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THE 10 COMMANDMENTS
OF GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

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USA Hockey

Hockey in America

8
DAYS
A WEEK

When It Comes To Playing Games,
How Much Is Too Much?





*Words To
Live By As
You Get
Ready For
The Season*

By Dan Saferstein



A LOT OF YOUNG ATHLETES think of sportsmanship in terms of manners—kind of like remembering to use your napkin at the dinner table or thanking someone for passing the potatoes. But sportsmanship is really about something much greater than politeness. It's about having the courage to treat everyone we meet on our path with dignity and respect.

Youth hockey can be a great training ground for developing this type of courage, because everyone is eventually given the opportunity to experience both victory and defeat. One of the great lessons that sports teaches us is humility. When you don't place yourself above the opponents in victory, you won't place yourself beneath them in defeat.

Over the years I have worked with many talented athletes in my role as a sports psychologist. And during that time I have developed what I call the 10 Commandments of Sportsmanship, that I believe make every athlete successful on the field of play as well as off it.



1. Respect The Competition

Don't just respect the competition for their sake. Do it for your own benefit, because each time you treat your opponent with respect it strengthens your competitive spirit. Each time you treat your opponent with disrespect it weakens it. Poor sportsmanship advertises the fear you feel inside. It is not a sign of strength but a sign of weakness.

2. No Excuses

Work hard in practice and give your best effort and you won't need any excuses. You will have traded in your excuses for a heart-felt responsibility that will help you both on and off the ice. A big part of athletic maturity is realizing you can't get everything you want when you want

it. There is nothing to be gained by telling people why you didn't play better on a given day. You are better off learning from your disappointment and trying to do better the next time you take the ice.

3. Be A Good Teammate

In order to be a good teammate, you can't just think about what you want. You also have to think about what the team needs. A team is like a family. Everyone needs to work together. Everyone needs to make sacrifices. Everyone needs to value each other. The best way to judge the character of a team is by the way it treats its weakest player. Team chemistry is not a popularity contest. You can't be a leader on your team unless you're willing to care about all of your teammates.



By respecting your teammates and your opponents you are respecting the game.



4. Learn From Losses

It will be easier for you to be a good sport throughout the season if you feel there are lessons that can be learned from defeat. This doesn't mean that you have to like losing. It just means that you need to be humble enough to accept that you don't always deserve to win. The team that plays better on a given day deserves to be victorious. There is no shame in losing, no shame in learning from a loss. While winning is definitely more fun, that doesn't mean it will make you a better athlete. If you don't ever feel above defeat, then you will never feel beneath victory.

5. Give The Ref A Break

Complaining about the referee will never make you a better hockey player, no matter how badly you feel the game has been officiated. Referees make mistakes just as players make mistakes. If you can learn to forgive the ref when he or she makes a mistake, it might even help you to forgive yourself when you make a mistake. Often it is helpful to think of officiating in the same way as you think of the weather. There is no point getting angry at rain or wind. You are better off just putting on a jacket and trying to make the best of things.

6. Thank Your Parents

It is a great privilege to be able to play hockey. You should thank your parents for this opportunity. There are many kids your age whose families can't afford the costs involved in playing on a hockey team. There are many parents who aren't willing (or don't have jobs that allow them) to wake up early and drive their children to rinks across town. This

doesn't mean that you owe it to your parents to become a hockey star. It just means that you need to appreciate the privilege that's been given to you and let your parents know from time to time that you don't take it all for granted.

7. Control Your Temper

You won't be able to help your team from the penalty box, so you owe it to your teammates to control your temper and keep your head in the game. It is a myth that hating your opponent will make you a tougher competitor. Mental toughness isn't about anger; it is about confidence and concentration. The best way to retaliate against a team that is playing "dirty" is to keep your composure and play better hockey than they do.



You should never feel the need to tell people what a great hockey player you are. Your game should speak for itself.

8. Listen To Your Coaches

The only way to keep improving as a hockey player is to become a student of the game and value all of your coaches as teachers. There is something you can learn from every coach that will make you a better hockey player. The best coaches aren't always associated



Whether you win or lose, always remember that hockey is a game and the lessons you learn will stay with you for a lifetime.

with the most prestigious clubs, just as the best teachers aren't always associated with the most prestigious universities. Great coaches come in all sorts of shapes and disguises, which means that you need to be ready to receive hockey wisdom every time you lace up your skates.

9. Be Humble

You should never feel the need to tell people what a great hockey player you are. Your game should speak for itself. The problem with feeling above one player is that you set yourself up to feel beneath another. Arrogance always proves itself to be an athlete's worst quicksand. You don't get better by trying to impress others. Instead, you get better by quietly trying to develop your talent. If you are blessed with talent, you should feel grateful—the best spirit for receiving any gift.

10. Honor The Game

You cannot love the game of hockey without honoring it. What does it mean to honor something? It means you treat it with care and respect. It means you give of yourself and try to make it better. You don't have to have a lot of money to make something better. You just need to have a big athletic heart, and then take that big athletic heart of yours to practices and games and let everyone know how much you appreciate them being a part of your hockey life. It usually doesn't take much effort to let people know you appreciate them. Sometimes you can just smile or say, "Thank you." Sometime you can just reach out your hand and say, "Nice game." ☆

Dan Saferstein, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist in Ann Arbor, Mich. He is the author of STRENGTH IN YOU: A Student-Athlete's Guide to Competition and Life and WIN OR LOSE: A Guide to Sports Parenting. You can find out more about his books and practice at dansaferstein.com.