



WEEK 6: SPORTSMANSHIP

Last week I talked about the Soccer World Cup. I'd like to take a moment to mention it again. The 2006 World Cup brought many not only great, but also disappointing moments. In too many games players demonstrated poor sportsmanship. What was especially upsetting to me was that some of the commentators justified this unsportsmanlike behavior. When players were pretending that they were injured, commentators called it: "being smart". When players were pulling opponents' jerseys or pushing and tripping an opponent when the referees were not watching, commentators called it: "part of the game". When players committed falls when opponents were outplaying them just to create a good situations, commentators called it: "professional or necessary falls".

I hope that opinions of those specialists didn't influence too many people. I hope that the demonstration of self respect, ability for self control, honor, dignity, determination to win fairly and honestly is what everybody calls the professional way of playing soccer.

Losers are afraid to loose and they are willing to cheat just to gain an advantage, hoping that nobody will see that they are weak. A strong and confident person doesn't lose self respect and confidence in tough situation.

Referees are typically the ones who usually get blamed for poor sportsmanship during the games. The World Cup soccer specialists also blamed the referees (who actually try to improve soccer) for showing too many red and yellow cards. Only a few years ago, I realized that the people who are most responsible for a players' poor sportsmanship are the coaches. If a coach prepares his or her team to play a clean game and takes professional pride in teaching players to demonstrate high class, then players will suffer less injuries, they will improve skills and everybody will have more fun. Referees will not be overwhelmed by the enormous number of falls or penalties.

We have to remember that the most important role of a coach is to not only foster a love for the game but to also prepare young athletes to become good members of society. The lessons children learn in soccer, both on and off the field, they will use all their lives.

Jeff