

To Be Shared with Coaches and Parents

First let me thank those coaches and managers who have continued to set an example of sportsmanship for which we as a league want to be recognized. I also have to apologize for having to send this out again. Unfortunately, WMYSA has a small number of coaches, parents and fans who continue to set a bad example and take up the majority of my time.

For years sportsmanship, had been a term used to describe a player's attitude during and after games. As youth sports have continued to grow so has the concept of sportsmanship. What studies have shown us is that sportsmanship on the field has a direct correlation to it off the field. It's important we understand their behavior has consequences as it does affect the game. More importantly than the effect it has on any particular game is the impact it has on the players and referees for years to come.

Coaches are held responsible not only for their actions, but the actions of their players and parents as well. Parents and fans need to understand in order for the coaches to coach, they can't be focused on your behavior. With that being said it seems each season I am disappointed when I have to put out yet another reminder regarding expected behavior of our coaches, players, parents and fans.

We all know there have been referees assaulted in the game of soccer. In fact, one lost his life in 2014 on the other side of the state as a direct result of the assault. WMYSA is not isolated from this unacceptable behavior. We have had referees harassed, belittled, threatened and assaulted; this past year was no exception. One season recently one of our 15-year-old referees who was an AR for a game and was struck in the back with a banana peel from a parent.

Now while some may think this is humorous, I do not. When we get complaints about the quality of referees whose fault is it? Is it the fault of the referee association for not drawing more experienced individuals or the coaches, parents and fans who make the environment intolerable for them? If we want better quality referees (**and I am by no means indicating, we don't have good quality experienced individuals officiating our games**) then take some personal accountability to make it an environment they want to continue being involved.

Just out of curiosity as parents and fans let's take a moment to reflect on how many times you have made a verbal comment in a game to a referee. Then think about the number of times as a parent or fan which you actually told a referee thank you after a game or that they did a good job. If I were a betting man I would say the comparison is sadly overwhelmingly lopsided. Sportsmanship begins with all of us!

Please note the type of behavior I just referenced is not only unacceptable, but simply will not be tolerated.

If you are looking for tips on how to help one another deal with frustration, please read the below article I put out several years ago.

By Ken Pope
WMYSA President

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" The Importance of the Pause " By Ken Pope

No one is immune to human emotion: parents, players, fans and even referees. Even good people get caught up in the moment. We understand this, but who is responsible to help control these emotions and prevent them from taking over? If you believe it's a personal responsibility - you're correct, but not for the reason you may think.

The offender has a personal responsibility to not act out. But you also have a personal responsibility to step forward and stop it. It's your responsibility to remind your friends, family, coach, manager and acquaintances there are children around and the importance of calming down. It's your responsibility to tell them to " **Pause** ".

Coaches have a difficult job. Believe it or not they are held responsible for the parents' actions. By keeping the touchline quiet and calm, they can then focus their time and energy on the kids instead of the parents. Likewise, coaches need to remember players follow their lead. Your responsibility first and foremost is to the development of the children. The development of their character is as, if not more, important than their skill development. So please don't be one of those coaches who screams at the referee or players.

Likewise, don't be one of those coaches, parents, players or fans who just makes subtle comments to make themselves feel better. Unfortunately, regardless of which side of the touchline you sit, we all hear it all too often. That's the "Are you kidding me"? "Really, Really?" , "Are you serious?" , "What was that?" , "Call it both ways!" comments which tend to build upon the emotion and frustration of the referees. Particularly when you are dealing with youth referees. There simply is no excuse for this behavior. It doesn't accomplish anything positive and just fuels the fire for everyone else.

We need to remember mob mentality can be contagious so we need to stop it before it grows. While what happened to John Bieniewicz may be an extreme example; (referee who was killed in 2014) unfortunately, the escalation of emotions is all too common. Most of us have been there and heard the game where the parents and coaches are constantly yelling at the referees and it draws the attention of anyone passing by as we hear the volume grow. Words have consequences and as a result of this type of continued behavior, we have had several referees decide they have had enough.

As a parent of a female youth referee who was struck by a fan, I can attest that things have gone too far. We are asking for your help ~ parents, players, coaches, managers, board members and fans alike need to focus our attention on what's best for the club and players within it. Help us set the example the rest of the league and state wants to follow.

It's not complicated; the trick to sportsmanship is to remind one another to " **Pause** ". This season let's try to focus on the " **Pause** " take a few breaths to calm ourselves down and refocus our energy into something positive. If you see a parent getting frustrated and yelling or making comments at the referee take the initiative and simply say, "**Pause.**" Let this be the simple message which serves as a reminder of how our actions have consequences.

For those few coach's I was referring to earlier, I want to take this opportunity to be very clear. Simply because the referee has not carded you, this by no means indicates your actions are considered acceptable and you are clear and free of potential sanctions. WMYSA takes each and every complaint we receive very seriously. As I begin to see the same names showing up on referee reports, in my emails or on my voice mail I begin to get concerned. As a result, we have and will continue to send representatives to games to observe the environment in order to determine which course of action to take.

Moving forward we would all prefer to hear less about coaches and fans making abusive comments at referees, players coaches etc. Sportsmanship is not simply about being respectful to the referees, it's showing class to your opponents. When I see scores like 18-1 I wonder what that coach was thinking. Likewise, those coaches need to be concerned about what WMYSA is thinking.

Thank you and please have a safe and courteous rest of the season.

By Ken Pope
WMYSA President