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A Winning Attitude

It was a close basketball game, but the other team squeaked ahead. Now your hoopster’s gone all LeBron James, storming off the court and refusing to shake hands with the winners. What’s up with that? “Kids this age are still in the ‘all about me’ phase. They won’t naturally say ‘Good game’ to the other team after they lose. That’s something you—and their coaches—need to teach them,” says sports psychology consultant Larry Lauer, Ph.D., director of Coaching Education and Development at the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University in East Lansing. To help your child develop a winning outlook:

Review the rules. Tell him it’s OK to be disappointed, but you still expect him to shake hands with opponents and not throw equipment.

Identify what went well so he focuses on the positive. For instance, even if his team lost, maybe he made more rebounds than ever.

Watch your own (over) reactions. If you’re cheering maniacally in the stands, your child may feel pressure to win no matter what.

Cool the postgame celebration. Instead of getting ice cream after a win, or zipping straight home after a loss, just review the game together briefly (whatever the outcome was) and go on with your day.

Don’t let a sore winner slide by, either. Making a comment like “We won, burn on you!” is just as nasty as sulking after a loss. Be clear that gloating isn’t tolerated (and, tough as it can be sometimes, resist your own urge to indulge). —T.C.