

Honoring the Game

Editor's note: This article is the second in a series regarding Little League's partnership with Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA).



Little League and PCA believe the time has come for a more powerful vocabulary than simply "Be a good sport!" Rather, we advocate the pro-active "Honor the Game!"

Honoring the Game is an idea to energize and motivate everyone in our baseball and softball communities. It encourages us to set, and live up to, high standards even during times when getting caught up in the heat of the moment is so easy to do.

Last month we introduced the concept of the Little League Double-Goal Coach, who strives to win and has a second (more important!) goal of using sports to teach positive life lessons. "Little League Double-Goal Coach develop winning attitudes for today's youth and tomorrow's leaders," says St. Louis Cardinals manager and five-time Manager of the Year, Tony La Russa.

Note: Visit the Little League Double-Goal Coach Course [here](#).

This month, we will discuss a key Double-Goal Coach philosophy, and the first of the three core principles of Positive Coaching.

Honoring the Game: the ROOTS of Positive Competition

The concept of "Honoring the Game" describes the behavior we, at Little League, want to model. To help our ball players, coaches, managers and parents remember the concept, we say that Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTS of positive competition, where ROOTS is the acronym for Respecting:

Rules

Honoring the Game means we refuse to bend the rules to win a game. Getting away with illegal behavior, just because the umpires' views are blocked, doesn't change the fact that it is against the rules of the game. (Compare this to the classroom – cheating when the teacher is not looking, is still cheating.)

Honoring the Game includes the letter and the spirit of our Little League rules. For example, you are a base runner and the batter hits a pop fly towards your part of the field. You see multiple fielders converge under the pop fly and as it comes down, you shout, "I got it! I got it! My ball!" in an attempt to intentionally interfere with the play.

Another example that comes to mind is a recent World Series game in which a player knocked the ball from the Red Sox first baseman and claimed that the incident was nothing more than a result of his running motion. (The umpires ultimately ruled against the runner on this call.)

If you win by ignoring or violating the rules, of what value is your victory?

Opponents

Without opponents, competitive sports make no sense. We aren't challenged to do our best unless we have a worthy opponent, one who challenges us to do our best. Little League and PCA believe that a worthy opponent is a gift and should be treated with respect.

A phrase that sums up how sports competitors should treat each other is "Fierce and Friendly." We savor fierce competition when the game is on and friendly relations when the play is over and in between innings.

Officials

Honoring the Game means you respect the umpires, even when you disagree. Referees have been selected and trained to enforce rules to keep the ball game from becoming chaotic. Umpires, like athletes, coaches, managers and parents, are not perfect and make mistakes. However, there is no excuse for treating officials with disrespect when you disagree with them. Little League leaders on the field, from managers to the umpires, are trying to make the game safe, fun and fair for all competitors.

Our ability to recruit and retain umpires over the course of the season, much less recruit the next generation of referees, depends upon our ability to respect officials even when we disagree!

Teammates

To truly Honor the Game, athletes must be willing to make a commitment to one's teammates to never do anything, on or off the field, that would embarrass them or compromise their efforts to be the best they can be. Just as the strongest chain is only as strong as its weakest link, a team's morale, reputation and success are dependent upon the standards of conduct, which any single player holds himself or herself to. For example, if just one player on your team has a habit of questioning the home plate umpire's calls, this could define the reputation of the entire team.

Self

A question we hear frequently from coaches, is "How can I expect my players to set high standards and Honor the Game when our opponents do not?" At Little League we want everyone to Honor the Game no matter what other teams, coaches or fans do. We want you to be the kind of team and player that Honors the Game even when others do not. You have respect for yourself and would never do anything to dishonor the game.

Athletes, coaches, managers and fans who Honor the Game, want to win and compete fiercely to win, but will only strive to win within an ethical context of baseball or softball. Little League is intent on helping all athletes become a person that his or her team, school and family can be proud of.

To learn more about the Little League-PCA Partnership, or bringing the benefits of Positive Coaching to your league, visit <http://www.PositiveCoach.org/LittleLeague>.