

STORIES OF SPORTSMANSHIP



In a crisis, families and neighbors often put aside their differences and come together to help each other.

In sports, a player will occasionally extend a hand to help an opponent off the ground or linger over a fallen adversary to make sure the injury isn't severe, but true caring and assistance often don't extend beyond those gestures.

It's rare, then, when a college and one of its athletic teams reaches out to a rival that has experienced a traumatic event, especially when it means jeopardizing a chance at defending a championship title.

But that's what Azusa Pacific University and its men's soccer team did last November. For their compassion and generosity, the university and the team will be honored Nov. 21 at the 2009 AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards in St. Louis.

Azusa Pacific is a college of more than 4,800 undergraduates located northeast of Los Angeles. The Cougars had a home soccer match scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 15, against Westmont College, a small liberal arts college in Santa Barbara, Calif.

The game would determine the champion of the Golden State Athletic Conference and who would represent the conference in the annual NAIA Men's Soccer National Championship, which the Cougars had won the year before.

Two days before the match, a wildfire, which authorities believe started in the Tea Garden Estate a mile north of Westmont's campus, swept down the hills. The blaze destroyed several campus buildings and more than a dozen faculty homes.

News of the losses caused by the "Tea Fire" spread quickly to Azusa Pacific. One reason was that Dave Wolf, coach of the Westmont Warriors, called his brother Phil, the Cougars' head coach, to tell him his family was safe but their home had burned to the ground and they had lost everything.

Furthermore, Dave told Phil he wasn't sure of his team's status. As it turned out, no one was hurt in the fire, although one Westmont player lost the home he was renting with several other students and another player's dorm room was destroyed.

Azusa Pacific could have elected to win the conference title match by forfeit, but Phil immediately agreed to postpone the match. University Director of Athletics Bill Odell agreed and went to work to have the game rescheduled for Monday.

Then the Azusa Pacific athletic department and student body responded. The athletic department offered to house the displaced Westmont soccer team in the dorms at Azusa Pacific for as long as they needed and to pay for meals.

Westmont has an enrollment of less than 1,400, but on game day, Nov. 17, several hundred of the students traveled to Azusa to see the match. Courtesy of Azusa Pacific, they received a free lunch of pizza and salad, a gift bag that included toiletries and free admission to the match.

"What we did was a natural response to our convictions," Azusa Pacific's Odell said. "We felt terrible about what happened to them, but we were honored to be in a unique place to come to their aid."

About 500 fans from both colleges watched the Cougars and the underdog Warriors battle to a scoreless tie at intermission. In the second half, the emotional, hustling Westmont players scored two goals for a 2-0 victory and a trip to the national tournament.

"They definitely had the momentum the whole game," said Azusa Pacific midfielder Eric Winblad. "We were feeling like the bad guys coming in. . . it was just hard to overcome that."

But to collegiate athletic officials and the opposing coaches--who happened to be brothers-- the game meant more than winning or losing.

"In this extremely competitive situation, the generosity exhibited by Azusa Pacific clearly sends a message to society," NAIA President Jim Carr said. "True sportsmen understand that there is a standard higher than victory. The willingness of the Azusa Pacific family to embrace a rival in a time of need sets a standard of which we can all be proud."

Cougars coach Phil Wolf said: "Titles burn up and national championship rings melt down, but at the end of the day, it's about relationships, it's about family, it's about brotherhood and building a community."



Bill Odell

SPORTSMANSHIP TIPS FOR PARENTS: Courtesy of "Through a Child's Eyes," a publication of the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance

KNOW YOUR ROLE

The first step to helping your child is knowing where you fit in the process and acting appropriately. Bruce Brown, a special presenter for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), puts it this way: "You can play. You can coach. You can officiate. You can be a fan. But you need to pick just one and respect the others." Know your role.

What does "knowing your role" look like? If you're a FAN (which most parents are):

- Be a positive and encouraging supporter.
- Cheer for good plays on both teams.
- You're not the coach, so don't shout out instructions.
- You're not the official, so don't offer opinions on the officiating or on a particular call.
- It's your job to help your child keep it all in perspective. That means keeping everything in perspective for yourself, too.

Help improve the experiences for young athletes and make St. Louis a model community for sportsmanship. Sign the Sportsmanship Pledge at www.stlsportsmanship.org/

ACTIVITIES

Discuss It: What good deed earned Azusa Pacific this honor? Why is this deed extraordinary? What would you have done in this circumstance?

Constructed Response: Jim Carr is quoted as saying, "True sportsmen understand that there is a standard higher than victory." What does this mean?

In the News: Read the sports section and create a T-chart that lists examples of good sportsmanship and poor sportsmanship.

Extension: Pretend you were a player for the Westmont Warriors. Write a thank you note to the Azusa Pacific team for their generosity.

Missouri Show-Me Standards: G1-4, 1-6, 1-8, 1-10, 2-3, 3-1, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA6 / Grade Level Expectations: R1H, R3C, W2A, W3A / IL Learning Standards: 1A3b, 1B2a, 3C2a, 4B2b / IL Social/Emotional Standards: 1B3a, 3A3a



Through its Sportsmanship Initiative, the St. Louis Sports Commission creates more positive environments for kids to play sports so they will remain active and lead healthier, happier lives. The Sports Commission seeks to make St. Louis a model community for good sportsmanship. The organization is proud to partner with Newspapers in Education to highlight exemplary stories of sportsmanship and showcase outstanding role models for young people.



More great stories of sportsmanship will be celebrated at the 2009 AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards in St. Louis on Nov. 21. For more information visit www.stlsports.org