



Inspiring teachers, coaches, and parents in building up young people.

Your Paid Admission To This Event Challenges You To...

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This is a 4-part challenge for anyone—but particularly geared toward parents— watching a youth or high school sporting event.

I'll quickly summarize the event that gave rise to the challenge. I was watching my son at a 4th grade basketball tournament this past weekend—a game in which my son's team was outmatched. His team was a collection of kids who assembled from a community league to play in a tournament; the other team—judging by their supporters and coach—were gearing up for the NCAA tournament. The opposing coach paced feverishly despite a more-than-comfortable lead throughout the game, riding the officials with every possession: “Body checks are legal, now?” “You can't let that go!” “He just ran over my guy twice now!” The fans

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mirrored the coach's demeanor. They could not understand why the 11th player on the 11-kid squad that was down 14 got away with shuffling his feet with just under 2:00 left in the game. They questioned the refs eyesight (Are people still really using this line?) and his awareness of what a travel is. Unfortunately, this is now what we're calling normal—part of the culture. My dad, from another time and culture, came to see his grandson play. (A quick bio: My dad has played in, coached, and officiated more games than the anyone in the gym—and it's not even close.) The senseless whining from the opposing fans was enough to cause him to relocate and offer up two qualifications for complaining to officials:

1. If you are yelling at an official, you must be a certified official of that sport.
2. If you are not, you must stick an entire sock in your mouth and then say what you'd like.

Enough of the toxic. Here are four things I hope you'll do at the next event that you attend. And the one after that. And I hope the people around you adopt your behavior. And I hope this becomes the new normal instead of the one above.

Challenge 1: Talk with a parent from the opposing team. The opponent becomes incredibly more human when this is done. You're much less likely to see the foul committed by some reckless heathen whose sole mission is to inflict bodily harm and more likely to see the foul as a misguided attempt to get the ball, committed by a kid who has a Gatorade mustache and ate a record seventeen orange slices after their last game—or so you found out by having an actual conversation with another parent.

Challenge 2: Compliment the other team. A good play is a good play. A kid is a kid. And praise feels good—especially when it's not expected. "Good hustle." "Great pass." Wow—nice shot, #24." Say it for your team—not just your kid. But give it a try for the other team too. And if you're in it for the social experiment angle, see if the other team's fans reciprocate.

Challenge 3: Tell the ref he made a good call. Some sports are more conducive to this than others: the ice is separated by glass in hockey; the football official is quite a distance away from the stands; the MLB replay control center is in New York, allegedly. But the basketball official is nearly in fans' laps as he hands the ball to the in-bounds passer. They can hear everything, and I am continually amazed at the license that fans take to say things they would rarely say to another human being. So while you have the ear of the official, let him or her know it was a good call. When they're leaving the gym, the field, the court (rarely are they being whisked away to their limo; they are more than likely getting into their



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"The best time to start was yesterday. The next best time is now." - Unknown

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Buick), give them a quick compliment—no grand production. Just be the right kind of human.

Challenge 4: Seek out the unsung. Most people notice the kid who scored a hat trick, went for 23 points and 11 rebounds, or hit the walk-off. They should and will get a five, an “attagirl,” or a headline. But let’s be equally good at seeking and finding that which doesn’t get highlighted. Here are some starting questions: Who played great defense? Who passionately supported their teammates from the sidelines? Whose play could be described as “unselfish”? Who opened the gym or mopped the floor? Tell him; tell her. Do you think they’ll appreciate their role being noticed?

What a different place the sports arena could be if this became normal. Why can’t it be?

-Dan Schall

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Posted on Sunday, February 21, 2016

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6 thoughts on “Your Paid Admission To This Event Challenges You To...”*Dave Schmidt* says:
February 21, 2016 at 8:17 pm[Reply](#)

As a long time coach, current official, and parent thank you for this post. During my time in those 3 roles I know this for certain the vast majority of coaches, officials, and athletes devote a great deal of time to being the best they can be and all contests are much better when we take the time to recognize their effort and passion rather than their occasional mistake.

*Daniel Schall* says:
February 22, 2016 at 11:34 pm[Reply](#)

Dave—thanks for reading and commenting. You’re exactly right regarding everyone’s desire to be the best they can be...this often gets lost in the excitement and intensity of events. Your experience gives you a unique perspective on any sporting event.

*Bill Petulla* says:
February 22, 2016 at 8:36 am[Reply](#)

Fantastic article Dan. Fourth grade hoops? I like how your article moves away from the fire-and-brimstone coach pacing the sidelines and the fans who follow his lead to giving some practical tips about to ease this tension in the stands.

*Daniel Schall* says:
February 22, 2016 at 11:36 pm[Reply](#)

Bill, I failed to mention that this gymnasium—the level of competition, the crowd’s intensity—had very much the same feel of Phog Allen Fieldhouse. In March.

*Karla* says:
February 26, 2016 at 11:12 am[Reply](#)

Hear, Hear. Thank you for addressing what has become one of the major societal issues of our time.. a lack of respect and tolerance of others' perspectives. From "sports fan" rage to "road" rage to "political" rage, and so on, the anger and horrible things people say over "small stuff" is downright frightening. Sports fans are composed of people from all walks of life: business people, clergy, teachers, fireman, policemen, etc. Every adult in those stands is a potential role model for our children. Do we really want to raise a generation that focuses on the negative and thinks it's okay to verbally abuse a person if you happen to disagree with them? I certainly hope not! Here's to your 4 Challenges going viral on a National scale!!!!



Mike Schall says:
February 26, 2016 at 11:24 am

[Reply](#)

Thanks for reading Karla. We are putting the 4 Challenges into action. Our volleyball club is hosting a tournament this Saturday and we are handing out postcards with the four challenges on it. I'm curious to see how it affects the atmosphere in the gym.