



Respect Should Reach Pro Sports

By Bill Gosse

Posted June 23, 2007 in the Green Bay Press-Gazette

The difference between gamesmanship and poor sportsmanship can be a very fine line.

Sportsmanship is abiding by the rules of a contest and accepting victory or defeat graciously. Gamesmanship is doing whatever it takes to win within the rules, even if the behavior is questionable or unsportsmanlike.

A few weeks ago, Alex Rodriguez of the New York Yankees did something during a game where he may have crossed that line. The Yankees were winning 7-5, with two outs and two runners on in the top of the ninth inning. Jorge Posada, the Yankees catcher, popped up to third. The Toronto Blue Jays rookie third baseman camped under it ready to catch the pop-up for the third out. As Rodriguez trotted by, he yelled something causing the third baseman to think his own shortstop was calling for the ball to make the catch. The third baseman backed off, and the ball dropped to the turf, allowing the inning to continue, and the Yankees scored three more runs. When Alex was first asked why he did what he did, he said it was simply to win a game because they were desperate. The Blue Jays manager and some of the Toronto players thought the act was bush-league. It seems when a runner at second base steals the catcher's signs to help his teammate at the plate, it is called a heads-up play. A-Rod's play has been viewed by many as poor sportsmanship. What do you think? Did he cross over the line from gamesmanship to poor sportsmanship?

It seems every sport has its own list of dos and don'ts that you learn as you grow up. You could call them a code of conduct - certain things that are not technically against the rules, but you're still not supposed to do them. In basketball, players expect fans to wave their hands or signs in an attempt to distract them from making their free throws; in football, coaches have been known to teach their linemen how to hold in ways that will be difficult for officials to detect; in golf, a player steps on an opponent's putting line. For years, people have debated whether it's okay for a pitcher to throw at an opposing player in retaliation for hitting one of his teammates with a pitch. These are just a few examples. Just pick your favorite sport and I'm sure you'd be able to come up with plenty of scenarios.

Is it right to do these things? Do we want our young athletes to act like this? Unfortunately, the acts of poor sports are played over and over so we all see them, and our kids can copy them.

When we were little we were taught to treat others the way we want to be treated. This certainly applies to everyday life, but it should also apply to sports. I've heard talk shows say that anything goes in professional sports. I disagree. The need for respect still exists in sports today. Do you think Alex Rodriguez would like someone yelling at him when he is trying to catch a pop-up, or do you think he would like some help when he's close to falling in a dugout while chasing a foul ball?

Let's teach our kids to respect their opponents and the games they play. Then they won't have to worry about crossing over some fine line.