

# STORIES OF SPORTSMANSHIP



The basketball game between DeKalb and Madison high schools was a close one. A technical foul had been called on one of Madison's players. DeKalb sent one of its best free throw shooters to the line to make the technical foul free throw shots.

The DeKalb player took his time, set himself for the shot, and let it go. He missed the free throw. His didn't just miss it - he missed it by a mile as the ball dribbled under the basket and hit the wall.

The DeKalb player set himself for another free throw shot and let it go. Again, not only did he miss the shot, he REALLY missed the shot. Under most circumstances, a coach would have chastised his player wondering why at this particular moment in his high school basketball career he decided to lose his skills as one of the best free throw shooters on the team.

Instead, this is the way a high school basketball team from Northern Illinois responded to a rival team in Milwaukee after tragedy struck the Wisconsin team shortly before a game between the two schools.

For their exceptional display of kindness and sportsmanship, the DeKalb High School boys' basketball team from DeKalb, Ill., will be honored Nov. 21 at the 2009 AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards in St. Louis.

The DeKalb Barbs had been building a friendly cross-state rivalry with Madison High School in Milwaukee, and they were scheduled to play their third game in three years on Saturday night, Feb. 7.

After a two-hour bus ride, the DeKalb team arrived at the Madison gym and began to warm up after the junior varsity game concluded. But the Madison players did not come on the floor, and there was no head coach to explain their absence.

In fact, Madison head coach Aaron Womack Jr. was rushing back to the school from a local hospital where earlier in the day 39-year-old Carlitha Franklin had died after a five-year battle with cervical cancer. She was the mother of Johntel Franklin, an 18-year-old senior forward and captain of the Madison Knights.

When Womack arrived at the gym, he told the DeKalb coaching staff what had happened. They offered to cancel the game, but Womack said the

Illinois team had traveled too far and his team wanted to play. The DeKalb coaches told Womack to take his time getting ready.

The Madison players already were emotional over the loss of Johntel's mother, but when he walked into the gym during the second quarter, the reaction was spontaneous. The Madison players, friends in the stands and cheerleaders embraced him and offered condolences.

Then, Johntel surprised everyone, including Womack. He said he wanted to play. Womack sent him to sit up, although he knew his team would be assessed a technical foul because Franklin's name had not been listed in the scorebook. When Franklin entered the game midway through the second quarter, the referees, indeed, said they had to enforce the rule.

The DeKalb coaches argued with the referees and told them to forget the technical, but the officials insisted.

DeKalb head coach Dave Rohlman gathered his team and asked for a volunteer to shoot the free throws. Darius McNeal, a senior point guard, raised his hand.

"You realize you're going to miss, right?" Rohlman asked McNeal. McNeal nodded.

With no one else on the court, McNeal went to the free-throw line. Instead of a normal shot, he let the ball go two or three feet in front of him, and it dribbled under the basket and out of bounds. He did the same thing with the second attempt.

"I did it for the guy who lost his mom," McNeal said later. "It was the right thing to do." The Madison players and fans stood and applauded McNeal and the entire DeKalb team.

In a letter written to the DeKalb Daily Chronicle, Womack said, "I was overwhelmed with this display of almost unheard-of sportsmanship and class."

At the time of the technical, the game was close, but Madison pulled away in the second half and won 62-47. Franklin contributed 10 points.

"Even though we lost the game, it was a true life lesson," Rohlman said, "and it's not one our kids are going to forget anytime soon."



Rohlman



McNeal

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

**KEEP IT FUN - HAVE A CHILD-CENTERED PHILOSOPHY**  
One way to keep your child engaged in youth sports is by keeping it fun and focused on their needs. To emphasize a child-centered experience, you can:

- Look for a league that puts the goals of children - fun, friends, fitness, participation, and skill development - first.
- Keep in mind that children of different ages have different needs. Look for programs that are developmentally appropriate for your child.
- Look for coaches who emphasize fun and participation over winning.
- Talk to your child about what he or she wants to achieve in sports (not what you want your child to achieve).

To keep sports fun for your child:

- Emphasize skill development, not winning.
- Maintain realistic expectations.
- Stay positive. Avoid criticizing your child's play.
- Keep in mind that if sports become work, they're no longer fun.

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

## ACTIVITIES

**Discuss It:** How did the DeKalb high school team display compassion? What would you have done if you were in the coach's position?

**Constructed Response:** Given the outcome of the game, do you think the DeKalb team would make the same choice again? Make your prediction based on facts, details, and character traits defined in the story.

**In the News:** Use your newspaper to find sports stories that cover high school sporting events. Find examples of sportsmanship and positive behavior in these athletes - both on and off the playing field.

**Extension:** Imagine you are a reporter who was assigned to cover the DeKalb/Madison game and write your news story.

*Missouri Show-Me Standards: G1-1, 1-6, 1-10, 2-3, 3-6, 4-1, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA6/Grade Level Expectations: RI1, RI1, R2C, W2A/IL Learning Standards: 1B2a, 1C2a, 1C2b, 2A3a, 3C2a, 4B2b, 24B2/IL Social/Emotional Standards: 1A3a, 1B3a, 2C2b*



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](http://www.stlsports.org)