



Rewards Come to Those Who Practice Sportsmanship

By Bill Gosse

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This is the season for year-end awards – just ask Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year Brett Favre.

I'm not about to reveal any further awards, but I would like to bring recognition to some examples of great sportsmanship. Not enough mention is made of acts of great sportsmanship. Unfortunately, negative publicity seems to draw more attention.

The first story arises from the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy and involves a Norwegian cross-country skiing coach. Why a story from 2006? First of all, hardly anyone notices cross-country skiing at the Olympics, and secondly, this is such a good story it bears repeating for those who have already heard it.

The Olympic spirit was alive and well when Bjoernar Haakensmoen gave a Canadian skier a new pole when hers snapped midway through the team sprint event. The skier stayed in the race and helped win the silver medal. The Norwegian women finished fourth, out of the medals. Imagine being this coach, standing on the course and positioned to help your own athletes, and one of your opponents happens by and begets bad luck. The typical competitive response might be to inwardly snicker. Even if clearer heads prevailed, our best effort probably would be an empathetic feeling toward this skier; certainly not going out of our way to help them finish ahead of our own team.

Asked why he did it, Haakensmoen said he lives in a country that believes in fair play. He wanted to be somebody of fair sportsmanship. To most of us the event may have been a silly ski race, but it sure was nice to see someone have the courage to do what's right.

Another story brought to my attention earlier this year produced an immediate smile on my face. This example of sportsmanship is one through which youth coaches in all sports can learn a great lesson.

A local girls hockey team played in a Madison-area tournament. This tournament was based on a point system - not strictly wins and losses.

After losing a close game to a team from central Wisconsin, the local team went on to win the rest of their games in the tournament, leaving it in great shape for the overall tournament lead. The central Wisconsin team did very well during the rest of the

tournament too, but with one game remaining needed to earn enough points through a win or tie, to win the championship.

The central Wisconsin team skated to a hard-fought tie, but didn't earn enough points. Therefore, the central Wisconsin team finished second to the local team, even though it hadn't lost and had also beaten the local team. It doesn't seem fair, does it?

Apparently, the local coach didn't think so, either. In spite of some resistance from his players' parents, he talked to his girls about the outcome and his team agreed the trophy for the best team should go to the girls from central Wisconsin.

After the trophies were awarded according to the tournament rules, the local coach called out to the second-place coach and his daughter and indicated his team had something for them. They then presented the best team trophy to the team from central Wisconsin.

These are just a couple of examples of great sportsmanship, but every time we set out for a contest we have the opportunity to respect and encourage our teammates, opponents, officials, coaches, fans, and parents. Those who have the courage to do what's right deserve the rewards.