



The [World Cup](#) may be over, but the significance of the competition goes far beyond the final goal.

Whether you call it football or soccer, the World Cup is more than just a fight for the sport's ultimate title -- it's proof-positive that good sportsmanship matters.

Even in the face of tremendous pressure to win, highly competitive teams from all corners of the globe can come together to compete and still be good sports.

Conversely, in the absence of bad sportsmanship, all of the attention given the games can stay where it matters, on the players' skills and the emotional highs and lows of a well-played game that must, in the end, have only one winner.

A few modern guidelines to keep the sportsmanship in your game:

As a player:

- Be on time. There's nothing worse than not having your fourth player while others are

queued up behind you on the first tee, or to be kept waiting by your tennis partner who overslept.

- Know the rules. Whether it's soccer or baseball, cycling or skiing, know the rules of the field, road, or slope. It's not rude to ask questions, but timing is everything!
- Remember why you're there, to have fun, and leave your temper at home. Emily Post said it best in 1945 when she wrote, "The quality which perhaps more than any other distinguishes true sportsmanship is absence of temper ... not temper brought along and held in check, but temper securely locked and left at home."
 - Leave coaching to the coach-it's their job; yours is to play your best.
 - Don't criticize referees or judges. Serena Williams' foul-mouthed reply to a line judge during a tennis match at the 2009 US Open cost her bad press and a hefty fine. You can discuss or calmly dispute decision, but don't indulge in personal insults or delay play.
 - Leave any animosity on the field. At the end of the game, acknowledge the opposition with a "good game" and a handshake. For most of us, we recreate to enjoy ourselves. Competition can be intense, but once it's over, it's over.

As a fan:

- Become familiar with the rules of the sport you're watching.
- When entering or leaving the stands, walk slowly with the crowd; don't push through it. Say "excuse me" as you squeeze past others in your row on your way to your seat.
- When a large group of spectators rises and blocks your view, go with the flow and stand. Sometimes someone gets wrapped up in the game and forgets to sit down. A friendly "Down in front!" works at a stadium, while "Excuse me, would you mind sitting so we can see? Thanks!" works for the individual in front of you.
- Watch your language. Obscenities in public are by nature offensive, no matter how charged the atmosphere. Sporting events are for kids, too; set an example for the fans of tomorrow.
- Cheer your heart out when your team is playing well, but don't cross the line into taunting or other obnoxious behavior.
- Booing is the universal sound of displeasure, but leave it at that. Angry, derisive, or obscene shouting is over the line.
- Stay under your drinking limit. Alcohol plus anonymity plus high emotions is a powerful cocktail, often the catalyst for boorish fan behavior.

A Coaching Word to Parents

When taunts rain down on the referee of a kids' game, a mother stalks onto the field to protest a move by the coach, or two fathers come to blows over perceived slights in a match, it puts a damper on the game for the rest of the spectators, the kids and the refs.

Whether it's your child's school league or the World Cup, point out the positive role models: the good sports who follow the rules and win or lose graciously.

This article was originally distributed by [Reuters](#) .