

BILL GOSSE

SCORE

**Guide to Supporting and Instilling
Exceptional Sportsmanship**



SCORE

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Vision – To develop a spirit in sport where victory is not measured so much on the scoreboard, as it is in the stands and on the benches; where children, teens and adults can celebrate victory or defeat with style, grace, and sportsmanship; developing character for success in life.



WHEN SPORTSMANSHIP PREVAILS, WE ALL SCORE!



TeamScore Inc is a non-profit organization on a mission to promote good sportsmanship in youth athletics.

President and Co-Founder Bill Gosse brings a unique perspective to the subject of sportsmanship: Currently the Executive Director at St. Vincent de Paul Green Bay; NCAA D1 walk-on in basketball; father of five grown boys; coach for several youth teams; WIAA official, and Weekly sportsmanship columnist. He has seen *all* sides of sports, and still appreciates the great things it offers. He is passionate about improving the fan – and participant – environment in sports today.

<https://billgosse.com>

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Dedication

To my late father Edgar Gosse, who was always there for me growing up, setting a wonderful example. Thanks Dad. I love you.

Acknowledgements

Whether it was through school or church events, athletic contests, piano or trumpet lessons, or the memorable family day trips, I don't know if Dad could have set a better example for me. The countless hours of 500 he used to play with us, and the amount of time he spent playing catch and pitching with me, left such an impression. As an only child and the product of a humble, rural beginning, his selfless example and lifelong mission to provide his family with something better than he had growing up, was truly a gift from God, and amazes me to this day. He helped me dream big, which included attending Marquette University, trying out for the Warriors basketball team, raising a large family, writing a newspaper column, and thinking about writing a book, to name a few.

For some time, a book was in my thought process, but I wasn't sure how to go about it, and it almost got lost in the proverbial closet. Thanks to encouragement from Dad, my wife Debbie, and our five boys, the dream of writing a book stayed alive, and has come true. In fact, having five boys who are twelve years apart from youngest to oldest, and with varying degrees of interest in sports, helped position me to even be in a situation to write a book.

Certainly, Dad and Mom helped me out as an athlete, and were great sounding boards as that part of life was navigated. To be a parent is a special honor, and to be a parent of sports kids is not something to be taken for granted. Not all kids are interested, or as interested, in sports as others might be, and it takes time and effort to plug into what they may want to derive from sports. A great deal was learned from coaching them and also trying to be their father at the same time, which can be difficult. As with any experience, the results would be better if a second opportunity was granted.

As a longtime high school football official, who also dabbled in basketball and baseball officiating, I gained an appreciation and awareness for what officials have to tolerate, and the understanding exists why there is such a shortage of reliable and qualified officials. While working with all kinds of officials, it was easy to conclude some did it just for the money, but the pleasure of working with officials who strove for excellence was a wonderful experience. As you may imagine, it's a special feeling and accomplishment to be awarded the opportunity to officiate a state football final – 3 times. The realization also came to pass, that the more we prepare as officials, the better we are at handling all aspects of that responsibility.

As our last son's time in youth sports nears the end, our tie to youth sports shifts again to hopefully becoming a true fan and enjoy sports for what they were always intended to be, and that's plain, old-fashioned fun. Of course, as grandparenting eventually becomes part of our lives, that investment of emotion could take place again. Prayerfully, the club environment doesn't completely take that special feeling of fun away from sports fans.

Certainly, completing a book doesn't go directly from dream to reality, but it takes many different experiences, encounters, and episodes to get there. Honestly, the first seeds of writing a book were probably planted when the privilege of writing a regular sportsmanship column for the Green Bay Press-Gazette was granted to me, because my fondest memories of school truly don't include enjoying any school-related writing assignments. With that being said, excerpts or portions of my previously published columns have been reprinted in this book with permission from the Green Bay Press-Gazette, and I've been informed many of my past columns remain available for purchase through the greenbaypressgazette.com archives. Not being a trained writer, to even think of writing a column, came forth with thanks to an edition of The Sheboygan Press, which was brought to my attention by my in-laws.

In that particular sports section, there were three separate articles involving sportsmanship. They weren't regular columns, but feature stories, covering different aspects of poor sportsmanship.

I thought they were great, but felt these “one-shot deals” weren’t going to do a whole lot of good, because their sound message would wear off quickly. That day, a commitment was proclaimed to my family that the Green Bay Press-Gazette needed a regular sportsmanship column, and my journey began to seek out their high school beat writer and author of one of the three articles in that sports section, Scott Venci, to see if his employer would be willing to take on such a proposition.

Already trying to establish a sportsmanship initiative, being able to write a regular column would be a great addition to the program and getting to know Scott through officiating high school football, my quest towards becoming a columnist continued. Without remembering how long it took, and how many counteroffers were involved, but basically, by offering my services for free, and agreeing to provide a column without even having to provide a sample, my journey into about 250,000 northeast Wisconsin homes, and many more across the internet began. However, out of a long-established desire for excellence, there was no way my initial efforts were going to be simply submitted without having an expert first review my creations.

That’s where Lois Maurer, who was a producer for Milwaukee Public Television at the time, was contacted. I got to know Lois by way of her reaching out to me and offering a helping hand, after seeing me a year earlier on a Milwaukee morning talk show. On that program, my efforts to improve the sportsmanship environment surrounding youth sports were featured. Thank you to Lois for providing great guidance during the early days of my column-writing. Your help provided great training wheels.

Obviously, the Green Bay Press-Gazette staff deserves tremendous gratitude for bearing with a novice writer, who simply wanted the opportunity to speak from the heart and be able to plant seeds of good sportsmanship. Thanks are extended to Scott Venci, who advocated for me, and Editor Mike Vandermause, who took a chance on a genuine rookie. Nonetheless, 493 columns, and almost ten years later, my column-writing journey was complete,

which wasn't possible without the wonderfully loyal readers who reached out to the Green Bay Press-Gazette and to me, offering ideas, encouragement, and constructive criticism. It was an experience that will be cherished forever. That experience, and my speaking engagements across the country, paved the way for this book. However, who would be my publisher?

My employment as Executive Director for The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Green Bay, provides exposure to The Business News, a publication for Northeast Wisconsin. On several occasions, there were articles about publishing companies, but none of them truly caught my attention, until one day there was an article about Titledown Publishing. The owner of this organization was also fully immersed as the manager of the local 9-1-1 office, and had quite a story. Without completely reading the article, and in an effort to meet the owner of Titledown Publishing, attempts were made to reach out to The Business News by sending an email to the writer of the Titledown Publishing article. Upon receiving no response, a follow-up was delivered to the editor of The Business News, which returned an assurance that someone would contact me. When that didn't happen either, the decision was made to read the whole article, which led to the discovery in the remainder of the article that an editor with Titledown Publishing had worked with me at a prior employer. *I'll just call her!* This phone call led to a meeting that would change everything. Thank you Tracy Ertl and Erin Walton for your help, encouragement, and all-around mentorship. This project has been more enjoyable than imagined, and anticipation awaits for what the Lord has next for all of us.

Lastly, recognition is warranted for the individuals who were willing to be interviewed for this book. These people offered valuable content to support my thoughts, and the experience of interviewing them was indeed a pleasure. Therefore, a special thank you goes out to Tim Bannon, Scott Venci, Ryan Borowicz, Paul Ihlenfeldt, Ron Meikle, Robert Brooks, and Dennis Freels. Best wishes and continued success to all of you, in and outside of sports.

Foreword

The world of sports has long been a staple in communities no matter where you live. In fact, it speaks a universal language that we all can understand on some level no matter where we're from.

In his book, Bill Gosse focuses on character disciplines such as control, respect, humility, and patience in the arena of sports that will always withstand the test of time. Those who demonstrate these will prove to be victorious on and off the field.

This resource will create conversations as well as provide insight for both the participant and the fans. It is a guide to embrace applicable good sportsmanship truths, creating an atmosphere where we all can enjoy the experience to the utmost.

In this first book of the series, Bill has created solid reading that should be incorporated in sports organizations, formal and informal. I'm excited to watch the trajectory of his ground-breaking work and the impact of his entire future series!

– Robert Brooks, Athletes in Action Pro Ministry, NFL Chaplain

Introduction

Teddy Roosevelt was often quoted as saying, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” Roosevelt isn’t credited as being the author of that quote – William Shakespeare is – but Teddy was smart enough to surround himself with those who were high achievers when deciding how to live his own life that led to becoming the 26th President of the United States of America.

As a young boy, it’s easy to remember the time when my father introduced me to sports. However, being probably all of eight or nine years of age at the time, just having fun was all that mattered to me. Looking to achieve greatness in sports wasn’t in my thought process, because what did that mean? Dad took an old five-gallon can and cut out the bottom, nailed it high above in our garage to an old piece of tackboard, and our first backboard and hoop had been created. Then, Mom and Dad bought a simple, multi-colored bouncing ball from a local department store, and our first “basketball” had arrived.

Was I born a great athlete? Would I achieve greatness? Would greatness be thrust upon me? At that young of an age, that wasn’t understood, nor was it something my parents were worried about.

They weren’t trying to groom the next Lew Alcindor or Jerry West. They were simply trying to provide me with a fun activity to experience. It would be discovered later that my father’s mission was always to try and provide his children with more than what he had as a child. You’re probably thinking an old can, tackboard, and a bouncy ball isn’t a whole lot, and you’re right. However, with that humble beginning, he was already providing more than what he had as an only child raised during the Great Depression on a small farm in the early twentieth century in rural Wisconsin. He lived a

life of hard work, during a time when graduation from high school, let alone college, was a luxury, not an expectation. To be clear, the gift wasn't in the humble basketball "equipment" he provided, it was in the opportunity to spend time with my father – something my grandfather rarely did with my dad. This quality time evolved into a love for the purity of sports, as I was taught sportsmanship and fair play, qualities that aren't always present in today's me-first world of tremendous salaries and intense competition.

For parents of young athletes, there are some easy tips to remember, which will help smooth out the sports parent journey.

If we adjust our expectations to focus on how beneficial it is for our children to simply be participating, instead of on wins and losses, it will be a whole lot less stressful. Especially at a younger age, our goal should be for the kids to have enough fun to want to come back the next year. Kids will develop confidence through wins and will be challenged through losses – *if* they're having fun. As it turns out, both situations are great for kids to experience, and we, as parents, need to understand that fact.

Another great thing to know is that only a small minority of all athletes actually receive college scholarships when they get older. According to Jack Renkens, Founder and President of Recruiting Realities, less than one percent of high school student-athletes receive a fully funded Division I scholarship. Therefore, we need to stop pressuring our kids to excel to be recognized. Again, let them participate in a way so that they want to play again in the future because they had self-satisfaction and fun.

The greatest thing we can do to support our children athletes is to encourage them and their teammates. Studies vary on this ratio, but a typical standard between praise and criticism should be at least 5 to 1. If we're not able to meet at least that expectation, we'll be causing our kids undue stress.

Former Baltimore Orioles baseball player and Hall of Famer Cal Ripken, Jr. says we should return the games to the kids, allowing them to have fun on their terms. We should let them develop, let them learn, let them fail, and support them in a way that is

calming. This allows for a positive environment for the kids to learn the game and grow.

One of the best ways to support our kids without getting all worked up, is to volunteer our time to their coaches or the program in which they play. They may not currently need a coach, but helping transport kids to games, bringing nutritious snacks, or helping take care of the officials at the games is a great way to get involved without trying to be a coach in the stands. It also helps us get to know the people involved with our kids and we'll realize the majority of coaches and officials are well-intentioned people looking to have fun, too. We'll also realize they are people deserving respect, just like us.

Lastly, we always need to display good sportsmanship. As we've seen, especially at the younger age levels, the games are supposed to be more about fun than competition. Sportsmanship of fans should never be in question, because it should all be about encouraging our kids, remember? Nonetheless, it only takes one emotional outburst to give yourself, your team, your community, and most importantly your child, a black eye of embarrassment, and it takes longer than you'd like for that black eye to go away.

Your example will be contagious, so make it a good one.

Chapter 1

Getting Started

When I decided I wanted to do something to help kids in youth sports, it was because I had a burn to stop the nonsense I had been witnessing. Our oldest three boys were young enough to be right in the middle of some of the chaos, and it seemed like it was getting worse instead of better. What I was seeing made me uncomfortable and I wanted to make a positive difference.

I was motivated to do something to help the kids, but then I got some of the same feelings others might get when they want to *take on the world*, as doubts emerged.

Self-talk questions ran through my head: *Was what I was witnessing really that bad? Was the unsportsmanlike behavior only in our little corner of the world? Who was I to speak out about the behavior of parents at a basketball game? What gave me the right to be able to demand fans to stop yelling at officials? I didn't have a doctorate in psychology, so what gave me the right to think I knew something better than others? What would draw people to stop and listen to what I had to say anyway?*

I was getting tugged in two directions, but the stronger pull was coming from the end of wanting to do something positive – anything, but *would I be doing the right thing? How would I know if I was making a difference? Who was I really trying to help? Who in youth sports needed to clean up their act the most? Why did I have this knot in my stomach?*

Those questions and emotions flooded over me, just like they would in some shape or form for anyone wanting to step out and make a positive effect on society. When anyone wants to accuse people of improper behavior and try to foster change, they're probably going to feel *something*. I sure did.

Obviously, I got past the doubts, but how? Action. It's as simple as that. Put together a plan on how you want to make a difference, and then put it into action. That cured me as long as I kept working at it. When lulls in my opportunities to keep going presented themselves, invariably I'd have self-doubt creep in again. How bad did I want to make a difference? That's what I had to keep asking myself.

While creating my plan, I felt I needed to make a solid first step, something that would support my feelings. I decided I'd proceed with a basic survey and collect information that would either support what my gut was telling me needed to be done, or it would make it very clear to me I was chasing something that didn't exist. I wanted to be sure. Therefore, with the help of a former work colleague who had access to another gentleman in the statistical collection arena, we designed a survey for athletic directors. Wisconsin high school athletic directors would know who's to blame at sporting events, right? (Like I didn't already know.) Obviously, they're on the front lines each and every day, and they should be able to speak right out and point the finger at the culprit(s), so we could fix the craziness we read and see too often. I wanted the survey to be unbiased and professionally done, so the results would be clear and obvious, making it painfully clear what I felt I already knew.

After conducting the first survey, I enjoyed poring over the data. However, having some statistical background, I knew one set of data wouldn't be credible. Therefore, if one survey was good, two of them surely had to lead to the conclusive answer. Was it obvious I was stalling?

These studies were designed to determine the quality of sportsmanship at school sporting events and the prevalence of incidents of poor sportsmanship. The goal was to pinpoint problem areas, so that specific poor sportsmanship behaviors could be addressed and improved.

I didn't want to venture out on something that was a knee-jerk reaction, and what better way to justify a hunch than with statistical proof.

One question asked the respondents to identify three primary reasons for poor sportsmanship at school sporting events. The most frequent answer? Parents. *Tada!* Honestly, it wasn't a surprise to me parents were the main thorn in school leaders' sides, as well as the kids', and the officials'.

The surveys got me on my way, but I'd like to describe the experiences that put me over the edge to want to do something from the very beginning.

I have to admit, I'm as competitive as they come, and my own sportsmanship needs to be reeled in from time to time. In fact, I received a technical foul as a middle school basketball coach for yelling, "Holy moly!" at the officials. I didn't believe that I had actually cursed at the officials, but I disrespectfully raised my voice and didn't set a very good example for the kids I was trying to teach. I deserved the punishment because I had crossed the emotional line that so many people fail to recognize.

Dennis Freels of Keller, Texas, owner of GTTS LLC, an organizer of youth sports tournaments, uniform manufacturer, husband, and father, obviously has had experience working with other parents of children in sports. In fact, after dealing with parents quite a bit, he's formed some opinions, and laid them out when he told me, "I know it's a little embarrassing, but I've spent a lot of my time talking my son out of playing any sport, because I want him to understand it's (playing sports) not something you have to do in order to be successful. It's not something that life is all about. I was just so down on sports, because of the time I spent running youth tournaments, and the beating I took from some of the parents. They just turned me off so bad, I didn't want to have anything to do with youth sports. There are parents who can play so dirty, as they'll cause you grief, then they'll spin it, and then take it public. Even though I ran tournaments thirty-five weekends out of the year, I didn't want my family to participate in the very activity I worked. It's weird, but as a child, I felt I had to be in every sport. In fact, I had to have some event or competition coming up, just to get me through the week, or I felt inadequate."

In my own experiences as a sports parent leading up to launching my sportsmanship initiative, I observed what I viewed as bizarre behavior at sporting events. Because I strongly felt youth sports was (and still is) a great tool for teaching kids how to have fun, as well as other life lessons, the following events played a big role in steering me in the direction of trying to make a positive difference.

Three particular cases stick out in my head:

I witnessed one parent berating two basketball officials so extensively during an off-season tournament game, that the more-experienced official decided to take the initiative to stop the game and respectively go over to the stands and insist the father start acting as an adult, or he would be asked to leave. I also saw a mother choking her son at a youth wrestling tournament so he wouldn't cry because he lost his match. Include that with witnessing another father micromanaging his son's Gus Macker 3-on-3 Tournament team to the point where he stood with his toes right up to the out-of-bounds line as if those boys wouldn't be able to do anything without him dictating each and every move.

Sports aren't nearly as fun for kids when they must deal with parents like the ones I witnessed. These parents motivated me to try to make a difference through school and public presentations, television and radio appearances, magazine articles, newspaper columns, and now through this book.

As I recall the three aforementioned motivational scenarios, the situation where the veteran official confronted the loudmouth father excites me the most. Why? Because he followed through and made a positive difference not only in that man's life, but also in all the kids and people around that man who were adversely affected by his unacceptable behavior.

On that particular day, my family was visiting the tournament to watch our niece play. To get to the location where her game was being played, we had to pass through the gym where this incident took place. I remember pausing, watching, and being drawn into the whole situation as it unfolded with the official and the father. As a longtime high school football official, I could relate to this

referee, and I could feel myself getting upset by the loudmouth parent. To this day, I know the official did the right thing, and I was fired up by his courage. I also realized why I didn't pursue basketball officiating further – the fans were too close.

In the episode at the youth wrestling tournament, I couldn't say anything to the mother choking her son, because I was so taken aback by her actions it caused me to freeze in my tracks. I had never seen anything like that before. Was there anything I could have done? Certainly. Looking back, I wish I asked her the simple question, "Is everything all right, ma'am?" Reaching out with that simple question may have helped her realize others were noticing that what she was doing was inappropriate, even though she was afraid her son would embarrass her because he lost a simple wrestling match at a youth tournament. She was hurting him, and I was selfishly worried about how she would respond to me, instead of stepping forward and doing the right thing. If I had asked her that question, I believe I would have been putting myself in a position of caring for that family – of simply trying to help, which is exactly what that boy and mother needed at that moment. Similar to the case of the basketball official, this moment of seed planting required an act of courage, which I wasn't able to muster at the time.

Regarding the other father, this was a time in those boys' lives where weekend 3-on-3 hoops tournaments should be more about having fun than being micromanaged by someone trying to resurrect his own playing days as he attempted to live through his child and a few friends. He managed those boys so extensively, my only remaining question was whether he followed them into the bathroom and dictated their every move in there, too. Again, I didn't say anything in that situation, and now that young son must be in his early twenties. I missed my opportunity at the time it was taking place, probably thinking more of how the father would react, instead of focusing on trying to help.

I understand we won't be able to change everyone, but we need to keep planting positive seeds. If enough people call out these

unacceptable behaviors in a caring way and plant positive seeds of how sportsmanship should be conducted, our world will be a better place.

Sometimes no results will come, because the people might not understand what's being taught. For some, the positive effect might be followed with temporary excitement and then wither away. Others might hear what is said, but will worry about what others think, instead of making the necessary adjustments.

As seed planters, the results typically will never be known, and it shouldn't be our concern to know what will happen next. Sometimes the outcome might come full circle a year later, but most of the time the results of our positively planted seeds will be beneficial for someone else to enjoy. Let's be honest, not all of our seed-planting will be received positively. Nonetheless, if we want to make a positive difference, we must continue onward with examples reflective of our intent. Obviously, it will be a huge encouragement when we know some positive seeds take root and help others find their way. You can do the same thing. It just takes loving, caring action.