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Top 10 Stories You Probably Missed: Respect Brings Out the Best in Kids and Parents

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YOUTH SPORTS



Top 10 stories you probably missed

By Douglas E. Abrams

In 1984, an opponent's stick caught 16-year-old Long Island hockey player Bryan Pleines under his helmet as he skated after the puck. Bryan lost consciousness in the locker room and died two days later. He had played on my team the year before, and his death stunned the town.

"Maybe now," a father whispered at Bryan's wake. "I should stop yelling 'kill 'em' from the stands."

He missed the point: Why would anyone ever yell "kill 'em" at athletes they respect as competitors?

It took a crisis to get this disruptive father to focus on respect in youth sports. The players and parents in my third annual "top 10" youth sports stories are different. Crisis brought out the best in these heroes this year, but it's a fair bet that respect already was guiding their competitive spirit. Their respect for teammates and opponents, for coaches and officials — indeed, for the game itself — did not diminish their desire to win. If anything, the quality of their character enhanced it.

10. As Coon Rapids (Minn.) faced Lubbock (Texas) in the Little League World Series, the mother of Coon Rapids infielder Pete Anderson remained home battling brain cancer. Before the game, both teams gathered in center field and shared a prayer for her. (Lubbock won, 6-0.)

9. The Kellenberg (N.Y.) High School boys basketball team registered a 60-37 victory over Roosevelt High School, whose athletic teams continue

to exist only thanks to private donors who stepped up in the wake of severe school district budget cuts. After the game, Kellenberg coach Jack McCutcheon handed his Roosevelt counterpart a check for \$1,000 that had been contributed by Kellenberg's players and coaches.

8. Kevin Warren of Glenville, N.Y., won the Positive Coaching Alliance's Double-Goal Coach Award for teaching life skills to the young players on his community teams. A week later, the Warrens' home burned to the ground and destroyed most of their belongings. More than 100 families in the area — including those of his various teams, as well as opposing teams — donated food, clothing and a temporary home for them.

7. Luke Seibert of Portland, Texas, won \$30,000 for showing his two champion steers in a local competition. He gave one-third of the prize to the family of a high school football teammate, Matthew Claudio, who was hospitalized and in a medically induced coma to allow his body to better fight infections and pneumonia. A few weeks later, Matthew had begun his recovery and returned home.

6. Umpire Billy Reynolds collapsed during an Akron, Ohio, youth baseball tournament. Parents administered

CPR and called 911 while both teams' players and fans joined hands in a long line to guide ambulances from the road to the field. Paramedics had to revive him several times, but he survived.

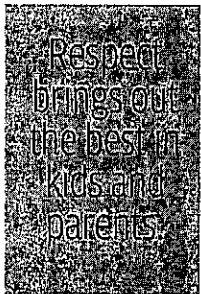
5. After Aberdeen (S.D.) Central High School running back Derek Johnson suffered serious leg injuries from an early-season tackle, high school football teams across the state raised thousands of dollars to help his family pay for the multiple surgeries he required. Randy Marso, athletic director at rival Brandon Valley, called the state's teams "a big extended family" and obligated to "take care of the people you compete with."

4. When 12-year-old pitcher Anthony Burruto of Orlando (Fla.) homered over the left-field fence in a Little League game, both teams cheered and the opposing third baseman high-fived him as he trotted toward home plate. Opposing team members and their parents do that all the time for Anthony, who wears prosthetics because birth defects required amputation of both legs at the knees when he was an infant.

3. Gregg Petrocelli, head coach of the Elmont (N.Y.) High School girls basketball team, collapsed and died during a playoff game against Hicksville High School. When the game resumed three nights later, both teams wore T-shirts with the popular coach's photo and joined hands at center court as the crowd cheered the gesture. After Hicksville's 60-57 victory, the teams hugged, and Hicksville co-captain Michelle Kurowski assured the defeated squad that "things will be OK."

2. With 20 seconds remaining, the Everett (Mass.) High School boys basketball team held a 70-67 lead over Peabody High School. A fouled Everett player could not go to the free throw line, so coach John DiBiasi summoned reserve guard Sean Cronk, who doubled as the team's scorekeeper. Sean made both free throws, and Everett went on to win the game — and the league title. As his teammates carried Sean from the court on their shoulders, it was clear that Sean had triumphed over his cerebral palsy.

1. Germantown (Pa.) High School shot-putters Jerome Plant, Dwyne Hall and Sharrod Graham were competing against West Philadelphia's Kyle Young when an elderly woman screamed for help from her burning home nearby. The four athletes scaled an 8-foot fence, raced together into the home through the smoke and rescued the woman before firefighters arrived. The four then returned to the track meet and resumed their competition — with even greater mutual respect as athletes and citizens.



Douglas E. Abrams, a law professor at the University of Missouri at Columbia, also serves on the expert panel of the Center for Sports Parenting at the University of Rhode Island.