

Positive Coaching Alliance

Below is an excerpt from the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), an organization committed to the advancement of youth sports. PCA was established at Stanford University in 1998. PCA believes that winning is a goal in youth sports but that there is a second, more important goal of using sports to teach life lessons through positive coaching.

If Honoring the Game is to become the youth sports standard, it needs a clear definition. At PCA, we say that Honoring the Game goes to the "ROOTS" of positive play. Each letter in ROOTS stands for an important part of the game that we must respect. The R stands for Rules. The first O is for Opponents. The next O is for Officials. T is for Teammates, and the S is for Self.

R is for Rules

Rules allow us to keep the game fair. If we win by ignoring or violating the rules, what is the value of our victory? PCA believes that honoring the letter AND the spirit of the rule is important.

O is for Opponents

Without an opponent, there would be no competition. Rather than demeaning a strong opponent, we need to honor strong opponents because they challenge us to do our best. Athletes can be both fierce and friendly during the same competition (in one moment giving everything to get to a loose ball, and in the next moment helping an opponent up). Coaches showing respect for opposing coaches and players sets the tone for the rest of the team.

O is for Officials

Respecting officials, even when we disagree with their calls, may be the toughest part of Honoring the Game. We must remember that officials are not perfect (just like coaches, athletes and parents!). Take time to think about how to best approach an official when you want to discuss a call. What strategies do you have to keep yourself in control when you start to get upset with officials' calls? We must remember that the loss of officials (and finding enough in the first place) is a major problem in most youth sports organizations, and we can confront this problem by consistently respecting officials.

T is for Teammates

It's easy for young athletes to think solely about their own performance, but we want athletes to realize that being part of a team requires thinking about and respecting one's teammates. This respect needs to carry beyond the field/gym/track/pool into the classroom and social settings. Athletes need to be reminded that their conduct away from practices and games will reflect back on their teammates and the league, club, or school.

S is for Self

Athletes should be encouraged to live up to their own highest personal standard of Honoring the Game, even when their opponents are not. Athletes' respect for themselves and their own standards must come first.

Having this definition of Honoring the Game (HTG) is a start. To make Honoring the Game the youth sports standard, coaches, leaders, and parents need to discuss HTG with their athletes. Coaches need to practice it with their athletes (i.e. have players officiate at practice). And perhaps most importantly, all adults in the youth sports setting (coaches, leaders, parents, officials, and fans) need to model it. If these adults Honor the Game, the athletes will too.

The Double-Goal Coach PCA believes all youth sport coaches should be "Double-Goal" Coaches. A win-at-all-cost coach has only one goal: to win. He or she is concerned primarily with teaching skills and developing strategy designed to win games. A Positive Coach is a "Double-Goal Coach" who wants to win, *AND* has a second goal: to help players develop positive character traits, so they can be successful in life. Winning is important, but the second goal, helping players learn "life lessons," is more important. A Positive Coach puts players first.

Positive Coach Mental Model There are three major elements to the "job description" of a Positive Coach. A Positive Coach:

1. Redefines "Winner"
2. Fills Players' Emotional Tanks
3. Honors the Game

1. Redefines "Winner"

A Positive Coach helps players redefine what it means to be a winner through a mastery, rather than a scoreboard, orientation. He sees victory as a by-product of the pursuit of excellence. He focuses on effort rather than outcome and on learning rather than comparison to others. He recognizes that mistakes are an important and inevitable part of learning and fosters an environment in which players don't fear making mistakes. While not ignoring the teaching opportunities that mistakes present, he teaches players that a key to success is how one responds to mistakes. He sets standards of continuous improvement for himself and his players. He encourages his players, whatever their level of ability, to strive to become the best players, and people, they can be. He teaches players that a winner is someone who makes maximum effort, continues to learn and improve, and doesn't let mistakes (or fear of mistakes) stop them.

2. Fills Players' Emotional Tanks

A Positive Coach is a positive motivator who refuses to motivate through fear, intimidation, or shame. She recognizes that every player has an "Emotional Tank" like the gas tank of a car. Just as a car with an empty gas tank can't go very far, a player with an empty emotional tank doesn't have the energy to do her best.

A Positive Coach understands that compliments, praise, and positive recognition fill Emotional Tanks. She understands the importance of giving truthful and specific feedback and resists the temptation to give praise that is not warranted. When correction is necessary, a Positive Coach communicates criticism to players in ways that don't undermine their sense of self-worth. A Positive Coach strives to achieve a 5:1 "Plus/Minus Ratio" of praise to correction.

A Positive Coach establishes order and maintains discipline in a positive manner. She listens to players and involves them in decisions that affect the team. She works to remain positive even when things aren't going well. She recognizes that it is often when things go wrong that a coach can have the most lasting impact and can teach the most important lessons. Even when facing adversity, she refuses to demean herself, her players, or the environment. She always treats athletes with respect, regardless of how well they perform.

3. **Honors the Game**

A Positive Coach feels an obligation to his sport. He understands that Honoring the Game means getting to the ROOTS of the matter, where ROOTS stands for respect for:

- **Rules**
- **Opponents**
- **Officials**
- **Teammates**
- **Self.**

A Positive Coach teaches his players to Honor the Game. He loves his sport and upholds the spirit, as well as the letter, of its rules. He respects opponents, recognizing that a worthy opponent will push his athletes to do their best. He understands the important role that officials play and shows them respect, even when he disagrees with their calls. He encourages players to make a commitment to each other and to encourage one another on and off the field. He values the rich tradition of his sport and feels privileged to participate. A Positive Coach realizes that one of the most difficult times to Honor the Game is when the opponent is not, and he reminds his players to live up to their own highest standard (respect for self). Ultimately, a Positive Coach demonstrates integrity and would rather lose than win by dishonoring the game.