

Roberson coach's example of sportsmanship should be widely celebrated

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Last Wednesday night, the Roberson High School boys soccer team turned an ordinary game into an extraordinary event.

Late in the second half, the Rams appeared to have scored a goal that would have given them a 2-0 lead over archrival Asheville. The score was protested by Cougars coach Mike Flowe and his players. During that argument, Roberson coach Rob Wilcher, after hearing from many of his players that the ball didn't actually go into the net, went to the referee and told him the goal shouldn't stand.

"I just wanted to do the right thing," Wilcher told the Citizen-Times after the game, which eventually ended in a 1-1 tie.

Somebody call Sports Illustrated. The magazine's next "Faces in The Crowd" page should feature the entire Roberson team. The N.C. High School Athletic Association shouldn't wait until the end of the school year to hand out its school sportsmanship award. Hold the ceremony tomorrow and present the trophy to Roberson.

What the Roberson soccer team did the other day just doesn't happen very often. Asheville is the team the Rams battle every year for supremacy of the Mountain Athletic Conference. You do whatever it takes to win, right?

The referee blew the call, that happens. Many competitors would think, "Hey, we got a break. Makes up for the call he missed earlier in the game."

Sports is full of moments when an official errs on a call, or in not making one. In baseball a player may accidentally miss first base on his way to an extra-base hit. He should be out, but if the ump didn't see it, the player got lucky. During a football game, a lineman may get away with an illegal block that springs his teammate to a touchdown. Have you ever seen a player or coach go up the ref and tell him to take back the score because he missed a penalty?

For Wilcher and his team to "do the right thing" even if it meant a tie instead of a win, was the essence of sportsmanship, something that the players on both teams will never forget.

On other side of the coin is the little league baseball coach in Pennsylvania who was sentenced to prison on Thursday after being accused of offering one of his 8-year-old players \$25 to bean an autistic teammate so he wouldn't be able to play.

The man, who was convicted by a jury last month, told reporters as he left court, "I didn't do nothing."

No, moron, you didn't do "nothing" except tell a little boy that it's all right to try and win at any cost, even if it means injuring a less talented teammate to keep him from playing in the game.

It's a shame that despicable characters like that are coaching children. Unfortunately, there may be too many people like that around.

That's why coaches like Wilcher should be celebrated for teaching kids that losing or tying with dignity is 10 times more rewarding than winning dishonorably.

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