

Respect the Rules: Fake Fouls & Flopping

We've all seen it: a player goes down dramatically, arms waving and immediately claiming he was fouled. But wait? Where was he fouled? It looked like he wasn't even touched. Worse, some players feign injury hoping for a whistle and a stoppage of play, allowing them either to regain their breath or help their team's defense reset. This behavior is called flopping, and while it might seem innocent, it's actually a form of poor sportsmanship and shows a lack of respect for both the rules and the [opponent](#). [Liberty Mutual Insurance](#) and their [Play Positive®](#) initiative powered by [Positive Coaching Alliance](#) provides guidelines for parents and coaches to help encourage athletes to respect the rules and play fair.

Play By The Rules

One of the key components of good sportsmanship is to play by the rules. But when athletes fake fouls and injury, they break the rules and they use the rules of the game (assessing penalties for fouls) in a way that actually doesn't honor or [respect the game](#). As parents, we hope that one of the life lessons our kids learn from sports is that playing by the rules is important – in sports and in life. And when our kids see [images of professional athletes](#) bending the rules – and oftentimes being rewarded for that behavior – they start to think that maybe they, too, should play the way they see the pros play. It's important to remind kids why we have rules: to keep players safe. Rules of a game prevent one player from doing something that would harm another player. And beyond just physical safety, rules ensure that players respect each other and play fairly.

Consequences For Breaking The Rules

It's important that we establish consequences for when rules are broken. In youth sports, some of those consequences are already established in the rules of the game: if you foul a player, you're assessed a penalty. But outside of the formal rules of the game, coaches and adults can set out a broader set of team rules with clear consequences to discourage breaking those rules and hold the team to a higher standard.

Consider establishing team rules that embody overall team values, such as good sportsmanship, [respect for opponents](#), anti-bullying and hazing, and community service. And enforce all rules with consistency – avoid any special treatment for star players or exceptions because next week's game is "the big game." As a coach, treating all players equally will show the value placed on [respecting the rules of the game](#).

When An Opponent Uses Flopping

When you see a player flop or fake a foul, it's tempting to protest to the [referees, umpires or coaches](#). Remind athletes that one of the hardest jobs for a [referee](#) is to call fouls – and it's hard sometimes to distinguish the fake ones from the real ones. But [coaches](#) and [parents](#) should encourage athletes to keep their heads in the game and not allow the fouls and flops to distract them from the next play. Simply brush them off and refocus on the game, huddle up with teammates and plan their next play versus getting upset and allowing it to get in their heads and affect their performance.

Playing By The Rules Matters

While sometimes it may be hard for kids to see at the time, playing by the rules does matter. There are numerous examples of athletes who break records, only to be found out later that they were cheating. Their reputations are then tarnished, skills are questioned and accomplishments are tainted. Kids can see just how cheating does eventually reflect badly on the cheaters themselves.

Playing by the rules ensures fair outcomes, helps keep players safe, creates consistency and helps players learn respect. Winning “fair and square” means something – and helping our kids understand this is an important life lesson that sports can uniquely teach.

*At **Liberty Mutual Insurance** we believe that integrity matters. That’s why we created **Play Positive®** powered by **Positive Coaching Alliance** an initiative that promotes good sportsmanship to help ensure our kids have the fun and positive youth sports experience they deserve. We are committed to providing tools and resources for parents and coaches so we can come together to provide valuable life lessons that support winning on and off the field.*

*In an effort to benefit millions of youth athletes, parents and coaches, this article is among a series based on the fundamental principles of sportsmanship and relevant youth sport topics, powered by the experts at **Positive Coaching Alliance**.*

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