

# The JOURNAL

Official Publication of the  
National Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association of America, Inc.

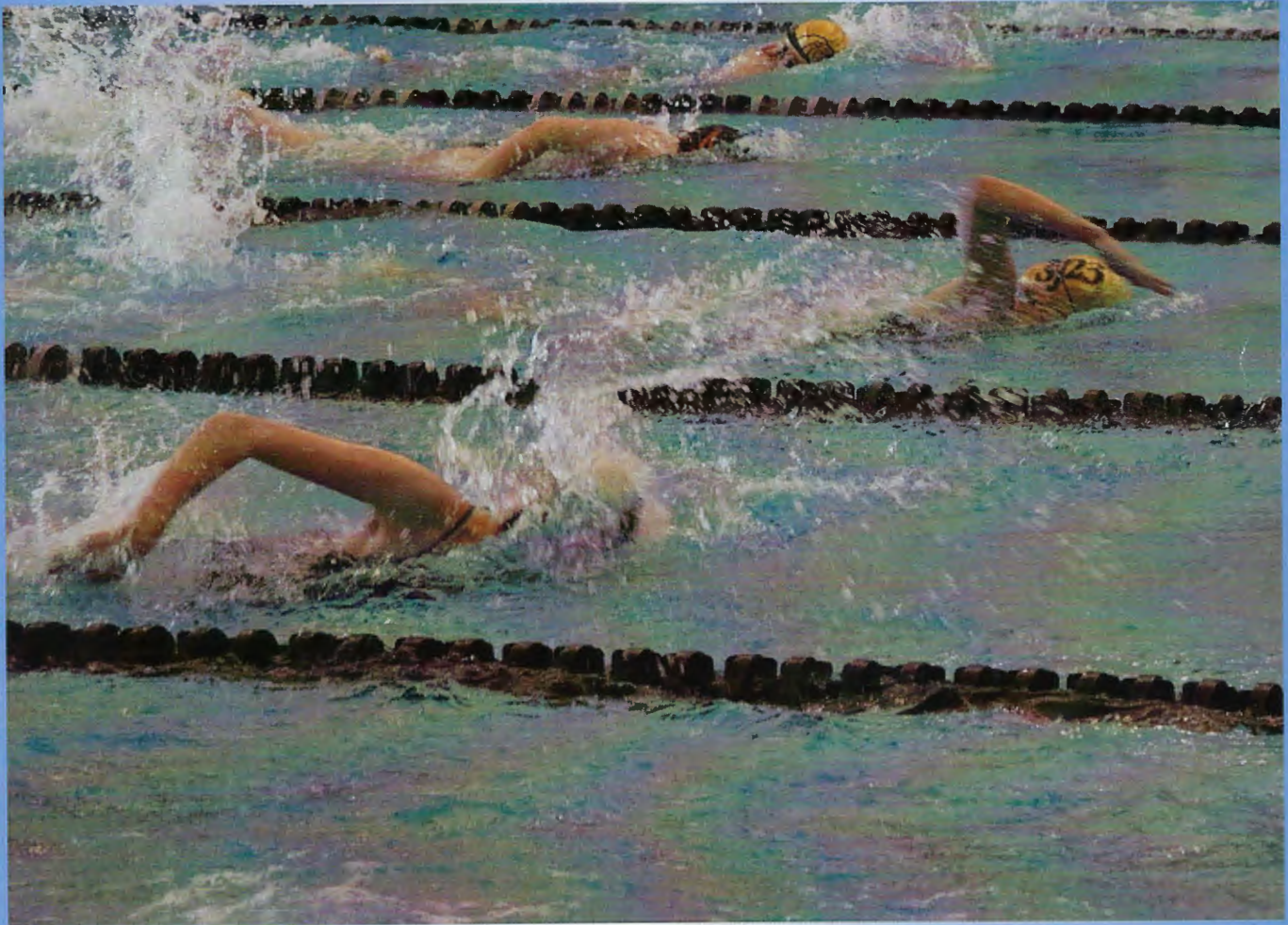


Photo by Flor Foreman

## In this Issue:

Strength Training with Charlie Hoolihan

An Ode to Kicking, Parts I/II, III/IV

How to Write Workouts - Part II

Sportsmanship and Life Lessons

Improve Your Leadership Skills

Nutrition - The Magic of Zinc

How Good Is ChatGPT?

The Daily Coach

Bits and Pieces

Brain Food

January - February 2024



## Sportsmanship and Life Lessons

Michael J. Stott

As an observer of modern day life and an athletic coach of modicum success I have been wondering where today's younger athletes get their ideas of sportsmanship. In search of an answer I polled a number of NISCA colleagues whose honest responses made me realize how far our culture has strayed from the foundation drilled into me as a grade schooler.

Francis L. Rathke was my physical education teacher at Harper Elementary School in Wilmette, Illinois. A varsity lacrosse player (class of 1950) at Springfield College he absorbed and dispensed old school values. He answered to "Coach" and did his utmost to school us in the non-negotiables of sportsmanship and fair play.

To say that Coach Rathke was all in on his golden rule principles would be a vast understatement. Best I can tell when he arrived in Wilmette (circa 1951) he was given responsibility to teach physical education at three elementary schools (Logan, Highcrest and Harper). In short order he established an intramural program in five sports at each for boys in fifth and sixth grades. While he taught "gym" to both genders the only competitive activity open to girls was track at annual field days.

My father traveled extensively so he was in large part an absentee parent. Coach Rathke, however, was available five days a week. Listening to him share homilies and life lessons was like listening to God. I became a true believer in all the virtues clean living and fair play offered. By the time I got to New Trier Township High School and Dave Robertson's mantra of "Championship Living" I was in for the long haul.

Coach Rathke didn't do anything half way. To buttress his ideologies he wrote recaps each week of EVERY after school game played (touch football, soccer, basketball, volleyball, softball) highlighting results, great plays and offering hints to team captains on what their teams might do to get better.

Always included in his weekly missives was a closing paragraph on some iteration of sportsmanship intended for both athletes and parents. Coach Rathke wrote, mimeographed and distributed his musings in entertaining prose in the hopes that we might adopt his ardent beliefs. Some of the topics from the 1952-1953 school year include: The importance of Listening, of Being Honest, Keeping Score, Being Respectful to Teammates and Referees, Doing It the Right Way, Loyalty to Team and Not Giving Up, Facing the Music, Unsportsmanlike Conduct, Temptation, Running Up the Score, Why Rules, Responsibility of Team Captains, Selfishness, Value of Multiple Sport Participation and much, much more. Clearly he was giving us values to live by.

He was exceptionally thorough in laying out program details to parents and players: the rules of engagement for each sport and his expectations of players – and disciplinary consequences for misbehavior in class, on the playground and in games. Coach was no nonsense in that regard – and a no exceptions enforcer.

In time, as his message took hold, player suspensions and team forfeits ground to a halt.

Those values have remained with me through 20 seasons of soccer coaching and 45 years of swim coaching and administration. To my dismay I find these virtues in direct conflict with behaviors I now see displayed in many facets of modern culture (certain professional sports, entertainment, politics, etc.). It troubles me that these days bad behavior (especially athletes and politicians, etc.) is publicized, celebrated and deemed acceptable.

"Kids get their ideas from what they see," says Andrew Stanley athletic director at The Collegiate School in Richmond, Virginia. "Sure social media has something to do with it, but the volume of information people are trying to process is way too much to really internalize. Bad behavior appears to be OK for professional athletes – kids see their idols ranting and raving on TV with little to no ramification too often for it not to impact how they think and act."

### Then and Now

"There are things in society now that five, ten, twenty years ago weren't acceptable. And we're accepting them without asking whether we should. We've become numb to everything, including sportsmanship, something that is really hard to teach kids. I believe we have to counteract this one kid at a time," says Stanley.

The question then becomes how does one reverse the trend or instill old school values to reach new generations? "We have talked to our captains, team leaders and coaches about the importance of detaching from emotion in the moment," says Stanley. His school, and others, including the state's athletic associations have made a concerted outreach to schools and parents to rein in the emotion to improve sportsmanship and stop the exodus of officials due to poor behavior at competition sites.

### Other Voices

Ruth Ann Ahnen is in her 12th season as head girls coach at Arrowhead High School. Her teams win a lot. Third at this year's state meet, her Warhawks were D-I Wisconsin champs in 2022, a team that featured national junior teamer Campbell Stoll (Texas) and Hailey Tierney (Wisconsin).

"My belief is that athletes get their sense of sportsmanship from parents/family, coaches, culture, social media/who they follow and beliefs. I don't think that has changed, but I do believe that the input in each level has changed," says Ahnen. "As a coach it is very important to teach it, define it, give opportunities to live it and encourage it. Creating a culture and legacy of good sportsmanship is also important. Lead by example! The saying, what gets celebrated, gets repeated, is gold," she says.

NISCA Outstanding Service Award winners Ron and Rich Blanc of



Santa Margarita High School, not far from Mission Viejo, share Ahnen's sentiment. The brothers produce perennial winners in NISCA's National Dual Meet rankings and this year their boy's and girl's squads won both California's CIF crowns. Blanc teams are also known for sportsmanship.

"Since I started coaching, I noticed that young athletes are constantly looking up to adult authority figures like coaches for appropriate ways to behave," says Ron Blanc. "Naturally, coaches then have an integral impact on shaping the sportsmanship attitudes of their athletes. We, as coaches, need to model good sportsmanship and share with the kids what good that is."

Adam Kennedy is executive director of SwimRVA. A former head coach at the University of the Pacific and he was also an assistant at Colgate and the Naval Academy. As someone who stages age group, high school, college and professional meets at his facility's 50 meter pool (used for the 2008 Olympic Trials) he sees sportsmanship (the good, the bad and the ugly) up close and personally. Speaking positively he notes "there is a lot of great work being done around gratitude and the power it holds. At the University of Virginia Todd DeSorbo and basketball coach Tony Bennett talk about the importance of how you treat people. I think that makes a huge difference in how athletes perform."

Gratitude is one of the guiding forces in the GEMS philosophy of Seton School's (Manassas, Va.) head coach Jim Koehr. He directs his 123 member team through a philosophy of Gratitude, Excellence, Meekness and Sacrifice. In his 20 years as coach Seton has won 10 Virginia Interdependent School Athletic Association D-II state championships. "I burn a lot of energy on teaching kids to compete in a way that makes our competitors better," says Koehr. "Meekness is about directing your passions toward good, and especially toward the good of others. In other words, sportsmanship. Kids get it (or don't) from the example of their parents first, their coaches second and the culture of their school or community third," he says.

### **In the Beginning**

Aside from blowing bubbles with their parents most kids' first experience with organized swimming starts with a coach in summer league. And for many, even if they don't pursue competitive aquatics beyond summer league or high school, a swim coach can have a lifelong influence.

Mike Peters and Bucka Watson are best of friends and fierce rivals in Richmond, Virginia's James River Aquatic Club summer league and the Virginia Prep League/League of Independent Schools. Of the past 20 available (minus 2021 years COVID) boys and girls state championships their teams have finished first, second and third six times each. In summer league one of their teams has won every championship going back to 2008.

Peters admits to not being a good sport growing up. Matt Kredich at Brown helped him find religion in that regard and it is a value he inculcates regularly into his athletes today. "Sportsmanship is an every time thing; you live it -- and summer league is a great place to teach it because formative lives

are involved.

"With the younger kids you are doing the window dressing stuff so you can teach them what it means. Most of my 5 and 6 year olds have no idea why we shake hands," says Peters.

"They don't understand what they are doing; they've just been told to do it. When they are ready we extend it out to the next level. I expect 6's and 7's to have lapses in judgment and sportsmanship. That's totally normal and that's when you have to address it. For 7 and 8's we talk about how you talk behind the blocks to someone else; 9's and 10's we talk about how you handle it when someone is not saying nice things at the clerk of course; 11 and 12's we discuss how you comport yourself on deck. As kids get older you teach them the next step," he says.

"A key is trying to get kids to accept results and respecting the sport of it. Sometimes things go your way and sometimes they don't." The same applies to a coach he notes. "Coaches are held to a higher standard. In the heat of battle you have to control yourself no matter how unfair you think the situation is or upset you are. I can say the right thing 100 times, but if I do the wrong thing one time it negates all I've said before and the message to the kids becomes 'if you are angry; you can act that way.'"

Says Watson, "When we race in summer league practice we spend 10 minutes a day with 8 and unders and 9 and 10's making them stay in the pool and shake hands. We tell them how to do it and why we do it rather than just relying on moral compass.

"I believe true sportsmanship has to come from within. The idealist in me hopes it comes from the heart. In a lot of cases it's just person by person. It's a hard concept to teach, model and enforce. As coaches there is only so much we can do if they are not getting that modeled behavior at home or elsewhere."

### **A Way of Life**

At Orinda Aquatics just eight miles east of Cal Berkeley, brothers Ron and Don Heidary have crafted a culture which embodies the essence and spirit of sportsmanship. They see it not as an imperative for a mission statement but an embraceable lifestyle. The two have lectured internationally on the subject for more than three decades and have ingrained the attendant values into their club team as well as their Miramonte and Campolindo High School squads.

The goal is to create athletes, i.e. sportsmen and women who live a code of sportsmanship. "And the biggest driver of sportsman is culture and/or tradition, either through a strong history with elevated behavioral standards and protocols, or strong leadership and (earned) respect at the coaching level," says Don Heidary. "Sportsmanship, and the ultimate pursuit of leadership, is really a by-product of general character and integrity. And often, the lynchpin of both is leadership from team captains and upper classmen.

"To this end, we have aggressively, and simultaneously, pursued anchoring concepts that solidify not only team cultures



and sportsmanship, but the trajectory of each athlete's life. These are work ethic (embrace the process), integrity (do the right thing), humility (no ego), compassion (care for others), selflessness (be a good, or great, teammate), and a positive attitude (glass as half full – always)," he says.

Coaches agree that in reality, by the time youngsters reach 14 or 15 years of age, their core values become much harder to change. "Solely chasing sportsmanship, in a teenage world, is a tenuous and unpredictable endeavor at best.

However, building a culture anchored in life and athletic virtues, with strong leadership at every level, allows sportsmanship to evolve seemingly effortlessly, and ultimately become a recognized staple of your program," says Heidary.

Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach whose Collegiate School (Richmond, Va.) teams won nine state high school championships in 15 years. A member of that school's Athletic Hall of Fame, he is also a recipient of NISCA's Outstanding Service Award.

#### **A Tale of Two Teams (Miramonte High School vs....)**

"Time was we had a dual meet with a local rival team, i.e., same community and same socioeconomic, academic, success trajectory, etc., but vastly different sportsmanship cultures.

"We arrived for warm-up (an away meet for us) and the opposing team's coaches were setting up the pool, not the athletes, because they were not there yet, and should have been. During the meet, our swimmers who were not competing cheered (team policy and team culture). Their swimmers who were not competing were... tanning. At the diving break, during their graduating senior recognitions, our swimmers gathered and applauded each one. Theirs continued to tan. Our swimmers were in team attire, to a person, and theirs were in... whatever they wanted. At the end of the meet (400 free relay), their swimmers who were not competing in the final event were... gone. As their parents began the take-down process (lane lines, tables, etc.), our swimmers, on their own, began to help.

"So where did sportsmanship come from, and where did it go? Both teams have the same mission statements and signed the same athlete behavior contracts. Both groups had every advantage - in sports and in life, and every opportunity to lead, or at a minimum, be sportsmanlike."

Don Heidary. WSCA Board of Directors

#### **A Rathke Homily On Sportsmanship**

*"Athletes, this week I would like to discuss something that happened several days ago and that is definitely a part of the two words 'good sportsmanship.' Although this occurrence did not happen during our after-school sports program, I feel it is still an important part of our growing into a good sport.*

*"Here's what happened and see if you agree or disagree!!! Last week at one of the schools, I was invited to witness a play on safety. While watching this play, I had the misfortune to notice some students 'booing' at remarks made by the players, jumping up and down in their seats and exaggerating or overdoing their laughing. Are these actions by students to be accepted as good behavior? I know everybody knows how to conduct himself in a group situation, but do we do it???"*

*After witnessing this type of action by some of you, I can only conclude that I have failed to reach many of you in my sportsmanship write-ups. I thought I was teaching you good sportsmanship, but I was wrong. A good sport would NEVER act that way in a group or audience situation. Good sportsmanship does not only pertain to athletic contests, but should be practiced at all times, regardless of the time, place, and persons involved.*

*Remember the movie I showed you on good sportsmanship?? In this film, they showed you many different places where sportsmanship could be demonstrated, such as, in the classroom, on the way to school, and at home. How about it, Athletes, am I wrong or am I right? Is this a part of good sportsmanship or isn't it? Think about it – because it is really something to think about!!!!"*

– April 30, 1952

