

An Open Letter to the Fans

Dear Fan,

You walk up to the stadium or field ready to see a clash between your high school team and your most hated rival. You pull out your hard earned cash for that ticket, that golden ticket that allows you to a seat where you plan to “help” your team with constant berating of the opposing team and officials. You feel it is your duty as a fan to do everything you can for your team, and your role is to call it like you see it from 50 feet away in the stands.

What you don’t understand is that your verbal abuse does nothing more than tear at the fabric of high school sports. The players on the athletic field, court or diamond are not being paid to play; they are not professional athletes that have to deal with fans like you on a daily basis. It is a privilege, not a right, for these athletes to compete as much as it is a privilege for you to sit in the stands and watch.

But what about your golden ticket that you paid good money for, doesn’t that entitle you to something? Yes, you get the opportunity to watch two schools show off their skills and what they have learned in the athletic classroom. Other than that, your ticket gives you little more than a first-come-first-serve spot on a crowded row of bleachers. Contests could not exist without rules, and just as the players have to abide by rules on the field, you too have to follow the rules in the stands.

It’s not all your fault; you probably had someone much like yourself at your high school games. Hopefully it’s not the case, but you may never have seen proper spectator decorum. The UIL has a few basic tips that can help steer you in the right direction.

1. The field of play is the athletic classroom for student-athletes. Instead of math and science they learn teamwork and group responsibility in addition to dealing with success and overcoming adversity. You wouldn’t dare interrupt a teacher giving a test to his or her students, yet you do it to coaches and student-athletes routinely in their classroom.

2. Your ticket does not entitle you to disrespect or degrade others in any way. Everyone who is a part of high school athletics gives their best effort and that commitment to educational athletics should be celebrated.

3. Understand that the student-athletes you are watching will make mistakes, and no participant should be ridiculed at any time because of their efforts. Many of them are still learning the games they play and can easily be disheartened by a rogue fan attacking their performance.

4. High school coaches are actually full-time teachers first and coaches second. Anyone who tries to reverse this order is taking the first step to destroying a program. No one wants a program to fail, but the merciless pressure you put on him or her as someone who had nothing to do with the building of the program can bring it down.

5. Officials are present to promote the game and the student-athletes involved. They make judgment calls in good faith based on their knowledge and extensive training. A lot of time and effort has gone into making sure that they know the rules better than you. Respect their decisions.

6. Finally, you are a guest of the school and should act like one. Winning is an admirable goal of competition, but it is nothing if it comes at the expense of morals, ethics, and common sense.

This manual is intended to help participants and school officials understand the importance of sportsmanship in UIL athletics. Please take the time to read each section and feel free to visit our extensive Web site at www.uil.utexas.edu. If you have any questions regarding sportsmanship or the UIL please contact one of our staff members.