



## **AN OPEN LETTER TO THE FANS**

Dear Fan:

You walk to the contest venue ready to see a game between your school's team and your opponent. You may have to pull out your hard-earned cash for that ticket, that "golden-ticket" that allows you to a seat where you plan to "help" your team with constant berating of the opposing team and officials. You feel it is your duty as a fan to do everything you can for your son or daughter, your team, and your role is to call it like you see it from the stands.

What you don't understand is that your verbal abuse does nothing more than tear at the fabric of interscholastic sports. The players on the athletic field, court or diamond are not being paid to play; they are not professional athletes that have to deal with fans daily basis. It is a privilege, not a right, for these athletes to compete as much as it is a privilege for you to sit in the stands and watch.

But what about your "golden ticket" that you paid good money for, doesn't that entitle you to something? Yes, you get the opportunity to watch two schools show off their skills and what they have learned in the athletic classroom. Other than that, your ticket gives you little more than a first-come-first serve spot on a crowded row of bleachers. Contests could not exist without rules, and just as the players must abide by the rules of the game, you too have to follow the rules in the stands.

It's not all your fault; you probably had someone like yourself at your interscholastic games. Hopefully, it's not the case, but you may never have seen proper spectator decorum. Here are a few basic tips that can help steer you in the right direction.

1. The field of play is the athletic classroom for student-athletes. Instead of math and science they learn teamwork and group responsibility in addition to dealing with success and overcoming adversity. You wouldn't dare interrupt a teacher giving a test to his or her students, yet you do it to coaches and student-athletes routinely in their "classroom".
2. Your entry into a contest does NOT entitle you to disrespect or degrade the players, coaches and/or officials in any way. Everyone who is part of interscholastic athletics give their best effort and that commitment to educational athletics should be celebrated.
3. Understand that the student-athletes you are watching will make mistakes, and no participant should be ridiculed at any time because of their efforts. Many of them are still learning the game they are playing and can be disheartened by a rogue fan attacking their performance.
4. Coaches are individuals who are actually full-time workers and coaches second. Anyone who tries to reverse this order is taking the first step to destroying a program. No one wants a program to fail, but the merciless pressure you put on the coach does not help in building a program or making the student-athletes and the team enjoy their experience and be successful.
5. Officials are present to promote the game and the student-athletes involved. They make judgement calls in good faith based on their knowledge, training and experience. A lot of time and effort has gone into making sure they know the rules better than you. Respect their decisions!
6. Finally, you are the guest of the school and should act like one. Winning is an admirable goal of competition, but it is nothing if it comes at the expense of morals, ethics, and common sense.

**Thank you and enjoy the game!**