

Leading with Grit and Grace

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When asked to think of a leader, does a friend, a competitor, or a captain come to mind? Could a leader embody all of these characteristics? As a captain of my varsity basketball team, I personally try to fit all of these personas. To support, to challenge, and to instruct are my roles. As any good leader, I take an equitable approach to guiding my teammates. There are certain prerequisites of a role of a player on a team, whether it be age, skill level, or personality. Though these ranks on any program are important in recognition of athletic performance, a good leader embraces the diversity of the unique humans in their program. When I think of myself as a leader, whether it be on the basketball court, in the classroom, or in my community service, I like to think that I take these skills into action. As a mentor at a senior military college once told me, “leaders are not born but created”. It does not require a born instinct to create impact, but instead heart and effort. So become a friend, become a competitor, become a captain, and become a leader.

And how about sportsmanship? Sportsmanship is more than just shaking hands with opponents after a game or taking a knee when another player is injured. As an athlete, sportsmanship means to be kind in the face of competition. To show gratitude for the presence and talents of your rivals, to be thankful to have the opportunity to play and enjoy the emotion of sports. My mother has always told me to play with “grit and grace”. When I hear this expression, I think of how perfectly it embodies the definition of sportsmanship. To face adversity with a competitive mindset, but a kind heart. In my game, I practice sportsmanship by learning the names of my referees, by helping my opponents up if they fall, and by playing my best game through my actions instead of words of complaint or frustration.

Of course it is important to understand the elements of both leadership and sportsmanship, but it is arguably more crucial to recognize how they are intertwined. Sportsmanship, arguably the most important aspect of any game, cannot exist without strong, courageous leaders. Good captains and good teammates take action to lead by example. And good leaders practice commendable sportsmanship by acting with “grit and grace”.