



YOUR PLAYERS

The Golden Rule of Recreational Tennis

A culture of sportsmanship will inspire young players—and build business.

BY ANGELO A. ROSSETTI

Probably more than any other sport, tennis provides an athlete an opportunity to demonstrate good sportsmanship. As teachers and coaches, we can either encourage our players to embrace that challenge and exhibit the best qualities of sportsmanship—or we can simply succumb to telling our players to do whatever it takes to win.

My philosophy has always been straightforward: If you lead with your heart and with what's fair, then playing within the rules becomes easy, and feels right—so do it. If you are considering doing something that feels wrong, just don't do it.

Unfortunately, in our society, it's often the acts of poor sportsmanship that tend to attract attention. The

infamous YouTube video of Marcos Baghdatis smashing four racquets at the Australian Open received more than 2.6 million views. Good sportsmanship often goes unnoticed and unrecognized.

That's why, at our club, we're building a culture of sportsmanship in our young players by recognizing "random acts of sportsmanship." We do this through our "Sportsmanship Shout Out," which is part of our junior tennis bulletin board. It highlights past and present acts of good sportsmanship. These can be anything—from a youngster who wins a Section sportsmanship award, to a player who gives a questionable line call to his or her opponent in the spirit of fairness, to donating racquets to a charity instead of receiving presents on a birthday, to simply picking up the most balls after a tennis event.

This not only helps to build character in our junior players, but it also helps to inspire the growth of our business. Why? Because people want to align themselves with (and spend money with) clubs and programs that share their core values. Do things for the right reasons and you will grow your business as a by-product.

As coaches, teachers, parents, officials and mentors, we need to be aware that children learn by example, and they often take their cues from adults. That's why the recent "Varsity Blues" scandal of parents and coaches falsifying athletic and academic records so their kids can be admitted into prestigious schools is so damaging to youngsters. Sportsmanship is about creating—and living by—solid values, and it starts with parents and adult role models.

The more media attention on what's wrong in the world will make people do more wrong. We need more attention on what's going right. We need to be sharing stories about good sportsmanship and success, no matter how seemingly small.

In tennis, I believe there is a gap between sportsmanship display and rule interpretation and enforcement. All players need to be fair and generous with line calls, rather than "when in doubt, call it out." We should play like the world is watching. Adults should play and act like you want your kids to play. Value the outcome, but always focus on fairness. Let's inspire people, especially youth, to do the right thing, rather than discipline them for doing the wrong thing.

The more that we cherish, value and promote athletes who compete with integrity, the more our sport's participation will grow. Encourage "random acts of sportsmanship." It will help to inspire the growth of the game—and maybe sportsmanship in tennis won't be so random. ■



Angelo A. Rossetti, the director of tennis at the Weston (Conn.) Racquet Club, is a USPTA Elite Pro and a PTR Professional. He's the president of USTA Connecticut and a member of the USTA National Sportsmanship Committee.