

## Sportsmanship a lost art

Displays of unsportsmanlike behavior on the part of fans attending school hockey games prompted the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School Committee to ban spectators from home hockey games with Barnstable. Barnstable High's principal, T. Walter Wannie, acknowledges that the town's school committee has discussed closing its games to fans, but "is optimistic their behavior will improve."

Spectator behavior has included throwing firecrackers at players, shoving and jeering at them, yelling obscenities at the opposing team, and spitting upon the pep leaders, girl students who lead fans in cheers.

Is it possible team loyalty can justify such actions? Can anyone who behaves in such a manner toward school children playing a game consider himself a sportsman?

Taxpayers finance public education; public schools conduct classes in physical education; physical education includes competitive games such as hockey. Supposedly, playing games such as hockey instills in youngsters a sense of respect for justice, for rules and regulations, and for laws. Games provide experience in team effort and teach the value of cooperation with others. Sports, as a part of physical education, is but a tool to teach pupils appreciation of teamwork; the lessons will then be applied when the youngsters become adult. Sports instills values of "playing by the rules."

Sports demonstrates to players and spectators alike that to enjoy the game, an opponent is necessary. Whacking a tennis ball against a brick wall is not nearly as interesting as having the ball returned by a person on the other side of the net. Simply volleying back and forth without keeping score is a pleasant way to spend the time and indulge in healthy exercise.

The emphasis, however, has moved from playing the game to winning the game. The opponent is viewed as the enemy. To quote Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers, "Winning isn't the only thing; it is EVERYTHING." That's how pro-football is played today. And pro-hockey is a brutal game, as witnessed recently in a recent playoff game between Montreal and Quebec, undeserving of the term "sport."

Fans are violent. They scream and curse and throw objects

at players. Fans who watch pro-hockey on television go to school games and mirror the behavior they observe on the screen. If people behave that way at big games, it must be appropriate behavior at all games.

Taxpayers willingly pay for public schools in order that we all may feel assured young people are learning to live in peace and harmony, to work and play together in a world that grows increasingly overcrowded and contentious. Citizens who are taxed to pay for children's education are under no obligation to support a "sport" that exposes the children to abuse from fans. Their behavior teaches lessons diametrically opposed to those we want children to learn from their experiences on the playing fields.

Unless spectators demonstrate self-control and respect for players and for the game, the entire sports program (not just hockey) should reassessed. Players' safety should not be jeopardized by fans conducting themselves like savages. No student doing his best to deliver a creditable performance should be treated with disrespect.

Physical education classes must continue, of course; they may consist of calisthenics, jogging, weight-lifting, dancing, or any other activity conducted without benefit of or threat from a gallery. Providing physical education for school children does not necessarily include providing entertainment for fans. Taxpayers are entitled to some "say" in how their money is spent; surely no taxpayer supports a program of sports that subjects pupils to spectator abuse!