



Group Blames Parents for Poor Sports

By Scott Venci

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Bill Gosse didn't like what happened during a boys high school basketball game between Bradley Tech and Bay View in Milwaukee on Jan. 30, when several fights broke out on the court after the game, leading to six injuries and 10 arrests.

But he wasn't surprised.

Instances like the one in Milwaukee prompted Gosse – a former men's basketball walk-on at Marquette University – to launch TeamScore Inc., last summer with a few partners, one of which includes co-founder Robert Brooks, a former administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

TeamScore is a nonprofit organization specializing in raising awareness of sportsmanship and creating a positive environment between parents, athletes, officials and coaches through seminars and presentations.

Gosse, with the cooperation of the WIAA, conducted a survey of athletics directors and administrators last summer, asking them the biggest reasons for poor sportsmanship and if it was a problem.

The responses didn't come as a shock.

The overwhelming reason for poor sportsmanship was due to parental influence, although coaches, fans, and players can get out of line, too.

"It's not just happening here," said Gosse, who lives in Greenleaf. "It's happening all over."

Gosse, who is a high school football official and also coaches several youth teams, became alarmed by the growing trend of poor sportsmanship and the parents' involvement in it during a few events he attended over the past several years.

He saw a mother choking her son at a youth wrestling tournament so he wouldn't cry after he lost a match.

He saw a basketball coach get thrown out of an off-season tournament for berating an official, and was perplexed as to why the coach was conducting himself in such a bizarre manner.

Gosse was at a summer basketball tournament watching his niece play, when, while walking to a second gym in the facility, he heard a father yelling so abusively at a pair of officials that one of them had to stop the game.

"I actually had paused and stopped and told my wife to keep going," he said. "I had to gather myself as to how I'm going to approach this man for acting like a complete idiot."

“Luckily, for me, the refs stopped the game. I was so excited about what that official did, to try to proactively get this parent to behave himself. He said, ‘If you don’t start acting like a parent, I’m going to ask you to leave.’”

There are, in Gosse’s opinion, a few major reasons why sportsmanship has become worse over the past decade.

The biggest? Hopes of landing a scholarship have clouded some parents’ eyes to how talented their child is and the big things they can accomplish.

Gosse had a dance instructor insist he come to speak at her studio last fall. The reason? The instructor had a set of parents who were determined to see their child get to the Olympics, mostly so the camera could pan on the mother.

“This was a girl that at age 10 was already having chronic knee problems because of all the ice skating and gymnastics that she was doing,” he said. “Her mom and dad were wearing the kid out, all for some possible future glory they may get.”

Gosse’s study found poor sportsmanship was due to the lack of respect, responsibility and accountability of people and society’s acceptance of it.

It’s not uncommon to attend games and hear parents and fans yelling at players or officials, or even at the opposing fan section. Other times, it’s the players talking trash while on the court.

All of it can be innocent fun but it can go over the line.

“When you referee the younger tournaments – fourth-, fifth-, sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders – it’s worse than ever,” said Jim Albers, a local referee. “You have parents running down from the stands after games confronting you. It’s just unbelievable.”

“Believe it or not, it gets better as the (kids) get older because the parents start to understand the game more. But when they are young and the (parents) don’t understand the game, they are out of control.”

Gosse hears and sees these situations all the time, and he worries about the future of prep sports if things continue to get worse.

A study at Northeastern University in Boston found 70 percent of kids ages 5 to 18 are dropping out of sports by age 13, because they no longer are having fun. The focus has gone from having fun to winning at all costs.

Gosse wants to change that one parent, fan, player and coach at a time.

“Last week’s fight (in Milwaukee) has really gotten the phone ringing,” he said. “Thank goodness that we don’t have to have someone get killed.”

“I’m trying to prevent all that.”