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WE PAY TAXES, YES WE DO.
WE PAY TAXES, HOW ABOUT YOU?

In 2003, white fans at a Show Low, Ariz., high school heckled a visiting Apache basketball team with this class- and race-based chant, assigning second-class citizenship to Native Americans. Many in the crowd dismissed the fan behavior as a joke — a
tactic often used to discount or minimize the damage done by racialized language.

Harold Slemmer, Arizona Interscholastic Association executive director, said that more adults than students were involved in the jeers. State administrators ordered the entire school to complete the Pursing Victory With Honor sports program. Slemmer said that no fan incidents have been reported since.

BROKEBACK BOBBY!

In February 2006, students at Douglas Freeman High School in Richmond, Va., were banned from attending the district tournament quarterfinal basketball game at their school. Dr. Edward Pruden Jr., Freeman’s principal, chose the one-game punishment in response to how his students, a week earlier, had singled out a star player on an opposing team. When arch-rival Mills E. Godwin High School visited, fans of the Freeman Rebels repeatedly heckled a player on the Godwin team, chanting references to the gay-themed movie *Brokeback Mountain*.

The cheer defied school policy — a policy that had been emphasized throughout the year and even sent home in a letter to students’ families. The school specifically prohibits cheering against opponents, especially when cheers ridicule an individual player.

YOU CAN’T READ!
FAILING ENGLISH!
SIXTH-YEAR SENIOR!

These assorted insults came in March 2005, when Lake Oswego, Ore., hosted Portland’s Lincoln High. Lake Oswego students singled out Lincoln senior Omar Leary, after a baseless rumor swept the stands that the black player was a 20-year-old who had been held back.

The local newspaper quoted Lake Oswego’s student body.
Three Steps to Reducing Intolerant Cheers

Michael Josephson, founder of the Character Counts Coalition, offers these steps to reduce or eliminate negative cheers:

**Step 1: Define standards for what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.** Aim for the honor involved in sports, Josephson said. “Sports are important to those who play. It’s insulting when people demean it.”

**Step 2: Communicate those standards.** Josephson urges using written codes of conduct and including them in printed programs, having fans sign pledges and/or posting them prominently.

**Step 3: Have a mechanism to enforce those standards.** “In some high schools, it’s enough to have a vice principal … touring the stands and kicking people out,” Josephson said. “If there’s a level of violence, if you have drunken [or] unruly fans … you may need police or private security.”

Using these steps, it will get better, Josephson said. “How much better will depend on leadership, courage (and) the demands of parents and the community.”

Slogans and Pledges

“We, the participants of the Narrows League, will demonstrate excellence in school spirit and pride. This will be accomplished through good leadership, integrity and respect. By showing commitment, desire to motivate, passion for the game and fair play, we will strive to be positive role models in our school and communities. Home or away, win or lose, play hard, play fair, have fun, but remember that it is a game.”

—Narrows League Sportsmanship Slogan, posted in the South Kitsap gym

“Good sportsmanship is viewed by the Iowa High School Athletic Association and the Central Iowa Metro League as a concrete measure of the understanding and commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity. It is a priority of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and the CIML that all participants in this contest exhibit good sportsmanship, and it should be a priority of the fans and spectators to do so as well. Your cooperation in role modeling sportsmanship will ensure that this contest displays the positive values of the community and school each of you represent.”

—Marshalltown High School pledge, recited by a student before each game
trash. The Oregon City kids laugh it off. ... They wear their redneck/country [reputation] as a badge of honor.”

FINDING A ‘SOFT SPOT’
In Massachusetts, Provincetown High School teams have fought back against offensive cheers. Because the town has a well-known population of openly gay residents, the teams have been bombarded with anti-gay shouts from opposing crowds.

Provincetown softball and baseball teams traveled to Nantucket in 2003. Both visiting squads were peppered with anti-gay insults. As a result, Provincetown’s principal and athletic director complained in writing to their Nantucket counterparts, characterizing the fan behavior as “an assault on the students of Provincetown High School ... (and) ... an assault on the entire Provincetown community.”

The Nantucket principal responded, threatening to ban all Nantucket students from the stands to quash the epithets.

Any personal detail can fuel a taunt. In 2004, the Sioux Falls, S.D., Argus Leader newspaper examined fan misbehavior in the state.

Some putdowns aimed at individual players included chants of “Daddy’s boy” against a coach's son, “Average Joe” (comparing a player’s first name with a reality show of the same name), and “Kill whitey!” and “Sunscreen,” both against a player with light hair and complexion.

“They find whatever is a glaring weakness, a soft spot,” said James Staunton, commissioner of the southern sector of the California Interscholastic Federation.

The overweight softball player. The smaller-than-average football player. If nothing else, Staunton said, some fans might settle for chanting a player’s first name in a sarcastic singsong.

“I don’t think taunting is racial. It is harassment, in my opinion. It’s a group activity,” he said. “Or, more precisely, a pack activity.”

Tim Bell, athletic director for Marshalltown High School in Iowa, said such cynicism can be glorified by the media.

“Our students learn from television,” he said. “All college games are broadcast. They watch ESPN. If Duke University fans can do it at a game, why not here?”

WE CROSSED THE LINE
One Washington state school made headlines for the handling of its own negative cheering. In 2000, Port Orchard’s South Kitsap High School hosted the Foss Falcons of Tacoma.

In the waning minutes of a home-team loss, South Kitsap fans began berating the fans and players of predominately black Foss.

GO ROB A LIQUOR STORE!
HOOKED ON PHONICS!

By game’s end, South Kitsap’s players and coach apologized to Foss for fan behavior in the stands.

The next day, South Kitsap’s athletic director, principal and student body president co-signed and delivered a letter of apology to Foss, just hours after South Kitsap Principal Dave Columbini learned about the taunts.

“I’ll never forget it,” Columbini said, five years after the incident. “Immediately, I got on the intercom. I shared that the cheering was inappropriate, that we crossed the line, and that it will not be tolerated in the future.”

Columbini’s strategy involved a rapid public response and a focus on converting the incident into a learning experience. He thanked his players and coach, who diffused tensions by apologizing to their Foss opponents immediately after the game.

Next, Columbini said, “We held a summit with Foss students. They came and shared how it made them feel. This happened within a month, still in the basketball season. From our league, we invited 10 to 15 students per school for a meeting. Students worked together to create the Narrows League Sportsmanship Slogan. It hangs in our gym and is read before every game.” (See box, page 25.)
Columbini, in just his second year as principal, never had faced such a school crisis. "An incident like this affects not only your school, but your community and another community," he said. "A lot of healing needed to take place."

Community education became part of Columbini's challenge. The school used its televised morning announcements as a time to discuss positive, appropriate cheers.

"We were on our kids for anything that seemed like a negative cheer," he said. "As a result, the kids clammed up. Parents called, saying, 'Let them cheer!' We explained we wanted a lot of noise and a lot of fun without negative cheers. We give them some freedom, but we won't tolerate cheers degrading an individual or race."

'THIS IS OUR HOUSE'
Many schools face a balancing act in defining negative cheering. Racial slurs and intolerant language contradict the ideals of competition, but silence is not the answer.

In Iowa, Bell and his department realize students are out for entertainment, not necessarily citizenship lessons. That's why the school's pre-game sportsmanship pledge, previously read over the public-announcement system by an adult, is now recited by a student. (See box.)

"When they hear it from a peer, students pay more attention," he said.

In Washington state, during a recent South Kitsap overtime basketball game lost by one point at the buzzer, Columbini found his own packed gymnasium quiet with two minutes left.

"I went into the crowd and told our kids, 'This is our house. Let them hear you,'" he said. "Then, the cheers of 'Offense!' and 'Defense!' started. Sometimes, you have to show them how to have fun."

Josephson, of the Character Counts Coalition, knows of one league that required near silence at games.

"I think that's horrible," he said. "Everyone should be able to passionately and enthusiastically be involved in the game. The question is appropriateness of conduct."

Tom Owens, a children's book author living in Central Iowa, is a frequent contributor to Teaching Tolerance magazine.
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