



Keeping Cool Around Hot High School Rivalries

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“We’re entering the traditional rivalry portion of our high school sports seasons. What are keys to our coaches, players and spectators keeping cool heads when competition gets heated?”

PCA Response by Will Jackson, PCA Trainer–Atlanta

Great question! It’s in the spotlight of competitive rivalries that all teams feel the inspiration and challenge to be at their best. That’s a wonderful part of sport, but it takes special attention to also be sure that good sportsmanship, appropriate fan behavior, and PCA’s Honor the Game concepts are central to the action.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- Start early: Contact your rivals’ leadership team and get together to brainstorm themes and activities to keep the rivalry exciting and positive for all. Principals, AD’s, coaches, team captains, cheerleader reps, etc. could all be in the conversation. Emphasize the benefits for everyone of having this special rivalry; share ideas about how to emphasize this opportunity in both school communities.
- Consider getting together on a common local project that both schools and their team members could support with volunteer effort. It might be a local charity, a Boys and Girls Club, a park or playground that needs refreshing. Parents from both schools can be involved. Whatever the project, people who work side by side on a shared interest develop a respect and appreciation for each other that will pay off on game day.
- Promote positive aspects of the rivalry in local media. Feature photos of team leaders, coaches and cheerleaders working together, shaking hands, etc. Urge fans of both schools to show the same respect for their rivals. Use your school website to publicize these same messages, and encourage your students to keep social media messages in line with your goals.
- Help cheerleaders and other student leaders recognize their influence over crowd behavior at the game. Encourage positive cheering that supports your team, but be proactive in squelching all attempts at insulting or inflammatory behavior toward your rival.

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Keeping Cool Around Hot High School Rivalries, continued

- You might consider a short handout for all fans who enter the game, describing some of the history of the rivalry, the shared projects of the students, and how the highest standards of sportsmanship will continue make this series so unique.
- Message bombardment can continue at the gym or venue. PCA has cool “We Honor the Game Here” wall banners that can help set the tone you want. Your spirit club or cheerleaders can certainly create their own signs; just keep them positive and upbeat.
- At the game, be sure your PA announcer displays respect for your opponent and the officials. Make sure his announcing is balanced, praising the good plays for both teams. Introduce and welcome the teams, fans, coaches and officials, reminding everyone that respect for your opponent is what makes a rivalry special for all.

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