RULES OF THE GAME: At one point during a game, the coach said to one of his young players, “Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?” The little boy nodded in the affirmative. “Do you understand that what matters is whether we win together as a team?” The little boy nodded yes. “So,” the coach continued, “when a strike is called, or you’re out at first, you don’t argue or curse or attack the umpire. Do you understand all that?” Again the little boy nodded. “Good,” said the coach. “Now go over there and explain it to your mother.”

How a person plays the game shows something of his character. How a person loses shows all of it. (NCYS “Youth Sports Today” Newsletter – September/October 2000)

Rick Wolf, noted radio talk show host on Youth Sports, had an article in the Time Magazine (2001). One of the most popular questions from parents: “When should my child begin to specialize in just one sport?”

He believes “if your child is an excellent athlete with the constant desire to improve, it doesn’t make much difference if he or she decides to specialize in a sport at an early age or plays several sports along the way. Ultimately, youngsters who are fast enough, or strong enough, or talented enough, will make the grade in whatever sport they select. In the meantime, especially when it comes to team athletics, don’t worry about pushing your child into a sport too soon.”

“Although most kids discover a sport or two they prefer by the time they’re 13 or 14, there is no perfect age for specialization. Let your children tell you what sport or sports they want to play, as opposed to you guiding – or pushing – them. Remember, it’s their childhood, not yours.’ (Rick Wolff is chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting at the Institute for International Sport – www.sportsparenting.org.)

Questions coaches should ask themselves: What am I doing? Why am I doing it and How am I doing it. “If coaches are not seen expressing character that is good, respectful, connected, and truly struggling to live out their own calling, their players will see the hypocrisy immediately (Dr. Juan Hinjosa, Director of Lay Ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago).”

A faith based athletic program, such as CYO, needs to be more concerned about the people involved in the contest than the outcome. Those who love sports need to call “time out” and evaluate the term SPORTSMANSHIP. Sportsmanship is the way people in sports refer to all that is good in sports.

We need to reflect on how to develop and implement a personal philosophy that reflects a belief that God is present in all that we do and who we are. Sportsmanship can be transformed into spirituality. Being involved in sports can bring us closer to God.
One parish in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia includes in their handbook – “a person must participate in one spiritual activity as well as one service activity.”

**Examples:** mass for shut-ins in the parish, where the kids transport people to and from church, present them with corsages, fill all the roles of the mass, and then have a reception afterwards.

The players make sandwiches for the poor and recently started an outdoor rosary for the parishioners. CYO has to be more than a sports program. The challenge was changing coaches’ old attitudes and convincing them to uphold the values that we were trying to install in these teenagers. We need to fulfill the teenagers’, not just take up their time.

**COURSES OFFERED IN COLLEGE:** “Competitors, coaches, and spectators sometimes get so swept up in winning that they abandon values key to playing the game.” (Ed Hastings, Director of the new Center for Sport, Spirituality and Character Development at Neumann College – outside of Philadelphia, Pa. A similar program has been developed at Notre Dame in S. Bend, In.)

“There is an inescapable moral element in sport,” Don DiJulia, St. Joseph College AD, said. “If you call it a sense of fair play and play that out, what you’re talking about is something of a higher ground.”

**Len DePaul – formerly of the CYO/Archdiocese of Philadelphia (now on the faculty of Newman College):**

In developing an athletic program that provides a healthy developmental environment for all involved, we need to remember the value of the time out. Good coaches realize that they need to create time to personally reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their programs. They reflect not only upon the win-lose record, but more importantly upon the “what am I doing,” “why am I doing it,” and “the how am I going about getting it done” aspect of coaching.

Who says everyone has to be a winner. Mike Krzyzewski, coach at Duke, was a plebe at West Point when he experienced failure. “West Point taught me that the best way to succeed is by failing. You learn how to USE failure.” I love this quote: “Players do their best listening after a loss.”
Coaches are fond of the quote, “Losing is worse than death, because you have to live with losing.” But the opposite is true: **Losing is better, because you can’t bounce back from death!** Dealing with sports-related disappointments now will help you later in life. You’ll suffer failures. But if you learn now how Christ can help you overcome adversity, it’ll make future bumps smoother.

Every team needs a variety of talents. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. What applies to sports applies to church too. When all talents work together the ball goes in the right direction whether it is an individual sport (one body) or a team sport (many bodies)

**Corinthians 9:24:** “Surely you know that many runners take part in a race, but only one of them wins the prize. Run then, in such a way as to win the prize.” 25 “Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last, but we do it for one that will last forever.”

“Your main competition isn’t your opponent; it’s you. The challenge isn’t to **BE** the best. It’s to **DO** your best.”

Think about it: Would God want you to participate in sports if you’d have to hate people?

If winning is so important, you can always find people to beat.

Bob Goldman, in his book *Death in the Locker Room* wrote: “I asked 198 top world-class athletes…’If I had a magic drug that was so fantastic that if you took it once you would win every competition you would enter… (but) it would kill you five years after you took it, would you still take the drug?’ Fifty-two percent said yes.” That’s a good example of a warped perspective: Winning overrides all other goals.

Christianity and sports can mix, but Christianity comes first. If you find you simply can’t compete and reflect Christian character, it might be time to take a little time off and get that together.

**STANDING UP FOR SPORTSMANSHIP — (Referee Magazine – January 2002)**

“Apparently there is a local church league in the Charleston area that – get this – teaches players fundamentals and life skills. Not only that but according to Pastor Charles Larue, who runs the league, players are taught such fanciful notions as self-esteem, respecting authority and sportsmanship.”
The Coach is the Key – (NFL Director of Officiating – Mike Pereira) “This whole analysis we’re discussing, nobody can argue with integrity and honesty and all that – all those values are common sense – I look at responsibility. Who is responsible for making a situation a more positive situation for the officials? It’s coaches. They have to be responsible. They should be the people who lead by example. If the coach is allowed to berate an official, or if he has an over-emphasis on winning and possibly skirting the rules to win, then we’re going to have a hell of a tough time trying to teach kids right from wrong.”

Sportsmanship starts from the top down and grows from the bottom up…..

Parents, who are almost always sports amateurs, can misunderstand the nature of athletic talent. “If you aren’t born with that gift from God, you aren’t going to be a star no matter how many coaches and camps and practices you go to,” says Rick Wolff. “Even scholarships are rare. Only 1% of participants in youth sports get one,” adds Doreen Greenberg, Ph.D., a sports psychologist in New Jersey.

Losing is Not an Option (USA WEEKEND- Jan 2001) – Here are some quotes and thoughts regarding “failure.”

“Across the bright face of America there is a widespread rebirth of an age-old phenomenon: failure.”

“Many of today’s successes report they learned a great deal from early loss. For us all, the key to achievement may lie in how well we get up off the canvas.”

Stephen Covey, 68, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, “You can’t let it intimidate you – The only way you truly fail in this day and age is to stop trying altogether.”

“You learn more from losing than winning,” says Morgan Wootten, the winningest high school basketball coach ever and a recent inductee to the Basketball Hall of Fame. “You learn how to keep going.”

Pat Conroy, who wrote The Prince of Tides’, has titled his next book My Losing Season about his time he spent playing point guard on The Citadel’s dismal basketball team. “Losing is underestimated in America,” he says. “I don’t think you learn anything from winning. It just feels good. But loss you think about. Loss makes you change the way you do things.”

“Notes” created by M. Collins – 2002
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