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Sportsmanship the Most Important Part of Competition

Summer is right around the corner and that means there are all types of competitive events for youth to participate in; from sports to dance, to livestock exhibition. I am a firm believer there is a place for competition. I'm competitive by nature; however, this needs to be healthy competition.

Regardless of the type of event you are involved with there is an adult leading the charge; coach, instructor, mentor or parent. Here is where the first lesson begins. We look to these leaders to exemplify a number of things; in my opinion number one is to create a positive relationship and act as a role model for these youth, secondly to teach a specialized skills, and third that no matter what has happened always act with integrity.

The ways in which you conduct yourself are constantly influencing that young person's life as they are developing the skills to work through the facets of competition. Competition motivates us to try our hardest, dig deeper in the face of adversity and....then how to react win or lose.

This is where things tend to get messy. Unfortunately, it seems more and more often this is the area that we need to look at our reactions as coaches (I use this term loosely, any adult guiding youth). Yes, we need to be the best advocate for our team, while also being respectful of the decisions made by anyone of authority. Teach our youth, even when you are not a fan of a decision made that you handle it to the very

best of your ability and to move on, not to belittle others. Find it within yourself to try even harder.

It can certainly be difficult to come up short when you have put everything you have into something, but this is when it is most important to act with integrity and strong character, knowing that others have practiced hard also and there are others learning from your reaction; other players, younger kids, parents and spectators.

Adults, I urge you to put sportsmanship back into any event you are part of. It truly is the most important part of competition. Win graciously, lose graciously and always act with dignity. There are people watching and learning from all of the things you do and say. You are a role model at all times, it does not stop during a time-out, conversation with a player, on the way back to your livestock pen and certainly not when things are not going as you had hoped.

Most often, we lead more by example than any other way. Be a leader who develops youth with perseverance and gratitude, who walks tall and is gracious to all following any competition. Be the first to reach out and shake a competitor hand and congratulate them. These are the youth who will take the skills they have gained from being involved with competition and turn them into successful futures. Always remember: Sportsmanship is the most important part of any competition!

For more information about sportsmanship contact kerry.elsen@unl.edu at the Buffalo County Extension Office.