



"Sports: A Means to an End"

By Dr. George A. Selleck

EduSports Blue Paper for Schools & Parents

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During my recent travels, which regularly take me from Oakland to Washington, DC, I have been besieged with negative comments about sports. People are upset with high-priced and selfish athletes. They feel that athletes have become very self-centered and only play for themselves and not for their team. People are also quiet fed up with the boorish behavior of team owners, and the “just-win” attitude of just about everyone involved with sports. The whole concept of team spirit and the passion for the game seems to have been lost. People feel that most of the athletes play only for the sake of winning and not for the love of the game. All that the players care about is holding out for a bigger contract. People feel that athletes seem to have put on their give me give me glasses and refuse to remove them even for a second.

I understand their frustration. I think a large part of the problem stems from the fact that much of sports has become an end in itself, as opposed to a means to an end. Winning has become all important. People don’t really care about how a team won, only the ultimate result seems to matter. The process has no importance, only the final outcome matter. Take the Olympics, for example. The feelings of pride and good will that are often created when our team courageously competes for a team medal are dissipated when rumors of back-biting and ill-will follow.

When Baron Pierre de Coubertin established the first modern Olympic Games held in 1896, his hope was to peacefully unite the communities of the world through the recognition and celebration of athletic talent. To that end, de Coubertin came up with five Olympic ideas to:

- Help develop better citizens through the building of character that accompanies participation in amateur sports.
- Demonstrate the principles of fair play and sportsmanship.

- Stimulate interest in fine arts through exhibitions, concerts, and demonstrations during the games, and in so doing contribute to a well-rounded life.
- Teach that sports are played for fun and enjoyment.
- Create international friendship and goodwill that would lead to a happier and more peaceful world.

Notice that with each of these ideals, sports is used as the means to an end. Nowhere does it say that the goal of sports is to win. Rather, sports is to be used for enjoyment, to stimulate interest in learning, to learn lessons which can be implemented in real life also – in other words, to create better human beings. Sports helps in all round development of an individual, it also helps in developing the personality of the individual. Personal values is very important. There may be instances wherein you have an opportunity to take the easy way out. But the personal values of the individual will not let them do that. Because once you give up your personal values then there will be no stopping and before you know you would have made a lot of compromises which would ultimately ruin your image and your career.

The ‘I can do it’ attitude is very important. There will be many instances in the life of an athlete when they would feel that they are losing the lead. This is when their attitude makes all the difference. As long as they believe in themselves they can always rise up like the phoenix and make a successful comeback. All it needs is to have faith in oneself and have a positive attitude towards life.

As parents, what can you do to help your child view sports in its proper perspective?

Be a role model. The best example your child can look to is you. Show how you are still using sports as a learning tool, whether you’re sitting in the stands learning about human nature, or testing the limits of your own ability through your own sports participation. Show them how sports helps you make mistakes which will not cost you dearly, how you can learn from those mistakes and implement it in your real life. Tell them about how sports gives you an opportunity to inculcate the values of team spirit and how it

drives you to give your best shot for your team. How sports is about achieving your goals through the victory of your team. Convey the message to them that sports inculcates the values of leadership, it also inculcates the value of truth and honesty. Sports is not about superstars, because a team cannot always win if just one player performs extraordinarily well, all the team members have to perform well. Therefore it becomes very important to encourage the weakest members of the team.

Tell your child that champions also have weaknesses. But they always work on the weakest part of their game. Michael Jordan once spent 8 straight hours shooting free throws simply because he missed one free throw in the crucial moment of a game. People are not champions because they win, they win because they are champions.

Show your child that having a ‘never give up’ attitude is very important. There might be instances when things are just not working out for you. But that doesn’t mean that you don’t possess the skills or the talent. That is when you have to be persistent and have a ‘never give up’ attitude and you will ultimately reach your goal.

To me, sports has always been about possibilities – opening your mind to all that we can dream and achieve through sports. But sports is also about responsibility to oneself, and to others. When we participate in sports, we have an individual responsibility to do the best that we can. But we also have the responsibility to reach beyond ourselves to make sports the tool of peace and goodwill that Baron Pierre de Coubertin envisioned. As Arthur Ashe once said, “I learned a long time ago what money can and cannot do for me. From what we get, we can make a living, from what we give, however, we can make a life.”

About the Author

George A. Selleck, Ph.D, M.Div, M.A., the director of Sports for Life Education Programs and the cofounder of Parents for Good Sports, is a counseling psychologist with more than 35 years of professional expertise. He has successfully integrated his knowledge of human behavior and his experience as an accomplished athlete and coach to become a national sports workshop specialist and recognized author in the field of sports education. He has presented seminars to hundreds of organizations, including the NBA Rookie Transition Program, the American Basketball Coach's Association, the American Football Coach's Association, Anaheim Unified School District, and more. Dr. Selleck is a former CIF Player of the Year and Stanford All-American, and is a member of the Stanford Basketball Hall of Fame. He was twice named the Los Angeles Times High School Coach of the Year.

Dr. Selleck is on the Advisory board of Edusports.

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