

Monthly Tips for Coaches and Parents from The Positive Coaching Alliance



Losing With Dignity

March Madness is often full of exciting upsets and Cinderella stories. While great lessons can be learned from these underdog triumph stories, it may be more important to learn from how the losers of these games handle themselves in defeat.

Losing With Dignity

A Checklist for Responsible Coaches and Responsible Sport Parents

We all know the adage: "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." We remember being told this as a kid, and we know we've probably said it a hundred times to our young athletes. If you're like us, sometimes you even have to remind yourself, in everything from sports to our work life. And if you truly are like us, you might also think, "It's easier said than done!" In the heat of the moment and with the emotions of a tough loss or a tough season, even the best of us have a hard time practicing this adage. It's easy to get caught up in the scoreboard and let the disappointment of a loss cause us to suffer an even worse loss - loss of sight of what's truly important.

So this month, we turned to the experts at Positive Coaching Alliance to help us develop a quick checklist for coaches, parents and athletes to help process a scoreboard loss with dignity.

Losing with dignity - whether as a child or an adult - is not an easy thing to do. The experts at Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) have helped the team at Responsible Sports put together this handy checklist of things you and your youth athletes can do to help "Honor The Game" and practice Responsible Sports in the face of losses and adversity.

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▪ **Congratulate your opponents**

Shake hands with the other team. Tell the other team's players "Good game."
Congratulate the opposing coach on a well-played game. Celebrate an opponent who made a great play. Congratulate the fans of the opposing team sitting in the stands with you. We know: it's sometimes not that easy to do. But they deserve both congratulations and respect for the win

▪ **Thank the officials - even if you think they got the calls wrong**

It's tough to be an official. They are human and sometimes make mistakes. But they officiate because they love the game and want to be a part of it. And if you're honest with yourself, you have to admit that in the hundreds of calls they have to make in any given game, they got most of them right. Thank them for being a part of the game and helping to ensure both player's safety and upholding the rules of fair play in the game.

▪ **Refocus on goals**

If you're practicing a "Mastery Approach" instead of a scoreboard or outcome approach, then, at the beginning of the season, you helped your young athletes set goals that focused on giving 100% effort, learning as much as possible and bouncing back from mistakes. (This is what PCA calls the ELM Tree of Mastery for Effort, Learning and Mistakes.) In the face of a loss or a disappointing season, it's important to return to take stock relative to these goals and not just the scoreboard. Even top coaches, like Roy Williams at the University of North Carolina, are facing this situation. With a win-loss record under .500 and the prospects of participating in post-season play slim, Coach Williams continued all the way through to the end of the season, coaching and pushing his athletes to work on free-throw percentages, hustling on defense, and making better shot selections.

▪ **Pick up your teammates**

Even the best athletes need help from teammates, coaches, parents and fans to stay positive. Take Ryan Miller, MVP Olympic Goalie for Team USA Ice Hockey. After allowing the game winning overtime goal to sneak by, Miller was quoted as saying: "I'm just very frustrated. We got ourselves in a position to win from two goals down. Sudden death kind of stings, especially in this situation."

But Miller's teammates - and fans - were quick to jump in and remind the star goalie of all that he had accomplished. "[Miller is] pretty down, but there's no chance we're here without the way he played the whole tournament," said Chris Drury, Miller's former teammate with the Sabres. "It's heartbreaking to lose in OT of a gold-medal game, but he should be proud of everything he did the last two weeks." "He was unbelievable all week, all day today, all tournament," teammate Zach Parise said. "He was awesome. He was a lot of the reason we were here tonight."

And when Miller returned to regular play for the Buffalo Sabres in a tough away game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, the fans greeted him with a standing ovation louder than the applause for Penguins star Sidney Crosby who had scored the game-winning goal in the Olympics for Team Canada.

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- **Remember the rules**

During the Olympics, U.S. speed-skater Apolo Anton Ohno was disqualified when an official determined that he interfered with a fellow competitor. Ohno disagreed with the call, believing his hand did not cause his competitor to fall. Sven Kramer was disqualified when he improperly changed lanes during his race. Both men were understandably disappointed and took out their frustration and anger on referees and coaches, respectively. But in hindsight both admitted that their disqualifications were part of honoring the rules of the sport. It's an important reminder that "Honoring The Game," including the rules and traditions, are an essential part of losing with dignity.

- **Brush It Off**

Last but not least, help young athletes to "brush off" losses and move forward. Take the lessons that are provided from losses and adversity and focus on the future - the next game or the next season.

Teaching our young athletes - and reminding ourselves as youth sports adults - how to manage losses and disappointments with dignity is an important role we play as Responsible Sport Parents and Responsible Coaches