



This Religion column is a regular feature written for the Gallup Independent by Gallup area residents, representing different faith communities, who share their ideas about bringing a spiritual perspective into our daily lives and community issues. For information about contributing a guest column, contact Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola at The Independent: (505) 863-6811 ext. 218 or lizreligion01@yahoo.com.

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The Outrageous Idea of Sportsmanship

The need for this article occurred to me sometime during the first half of the Navajo Pine/Rehoboth basketball game a week ago today. It is born out of the heat of battle between two teams, two sets of fans, two communities, though one could easily substitute any two schools in America and come to the same conclusion.

What is about to be shared here is truly outrageous! Most folks, if they get beyond these opening paragraphs, will conclude that I am losing my marbles. These ideas for many will be outlandish, excessive, over the edge.

And they come to this page from a flawed and fallen soul who has not always practiced what he is about to preach. So I am preaching to myself, and allowing others to listen in. It is a sermon I have to bring up nearly every game I go to, and being a veteran school administrator, that means hundreds of ballgames in my career.

The first outrageous idea is that we are “playing” another team. One cultural critic has noted that these days we “worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship.” When we go to another gym, we go to “play.” That would suggest we need to lighten up and not act like our entire self-concept as a school or community is going to depend on whether we win or lose, and how well some teenagers are “playing” the game.

The second outrageous idea is that we should love the other team, welcome them and thank them for coming. If they had not come, we would not have anyone to play with. We can only have a game if those good folks show up, so let’s show our gratitude for all the miles they drove to play with us. The essence of competition is that two parties (or more) have agreed to come together to play and compete. In the process, the other team will enable us to **enjoy** the God-given gifts and talents of all those represented. Imagine loving the other team—that is absurd--or isn’t it?

If that were the case, we would not likely tease the other player when they shot an “airball.” After missing a free throw, we would likely not yell “let’s have another one, just like the other one.” Instead, we would compliment the other team, their fans, and thank them for coming to our school. Never would we taunt our neighbors.

A third outrageous idea is that we would even have respect and admiration for the referees. Imagine what kind of game we could have if we did not have referees? It would be chaos—it would not be a game. There could easily be injuries, and maybe even a brawl if those good officials did not keep control. Surely Kevin Jones and Danny Lujan



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did us all a huge favor last Saturday by calling a good, tight game. Thank you, fellas—and forgive us for not lining up afterward to express our appreciation.

The next idea will seem less outrageous until we examine the behavior of fans even towards their own players. To be sure, there is often much adoration of one's own team. But what happens when they start messing up? Then one hears all kinds of advice from fat old fans who could barely run down the floor. “Pass the ball!” “Don’t dribble so much!” “Drive for the bucket!” Insults are hurled, even within earshot of a player’s parents. Shameful, outrageous I would say—at least let us be positive toward our own precious kids!

Well, you add all these outrageous ideas up, and it comes out to be **sportsmanship**. Honoring the other team, respecting the officials, cheering for your own kids—that is how we can create an atmosphere that will bless our community.

There is really a very simple and loving solution to some of the bad stuff that happens at games. Be positive, positive, positive!

Cheer for your team, not against the other team. Positive cheers are awesome, negative cheers are awful!

Notice how often the refs get it right! Admire the giftedness of players on the other team! Reach out and shake hands with a fan from the other team!

This for Navajo Pine—what a terrific team you have, and supportive fans! You played well, and made us better in the process. We look forward to another good game at our place in a couple of weeks!

We love our basketball around here—let’s make sure we love each other in the process!