

STORIES OF SPORTSMANSHIP



Empathetic people have the ability to put themselves in someone else's shoes. They can get into someone's head and experience what they are feeling.

Empathy is essential for a civil and just society. Empathetic citizens feel for the vulnerable in society—the poor, the homeless and the disadvantaged—and they often reach out to offer assistance.

In sports, empathy means not embarrassing an opponent who is already beaten. It means extending a hand to help a fallen foe off the ground or patting a teammate on the back who has botched a crucial play.

But rarely does it mean treating an opposing team as if they were the home team, providing them with fans, cheerleaders and support and giving them joy, dignity and a sense of self-worth—at least for a night.

It happened a year ago in a high school football game in Grapevine, Texas, a suburban community directly west of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. For its inspiring display of compassion and sportsmanship, the Faith Christian School football team of Grapevine and head coach Kris Hogan were honored Nov. 21 at the 2009 AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards in St. Louis.

The Grapevine Faith Lions were scheduled to end their regular season with a game on Nov. 7, 2008, against the Gainesville State School Tornadoes. It was the first meeting between the two schools. Grapevine was 7-2 going into the Friday night game, and Gainesville was 0-8.

But the records weren't important to Hogan. He thought about the kids his players would face. They were inmates at Gainesville State, a maximum-security correctional facility located about an hour's drive north on Interstate 35. The facility houses more than 250 boys from 12-19 who have been convicted of various crimes.

Playing football at Gainesville is a privilege limited to juniors and seniors. To be eligible, a player must have served at least half his sentence, be in good academic standing and not be involved in any disciplinary incidents prior to a game.

All the games are played away, and the coaches are never sure how many players they will have from week to week. Their fan base consists of 20 or so faculty members and security guards who usually travel to the games.

ACTIVITIES

Discuss It: How would you describe empathy in your own words? Why is it important to have empathy for others? Give an example of empathy that you've experienced. How did the Grapevine Faith Lions demonstrate empathy for the Gainesville Tornadoes?

Constructed Response: Coach Kris Hogan wanted the Gainesville students to feel valuable. Describe three specific ways the students from Faith made the

Despite their circumstances, Hogan didn't see the Gainesville players as criminals. They were teens who had made poor decisions and gotten caught. Now, they were struggling to get an education, play football and get their lives back on track.

A few days before the game, Hogan sent an e-mail to his school's parents, asking them to support the Gainesville players. "These young men will not have any fans outside of the faculty from their school. Their parents will not be there," Hogan wrote. "Here's the message I want to send: You are just as valuable as any other person on planet Earth."

On game night, 14 Gainesville players got off the bus and ran onto the field through a banner and two lines of several hundred cheering Faith fans.

When the game started, the junior varsity cheerleaders from Faith and 200-300 of their fans went over to the Tornadoes' side of the field to cheer the players by name.

"I never in my life thought I'd hear people cheering for us to hit their kids," the Gainesville quarterback and middle linebacker said.

Faith won 33-14, although Gainesville scored the final two touchdowns. The score didn't matter to the Tornadoes. They celebrated and doused their coach with water.

After the game, the teams gathered at midfield for a prayer. "I don't know how this happened, so I don't know how to say thank you," the Tornadoes quarterback prayed, "but I never would've known there were so many people that cared about us."

The Gainesville players were escorted back to their bus by about a dozen guards. Before they boarded, each received food, candy, a Bible and an encouraging letter from a Faith player.

"These kids needed hope," Hogan said later. "The best way to do that was to cheer them on by name. ...We wanted to show that if you do the right thing, people will get behind you and you can do anything."

In the weeks and months following the game, several Faith parents began serving as mentors to boys at Gainesville. Other parents instituted and ran a character program designed to help Gainesville boys return to their homes or halfway houses. And the game, now dubbed the OneHeart Bowl, has become an annual tradition.

Gainesville students feel valuable.

In the News: Use the newspaper to find an example of a person, family, or group that could use some positive reinforcement or empathy. What could you do to help them?

Extension: Create a newspaper ad for the One Heart Bowl. Be sure your audience understands the purpose of this event!



Kris Hogan

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

HONOR THE GAME - RESPECT ALL ROLES
Honoring the Game means doing all you can to promote respect for everyone involved in youth sports.

- Set a good example for your child by modeling the behavior you'd like to see.

- Show respect for all people involved in the game, including the officials, coaches, players, opponents and opposing fans.

- If an official makes a bad call against your child's team, be quiet. (It may be difficult, but you can do it.)

- Avoid making negative comments about your child's coach, particularly in front of your child.

- Encourage other parents to Honor the Game. If someone is yelling at the officials, make it your job to remind them to Honor the Game.

- Support efforts by your child's coach or your child's league to promote sportsmanship and Honor the Game.

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

Missouri Show-Me Standards: G1-4, 1-5, 1-6, 1-8, 1-10, 2-1, 2-3, 3-1, 3-6, 4-1, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA6/Grade Level Expectations R1E, R1H, R1I, R3A/IL Learning Standards: 1A2b, 1B2a, 1B2b, 1C2b, 2B2a, 3B2b, 3C1a, 4B2b, 5C2a/IL Social/Emotional Standards: 1A2a, 1A3a, 1B3a, 2A2b, 2A3b



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.



See more great stories of sportsmanship when the 2009 AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards airs on CBS College Sports Network at 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, December 16.