Every sport has its rules and regulations. Umpires and referees on the field and on the court make sure, as well as they can, the eventual winner has played by the rules. But in spite of this, the dominant culture in sports has become, “Winning is the only thing.” “Just win, Baby!” And these lead to, “If you’re not cheating, you’re not trying.”

That message and set of values is absorbed and learned by young people as they grow up watching their sports heroes battle on the fields and courts around the world. The notion that winning is a goal worthy of bending the rules to attain bleeds across the white lines of the playing field to playgrounds, classrooms and any other setting where there may be rivalry, competition or evaluation.

Years ago at a junior golf banquet, I watched a PGA pro who was the guest speaker, nearly break down with emotion as he described the plight of a 10-year-old golfer in the tournament. The young man called a penalty on himself and had to add two strokes to his score. He eventually lost the tournament by one stroke.

The rules violation he called on himself was not seen by anyone else, and never would have been discovered. He could have been the tournament winner with everyone’s applause and approval. But his Dad had taught him that golf is a game played by gentlemen of sportsmanship and integrity. Apparently, he listened. Honesty on the golf course is expected, as it is in any other setting. The young man never hesitated--and did the right thing.

~Art Noyes