



# ***New trash-talking policy is something to cheer about***

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This is a home run, touchdown, goal and 3-point basket rolled into one. High school sports just got a lot more civilized in New Jersey. It's about time.

New York officials should take a long look at what the Garden State is doing.

Sports, particularly at the high school level, should foster sportsmanship, not trash talking or much worse. There have been too many cases around the country of athletes, coaches and fans being out of control at high school athletic events.

In New Jersey participants could be in trouble if they make harassing statements related to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or religion. Obscene gestures will not be tolerated. Referees will be required to report incidents for possible further investigation. Players and coaches can be disqualified for the next two scheduled events, or in the case of football the next game. The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association and the state Attorney General's Office announced the new policy on Wednesday.

There have been rules about proper sportsmanship for athletes, spectators and coaches, "but now we are going to be holding people's feet to the fire," Larry White, an assistant director of the NJSIAA, told The Post yesterday.

My three children have traveled through the world of high school sports, and it's only getting worse out there people. It's time we hold ourselves to a higher standard.

N.J. high school athletes who talk a particularly dirty brand of trash could find their teams penalized and themselves under investigation by the state Civil Rights

Division. The new policy brings athletic events into line with the state's anti-bullying law for schools, and it goes into place this fall.

"It's really not a new rule, there is just some added verbiage to our existing sportsmanship rule," White said. "The biggest thing is there is going to be a greater effort to enforce the sportsmanship rule, teach the sportsmanship rule to coaches, the student athletes, to the schools, to the officials so that we can start to put the clamps on."

This will not eliminate competitive comments or emotional outbursts, White knows that.

"Trash talking is going to be there," he said. "Things like, 'Hey, we just scored on you.' I don't know if we are going to disqualify kids for saying something like that, but if it gets into that racial, ethnic, gender-orientation, religious types of taunts and derogatory terms and things like that, that's where we are really going to come down hard on the offenders."

Every parent and athlete should understand that now. No excuses.

"Maybe in the past we didn't do as much as maybe we could have or should have with spectators, but that is another area where we are looking to ratchet it up," White said.

"Our officials will report it if and when it leads to a disqualification. Right now we get disqualification reports every time there is an ejection. Most fines in the past were for profanity. Now we will add that if you hear the racial slurs, the ethnic slurs and so forth and so on that could be grounds for disqualification. We're going to ask the schools to do a better job of hearing it and shutting it down from the spectators. If it comes to us and is investigated and we find out nothing is done about it, there may be penalties on the schools."

The NJSIAA is playing hard ball.

"We want people to root for their teams, we want players to play hard, play to win, play fair, and at the end of the day, if you lose, it's not personal," White said.

I talked to a high school referee who was in favor of the new rules.

"You can't take the emotion out of the game, but this is a good policy," he said. "Some referees might let a little more go than others. It's always a good move to bring up the level of sportsmanship."

Noted White, "The time has come."

It sure has. This just might be sportsmanship's last stand.

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