



Recent Examples Show Sportsmanship is Alive

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When growing up, my dad taught me how to be a good sport and a classy person.

It's debatable whether I paid enough attention, but I probably learned as much, or more, by watching his shining example. It amazed me how people seemed attracted to him like a magnet. I will always attribute that to his impeccable character and class.

When I think of athletes who had similar traits, famed Green Bay Packers quarterback Bart Starr comes to mind. Looking back to Starr's playing days, I picture a player who was always confident in his abilities, and displayed them in a controlled manner. I recall someone who never brought attention to himself, but always gave credit to his teammates. To this day, when I see pictures of Bart Starr, I think of my dad.

Athens is a tiny community west of Wausau. It has a manager on its varsity football team named Darin Weiks, who is passionate about the game. Darin has a rare liver disease that affected his growth and prevents him from playing contact sports. Darin has seen healthy teammates not giving their all and it has pained him in a different way. Until Athens' last game, Darin never thought he would get a chance to play high school football.

Some of the seniors on the team, including the coach's son, planned a way for Darin to play. They proposed the idea of him being the kicker for the final game. Because one hit on his liver could be fatal, other steps were needed.

The doctors agreed when Darin agreed to wear a flak jacket.

School administrators gave their permission after waivers were signed and the opposing coach played along by instructing his players to stay off Darin.

The final result? Six kickoffs and 3 for 5 on extra points – 11 plays that Darin Weiks never would have experienced if it weren't for a classy, selfless act by some incredible young men.

At the collegiate level, the recent Texas/Texas Tech football game was an intense in-state battle where tempers easily could have flared. Nonetheless, after losing to Tech on a last-second touchdown, Longhorns Coach Mack Brown was quoted afterwards as saying, "Football is a tough game. Tonight was their night, we need to be classy in defeat and give them credit for what they did."

Closer to home, the Packers released fan favorite Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila, perhaps ending his nine-year NFL career. I'm sure being released never is easy, but during the middle of the season must be especially hard. KGB's parting comments were of the highest praise for the Packers, his opportunities and the relationships he was able to develop through the game of football.

Not knowing Kabeer extremely well, I only can imagine how proud his family and friends must be for how he handled himself with dignity and class.

I only can hope more classy examples are set like these.

You never know who is watching.