

The game is sacred. It's a sacred field you walk on when you go to play. The game is forever; players and coaches are not. When you are out on the field, you must remember your legacy and what you are representing.

Herm Edwards
Former NFL Head Coach

3.2 The ROOTS of Honoring the Game

Triple-Impact Competitors make the game better by competing by a code of Honoring the Game. The acronym ROOTS describes behavior that makes the game better—respect for: **R**ules, **O**pponents, **O**fficials, **T**eammates, and **S**elf.

Rules: Triple-Impact Competitors want to win the way the game is supposed to be played. They refuse to bend the rules whether anyone is looking or not. Rules have been developed and carefully modified to make games as fair as possible. Breaking them undercuts fairness.

But rules can't cover every situation. A crafty individual can find a way to circumvent the wording of any rule. Honoring the Game means respecting both the spirit and the letter of the rules.

Opponents: A worthy opponent is a gift. Imagine a tug-of-war with no one at the other end of the rope. Without opponents, competitive sports make no sense. It's also not much fun to beat up on a much weaker opponent (or be dominated by a much stronger one). We are challenged when we have a

worthy opponent, one who requires our best. The level of play is elevated when evenly matched rivals with mutual respect compete against each other.

We've seen this with great rivalries in every sport. In tennis, for example, Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert pushed each other to greater heights in the 1970s and 1980s. More recently, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal produced historic matches of incredible tennis that neither would be able to match without the other's challenge.

"Fierce and friendly" says it all. You try as hard as you can to win. If you knock down an opponent going for the ball, you grab the loose ball and try to score. But when the whistle blows, you help your opponent up. Sports gives us the chance to get to know people we compete with, even become friends with them, without ever letting up when the game is on.

Katie Bruzzone, a 2008 finalist for PCA's Triple-Impact Competitor scholarship, saw her high school coach lose control and verbally attack the best player on an opposing team after a game. Katie looked up the opposing player's phone number and called her. "I wanted to personally apologize for the coach's hurtful comments and let her know how much I respect the way she plays the game." Katie was delighted to find that this conversation led to a wonderful long-term friendship with the other player.

Officials: Officials are guides to fairness in the game. Honoring the Game means respecting officials even when they are wrong. There is never an excuse for treating officials with disrespect. Detroit Tigers pitcher Armondo Galarraga impressively demonstrated this on June 3, 2010, when he lost a perfect game on the last out of the game.

Umpire Jim Joyce blew the call at first base that prevented Galarraga from a perfect game. While Tigers Manager Jim Leyland went nuts, Galarraga shrugged off the call and quickly got the next batter out to end the game.

The next day Leyland, who had apologized for his outburst, had Galarraga deliver the line-up to Joyce before the game so he could publicly shake his hand. Galarraga noted about Joyce, who was devastated when he realized his blown call ruined Galarraga's perfect game, "I have a lot of respect for the man. It takes a lot to say you're sorry and to say in interviews he made a mistake." Armando

Galarraga showed what it means to Honor the Game even when an official's mistake hurts – and in his case, hurt a lot.

Teammates: Triple-Impact Competitors never do anything, on or off the field, to embarrass their teammates. They behave in a way so their teammates, school, and family can be proud of them. Because the heat of competition can sometimes bring out the worst in each of us, it helps to develop personal and team routines to reinforce Honoring-the-Game behavior. Exercise 8 describes some routines that other high school and college athletes and teams have used.

Self: Respect for oneself is the foundation of Honoring the Game. Individuals with self-respect would never dishonor the game because they have their own standards that they always want to live up to.

When I'm asked if I expect people to Honor the Game when their opponents don't, I respond, "Of course. That's what having your own standards means." Triple-Impact Competitors maintain their standards even when an opponent lowers his to gain an advantage.

■ Make a Commitment to Honor the Game

The games we love to play deserve to be honored. When athletes like Mallory Holtman Honor the Game (as described in the previous chapter), they make their sport and the world around them better. Use Exercise 8 on the following page to learn how you can develop your own Honor-the-Game routines so you'll be prepared to elevate the game when the right moment presents itself.

Exercise 8: Developing Honor-the-Game Routines

As you read in Chapter 3.2, the S in the ROOTS of Honoring the Game stands for respect for one's Self. Triple-Impact Competitors live up to their own standards no matter what the opposition does. But competition is full of challenging situations that arouse our emotions and make this hard to do, such as when:

- An opponent cheap-shots you, talks trash, or cheats
- An official blows a call that hurts you or your team
- You want to win so badly you are tempted to cheat or play dirty
- A teammate or coach says or does something in a game or practice that angers you

Triple-Impact Competitors use Honor-the-Game routines like the ones listed below to control the anxiety, anger, and fear that competition can breed to better handle their emotions.

Appropriate routines can help you perform your best, keep you from doing foolish things that hurt your team (like getting a red card or technical foul, screaming at a teammate, or losing focus by seeking "payback" after an opponent trash talks), and boost your ability to Honor the Game.

Honor-The-Game Routines

1. Develop a self-control routine to use when you feel your emotions building up. Tap your head to remind yourself to "keep a cool head." Take deep breaths, count backwards from 100, or slap your thighs to symbolize moving on. Your routine should help calm you and refocus your attention on the next play.
2. Thank officials before and/or after every game.
3. Shake hands with the opposing coach before and/or after every game.
4. Shake hands with opponents after each game. Look each of them in the eye and say something positive, even after tough defeats.

Exercise 8: continued

5. Welcome opponents to your school. This can be done as simply as writing "Welcome, Eagles!" on the visiting locker room whiteboard, or as elaborately as presenting each opponent with a small gift, like a water bottle with "Honor the Game" and your logo on it, before the game. On senior night at one high school, gifts were given to the opposing team's seniors as well. At another high school, the scoreboard was changed to read, "HOME" and "GUESTS" (not "VISITORS"), and players, boosters, and staff were instructed to treat the opposing teams as if they were guests.
6. Before games at many schools, an announcement is made asking coaches, players, parents, and fans to Honor the Game and thanking the officials for their effort. If your school doesn't do this, talk with your coach and athletic director about starting to do it.

List the Honor-the-Game routines you commit to use this year, including those you plan to talk with your coach and teammates about.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



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