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MHSAA Perspective – Communications Director John Johnson Playing With Honor: Why Is It So Hard To Do?

There was a feature on ESPN's Sportscenter recently which addressed ethics in sports, and a prime-time show that chronicled an academic cheating scandal in college football. At issue were things that took place between the lines and outside the lines – issues of sportsmanship, gamesmanship and honesty that affected the game at hand.

The questions were simple – what happens when the officials, in doing their job to the best of their ability, accidentally give you a gift – something you didn't deserve? Is there a difference between gamesmanship – acts devised to gain an advantage – and sportsmanship? And what do you do when you personally, knowingly, cheat?

What do you do when an official's mistake suddenly snatches victory from the jaws of defeat? Do you participate in a scheme in which everyone knows you're intentionally breaking the rules? What kind of a message is sent to our kids – in high school and younger – when we perform acts of gamesmanship that basically say – it's OK to cheat?

If our games are truly educational, then they must be honorable. You do what you can to point out and change the official's mistake; and you don't commit that act of cheating or gamesmanship meant to deceive or otherwise tip the scales in your favor.

We hear stories at times of acts of honesty on the part of our student-athletes; students who point out such wrongs and try to make them right. But we also hear stories of reaction and retaliation by teammates and their parents, schoolmates, and community members who criticize and abuse such individuals for making the right choice, because it cost the rest of the team a victory or an opportunity to advance in a tournament.

Let's put it in a real life terms – what do you do when the cashier at the grocery store or the teller at the bank gives you back more money than you're supposed to receive? I think everyone knows what you should do, and everyone would applaud you for doing the right thing.

Why should it be any different in sports? Especially school sports?

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MEDIA ADVISORY – This is the script from this week's edition of MHSAA Perspective, which is heard on over 20 radio stations across the state, and is available for on-demand listening on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – mhsaanetwork.com. Archived programs dating back to September are also available for on-demand listening.

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