



Positive Change Can Start at the Lowest Levels

By Bill Gosse

Posted August 9, 2008

The presidential election is around the corner and we've heard comments from the candidates how they will be vehicles for change. Ironically, that's one thing that will never change.

Everyone has their favorite slogans regarding change: "If you're not changing, you're dieing." "Change is good." "You can't teach an old dog, new tricks."

Many people insist it's impossible to change. Consider how difficult it's been over the last few weeks for Cheesehead Nation to accept the possibility of change at quarterback.

During my speaking travels, there are times I wonder if positive change in youth sports is taking place. Are we actually reaching anybody out there? Are we planting any good seeds?

The answer is "yes" to both questions.

I've always contended people can change, and it's happening right around us.

After a recent presentation at a high school's athletic code meeting, a mother was waiting for me at the bottom of the stage. I just finished speaking and was collecting my materials. I could tell she was anxiously waiting to tell me something.

In the spring of 2007, I had spoken to her community's preseason Little League baseball meeting. The president of the league had informed me certain sets of parents were acting selfishly, and their out-of-line behavior was giving the community a bad name. He hoped some proactive work would cure their league of the developing trend of bad sportsmanship.

This woman and her family attended that meeting with several hundred other people. My presentation dealt with sportsmanship fundamentals, and she felt I was directly speaking to them. She even commented how they slumped down in their chairs because it had become clear they were guilty of some pretty poor behavior.

After the 2007 meeting, they went home and sat down as a family to make some changes. They had created some pretty unrealistic expectations for their son and the pressure was evident in his behavior. He desperately was trying to please his parents, but when he

couldn't, his actions embarrassed his community, his team and his family. The name on the back of his jersey had become more important than the name on the front.

How do you ease up on your kids?

Adjust your expectations and allow the kids to play the game. Let them develop, let them learn and support them in a way that's calming. Let them fail, too, because kids are challenged by losses.

They began cheering for all kids on the team, not just their son. This way they became involved with the entire program and displayed a caring attitude for others.

Lastly, they demonstrated good sportsmanship at all times. They avoided the emotional outbursts of the past and the accompanying black eye of embarrassment. They wanted to set a positive, contagious example for all.

These simple changes brought a year full of peace and confidence-building they had never seen before.

It also brought a smile I wouldn't change one bit.