

The Adventures of the P.E. GANG



Anthony Vekich

MEET THE P.E. GANG



Hi! My name is Anthony Joseph, but my friends call me "A.J." for short. I totally love to play baseball! In physical education class, our teacher Mr. Fitter taught us how to hit the ball and field balls above and below our waist. He says it's important to always keep your eye on the ball when you're hitting and fielding.

The coolest thing about Mr. Fitter is that he's always reminding us of how important it is to be a caring person, and to show that by encouraging each other in P.E. class to be our best. He says that instead of reminding each other about our mistakes, we should try to make each other feel good about playing by saying things such as "nice try" and "good effort," instead of things that might hurt each others feelings.

My dad and I spend a lot of time together practicing my baseball skills. Then, when my mom and dad come to my baseball games and watch me play, I try even harder and give it everything I've got. So far, they haven't missed any games, and that makes me feel awesome!



Hi! My name is Katherine and my all-time favorite sport in physical education class is soccer - I love it! I started playing soccer when I was four years old, and I'll never stop!

Our P.E. teacher, Mr. Fitter, taught us how to dribble, pass, and shoot the soccer ball. He says that for true teamwork to happen, we have to show responsibility first. Mr. Fitter reminds us that when you're playing soccer or any sport, you shouldn't make excuses, lose your temper or blame others when you make a mistake.

I love to run around and keep moving, and Mr. Fitter says soccer is a great activity for me to stay healthy and be strong. My mom's friend Ken and I practice all the time in the backyard. He says if you want to be good at something, you have to practice. All I know is I just like spending time with him doing what we do best - playing soccer!



Hi! My name is Jimmy and I think the best sport in the entire world is hockey. My favorite team is the Buffalo Sabres. In P.E. class, Mr. Fitter taught us how to hold the hockey stick correctly and how to pass and stick handle. He also teaches us how to be a fair person by treating our classmates the way we would want to be treated, which always means playing by the rules.

You wouldn't believe it, but Mr. Fitter rarely ever keeps score in class because he says that although winning feels great, we need to remember that there's always a team that loses. This keeps us focused on the fun of the sport, so that feeling sad is not an option!

I started ice-skating when I was three years old. My Uncle Pete and I practice a lot on the rink he built in our backyard. I'm ten years old now and play on our town's ice hockey team. When I ask my Uncle Pete who his favorite hockey player is, he says "me." That's just as nice as being on the ice!



Hey there, it's me Samantha, and I'm looking up! All my friends call me "Slamming Sammie" because my favorite activity is volleyball. Mr. Fitter taught us the underhand serve, the forearm pass and how to set the ball. We started with balloons first and then used beach balls to help us keep the ball in the air. After that, we started using real volleyballs.

Mr. Fitter teaches us how to be a respectful person. He shows us how to be respectful through his own actions. We learn how to listen to what other people have to say, and to not argue with our coaches, teammates, or officials, and to be courteous and polite. I'm looking forward to playing on the high school team when I get older. My mom tells me stories of the friendships she made while playing on her volleyball team when she was a kid. Her best friend was on her team and they still talk about the special times they shared together playing volleyball. Wow - that's so incredible!



Hut hut! My name is Casey and my favorite sport is football. To me, the best team on the planet is the Buffalo Bills. In Physical Education class, Mr. Fitter has taught us a lot of football skills. We've worked on gripping and throwing the ball, catching, kicking, punting, centering, and carrying the ball the correct way.

Mr. Fitter also teaches us how to be a trustworthy person by giving us opportunities to be honest and do what is right even when it's difficult. He shares his own life experiences, too, like when he was faced with tough times but still did the right thing.

My dad and I spend a lot of time at the park working on our football skills. When we're driving home, he tells me all the important values he learned playing football, like hard work and discipline, and how he applies it in everything he does. He says the teamwork you learn in football gets you ready for adult life. Dad says that the friendships you make playing football are more like being brothers, because you're always there for each other. I can't wait to play on a football team!



Hi! My name is Matthew, but my friends call me M.J. - short for Michael Jordan - my all time favorite basketball player. In Physical Education class, Mr. Fitter taught us how to dribble, pass and shoot the ball. I'm really good at the jump shot - swoosh, there it is!

Mr. Fitter teaches us how important teamwork is, both on and off the basketball court. He says that good teams encourage each other and cooperate to meet their goals, always working together as a team.

Everybody in my family plays basketball. My mom bought us a basketball net for the driveway and all of my friends like to come over to play. My older sister, Jamie plays on the high school basketball team and she loves it. Last year, she didn't make the team and I remember her crying when the coach told her the news. Jamie might be my sister, but I'll tell you, she sure has guts! She never gave up her dream of playing and kept practicing everyday. This year, she made the team because of her hard work. That's what it's all about!

CHAPTER 1

"You never know how much you can do until you try."

Hello again, it's me Anthony. All my friends call me A.J., remember? I am ten years old and totally love to play sports. My favorite sport hands down is baseball, but I also enjoy playing football, basketball, and hockey. Can you guess what my favorite subject is in school? Yep! You got it: it's Physical Education, also known as "P.E."

My dad and I practice sports everyday of the week except Sunday, because after church, we have a lot of work to do around the house. I have a younger brother Zachary, who is three. He doesn't enjoy sports as much as I do. His idea of sports "fun" is taking the ball away from my friends and me during a game, and then running away with it. Zach would much rather be playing in the dirt with his trucks and construction vehicles, and that's okay, because that's what he loves!

The neighborhood that I live in is great. Everyone is really friendly and helpful. My best friend Bobby lives down the street from me. When we aren't playing or practicing baseball, we can usually be found at one another's house hanging out together.

My dad is the coach of our baseball team, and he holds practice every day after school, so long as the weather is nice. My dad tells us that although we don't always win our games, we should continue to try our best, be respectful, and play fair. He says that getting better at your sport and having fun is more important than winning. He proves that to us in practices and games by giving everyone a chance to play different positions, no matter how good they are at it.

After baseball season is over, football season soon begins. My dad and I enjoy watching the Buffalo Bills, our local football team, on television. Sometimes he takes me to the live games. One day last season, my dad took me to see a Bills game, and right before it started, he took us down to the field to get some autographs from the players. The players seemed larger than life to me, but as they started talking, I realized how friendly and "normal" they were. Just regular guys, like my dad and me.

After they signed our jerseys, they reminded us to cheer as loud as we could whenever the other team had the ball. I guess this made it difficult for the quarterback to give signals to his players. During the game, a player from the other team scored a touchdown and started doing some crazy dance afterwards in the end zone. He sure was funny, but my dad said that that kind of "end zone nonsense" was unnecessary and just an example of a player being a showoff.

I am so happy in my neighborhood and I really love all of my friends, so you can imagine how disappointed I was when my dad came home one day and told the family we had to move. His company had asked him to relocate somewhere far away. I couldn't imagine how I was ever going to survive without my buddies or leave my sports teams. I really couldn't even think about leaving Bobby. What was I going to do? My mother knew I was sad and told me that I would meet new friends and that I could still play sports at my new school. I was so upset, I couldn't even think about that.

Well, the first day at my new school was a little frightening to say the least. The building seemed so much bigger to me than my old school and of course, I didn't know anyone. But the principal walked me down to my classroom, and I took a seat next to a boy named Jimmy. He asked me if I was "newbie" and I told him I had just moved here and didn't know anyone. He said he'd

be happy to show me around the neighborhood and would introduce me to some other kids. He even lived around the block from me - what a relief!

When Saturday morning came around, Jimmy kept his promise and came knocking at my door. He had his bat and glove and asked if I wanted to play baseball with him and the other kids. We played in a field behind the old warehouse down the street. When we met up with the other kids, Jimmy introduced me to everyone and it felt great. One of the kids shouted, "Are you any good at baseball?" My first reaction was to say that I was the best player on my team back home, but then I remembered my dad's words, "Don't brag about being good at something, just show it." So instead I said, "I played on a team back home."

The two older guys were captains and they started to pick teams. It was the first time in my life that I was picked last. It sure didn't feel good. Then, the captain of our team told me to play right field. I thought to myself, how will I ever show anyone how good I am out in right field?

It was finally time for me to bat. I was never so nervous in all my life! It used to feel so natural back home when I played sports. When I stepped up to the plate, my legs were shaking and the bat felt too heavy to swing. The first pitch was over my head, but I swung anyway. The second pitch was right over the plate and as I swung, I heard, "strike two." I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I couldn't even remember the last time I struck out. Finally, the third pitch came and, even though it was a little outside, I reached out and swung. As I hit the ball, it rolled to the pitcher and before I knew it, he had thrown it to first base and I was out.

It was getting late and I knew there wasn't much more time to show them that I was really good at this game. A player from

the other team said this was going to be the last inning. The score was 5 to 3 and we were winning. The other team had two players on base with two outs. Our pitcher threw the ball and the batter smacked the ball into the air. It was coming right for me. I took a step in and then realized the ball was going over my head. I put my head down and started to run as fast as I could after the ball. At the last moment, I jumped into the air, stretched my arms out, and as I was falling to the ground, the ball landed right into my glove! It was the best catch I had ever made. Everybody was patting me on the back and telling me what a great catch it was. It felt like I was back home again.

After a few weeks, I was definitely feeling better. I had met new friends and was enjoying school again. In P.E. class, I was always the first one picked on the team and that felt good. However, I often thought about that day I was chosen last during the baseball game. So one day I asked my P.E. teacher if there was any way we could make teams up without having to choose players. The teacher thought it was a great idea, so that day we chose our teams by counting off by numbers.

After that day, we sometimes chose teams by what color we were wearing or by what month our birthday was in. This new idea definitely made everyone feel less "singled out." The whole thing went over so well that my friend, Jimmy, and I decided to start a P.E. Club in our school that we called the "P.E. Gang." So far, we have six members in our club. There is Casey, who loves to play football. Then we have Samantha, who we call Sammie, and she loves to play volleyball. Katherine enjoys playing soccer. Jimmy is a hockey lover and Mattie, short for Matthew, loves basketball. And, I'm sure you can guess that I am the baseball player. We have a lot of fun playing together. We created a P.E. promise and if you want to join the P.E. Gang, you must follow these rules:

I promise to always play fair, be honest, work with and encourage others. I will also be a good citizen in my community, be helpful to my neighbors, and be respectful to my classmates, teachers, other adults, and most importantly, my parents or guardians.

Mr. Fitter loves our idea. He also suggested that if a student wanted to join, he or she would have to be nominated by one of the "members," and then invited to join either by Mr. Fitter or another adult at school.

Mr. Fitter also said we should use our sports skills to help other students in class and in our neighborhood. Sometimes, we work with the younger students in Mr. Fitter's P.E. classes and help out. It's a lot of fun! To encourage other kids to join the P.E. Gang, we had tee shirts made up with our P.E. Gang motto on the back. For me, being active and playing sports has been a great way to feel "at home" in my new school, and it sure has helped me make new friends!

I wrote to Bobby back home and told him about the P.E. Gang we started at my new school. He said the idea sounded so cool that he's going to start a P.E. Gang at his school, too! Although we live in different towns now, Bobby and I are still good friends. We talk on the phone the first Sunday of every month, and we e-mail each other as often as we can. We talk a lot about our experiences in sports because we have that in common. I miss Bobby, but am beginning to feel more comfortable now that I'm part of the P.E. Gang and have made new friends.

CHAPTER 2

"You can always be a better person today than the one you were yesterday."

Mr. Fitter, or "Mr. Fitness" as we call him, gave us our first job as the newly formed P.E. Gang. He wants us to work with a student in our fourth grade class named Patrick. Patrick is very disrespectful and is always fighting, complaining, or arguing with his classmates. His way of "fitting in" is to act goofy in class.

When Mr. Fitness sat us down to tell us about the job, no one really seemed too interested in the assignment.

"This is a pretty scary job. Patrick is a bully and if we try to help him, he'll probably beat us all up," Matthew said rather nervously.

"I think Patrick is just trying to fit in with the other kids but doesn't really know how. If you've ever watched him in P.E. class, you've probably noticed he isn't really good at any of the activities we do. Maybe we should invite him over this Saturday to see if he'd be interested in playing in a neighborhood football game," I suggested.

Katherine yelled, "Are you crazy? Do the math! Patrick and his tackle equal a heck of a lot of pain."

"First of all, Katherine, we don't play tackle football, we play two hand touch," said Sammie. "And guess what, I've got a great idea! Why don't we tell him the game starts at 1:00 p.m., when it really starts at 2:00 p.m.? This will give us an hour to help him with his football skills so he'll feel more successful."

"A.J., you show Patrick how to throw and catch the football. Katherine, since you play soccer, you should show Patrick how to

punt and kick the ball. Casey, you are the football expert so you should show him how to throw the ball. Sammie and I will teach Patrick how to hike and run with the ball. Now, which one of you is going to ask him to play?" Matthew asked.

"I will," I volunteered. I'm beginning to think the initials in my name stand for "always joining" instead of Anthony Joseph.

Before long Friday rolled around and that was our day to have Phys. Ed. in school. As usual, Patrick was being his same old, difficult self. Mr. Fitter was teaching us how to throw and catch the football. Patrick was throwing the ball as fast as he could to his partner, and it sailed over his head.

I went over to Patrick and asked him if he'd be interested in playing touch football over the weekend with some kids from school. I told him it would be at 1:00 p.m. at the old warehouse at the end of our street. Patrick looked at me rather suspiciously, and then asked "Why are you asking me to play?"

"Well, we're short some players and we thought you might want to give the game a go" I told him.

"Sounds like fun. You can count me in," Patrick replied.

Saturday came with a cold snap, but the sun was shining brightly which makes for great football weather. Everybody in the club showed up, but by 1:15 p.m., no Patrick.

"I don't think he's going to come," grumbled Katherine.
"He's probably grounded from being so bad in school."

"I'm here," blasted Patrick as he ran forward, out of breath. "I'm sorry I'm late, but I had to beat up some bratty kid for not giving me his lunch money yesterday... Ha ha, only kidding. I was really helping my dad cut the grass. Where is everybody?"

"Well," Samantha began, "Matthew had a great idea to practice before the game actually starts. He thought if we went over some plays and worked on our football skills, we would be ready for the other team."

Patrick must have thought that was a great idea too, because he said, "Why don't we start playing catch to warm up our arms?" Patrick threw the ball to Casey and it went flying over her head.

"Not bad Patrick," said Casey. "Try this instead. Place your fingers on the laces and then place your hand slightly back from the middle of the ball like this. When you throw, step with the opposite foot of your throwing hand, then twist your hips away from your target and throw."

"Wow! Where did you learn how to throw like that?" asked Patrick.

"In Phys. Ed. Class," Casey beamed. "Katherine, can you show Patrick how you are able to kick the ball so far?" asked A.J.

"Okay," said Katherine. "The most important part of kicking the ball is to watch with your eyes as your foot kicks the ball. If you look up while you're kicking, you're not going to kick it on the right spot of the ball. Remember to point your toes down and follow through with your foot after you kick. Watch this." Katherine then picked up the football and kicked it so far that it went sailing over our heads into the parking lot. "We learned that in our soccer unit," she said. "Don't you remember?"

"I guess," Patrick replied, rather unsure of himself.

"Patrick, now I'll show you how to hike and carry the ball," I said. "When you carry the football, place one hand over the end of the ball, like this, and hold it close to your body."

"When hiking the ball," said Sammie, "just pretend you're going to throw, then place the ball on the ground between your feet. With your feet spread apart, slide the ball back to your quarterback."

"Let me guess who taught you guys how to do that. Was it Mr. Fitness himself, Mr. Fitter?" said Patrick.

"You're right, Patrick," Matthew said. "By teaching us sport skills, he also teaches us how to stay active."

"Remember the day he sat us all down and said how difficult it is to learn when you act silly?" asked Sammie. "P.E. is fun and the easiest grade to get in school. All you have to do is follow directions and have fun."

"Maybe that's why it bugs me so much," said Patrick. "I'm not really good at sports. I try, but it's major hard for me to keep up with you guys."

"We are going to help you. We figure that if you want to learn, we, as a team, can show you all kinds of ways to be good at sports. The most important part of playing is to always play fair, be honest, work together with your teammates, and treat people with respect. When we play fair, we rarely get mad at each other. If we disagree on something, we try to work it out. Arguing and complaining is just a waste of time," said Katherine.

"Patrick, are you ready to play some football?" asked A.J.

"You know it!" shouted Patrick.

"Awesome! Before we start, let's work on throwing and catching a little bit" I told him.

Monday at school, we told Mr. Fitter all about Patrick and how the football game worked out so well. We told him that

Patrick was willing to let us help him with his sports skills and how nice and respectful he had been.

"Great job," Mr. Fitter beamed. "I've seen this happen in my P.E. classes in the past. I'll have a student who wants to do well, but acts out to try to gain acceptance from peers. It will be interesting to see how Patrick behaves in class now."

'Do you think Patrick can join our P.E. Gang?' I asked.

"Let's give him some time to show us how well he can do first. If all goes well, then we'll ask him. You guys did a great job today, I'm proud of all of you." When Mr. Fitter was proud of you, you knew you had "done well." And we knew.

CHAPTER 3

"You win some, you lose some, but you always try again."

Patrick was doing great in P.E. class. Mr. Fitter said he was very proud of how we'd helped him, even though he still had some work to do before we could ask him to be part of the P.E. Gang.

Aaron, Jimmy's older brother, is an awesome hockey player, but not always a good sport. He plays for the best hockey team we have in town and he leads the league in scoring every year. Although Jimmy and Aaron are brothers, you'd never know it by the way they argue all the time. I think it's because Aaron wants to always win at anything he and Jimmy do together. Then when Aaron gets with his friends, his attitude gets even worse, and then they all start picking on us.

Aaron and his friends challenged us to a hockey game. At first we said no because we knew from the last time we played

them what would happen. They like to make up the rules as they go along, which allows them to cheat. You see, Aaron's friend, Kyle made the rule that if you score, you get the puck back and can start again. That is not what happens in the official rules of hockey and they know it. Of course, when they play by their own rules, they always beat us.

A few days later we decided to play them anyway. What were we thinking? In the beginning, we were all playing well together and everything seemed to be going okay. Our passing was right on and we were actually scoring goals. The score was 5 to 4 and they were winning. Normally, before we end our hockey games, if the score is close someone will shout out "next goal ends the game!" Since the score was 5 to 4, we knew we had no chance of winning but for the first time ever, we had a chance to tie. Since we hadn't beaten them before, a tie would have been super sweet.

Aaron had the puck and, as usual, tried to score without passing to anyone on his team. We call him a "puck hog" because he tries to control the puck and do everything himself. He started at his goal and was stick handling right past everyone. The only person he had to beat was the goalie - J.D.

J.D. is an awesome goalie, which is the main reason the score was so close in the first place. J.D. knew exactly what Aaron was going to do because he does the same move all the time. He fakes a shot to the right, deeks to the left and then tries to lift the puck up over the goalie's pads. As Aaron approached the net, he faked his shot to the right and as he was making his move to the left, J.D. started to move to his right. J.D. then slid with his legs raised up in the air, and the puck bounced off of his pads and went sailing into the neighbor's yard. No goal!

Our best player Jimmy ended up scoring the last goal to tie the game. This made Aaron furious. Aaron is obsessed with hockey and cannot stand to lose or even tie to his brother. It was getting dark and very difficult to see the puck. Aaron kept trying to keep the game going, but it was impossible to see. The score was 5 to 5 and we all agreed earlier that the next goal would end the game. Aaron, being the poor sport that he is, grabbed Jimmy's coat and said, "This isn't over. We'll finish this game on Saturday."

After Aaron and his friends left, we all gathered around and celebrated our victory, even though we didn't win the game. A tie was the best accomplishment we had ever made and to us, this was a victory. We all decided that we would continue the game next Saturday. This gave us one whole week to practice.

On Monday, we told Mr. Fitter about what had happened and how excited we were about the tie. In P.E. class, we were working on hockey skills, which gave us a great opportunity to continue practicing. All week, Mr. Fitter stressed the importance of working together when playing any kind of sport, especially hockey. He said the best teams are the ones that play cooperatively together.

Mr. Fitter also told us that he once played on a hockey team that could have had the best player in the league. He was fast and had a great shot. His problem was that he never passed the puck to anyone on his team. He also had a bad habit of yelling at his teammates whenever they made mistakes. Not many people on his team liked him because of the way he acted, and because of this, they lost a lot of games.

After the story, Mr. Fitter reminded us that there is no 'I' in team. To play well, players must work together. Mr. Fitter told us that when we play Aaron and his friends again on Saturday, we

need to remember what he taught us in class: to "give and go and find an open space," just like in soccer and basketball. When we have the puck, pass it to someone on the team and go to an open space toward the opponent's net. We have to remember to keep moving around the playing area to make it harder for the other team to cover us. He told us he knows we will do well and he hopes we'll win, but even if we don't, we should never lose sight of why we play: because it's great fun!

Thursday morning at school, our classroom teacher collected our homework just like she does every other day. I overheard Jimmy telling her that he left his homework at home. During lunch, I asked Jimmy why he didn't hand in his homework and he said he was too busy practicing for our hockey game on Saturday. Now, if you forget your homework in Mrs. Smith's class, she calls home, and I know Jimmy's parents are very strict when it comes to his school work. Jimmy's dad has this rule: If your school work is not finished, you don't get to play sports. I couldn't understand why Jimmy did this, knowing that his dad wouldn't put up with any excuses. When Friday came, Jimmy gave us the bad news we knew was coming. He wouldn't be allowed to play on Saturday because he didn't do his homework.

"What were you thinking Jimmy?" scolded Katherine. "You know we can't win without you playing!"

"I'm so sorry," said Jimmy sadly. "I really thought my dad would understand when I told him about our game on Saturday, but he said my school work was just as important as playing sports. You know my dad doesn't let things like this slide because he believes it will eventually teach me to be more responsible. I'm really sorry I let you all down. I promise it will never happen again."

"That's okay," said Matthew. "Do you mind if we ask Patrick to play in your place?"

"No," said Jimmy. "I think that's a great idea."

On Monday, we filled Jimmy in on the results of the game. Even though we didn't win, we still played great together. After the game was over, Aaron actually came over and said "Good game!" Then we all gave one another high-fives! Can you believe it? Jimmy said that we'd never have to worry about him not playing again because he'd make sure his homework was always done in the future. Letting his team down again was something he was not going to let happen...

CHAPTER 4

"With success, attitude is as important as ability."

Mr. Fitter gave us all a new assignment in P.E. class today. He wants all of the fourth graders to understand what the phrase, "being a good sport" means by bringing in two examples: one showing an example of a "good sport" and another of a "poor sport." Mr. Fitter said that we would be making a videotape about sportsmanship and that we would be responsible for coming up with our own definition of what "being a good sport" is to us.

So I asked Mr. Fitter, "What will we be doing in the video?"

"Good question, A.J.," he said. "We'll be providing the audience with examples of being good sports and also of being poor sports. You'll have time in class to make up a game and show the many ways that students display good and bad sportsmanship. For example, I was just at my son's championship hockey game

this weekend, and his team lost their game 7 to 2. As his team was skating off the ice, some of the players were crying about losing. One boy even told his mother "Don't talk to me" because he was mad that his team had lost. That is definitely an example of being a poor sport. I told my son that after a game is over, no one should be able to tell if you won or lost the game."

Katherine then asked, "Why is that, Mr. Fitter?"

Mr. Fitter said, "Because after a game is over, regardless of the score, if you come off the field or ice knowing you tried your best, had fun, and encouraged your teammates, then you're automatically a winner. It is disrespectful to take your anger out on someone else, such as your parents who take the time to bring you to your practices and your games. You wouldn't even be there if it wasn't for their support."

Mr. Fitter then read to us one of the best definitions of sportsmanship that he had ever heard. It was written by Amy Van Dyken and went something like this:

"The most important lesson I've learned from sports is how to not only be a gracious winner, but a good loser as well. Nobody wins all the time. Winning is the easy part, losing is really tough. But you learn more from one loss than you do from a million wins. I mean, it's really tough to shake the hand of someone who just beat you, and it's even harder to do it with a smile on your face. If you can learn to do this and push through the pain, you will remember what that moment is like the next time you win and have a better sense of how your competitors on the field feel. This experience will teach you what really matters most, both on and off the field."

Mr. Fitter said he liked this example because it demonstrates a true sportsman - one who shows feelings and respect for others. Many times, people think that sports are just

for people that like to play games, but it is really much more than that.

Then he said he was thinking about a name for our video and asked what we thought about the title, "It's More Than a Game." He said that when we play games in P.E. Class, we are learning how to work together, play fair, be honest, and respect our teammates, as well as the players on the opposite team. This is why playing sports is more than just playing games.

Casey asked, "Isn't that our P.E. Gang motto?"

Mr. Fitter said, "Yes, Casey, it is. That is why I feel physical education class is so important for you."

He told us to watch for examples of good sportsmanship as well as bad and start keeping track of them. "It doesn't necessarily have to be during a game," he said. "It could be something that happens after a game as well. Once after a baseball game, I saw a player apologize for accidentally running into the catcher from the other team. That boy didn't actually break any rules, but he still felt bad and knew that apologizing was the right thing to do."

Matthew asked, "How can that be an example of good sportsmanship?"

Mr. Fitter smiled and said, "Great question, Matthew. If you are someone that has respect for people off the field, you will also have respect for them on the field. I will give you two weeks to look for several examples of good and bad sportsmanship. Watch a game on television or go to a local game in your community, like a youth baseball or soccer game. I bet you will find a lot of examples there. Too many times in our society we hear all the bad things that athletes do in sports. Let's see if we can find some good things as well. When we are done, I will put

each of your definitions of sportsmanship on the video along with your demonstration of the game. So, good luck to each of you and if you need my help, you know where to find me."

Samantha then asked me if I'd be interested in going to her sister Jillian's soccer game. She thought it would be a great place to find examples of good and bad sportsmanship. The game was scheduled for Saturday at 10:00 a.m. I thought that was a great idea and agreed to go. Samantha said she'd even ask her mom if I could sleep over! Samantha's sister Jillian is five years old and she's one of the best players on the team. Her dad is the coach, so she practices a lot.

At the game on Saturday, Samantha said, "Hey dad, A.J. and I are going to be watching for players showing good and bad sportsmanship. Mr. Fitter gave us this assignment in P.E. class."

Her Dad replied, "What a great assignment!"

After the soccer game was over, Samantha and I talked about the examples we saw of good and bad sportsmanship during the game. Jillian scored three goals within the first five minutes of the game and it was obvious that she was better than the other players. We selected Jillian because she realized that the other team wasn't that good, and instead of scoring more goals and making the other team feel bad, she decided that she would pass the ball to her teammates so they could have the opportunity to score. We both felt that she was a great example of someone being a good sport.

The example of poor sportsmanship that we both agreed on was when a boy from the other team refused to shake anyone's hand after the game because he was mad that his team had lost.

"I think we accomplished our mission," I said happily to Samantha.

"I think you are right," Samantha said. "Now, we just have to come up with our own meaning of being a good sport. I have some thoughts on mine, but I have to go now because I don't want to lose my idea. See you Monday in school!"

"Okay," I replied. "I'll see you then."

Being a Good Sport by Samantha:

Being a good sport has many different meanings to me. Being a good sport is trying your best to help your teammates and always playing by the rules. It means encouraging your teammates to feel good about themselves even when they make mistakes and not getting angry and arguing with the referees when your team is losing.

Being a good sport also means that when your team is winning, you don't try to make the other team feel bad about it. You work together as a team, rather than trying to do everything by yourself. A good sport also listens to the coach during the games and practices and helps his or her teammates when they need it. Being a good sport also means being respectful to the other team by shaking hands after a game and telling them "good game." Being a good sport is the most important part of playing sports.

CHAPTER 5

"Stand up for what is right even if you stand alone."

The P.E. Gang is growing fast. We already have over two hundred members. It's really making a difference in our P.E. classes, too. We don't complain or argue anymore when we are playing games in class because so many students are members. Mr. Fitter was right! If you work together, play fair, encourage others and have fun, you're automatically a winner, even if your team loses.

Casey wasn't herself in school this week. I could tell that something was bothering her. She is usually happy and trying to make all of us laugh. I asked her what was wrong and she told me, "Nothing."

I said, "Come on Casey, you can tell me. I won't tell anyone."

She said, "Okay A.J., but you have to promise not to tell anybody." I promised her I wouldn't say a word, so she continued.

"It's my parents. Every time they come to my baseball games, they always embarrass me."

"How do they embarrass you?" I asked.

She sighed and said, "Well, every time the umpire makes a bad call or when our coach does something my parents don't agree with, they get really loud and let everyone know about it. One time, the umpire called one of our players out. Because it was such a close call, my parents started yelling at the umpire. They said he was "blind" and that the runner was clearly safe. My mom

even asked the umpire if he wanted to "borrow her glasses so that he could see better." I don't think they know how much their behavior bothers me. I love having them at the games to cheer me on, but I really don't like it when they yell so much."

"I can see your point, Casey," I said.

"Just yesterday, my coach put me in to pitch the last few innings of the game," Casey began. "My fastball was really working well. I struck out the last six batters to end the game, and my parents were very excited for me. After the game was over, my dad went up to my coach and told him that if it wasn't for me, the team would have lost. I almost died when he said that! I was so embarrassed, and I know my coach wasn't happy with my dad's comment either because he just walked away and didn't say a word."

"Wow Casey, I would have felt embarrassed, too. Maybe you should talk to them about your feelings," I suggested.

"I can't A.J. I love them both so much and I'm afraid to hurt their feelings. I know if I say something, they will feel hurt."

"Casey, you might want to talk to Mr. Fitter. I know he would help you find the right words to say to your parents," I said.

"Are you sure, A.J.?"

"For sure, Casey. Do you want me to go with you?"

"That would be great, A.J.!"

After P.E. class was over, Casey and I asked Mr. Fitter if we could talk to him for a moment.

Casey began softly, "I have something that's been bothering me a lot lately, Mr. Fitter."

"What is it Casey?" asked Mr. Fitter.

"It's my parents. Every time they come to one of my baseball games, they embarrass me by yelling at the umpires or coaches. I don't know what to do. I want to say something, but I don't want to hurt their feelings."

"I know exactly how you feel Casey. When I was your age playing sports, my parents were the same way. They both came to all of my games. My team could always tell when they were there because they would complain and argue with the officials the whole time. I remember one day my mom was screaming her head off at the umpire during my baseball game. She was yelling so much that he had to stop the game and tell her that if she didn't stop, she'd have to leave the park. I was so embarrassed, but after the umpire said that to her, she calmed down."

Then Mr. Fitter said, "I have an idea Casey. Since you don't want to talk to them face to face, why don't you write them a letter about how you feel?"

Casey asked, "But what will I say in the letter?"

"Well, Casey, what do you want it to say?"

"I want them to know that I enjoy having them at my games, but I don't want them to yell so much."

"Okay, Casey, that's a good start, but you might want to begin the letter by telling them how much you care about them and how much you appreciate all of the time they take out of their busy schedules to bring you to your practices and games."

Tell them how much you enjoy playing sports and thank them for giving you the opportunity to play and make so many new friends. After you have made them realize how much you care and appreciate them, tell them how you feel about the embarrassment they are causing you at your games and I guarantee they will understand."

"That's a great idea!" shouted Casey.

"Okay, Casey, go take some time to think about what you are going to write in your letter."

"Thanks for all of your help, Mr. Fitter. I really appreciate it."

Casey began her letter:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am so lucky to have parents like you. You have always been there for me and let me play all the sports I've dreamed of. I really enjoy having you both at my games, encouraging me and cheering me on and I know if it wasn't for you supporting me and taking time out of your busy schedules, I wouldn't be playing.

The reason I'm writing you this letter is to let you know that, as much as I love having you both at my games, there are times I get embarrassed when you yell at the officials or coaches. I know that you mean well, but I feel terrible when you yell because it makes me feel uncomfortable. Sometimes it makes me feel like I don't want to play sports anymore. I hope you will understand where I am coming from and won't be upset with me. I love you mom and dad so much. Thank you again for all of your love and support!

Love,

Casey

The next day, Casey told Mr. Fitter that she finished writing her letter.

He said, "Casey I am proud of you. It must have been very difficult to write that letter. I hope your parents will now understand how you feel. I was thinking about your problem last night and I have an idea for a new project for our P.E. class."

"What is it?" asked Casey.

"I'm sure you're not the only person playing sports who has been embarrassed by their parents. So what we're going to do in class is come up with a checklist for parents, created by the kids, that tells them how to enjoy youth sports without embarrassing their children."

"I think that's a great idea. When can we start the project?" asked Casey.

"How about our next class?" replied Mr. Fitter.

The fifth grade class worked very hard for two weeks creating a checklist for parents. After the project was over, they had the checklist laminated and passed it out to all the students that wanted to give it to their parents. This is what it looked like:

**P.E. Gang Youth Sports
Bookmark for Parents:**

- 1. Have a "Fun is Number One" attitude in youth sports.**
- 2. Treat officials, coaches, my kids, their teammates, and their opponents, with respect.**
- 3. Praise my kids, their teammates, and their opponents, just for participating.**
- 4. Make a "big deal" out of positives with my kids, their teammates, and their opponents.**
- 5. Remain calm when my kids or their teammates make a mistake.**
- 6. Remind my kids and their teammates not to get down on themselves.**
- 7. Remind yourself and your kids that there is life beyond youth sports.**
- 8. Remind yourself and your kids to laugh and have a sense of humor on the field and off.**
- 9. Emphasize the importance of teamwork with your kids.**
- 10. Teach your kids the importance of sportsmanship: winning without gloating, and losing without complaining.**

CHAPTER 6

"Success is achieved when all parts work together."

Every year, Lincoln Elementary has basketball tryouts for the "Gators." Getting on the team is difficult because so many kids try out. Last year, thirty kids tried out for the team and only fifteen made it. The team plays games on Friday nights starting in November, with the season ending in January. In our school, basketball is a very popular sport. The team has cheerleaders and a lot of people come to watch the games. You can probably guess who the coach of the team is - Mr. Fitness himself - Mr. Fitter!

Last year, the Lincoln Gators only lost one game all season and that loss was to our greatest competitor, the Grizzlies. We've never beaten them because they always have a great team. Every year, they have the tallest and the fastest players. Tryouts start on Monday and the practice is really tough. Mr. Fitter wants to see if we are good enough to make the team. He's going to expect us to show him how well we can dribble, pass, and shoot.

We all play on the team, except for Jimmy. He doesn't like basketball that much, but he's always at our games cheering us on. Matthew is our best player. His older sister plays for our high school team and is the best player on her team, too. She wasn't always the best player, though. One year, she didn't make the team, but she kept practicing and working hard and the next year, she made it.

"This year is going to be our best year, I can just feel it!" Matthew said excitedly.

"I know, Matthew, I feel the same way, too. You and your dad have been practicing a lot this year," I said.

"I just want to beat the Grizzlies so bad. Why is it that we can never beat them?" asked Matthew.

"Remember what Mr. Fitter told us? He said that the Grizzlies coach keeps his best players in the game the whole time instead of rotating them," I said.

"Well, why don't we do that?" asked Matthew.

"Matthew, you know why we don't do that on our team! Everyone plays - every game. Mr. Fitter would never go for playing just the best players, you know that," I pointed out.

"Oh yeah, you're right. Everyone on the team plays. But I'm going to ask him if he'll let the best players play longer this year so we'll have a better chance of winning," said Matthew.

"Good luck," I said. "We both know what he's going to say."

"I know, but maybe this year he'll change his mind," said Matthew.

Monday, after the tryouts were over, Mr. Fitter sat everybody down in the gym and said, "This year, like every other year, the hardest part of my job is to let some of you go. Everybody here had a great tryout, but unfortunately, we only have fifteen team uniforms. That means only fifteen of you will make the team."

Mr. Fitter continued, "One year, I told someone who tried out that I just didn't feel that she had enough basketball skills to make the team at that point in her game. It was a very difficult decision for me to make because she showed more effort than anyone else. She tried her hardest and would have been a great

team player. She never gave up. She and her dad practiced everyday to get her ready for the next season. Now, she is one of the best players on the high school basketball team. Please try to remember that as I leave a list of the players who made the team this year. I promise I will talk to each of you that didn't make it so that you have a good understanding of what you need to work on for the next year if you'd like to try out again."

Matthew and I know what it feels like when you try out for a team and you don't make it. It stinks! My dad feels so bad for me and tries to make me feel better by taking me out to dinner and a movie. It feels good to know he cares.

Matthew and I both made the team and we started practicing right after tryouts. After practice, Matthew said he had asked Mr. Fitter about playing the better players longer this year. I asked him how it went and he said, "Not very well. He asked how I would feel if I didn't play in all of the games." I agreed with him, but he did say he had a new strategy for beating the Grizzlies this year.

After our second practice was over, Coach Fitter sat us all down and congratulated us on how hard we were working in practice.

He said, "This will be my tenth year coaching basketball and every year we have had a successful season. We have won a lot of our games because of the hard work we put into our practices. If we practice with a purpose, we will play our games with passion. However, our season is not measured by how many wins our team gets. We are here to learn how to play the game of basketball, and more importantly, to have fun. The game of basketball is a team sport. There is no "I" in team. If you want to continue to play on this team, you must promise to follow our motto, which is the same as our P.E. Gang motto.

Everybody will play on this team. If you played on the team last year, you know how we play during the games. I don't believe in players sitting on the bench the whole year. If you work hard during practices and continue to do well in school, you will play in all of the games. I know what some of you are thinking. "How will we ever beat our stiffest competitor the Grizzlies this year if we don't play our best players the whole game? Well, I have been working on a new strategy for that game. We **will** be ready!"

We continued to work hard in practices and when we started playing games, we had no problems winning. We worked great together as a team, and that is why we continued to beat our opponents. The Grizzlies were doing just as well as we were.

During practice, we learned about our new strategy for beating the Grizzlies. We were to continue to play as well as we had been, but if the game came down to the final seconds, we would have a special play designed for the last shot.

"What is it?" Matthew asked Mr. Fitter eagerly.

"Well, I figure they will be looking for our best player to try to make the last shot. What we are going to do is have you, Matthew, fake the shot and pass it to the wide-open player. I know what the other coach will do. He's going to have his two best players cover the person that he thinks is going to take the last shot. When that happens Matthew, you will have to fake the shot and find the open player on our team. Someone is going to be open. Let's practice the play right now."

Since both teams had the same record, we had to flip a coin to determine where the game was going to be played. This made a big difference. Having the game at your own school meant that you would be familiar with the basketball court and would have a lot of people cheering for you. The day before the game, Mr.

Fitter gave us the good news. We had won the coin toss and the game was going to be at our school!

The two teams with the best record play each other for the championship. Our team, the Lincoln Elementary Gators, won every game we played and so did the Grizzlies. This meant that, just like last year, we were going to have to face the Grizzlies for the championship.

"A.J., I can't believe we are going to be playing the Grizzlies again for the championship," said Matthew. "I was so upset last year when we lost to them."

"Don't worry, Matthew. I am sure we will do fine, and even if we don't win, we've had such an awesome year playing!" I said reassuringly.

In the locker room before the game started, Mr. Fitter told us how proud he was of us. He said that of all the teams he has coached over the years, ours was his favorite and it wasn't because we won all of our games. It was because of how hard we worked in practice, and how well we worked together as a team. He also said how happy he was that everybody on the team got along so well, and that we were like one big family because everybody looked out for one another.

The game started with the Grizzlies making the first three baskets and before we knew it, we were down 6 to 0. The Grizzlies players were so fast that we had a hard time keeping up with them. Every couple of minutes, Mr. Fitter would put new players in the game so that we wouldn't get too tired. This was exactly how he had made us play the entire year.

Matthew was playing his best game. We kept the score close, but the Grizzlies kept making baskets right after we did. They just seemed to be so much faster.

At half time, Coach Fitter told us to keep up the good work and that we were doing just fine.

"What are we going to do if we can't stop them from making so many baskets? It seems like every time they take a shot, it goes in," said Matthew.

"Matthew, we are only down by six points and they are getting tired. Remember, they play the same five players the whole game. Just keep up the good work and all will go well," said Mr. Fitter

When the third quarter ended, we were only down by four points. Mr. Fitter was right about them getting tired because they were definitely slowing down, while we seemed to be getting more fired up!

With one minute left in the game, we were only down by two points. Matthew stole the ball from one of the players on the Grizzlies and dribbled down the court. He took a shot and tied the game.

The Grizzlies' coach was so angry that he called a time-out. Mr. Fitter told us that we had to try to intercept the ball when the Grizzlies tried to pass it and to cover our players as close as we could.

After the time-out, the Grizzlies tried to pass the ball in, but the player that was going to catch the ball slipped and fell to the ground. With only thirty seconds left in the game, Matthew picked up the loose ball.

The coach from the Grizzlies yelled out, "Cover the guy with the ball. He's going to take the shot."

Three players from the Grizzlies came over to try and block Matthew's shot, but just like we had practiced, Matthew faked the shot and passed it to me. With only five seconds left in the game, I grabbed the ball and threw it up in the air. It hit the rim and circled it twice before it finally fell in the net. The buzzer sounded and we had beaten the Grizzlies for the very first time!

CHAPTER 7

"The sky's the limit when your heart is in it."

We had finally beaten the Grizzlies! After the game was over, Mr. Fitter sat us all down in the locker room and said, "How's everyone feeling now?"

Matthew replied, "I've never felt this great in my life. I'm on top of the world!"

"Unfortunately," Coach Fitter began, "some people never get to feel what all of you are feeling right now. You are a special team, and what you accomplished today was a result of your determination and hard work. Congratulations on a job well done! I will see all of you tomorrow at school."

The P.E. Gang membership had skyrocketed. Almost all of the students at Lincoln Elementary were members. Mr. Fitter made up really cool P.E. Gang membership cards for all the kids in the club. We had to sign the cards and promise to follow the P.E. Gang Motto. Everyone in the P.E. Gang carried the card around in school to show one other. Even Mrs. Stinson, our lunch lady, was proud of us. She gave all the students in the P.E. Gang a snack each month for being part of "such a wonderful group of kids," as

she put it. She said that we should be proud of ourselves for our commitment to follow the P.E. Gang motto.

In physical education class, we were learning about baseball skills. Since baseball is my favorite sport, I could hardly wait for P.E. each Monday and Thursday. After class was over, Mr. Fitter asked our teacher Mrs. Smith if it was okay for Jimmy, Matthew, Katherine, Samantha, Casey, and me to stay and help clean up.

After we were done cleaning up, he said, "I want you guys to know that you have made this year a very special one for me."

"Why, Mr. Fitter?" asked Matthew.

"It's because of the P.E. Gang. I'm always explaining to people about the importance of physical education in our schools. By creating the P.E. Gang, I think people will truly begin to realize just how important it actually is."

"How did we do that for you?" asked Casey.

"Well, think about it, Casey," said Mr. Fitter. A.J. was new to our school this year. Look how quickly he became so well liked and respected by his classmates! We know that he is good at sports, but that's not the only reason his classmates like him. A.J., why do you think other students like hanging out with you so much?"

"I don't know," I said shyly.

"Well I know why," Jimmy said confidently. "It's the way you treat people. When we play sports games, you don't get mad when someone makes a mistake."

"You're right, Jimmy," said Samantha. "A.J. is always trying to help us when we really need it."

"That's so true," said Casey. "I know I can always count on A.J. when I need someone to talk to. Remember when I was having problems with my parents, A.J., and you helped me through it?"

I said, "I guess so. But what does that have to do with gym class?"

"It has everything to do with gym class," replied Mr. Fitter

"How?" asked Katherine.

"Well, when I was your age Katherine, all I wanted to do was play sports. In the summer I played baseball, in the fall I played football, and I played hockey when football was over. I loved playing each sport equally. As I got older and had to choose a career, although I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do, I knew it had to be something to do with sports.

When I decided to be a physical education teacher, I didn't fully understand why, but now I do. The P.E. Gang is about all the reasons why I love to teach. It's about teamwork, playing fair and being respectful and honest. Those are the most important traits of good character that you can learn in school. If I can teach you those things, then everything else is a bonus. I have a great idea! Why don't we share your idea of the P.E. Gang with other schools? I bet they would love to start their very own P.E. Gang, too."

I told Mr. Fitter that was an awesome idea, because I still keep in touch with friends from my old neighborhood, like my friend, Bobby. I know he wanted to start a P.E. Gang at his school, too. Then I suggested to Mr. Fitter that he might want to send Bobby some of the membership cards that he made up for us.

Mr. Fitter said, "That's would be fine, A.J. I was thinking we could create a website on the Internet for everybody too."

"What would be on the website?" asked Katherine. "I love surfing the web!"

"Well, I thought we could write about the character traits that you have all learned in P.E. class. We could put all of the P.E. Gang members on the site and could even make up contests. There are all kinds of things we could do," said Mr. Fitter.

"That sounds like fun!" Jimmy replied.

"It will be, trust me," Mr. Fitter said.

We all worked hard trying to come up with ideas for the new P.E. Gang website. We decided that we were going to write down all of the things that we learned in P.E. class, with each of us choosing our favorite sport to write about:

- Jimmy - Hockey
- Matthew - Basketball
- Samantha - Volleyball
- Casey - Football
- Katherine - Soccer
- A.J. - Baseball
- Mr. Fitter - Importance of attendance at P.E. class

The day finally came when the website was finished. Mr. Fitter told us that our new web address was www.pegang.com. He also said he made a lot of telephone calls to people to tell them about our special program, and asked if they could help us out.

At our website, you can play educational games, send e-cards, color, enter monthly contests and read stories. But Mr.

Fitter said his favorite part of the website was the story I wrote about his favorite team - us - the P.E. Gang.