

CHAPTER 1

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The spirit of sports gives each of us who participate an opportunity to be creative. Sports knows no sex, age, race, or religion. Sports give us all the ability to test ourselves mentally, physically, and emotionally in a way no other aspect of life can. For many of us who struggle with “fitting in” or our identity, sports gives us our first face of confidence. That first bit of confidence can be a gateway to many other great things!

—Dan O’Brien, Olympic Gold Medalist, Decathlon

The greatest component of sports has to be the memories it creates, as those memories are passed from parent to child, becoming the stories of legend over time. So each time a new game is played anywhere, anytime, there is always the possibility of *it* being “the one.” The one that has the last-second touchdown. The one with the walk-off home run. The one where someone sets a world record. The one where spectators are present for that special moment in time. It becomes their story that needs to be told.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING...

Research has shown that sports and physical activity can contribute positively to students’ physical health, self-esteem, and sense of connectedness to their school. In addition, participating on an athletic team may provide academic benefits, both directly through school policies requiring athletes to maintain minimum GPAs and indirectly by strengthening students’ identification with their school communities.¹

Attendance at this “special” event carries an even greater weight. The memory begins the very minute it occurs—a memory that happens instantaneously yet lasts a lifetime. That memory is then shared from then on with anyone willing to listen about “that time when...” It *is* the moment when heroes are born.

In the early 1900s, the daily paper helped to create those memories. Take, for example, articles like, “Yankees Buy Ruth and Home Run Bat for Over \$100,000” from the January 6, 1920 *World* paper or “Dodgers Purchase Robinson, First Negro in Modern Major League Baseball” from the April 11, 1947 *New York Times*. By the mid-1900s, radio and television changed the way those memories were told. Commentators began calling the games, thereby adding a flair for the dramatic, “The Giants win the pennant, the Giants win the pennant!” Because most people didn’t attend the actual game, hearing it on the radio or watching it on TV made the memory become personal. The capability for the audience and listeners to mutually celebrate immediately became possible. People no longer had to physically attend an event to feel as if they were part of the game.

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These memories are shared over and over again with friends and strangers alike. Arguments develop over the memories because some believe their story is more substantial or “correct” than others. Fights ensue with great passion about how their sport’s moment is the “best ever.” People want to talk about how their story changed that moment in time. Everyone has a story. Everyone has a memory to share. It is something that burns inside us, needing to be set free.

There are numerous moments in the past 150 years in which sports were celebrated. Anyone can offer his perspective of the top 10 moments in sports history—top 10 lists of the best quarterbacks, the best goalies, or the best teams are only a small sample of the numerous categories that can be debated. Sports etch their role in our culture with new memories being created constantly.

Some of the greatest sports memories that no one disputes are the 1980 Olympics USA Hockey Team’s victory over the former Soviet Union; Jesse Owens winning four gold medals during the 1936 Olympics, dispelling the supremacy of the Nazi Aryan race; Jackie Robinson being signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in April 1947; and Joe Namath guaranteeing his underdog AFL Jets would win Super Bowl III. Each of these events and so many others provide sports fans with some of the greatest memories of their lives.

MIRACLE ON ICE

On February 22, 1980, a young U.S. hockey team faced the invincible Soviet Union team. Thirteen days prior to this game, coach Herb Brooks arranged an exhibition where the Soviets destroyed the U.S. with a score of 10-3. The Soviet team was made up of grown men, who were some of the best players in the world. They had won the gold medal at the four previous Olympic games dating back to 1964. The U.S. team was a group of college players with only one player on the team with previous Olympic experience. They were boys among men. Prior to the game, Coach Brooks spoke to his team:

Great moments are born from great opportunity. And that’s what you have here tonight, boys. That’s what you have earned here tonight. One game. If we played ‘em 10 times, they might win nine. But not this game. Not tonight. Tonight, we skate with ‘em. Tonight, we stay with ‘em,

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and we shut them down, because we can! Tonight, we are the greatest hockey team in the world. You were born to be hockey players, every one of you. You were meant to be here tonight. This is your time. Their time is done; it's over. I'm sick and tired of hearing about what a great hockey team the Soviets have. Screw 'em. This is your time! Now go out there and take it!

The U.S. team was down 3-2 at the end of the second period. However, by the end of the third period, the U.S. team was up 4-3 as commentator Al Michaels called one of the greatest memories in the history of sports broadcasting. "11 seconds, you've got 10 seconds, the countdown going on right now! Morrow up to Silk, five seconds left in the game. Do you believe in miracles? Yes! Unbelievable!" David beat Goliath. Those who were watching on TV can recall this memory in an instant, now referred to as the "miracle on ice."

AN ATHLETE'S STORY—JACKIE ROBINSON

Jackie Robinson, number 42, was a remarkable person. Although the individuals during that time realized the significance of what he contributed to our culture, it is only in the past few decades that we can truly appreciate his accomplishments. Jackie's ability to stare racism right in the eyes, dealing with the hate-mongers and physical violence, paved the road for thousands of athletes who followed. He came from humble beginnings and became the first player to break Major League Baseball's color barrier that segregated the sport for over 50 years. He pioneered the integration of professional athletics. Not only was it significant within baseball when he courageously challenged the deep roots of the racial divide, but the impact was felt throughout the North and South. What may have been a simple game with a bat and ball turned this country upside down by challenging the status quo.

Robinson continues to be an inspiration to fans and players alike. The number 42 (Jackie's number) is the only number retired throughout Major League Baseball. No other player will ever be allowed to wear that number again. The sport of baseball allowed the racial divide to be addressed. It was sport that changed our world in that moment.

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The lessons of hard work were the focal point for the U.S. team and Jackie Robinson. The ability to persevere in the toughest of conditions gives all of us the ability to relate to these two stories, reminding us that with determination, practice, and a little bit of luck, anything is possible. Anyone can win on any given day.

DIRTY SECRETS OF SPORTS

There was a time when life seemed a lot simpler without the stressors of today. We refer to those times as the “good ole days.” Baseball was the American pastime. Football was in its infancy with players wearing leather helmets. Soccer was only played in England, and a high school athlete’s greatest achievement was being a three-sport letterman. The heroes in sports were role models. They were honorable men living an honest life. They wanted to win and worked hard to do so. They were hard-nosed people who took pride in their sport. Sure there were some who lived on the fringe, acting out while drinking and dancing, but the fans didn’t seem to hold those choices against them. Athletes were allowed to live it up because they had earned that right.

In the old days, professional athletes would walk down the street shaking hands with fellow Americans and signing autographs for kids. They knew they were role models. Athletes were the type of people anyone would want to take home and introduce to their mother. They came across as solid citizens, who were always doing the right thing.

The tides always change in sports—and at some point, a shift occurred. Historians say it was subtle, but history will show otherwise. It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment, but it occurred sometime during the last half of the twentieth century. The professional athlete maintained the hero status, but the honor in that role seemed to disintegrate. Money with large salaries became a primary focus, as sports offered anyone with talent the opportunity to make a significant livelihood.

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Sports television became popular with around-the-clock coverage, highlighting all elements of athletics. Professional sports were first with the growth of football, baseball, basketball, and hockey. Next came college sports, which allowed teams across the country to gain visibility. Then high school sports became a target with teams receiving national coverage. Television even made poker games popular with the creation of the World Series of Poker ... who ever thought playing cards was a sport? Recently, television has focused on youth sports with the coverage of the Cal Ripken and Little League World Series. Twelve-year olds can become national heroes because they are able to throw and hit better than their peers.

Colleges have TV contracts that pay millions of dollars to showcase their schools in local markets. The NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) is facing attacks for profiting off the backs of their players with lawsuits for student-athlete compensation. College players are now demanding salaries to play for their school. A free college education is no longer sufficient because the potential to cash in on the moment is possible. Professional leagues have billion-dollar TV contracts that generate million-dollar salary packages for the players and coaches. Parents notice these options and develop plans early in their young athlete's life. There is now a dark side to sports that infiltrates the culture and promotes varying degrees of negative behavior that would never be allowed within other areas of our culture. It impacts the memories that sports create and lays the foundation for future generations.

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THREE KEY WAYS TO WIN

Effective coaches understand that success in sports requires winning. Winning generates dollars. Winning secures a financially stable livelihood for them, their families, and their teams.

Successful athletes also recognize this requirement. In order to receive the big salaries, being the best is no longer sufficient. Winning is a core component. Those people involved with sports understand that success requires three fundamental abilities: aggression, repetition, and an imbalance of power.

AGGRESSION

The first component in sports is the ability to be aggressive in nature. Those athletes who are physically the strongest increase their chances for a win. This element of winning seems to be pervasive in every level of sports. Regardless of an athlete's age, coaches focus aggressively on winning. Parents push their kids farther and harder by hiring personal position coaches early in their sports careers. Personal trainers work exclusively with specific types of athletes, offering programs that will generate a possible college scholarship.

HORMONES: THE HIDDEN DARK SIDE

The need to be physically bigger has opened the door in the past two decades for human growth hormones (HGH) and steroids. Professional athletes in the national spotlight have been accused and ostracized for their role in using these performance-enhancing drugs. Some experts say that cheating has always been prevalent in sports, yet what is currently transpiring seems to be the most serious offenses.

Adolescents are particularly susceptible to this drug use because it offers a quick way to become bigger and stronger. Plus, adolescents see their role models getting away with steroid use, so it makes sense for them to consider doing the same at their level. By being physically bigger, they get more looks

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from colleges that offer scholarships. Recently, several Major League Baseball players were suspended for their use of HGH. And Lance Armstrong, the most popular cyclist in the history of cycling, finally admitted his involvement with doping. He acknowledged his responsibility in taking performance-enhancing drugs and being a bully. The importance placed on this aggressive component has created an undercurrent that creates a dark spot in sports. The memories that are recalled might be used to condone cheating, encouraging others to copycat those choices.

REPETITION

The second component of success in sports is repetition. “Practice makes perfect” was a mantra decades ago. Now, the new mantra is “*perfect* practice makes perfect.” If something is practiced over and over and it is not perfect, then the obvious outcome is imperfection.

The focus on repetition creates muscle memory that has been proven scientifically to be significant in gaining an added edge within sports. The constant push for perfection can also be viewed in the context of winning. The team with the most wins ends up in the victory circle at the end of the season. The more practice, the greater opportunity there is to raise the trophy in triumph. This repetition not only impacts the physical nature of sports, but directly correlates with the mental aspect as well.

Nearly all experts claim that success in sports breaks down into two categories: physical and mental. The best of the best are physically stronger. Yet when it comes to understanding the approach of a world-class elite athlete, the experts acknowledge that the breakdown is probably closer to 15% physical and 85% mental. Going to the gym, working out, and practicing on the field are only a small part of the blueprint for winning. The mental component far outweighs the physical.

The mental repetition starts early in a young athlete’s life with messages from parents and coaches. Winning at all costs is the core of this mental approach. Those players who are gifted seem to receive preferential treatment

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from others. They are treated a bit differently because they can throw a tight spiral or come closest to the pin. They immediately rise to the top of the social strata and are allowed certain entitlements. They learn firsthand that popularity in school goes hand-in-hand with their athletic abilities: The better the athlete, the greater the chance for acceptance. This has a tremendous impact on the mental mindset of a young impressionable athlete.

A TALE OF PERFECTION

Author H. G. Bissinger in his book, *Friday Night Lights*, focused on a heroic football team in Odessa, Texas. The book was based on a true story that highlighted Coach Gary Gaines and the Permian Panthers. (This story was also made into a movie of the same title and directed by Peter Berg.)

Bissinger chronicled Coach Gaines's constant pushing of his players for perfection. Over the course of the season, the team had to overcome significant challenges. Yet, they never seemed to reach their mark of perfection. However, they did eke out enough victories to find themselves in the state championship game. In the movie version, the story came to a climactic end with the Permian Panthers just barely losing. Their hearts were broken, yet their spirits were lifted by the powerful lessons they had learned. As the end credits rolled, the audience learned that the following season Coach Gaines and his Permian Panthers were undefeated and did win the state championship...they finally achieved perfection.

CREATING AN IMBALANCE OF POWER

The final component to success in sports is creating an imbalance of power. Being aggressive is only effective with the ability to use that strength to overcome an opponent. There are two ways to effectively create this imbalance, physically and mentally. Science supports that physical edge, which is obtained by being bigger, stronger, and faster (survival of the fittest).

Typically, the physical appearance of an athlete is markedly different than people who are not athletes. This individual easily stands out from the crowd. Others befriend him for various reasons, but an underlying incentive

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is his size and skill. In the gym, he is admired for his brute strength, which is rewarded by his peers. In the locker room, comments are made that reinforce the positive nature of a large physical stature. Regardless of the sport, the individual with the greater strength tips the balance of power in his favor.

The mental aspect in this imbalance is just as significant as the physical, maybe even more so. If physical strength is relatively equal among opponents, then the piece that tips the scale is creating a mental advantage. Using intimidation tactics provide this needed edge. Whether it is through trash talking, eye black, or pre-game rituals, getting inside the head of the opponent is ideal. Coaches who have the ability to magnify an opponent's mental weakness can clear a path for their players to win. Even fans at events are encouraged to participate in this advantage by cheering at certain times to throw the other player off his game.

SPORTS AND BULLIES— MAKING THE CONNECTION

Ironically these three components—aggression, repetition, and an imbalance of power—are also the core ingredients of bullying behavior. As a sports culture, we are unintentionally creating bullies. Unfortunately, this kind of sports environment is now the accepted norm, but if we want to defeat bullying, we need to get away from this concept. We need to be aware that the core components we inspire in sports are also the same elements that foster an unhealthy bully culture.

The most commonly referred to definition of bullying is, “When a person is exposed to repeated, negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.”² The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program agrees with the three major components: First, it is aggressive behavior. Second, bullying typically involves a pattern of unwanted behavior repeated over time. Finally, it involves an imbalance of power or strength.³ There are many variations when it comes

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to defining bullying, yet these three elements are the core pieces that offer a universal understanding.

For example, an individual with aggressive behavior uses words and actions that are destructive. This person does not need to be physically larger than others, but is able to create an overly forceful approach that comes across as hurtful. There are two types of aggression: direct and indirect. Direct aggression involves words and actions that are directed toward an individual or group of people, while indirect aggression is used in a covert way. Comments or actions are not specifically directed toward a person, but they still have a negative impact on an individual or group. Spreading rumors is an example of indirect aggression. These rumors begin to take on a life of their own and eventually get back to the subject of the gossip.

Sports are designed to pit one player against another or one team against another. The words used in sports support assertive actions and dismiss those who are not willing to put forth their best efforts. Successful coaches pride themselves on their ability to push their players to the limit. They challenge them to raise the bar of excellence constantly when striving for superiority. It is the pure nature of competition that forces athletes to go after other teams or players in an aggressive fashion in order to win. The “win-at-all-costs” mentality exacerbates this aggression, setting in motion a culture that continually looks to be better and stronger than the competition.

A key component that often separates bullying behavior from other types of negative interactions is that it is repeated over time. Anyone who has experienced any type of bullying understands this piece personally. It seems to happen nearly every moment of every day with no end in sight. It sometimes starts out of nowhere and continues without ending. Some individuals are considered “provocative targets” and seem to attract bullies. These targets find themselves as the recipients of that type of repeated behavior. Many experts believe it is “learned” behavior that has taken root over the course of time. It may also be behavior that has developed as a result of family circumstances and types of parenting. However one thing is certain, regardless of how the bully develops the negative behavior, anyone who is at the receiving end can be damaged permanently.

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Creating an imbalance of power is a tactic that is mastered by bullies. Once a bully establishes this sense of control with regard to power, it is easy to manipulate his target by utilizing fear. The bully conveys the message acknowledging his (her) strength and the consequences that will develop if anyone challenges it. It is not hard to create an imbalance of power—the bully only needs to manipulate the perceptions of others.

When people think about the stereotypical bully from our past, they often envision an individual who is physically larger than most of their peers. This person always seems to get away with the bullying behavior without consequences. No one is willing to stand up to the bully. This lack of confrontation reinforces the perception that the strongest control the weakest. However, bullying is not about size. It is about the ability to create an imbalance of power. As long as this imbalance exists, whether real or perceived, the bully will always get away with hurting others.

In sports, the most successful athletes must create an imbalance of power over their competition. In order to win championships, coaches have to put their players into a position of strength in order to identify their opponent's weaknesses. Once these deficiencies are realized, winning coaches are able to develop game plans that attack those weaknesses to increase their chances for victories. The primary goal within sports is to maximize that imbalance. Without it, teams cannot win. This is most clearly seen in professional sports. In baseball, there are teams with larger payrolls pitted against teams with smaller ones. In most circumstances, the teams with the larger payrolls are in a more powerful position because they can buy talent, although in the National Football League significant efforts have been made to create parity with a salary cap. The NFL's new strategy enables teams who may be on the losing end in one season to have the opportunity to be successful the following season. However, professional athletes know that the only way to continue their profession is to win. They adapt by doing what they can to develop an imbalance of power.

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A real commitment is needed to help players, parents, and coaches understand how bullying is cultivated in sports. Awareness must be raised. Encouraging coaches and parents to recognize the overall error of their ways, and the environment they have supported these past several decades can do this.

Coaches at every level must take stock of their attitudes toward their players. They must be held accountable for their actions and recognize they can impact the memories they are creating for their players. Players must be led to renew the honor in sports and understand they are leaders in their schools and communities. Coaches must teach the players that their talent is appreciated on the field, but their skills are better served as a leader who supports those who cannot defend themselves off the field.

Sports will always create those incredible memories that are needed to sustain our dreams. Sports offer lessons about adversity, teamwork, and success. However, they also teach players to have a sense of entitlement and aggression. The sports arena allows parents to act unreasonably and promotes coaches who use their roles to create an imbalance of power. It is now a moral imperative to rethink our current structure, accepting the positives, while re-creating the negatives.

Sports can now be used as a gateway for intervention to prevent negative types of behavior. Coaches and parents can refocus on the honor and responsibilities that come with being an athlete. They can take the positive skills in sports and adapt them to everyday occurrences. They can get off the sidelines and into the game by becoming individuals who stand up to this type of negative, bullying behavior. Athletes can help foster cultures of acceptance in schools by changing the climate. Coaches can hold their players accountable to behavior unbecoming of a leader in their school. Athletes can be taught these lessons, which will provide opportunities for the future.

NOT FOR DUPLICATION - SAMPLE ONLY**AN ATHLETE'S STORY—CARSON JONES⁴**

*Quarterback, Queen Creek High School Football
Queen Creek, AZ – December 2012*

Carson Jones didn't think he was doing anything special when he asked his buddies on the Queen Creek high school football team in Queen Creek, Ariz., to help watch over a special-needs sophomore who was getting picked on by other students. The 18-year-old quarterback with a 4.3 GPA had no idea how his good deed would end up changing the life of Chy Johnson, whose neurological disorder limited her cognitive abilities to that of a third-grader. But Johnson, 16, went from being a bullied outcast to becoming one of the most celebrated kids at Queen Creek High.

Chy's mother Liz believed had it not been for Jones, she would have pulled Chy out of school and home schooled her. She first met Jones years earlier while working as a teacher's aide in his elementary school. When Chy started coming home from her classes in tears, describing how kids were throwing trash at her and calling her names, Liz wondered if maybe the "wholesome, good-natured" Jones might be able to help.

Liz tracked Jones down through his Facebook page and asked if he could find out who was picking on her daughter. The next day, Jones found Chy sitting alone in the cafeteria and asked her to come sit with him and a group of other seniors on the football team.

Chy started spending time with Jones and the other players. Simultaneously, Jones approached her tormentors to get them to leave her alone. Not only did the bullying stop, but the players also made Chy an unofficial member of their team—walking her to classes, taking her to dances and parties, even inviting her down to the sidelines during games.

Carson and the rest of the team's kindness hasn't been lost on Chy. "They're my boys and I'm their lucky girl," she says. "They're awesome."

NOT FOR DUPLICATION - SAMPLE ONLY**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS: BULLY BASICS**

- “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.”⁵
- It might be hard to tell the difference between playful teasing and bullying, but bullying is not teasing. Teasing usually involves two or more friends who act together in a way that seems fun to all the people involved. Often, people tease each other equally, but it never involves physical or emotional abuse.⁶
- Bullying is not conflict. Conflict generally involves some type of disagreement between two or more individuals. Even though it may be aggressive in nature, it does not involve an imbalance of power. The parties involved are able to defend their own perspective.

ENDNOTES

- 1 H. W. Marsh, S. Kleitman, “Extracurricular school activities: The good, the bad, and the nonlinear,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(4), (2002), 464–514.
- 2 Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).
- 3 Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.
- 4 <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20656400,00.html>
- 5 Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (from the training).
- 6 Ibid.