neutral observer of an event will not always agree with your perceptions.
- **Respect** yourself. What you do is a reflection on you, your school and your family.

Never Forget To Respect the Game



Parents

Respect the Game



- **Respect** the fact that all athletes are someone's son or daughter.
- **Respect** coaches and their decisions. Remember their job performance is on display at every game. Very few professions are so openly observed and publicly critiqued. Second guessing their work does not provide a positive atmosphere for the player, coach and parents.
- **Respect** a time and place to air concerns with the coach. After a game or practice is usually not the best time.
- **Respect** your son or daughter by realistically assessing their skills. Don't relive your experiences through them.
- **Respect** the educational component of school athletics. Remind your son or daughter that there is many times more money available for academic aid to college than there is for athletic aid.

Never Forget To Respect the Game



LET'S TALK!!!

- IF YOU OR YOUR COACHES HAVE EVER ADDRESSED SPORTSMANSHIP BEFORE ADDRESSING STRATEGY.
- BELIEVE YOUR ATHLETES REFLECT THEIR COACHES BEHAVIOR MORE THAN WORDS
- HAVE HAD TO ADDRESS A SPORTSMANSHIP ISSUE WITHIN THE FIRST COUPLE WEEKS OF THE SEASON?

DISTRICT EXPECTATIONS – CHARACTER COIN

Purpose

The Character Coin Initiative recognizes and rewards student-athletes who exemplify exceptional sportsmanship, integrity, and character both on and off the field. The program aims to foster a positive and respectful athletic environment by celebrating acts of citizenship, fair play, respect, responsibility, and integrity among students in Baltimore City Public Schools.



Character Coin

Goals

- **Promote Sportsmanship:** Encourage behaviors that reflect integrity and respect in athletics and daily life.
- **Recognize Leadership:** Honor student-athletes who lead by example and positively influence their peers.
- **Build Character:** Instill core values that contribute to personal growth and community well-being.
- **Engage Community:** Involve coaches, teachers, parents, and community members in recognizing and celebrating outstanding character.

Character Coin

Criteria for Nomination:

- **Citizenship:** Demonstrates commitment to teamwork, leadership, and community involvement.
- **Fair Play:** Upholds fairness, honesty, and sportsmanship in all interactions.
- **Integrity:** Exhibits strong moral principles and honesty.
- **Respect:** Shows respect towards teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials.
- **Responsibility:** Demonstrates accountability and dependability in fulfilling commitments.

Character Coin

Impact

- **Positive Culture:** Fosters a respectful and inclusive athletic environment.
- **Student Empowerment:** Empowers students to act as role models and leaders in their communities.
- **Community Involvement:** Strengthens community bonds through shared recognition of outstanding character.
- **Long-term Growth:** Encourages lifelong values of integrity, respect, and responsibility.

STATE EXPECTATIONS – MPSSAA

THREE PILLARS OF SPORTSMANSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Creating Welcoming Environments

Respect

Accountability of Actions



CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

- Administrators or student led athletic leadership groups welcoming officials, teams, visiting spectators.
- Appropriate dialogue between coaches, officials, and competitors.
- Respect for the hosting school, taking the playing surface with determination, but not crossing the line of respect by stomping on logos, leaving trash, tape, or other items for others to pick up, and reframing from taunting spectators.
- Clearly define to spectators that admission or entrance to the facility does not provide the right to verbally taunt, bait, attack, or discredit players, coaches, and officials. Such actions should result in removal from the facility.
- Maintain professionalism for game announcing and music.



RESPECT

- Respecting the decisions made by coaches regarding team selection, playing time and game strategy.
- Respect the calls made by the officials. You do not have to agree with them, but you must respect them.
- Remember that everyone involved in athletics wants to provide the student-athletes with the best experience possible.



ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ACTIONS

- Manage the score.
- A win is a win whether it is by one or ten. Celebrate your team's success and the efforts of all student-athletes involved.
- Display good sportsmanship through the respect of others.
- Support a positive social media presence.
- Use social media to celebrate sport and the efforts of those involved.
- Hold your students and coaching staff accountable for their actions and address egregious behavior (violent conduct such as fighting, vulgar profane language, spitting, insulting/abusive language and gestures, racial language and gestures, physical or verbal personal attacks towards an officials) with stern consequences.



Questions and Answers

Dana Johnson, CAA

Paul Laurence Dunbar

High School

dljohnson@bcps.k12.md.us

