



## **Fine Line Separates Good, Bad Sports**

By Bill Gosse

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A few weeks ago, the state of Washington brought us the feel-good story about the home-run hitting softball player being helped around the bases by opponents after wrecking her knee.

This week, the Evergreen State brings us a story from the opposite end of the sportsmanship spectrum, with a young baseball player sucker-punching an opponent while shaking hands after a game.

He crossed over from being an athlete playing with emotion to an athlete becoming emotional. This fine line is hard to define, but easy to cross.

Similar incidents don't have to be as dramatic, but they can have lasting effects, too.

As the recent WIAA state track meet was drawing to a close, several Division I boys teams were battling for the title and it came down to the final event: the 1600 meter relay. As the race was about to begin, the combatants knew one thing – win the race and win the state championship.

The race progressed and was nearing its finish when final leg runners from three schools were struggling to take control. In the final 200 meters, the runner from one school passed the leader and started shouting: "Let's go! I got this! You got nothing!"

The original leader regained the lead by the end of the final curve. However, that was when the runner from the third contending team came up strong from the outside to move in front.

This runner prematurely celebrated as he raised his index finger with 40 meters to go. Somehow, he lost his balance, mishandled the baton and dropped it with about 20 meters remaining. He stumbled across the finish line without the baton, embarrassed and disqualified, as the runner from the first team edged out the second team's runner to take it all.

Two emotional decisions conceivably cost two teams a shot at a state championship.

What a way to lose! What a way to win!

What causes people to cross the line of emotion? Why do people behave at sporting events the way they do?

Even NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is looking to crack down on unruly behavior, because many adult fans are setting poor examples of sportsmanship for our next generation.

When we experience tense muscles, fast breathing, increased heart rate and constricted blood vessels, we should be experiencing what it means to be an athlete. When we experience these symptoms as a fan, we're bucking for headaches, hyperventilation, high blood pressure and ulcers. Does it make sense for these things to happen as fans?

The intention of sports is to engage competitively in an activity governed by a set of rules. I think we've got that part down.

The intention of sportsmanship is to display an attitude that strives for fair play, courtesy toward teammates and opponents, ethical behavior and grace in losing. This is where we need some work.

Know where your emotional line is, and stay behind it.