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SECTION: SPORTS

HEADLINE: Kids & sports; Pop Warner players share their thoughts on what sports mean to them

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Dec. 9--The innocence of sports has been eroding throughout the modern era for some time but this year it hit a new low.

In the span of 11 months, kids learned their favorite quarterback kills dogs, that maybe their generation's home run king got some supplemental help with some of his homers, one of the greatest Olympic sprinters cried crocodile tears about cheating and was proved a liar, a professional wrestler killed his family, then tragically himself, and now their sports heroes can die in the most ill-timed, senseless fashion.

If you don't think kids pay attention, think again.

We talked to a group of local sixth-graders who play for the Lake Brantley Patriots Pop Warner team. On Friday, the Patriots won their first PeeWee Super Bowl title in the organization's 24-year history.

They watch SportsCenter. They watch their coaches. They watch their parents. They watch their local high school heroes.

But today, we are watching them.

And we wanted to know through the eyes of a sixth-grader exactly what sports means to them.

Why do you play sports?

Logan Warmoth: To have fun and stay healthy.

Chase Haecker: I play sports to become a better person and stay off drugs.

Justin Wagner: It is fun, and I stay fit.

Chris De La Rosa: I play sports to stay fit and because it can be fun.

Mike Frizzell: Sports keeps me strong, and they are fun.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

LW: A pro baseball player or football player.

CH: A professional football player.

JW: Site developer like my dad, architect, or a pro football player.

CR: I either want to be an architect or an NFL player.

MF: A veterinarian or an NFL football player.

Who is your favorite athlete and why?

LW: LaDainian Tomlinson.

CH: Tim Tebow because he is a missionary and plays for Florida.

JW: Tim Tebow. I like how he runs.

CR: Reggie Bush. He is really fast and a humble person.

MF: LaDainian Tomlinson. He's very good at running.

Who is the biggest sports star?

LW: Tiger Woods.

CH: Tim Tebow because he's going to win the Heisman.

JW: Tiger Woods.

CR: Tiger Woods.

MF: Tim Tebow. He runs over anyone, and he has more rushing touchdowns than any other running back in college.

What is the first thing you think about when you hear 'Michael Vick?'

LW: Being a dog killer, jail.

CH: Criminal and dog hater and is a jerk.

JW: Dog killer, convict, jerk.

CR: A criminal. It doesn't matter if you're great at sports. I think what he did was wrong.

MF: Dog killer.

Do you think he should play football again?

LW: No.

CH: No, he is a disgrace to everyone in the National Football League.

JW: No, he had everything and still made the bad choice.

CR: No, he doesn't deserve to.

MF: No, he's a disgrace to football and all athletes.

Is school important for an athlete?

LW: Yes, because in high school you have to have a good GPA and you get a good scholarship.

CH: Yes, so you're not clueless on the field.

JW: Yes, without school, you can't go to college.

CR: Yes, if you don't do good in school, you can't play, and you need a backup.

MF: Yes, the smarter you are, the better you are on the field.

Who is your least favorite athlete?

LW: Michael Vick because he kills dogs.

CH: Terrell Owens. He is a jerk, and he is not mannerful

JW: Terrell Owens. He is a showboat.

CR: T.O., he is a jerk.

MF: Mike Vick, he killed dogs, which are my favorite animals.

What does it mean to cheat in sports?

LW: You take steroids.

CH: To not follow rules that have been established.

JW: To only want to win and not have fun.

CR: To take performance-enhancing drugs or to bet on a game.

MF: Cheating just makes you feel bad for the rest of your life.

What does it take to be a successful athlete?

LW: You have to have good sportsmanship.

CH: Good grades and moral support.

JW: Do good in school and practice and exercise.

CR: You have to be a team player, get good grades and play your hardest.

MF: Smarts, toughness, strength.

What does it mean to have character in sports?

LW: To not celebrate.

CH: To have sportsmanship.

JW: To look good and play good.

CR: Either you have a good one or a bad one.

MF: No answer.

Which athlete has the best character?

LW: Marvin Harrison.

CH: Tim Tebow, Brett Favre and Peyton Manning.

JW: Tim Tebow. He does not cheat and is polite in public.

CR: Marvin Harrison. He never says anything bad.

MF: Tim Tebow.

Would you transfer to another school if you thought the athletic team was bad?

LW: No, because you have to be committed to that team.

CH: No, you have to be committed to that team.

JW: No.

CR: No, I would want to be on the best team I could be on.

MF: No.

What do you know about Barry Bonds?

LW: He used to be skinny and fast, and now he [allegedly] takes steroids and is big and slow.

CH: He is a [alleged] steroid player and cheated to break a record.

JW: He [allegedly] takes drugs.

CR: That some people think he took steroids and that he broke the all-time home-run record.

MF: He is a [alleged] steroid-taking jerk.

Should Bonds be in the baseball hall of fame?

LW: Yes, because he broke the record even though he took steroids.

CH: No, he cheated.

JW: No, he cheated.

CR: If it is proved that he didn't take steroids, then yes.

MF: No, all of his home runs should be taken away.

Do professional athletes have fun playing sports?

LW: Yes, because if they are pretty old and they are still playing, that means they like it a lot.

CH: If you're 12-0, you do, but if you're 0-12, you don't.

JW: I think some do it for the money.

CR: Some do, and some do it for the money.

MF: Most athletes do because if they didn't, they wouldn't be playing.

What's the most important aspect of sport?

(Rank, with one being the most important)

LW: 1. Having fun; 2. Winning; 3. Exercise; 4. Being popular; 5. Making friends.

CH: 1. Having fun; 2. Making friends; 3. Exercise; 4. Winning; 5. Being popular.

JW: 1. Having fun; 2. Making friends; 3. Winning; 4. Exercise; 5. Being popular.

CR: 1. Having fun; 2. Making friends; 3. Exercise; 4. Winning; 5. Being popular.

MF: 1. Exercise; 2. Having fun; 3. Winning; 4. Making friends; 5. Being popular.

Rank these important people:

LW: 1. Your parents; 2. President of the United States; 3. Your favorite athlete; 4. A police officer; 5. Your teacher.

CH: 1. Your parents; 2. Your favorite athlete; 3. President of the United States; 4.

Your teacher; 5. A police officer.

JW: 1. Your parents; 2. A police officer; 3. Your favorite athlete; 4. President of the United States; 5. Your teacher.

CR: 1. Your parents; 2. President of the United States; 3. A police officer; 4. Your teacher; 5. Your favorite athlete.

MF: 1. President of the United States; 2. Your parents; 3. A police officer; 4. Your teacher; 5. Your favorite athlete.

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