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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Honoring the Game Toolkit

Many people talk a good game regarding sportsmanship, but the test is how one acts when it feels like something important is at stake. Behavior speaks louder than words. Harp at officials, and your players will also. Stay calm and focused, and they will emulate you. Thus your first task is to ensure you have the capacity to be an effective role model and teacher of Honoring the Game.

Prepare Yourself With a Self-Control Routine

You can't serve as a role model or effective teacher of Honoring the Game to your players if you have trouble controlling yourself when things go wrong. The calmest coach can be aggravated by a bad call or a player miscue at a crucial juncture of a game. Develop a self-control routine you can call on when provoked. To maintain or regain your composure, do one or more of the following:

- Take a deep breath or two.
- Turn away from the field to refocus.
- Count backwards from 100.
- Use self-talk. ("I need to be a role model for my players. I can rise above this.")

Prepare Your Players (and Their Parents) to "Keep a Cool Head"

Encourage your players and their parents to create their own self-control routine. Then in a game, when the temptation to lose one's temper increases, you can use a simple gesture to remind them to keep a cool head. You can use exactly the same speech to your players and their parents:

"When things start to get a little tense and I see any of you beginning to lose your cool, I'll just pat the top of my head a couple of times to remind you to keep a cool head. And you should give me or any members of our team the same signal if it looks like one of us is starting to lose it. We want to keep a cool head no matter what happens, so let's agree to remind each other when we are under pressure."

The remaining tools in this chapter can help you make Honoring the Game come alive for your players and for their parents.

Tools to Help Athletes Honor the Game**1 | Model and Teach Honoring the Game**

Before your players can live up to the ROOTS of Honoring the Game, they will need to engage with the concept, again and again. One of the most important things you can do as a character-building coach is to introduce ROOTS early in the season and return to it throughout the season, ideally at least once every week.

Jot down some talking points to use with your players at an early practice and then return to them throughout the season. For example:

- I want us to Honor the Game so we can be proud of ourselves, win or lose.
- The acronym ROOTS will help us remember what we need to do.
- R – We obey the Rules even if we can get away with bending them, and even if our opponents don't.
- O – A worthy opponent helps us get better—we want to play fierce and friendly and never think of them as enemies.

- O – We respect officials even when bad calls go against us. I don't want you to confront officials during a game even if you are being treated unfairly.
- T – We don't do anything to embarrass our teammates, on or off the field.
- S for Self – Don't Honor the Game because I tell you to. Do it because you want to. We live up to our own standards even if our opponent doesn't.

Then periodically ask, "Who remembers what the R stands for? The O?" and so on.

2 | Seize Teachable Moments as They Arise

Use situations from your games or televised games as teachable moment conversation starters with players. If a high-profile coach or athlete has acted in a controversial way, ask your players if they think the behavior in question Honors the Game. Feel free to let them know what you think, but wait until they get their thoughts out. "I agree with Rashad. Taunting is not Honoring the Game nor is reacting violently when you are taunted. How can we make sure we don't respond if someone taunts us?"

Use positive examples as well. They aren't often highlighted in the media, but you will find many admirable actions by elite athletes you can use if you look for them.

3 | Make Your Point with Narrated Modeling

Just acting as a positive role model is not enough because people often misinterpret good behavior. Let's say the official has just made an obviously bad call. Because of your commitment to Honoring the Game, you remain silent. But your parents and players may think you don't know the rules or that you won't stick up for the team. So narrate what you are doing, both to your players and their parents so they won't miss the example you are setting for them.

"That was a bad call, but we Honor the Game on this team. And that means showing respect for officials even when they are wrong. So even though I was upset by the call, I waited until a time-out, and then I respectfully asked about it."

4 | Drill Honoring the Game in Practice

As coaches, we would never expect players to implement a new defense in a game without lots of practice. We practice it over and over until they get it. Do the same with Honoring the Game. Have them practice reacting the right way to tough situations before they confront them in a game. Here are some ways to do that:

- Officiate a scrimmage or competition in practice and make a flagrantly bad call. When the aggrieved player reacts in anger, use it as a teachable moment. "Is an official ever going to make a bad call in a game? (Yes.) Are you going to lose control in a game the way you did just now? (No.) Good!"
- Have players try to make a play or a shot while a teammate is distracting them verbally. (Make sure they understand not to talk trash or say anything mean-spirited.) This will increase their concentration, and you can use it to explain that you want them to keep their focus even if an opponent taunts them.
- Have players officiate a practice scrimmage. They will be amazed how difficult it is to get every call right, which will help them empathize with the officials.
- Invite officials to come to your practice and talk about how they do their job.

Tools to Help Parents to Honor the Game

Prevention is the best cure. Coaches who create a team culture based on Honoring the Game will have fewer sidelines problems among parents. Here's how to do that.

1 | Set expectations with a parent meeting.

Set the tone for the behavior you expect at a meeting with parents before competitions start. Distribute a letter explaining PCA principles (ELM Tree of Mastery, Filling the Emotional Tank, Honoring the Game). Review these principles with parents, and specifically ask them for their support to teach and model them to the players. Ask them to sign the PCA Parent Pledge,

which along with a sample Parent/Guardian Letter and a Parent/Guardian Meeting Agenda, are available on PCA's website (see page 70).

2 | Appoint a "Culture Keeper."

Appoint a parent as your team's Culture Keeper to help with sideline management. The ideal Culture Keeper is outgoing and able to remind parents to Honor the Game without further riling them. Or, rotate the job so that, over time, every parent has experience being a Culture Keeper. Check in with your Culture Keeper before each game to make sure they say hello to each parent and remind them to set a positive example by Honoring the Game. A Culture Keeper handout with detailed information on this role is available on PCA's website (see page 70).

3 | Cue parents before high-stakes games.

A playoff game is more likely to prompt bad behavior than an early-season game. Cue parents before high-stakes games, including reminding them of the signal for "Keeping a Cool Head" introduced earlier in this chapter. "Today's game is important, and we want to play our best. I want to remind you to Honor the Game today. If there is a bad call by the official, I want you to be silent – it's my job to address it. Your job is to fill players' E-Tanks and be role models who Honor the Game."

4 | Routinely introduce officials to your parents.

When you can, introduce officials to your parents. "This is Hector Garcia and Heather Stanley. They'll be calling the game today, and I know we all want to show them the respect they deserve. Let's thank them for being willing to do a tough job."

5 | Nip problems in the bud.

Sometimes the best prevention fails and you need to intervene. The earlier you respond to bad sideline behavior, the less likely it will get out of control. Like a match dropping in a forest, it's relatively easy to put out a fire at first, but it gets much harder once the blaze is going. Respond at the first

sign of misbehavior. "Okay, cool it. I need you to Honor the Game and not distract or embarrass our players." Sometimes just a look and "Keep-a-Cool-Head" gesture will do the job. Some guidelines for intervening:

- **Stay calm:** To paraphrase Rudyard Kipling: If you can keep your head while all around you others are losing theirs...you'll get better results. Getting upset at parents who are already upset can add fuel to the fire. Be firm but calm. And if you can't be totally calm, be as calm as you can be.
- **Respect personal space:** When a person's zone of personal space is entered without permission, it activates self-protection instincts and can easily lead to escalation. Avoid getting in someone's face when prompting him to behave. Stay at least arm's length away, and avoid any threatening manner.
- **Empathize:** Sometimes it helps to recognize the difficulty of what you are asking. "It's not easy to remain silent when the official makes a call that you don't like, but it's important that we're good role models."
- **Invoke a higher standard:** People tend to respond to a higher standard. Remind them of your team's commitment to Honor the Game. Reference the Parent Pledge (mentioned on page 49). "Remember the pledge you signed? You agreed to Honor the Game even when there is a bad call. That's what I need you to do right now."
- **Perfection not required:** You can stammer; the words can come out wrong; you can be abrupt. That's okay. You don't have to intervene perfectly. But you do need to intervene. Coaches have a responsibility to defend the positive sports culture we want for our children. You are the leader of the team, so let parents and fans know what is acceptable and what is not.
- **When all else fails:** Sometimes no matter how well you handle a situation, it still gets out of control. If you feel you have done all you can to get parents to behave without success, ask leaders of your organization to help resolve the situation.

Developing Winners in Sports and Life

THE POWER OF DOUBLE-GOAL COACHING



By Jim Thompson



Foreword by Phil Jackson



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BETTER PEOPLE

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For more Resources, visit: www.PCADevZone.org

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