

Good character is taking a bigger role in athletics

Good character in athletics is fairly common, as Lisa Brinkmeyer has begun to notice. Is this because of heavier implementation of character development in schools?

Being on staff with the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, I have the privilege to attend state tournaments year-round. We start with the State Cross Country Meet at the end of October and continue through July at the State Softball Tourney. It is encouraging and refreshing to watch good sportsmanship happen on the playing fields, tracks, courts, courses, pools and bowling alleys. It is apparent students are benefiting from the character education they have received. Rarely does a game go by without a member from one team helping up a team member from another. Also, it is not uncommon to see a state participant telling their opponent "nice shot" or "great race." Reflecting back on my playing days, there was no higher compliment than those that came from an opponent. To see it happening time and time again is extremely encouraging.

High school is not where the learning should begin or end. The Six Pillars of Character can be a great lesson on character education or at least a reminder for all ages. I think young people involved in the learning process can pass along valuable information to their parents and fans. Believe it or not, the loudest "grumbling" we hear at our state events comes from the stands, not the court or field. Even my 2-year old son is exposed to character education at his daycare. The Pillars are displayed at the entrance of our daycare, highlighting six students' pictures and a brief write-up honoring each child's behavior. There is no doubt the Pillars have made me more attentive to my actions by being exposed to character education through my son and my occupation.

Similarly to many young people in Iowa, the foundation of character education was instilled in my upbringing by my parents and the small community where I grew up, Hubbard, IA. Being related to a third of the town provided many watchful eyes that kept me accountable for my actions, which continuously built on my character as well. We are fortunate to have a program available like CHARACTER COUNTS! to compliment the guidance we receive from family, teachers and community members.

The CHARACTER COUNTS! program is crucial for educating young people with the skills essential to becoming well-rounded and respectful individuals. After all, it teaches the importance of the Six Pillars: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. It is comforting to know that the Six Pillars are helping thousands of young people become *pillars* of their communities.