

# HONORING THE GAME

(Excerpt from Positive Coaching Alliance Double Goal Coach)

<b>Rules</b>	We don't bend the rules to win.
<b>Opponents:</b>	A worthy opponent is a gift that forces us to play to our highest potential.
<b>Officials</b>	We treat officials with respect even when we disagree.
<b>Teammates</b>	We never do anything that would embarrass our team on or off the court.
<b>Self</b>	We live up to our own standards regardless of what others do.

## Intervening on the Sidelines for Your Team

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Prevention is the best cure. Coaches who create a team culture based on Honoring the Game likely will have fewer problems with parents and fans on the sidelines. But some parents and fans will inevitably misbehave when things go against their team or child. When that happens, coaches have the responsibility to intervene, to defend the positive sports culture we want for our children. Some suggestions:

**Cue parents before games.** Take time to remind parents before the game to Honor the Game.

*"Today's game is important to us, and we want to play our best. I just want to remind you to Honor the Game today. I expect everyone associated with our team to act to make us proud of each other. If there is a bad call by the official, I want you to be silent. If there is a problem with the officiating, it's my job to address it, not yours. Your job is to be supportive of our players in a positive way and be a good role model for our kids. Does everyone understand?"*

**Introduce Officials to the Parents.**

**Check in with the Manager/Culture Keeper.** Make sure the manager/culture keeper touches base with each parent early in the game and remind them to be a good role model.

**Model the behavior you want to see.** Parents pick up on the coach's behavior. Be calm and focused.

**Anticipate.** If you think about it, you can usually anticipate situations in which parents are likely to become upset. If a game determines which team goes to the playoffs, expect parents to be more likely to lose control than in an early season game. You may want to invite a board member to attend the game as a precaution.

- A close game is more likely to see misbehavior than a game decided early.
- A call against your team at the end of the game is more likely to attract jeers.
- If there is a perception that the other team is playing rough and the officials are not calling penalties, this is a combustible situation.
- If a call upsets you, you can expect your parents to also be upset. Be aware of this.

**Nip Problems in the Bud.** The earlier you respond to bad sideline behavior, the less likely it will be out of control. Let your parents know it is not okay. Sometimes just a look and a downward hand movement to “calm down” will do the job. Refer to higher standard.

“Okay cool it now. We don’t want to do anything that will distract or embarrass our players. Honor the Game.”

Refer to higher standards. Remind parents that the higher standard for team behavior is Honoring the Game. Remind them of the ethics agreement they signed.

### **Stay calm.**

**Respect people’s “personal space.”** Stay at least an arm’s length away. Avoid getting in someone’s face while you are telling him/her to behave themselves. Don’t approach in what might be interpreted as a threatening manner.

**When parents are upset with you ...** If you become the target of parents’ unhappiness in a game, be calm. *“This isn’t the time to deal with this. I need to focus on the kids and the game right now. I’ll talk with you when the game is over. Now the team needs you to calm down and let the kids focus on the game.”*

**After the moment...** Later you and your manager can conclude that you may need to have a follow-up conversation with one or more of the parents to make sure things don’t get out of hand again.

**Reinforce good behavior.** Make it a point of thanking parents after each game in which parents behave themselves.

**Recognize the challenge.** It helps to recognize the difficulty of what you asking of parents. When a parent begins to yell at an official, you might say

*“No one ever said it was going to be easy to remain silent when the ref makes a call that you don’t like, but I know you can do it.”*

**What if you don’t intervene perfectly?** You don’t have to be perfect. What is important is that you don’t let the misbehavior go without intervening. You are the leader of the team and must let all members know what is acceptable and what is not.

**Be willing to ask for help.** If you feel you have done all you can to get parents to behave, call the commissioner and other board members to set in and help resolve the situation.