

They are not your opponents; they are friends competing in the same race

FAITH IN SPORT

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This week I am continuing the theme begun in last week's Universe, on the role and importance of 'sportspersonship'.

This includes fair play and kindness, as well as "understanding that it's not all about winning and losing," said Mallory Holtman-Fletcher, who gained fame for carrying an injured opponent around the bases during a 2008 Central Washington University softball game.

The player tore her ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) after hitting a three-run home run, and the rules prevented her own teammates from helping her. So Holtman-Fletcher and a teammate carried the injured player around so that she could touch each base. "She earned it," Holtman-Fletcher said afterwards.

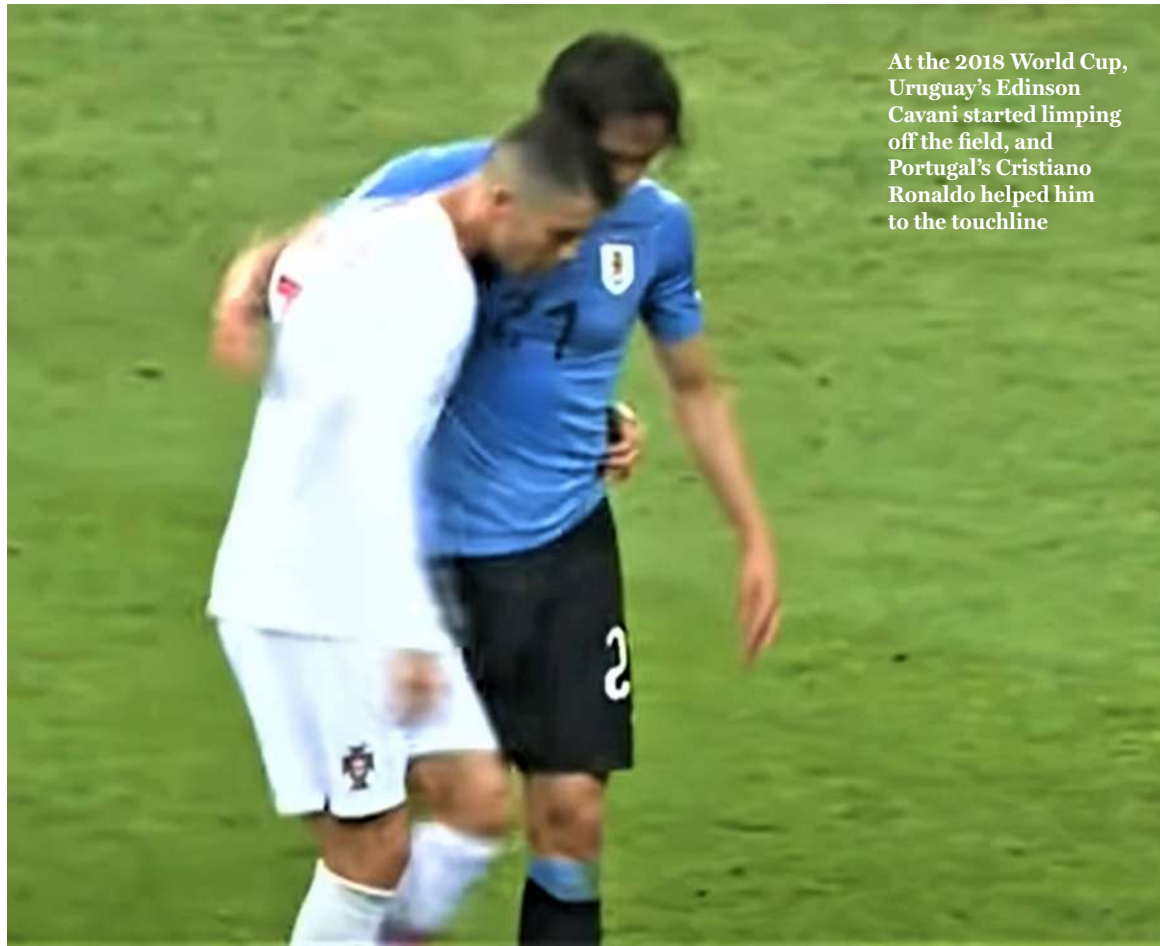
At the time, no one talked much about what she did until the story gained traction with the media. Yet that's not surprising, because athletes often don't learn about sportsmanship in any systematic way, as Holtman-Fletcher confirmed: "Growing up, there wasn't a point that somebody sat me down to teach me about sportsmanship."

Sportspersonship came to the forefront of the 2018 World Cup a number of times. It determined whether Senegal or Japan advanced. When the two teams finished tied in the standings, and the first two tiebreakers did not give either one of them the edge, the teams' number of red and yellow cards were added, and Japan had a lower total. FIFA's new 'fair play' tiebreaker allowed Japan to advance.

During the same World Cup there was a more visual showing of sporting behaviour when Uruguay's Edinson Cavani started limping off the field. He was clearly struggling and so Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo helped him walk. Another came when Belgium's Romelu Lukaku signalled to the referee not to penalise Tunisia after a player made contact with him.

In other sports, Desiree Linden won the 2018 Boston Marathon even after slowing to help Shalane Flanagan catch up to the pack after she was forced to stop for a bathroom break.

During the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018, the standout moment for many wasn't a gold medal victory but rather the gracious and inspiring behaviour that three athletes showed their opponent during the



At the 2018 World Cup, Uruguay's Edinson Cavani started limping off the field, and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo helped him to the touchline

women's 10,000m final. Aussie trio Eloise Wellings, Madeline Hills, and Celia Sullohern waited until the final runner, Lineo Chaka from Lesotho, had crossed the finishing line. The three ladies could have left the track like the other athletes. Instead, they waited for Chaka to congratulate her and make sure she was not alone when she crossed the finishing line. This was a proud moment for Aussies and sports fans everywhere.

Defending NCAA Football National Champions, the Clemson Tigers, played Syracuse University in 2017, and lost. Despite the tension and the close score, which was maintained throughout the game, there were several moments of sportspersonship between the players on and off the field. However, it was what happened after the game that truly stood out to us.

With the game concluded and both teams in their respective locker rooms, Dabo Swinney, Clemson's head coach, walked into the Syracuse locker room to congratulate the players and coaches. One player mentioned "to be knocked down like that, but have the humility to come over and congratulate us when he didn't have to and no one expected him to, I think that says a lot about who he is as a person and a coach."

That act of sportspersonship is something that likely won't be forgotten by Syracuse's players and coaches anytime soon.

Derek Jeter will always be remembered as one of baseball's greatest players. However, it isn't just due to his on-field skills, but also because of his leadership and determination. After he played the final game of his career against the Boston Red Sox, Jeter personally walked around and said goodbye to every single opponent player. In recognition of his skills and sportspersonship, the Red Sox also brought out many of their other stars and Hall of Famers to make sure he received a hero's farewell.

Eugenio Monti was one of the

most successful bobsledder in Italian history, and one of the most successful athletes in the history of sport, winning six Olympic medals (two golds), and nine world championships. At the Winter Olympic Games in Innsbruck in 1964, Monti proved that his level of sportspersonship was equal to his skill as an athlete.

At those Games, the British pair of Tony Nash and Robin Dixon had put themselves in contention for the gold medal following their first two runs in the two-man event of the bobsleigh competition. After



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their third run, however, Nash realised that a bolt on their sled was missing and they didn't have a spare. Monti lent the bolt from his own sled to the British team. Nash and Dixon would go on to win Great Britain's first bobsleigh gold medal at the Olympic Games, while Monti won the bronze.

In response to criticism from Italian media, Monti told them, "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt. He won because he had the fastest run."

A few days later, Monti once again demonstrated his exceptional level of generosity when he and his mechanics helped repair the damaged axle of a Canadian sled in the four-man competition. Without Monti's intervention, the Canadian team would have been disqualified. Instead, they went on to win the gold medal, while Monti and the Italian team won bronze. He was awarded the Pierre de Coubertin medal - the first athlete to receive such an honour.

Four years later, aged 40, Monti won gold in the two-man and four-man bobsleigh competitions at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble.

Spanish national newspaper *El Pais* reported a heart-warming incident at the World Cross Country Championships in 2012, which were held in Burlada, Navarra, Spain. Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was a few metres from the finish line, but got confused by the signals and stopped, thinking he had finished the race. The Spanish runner, Ivan Fernandez, was right behind him and, realising what was happening in front of him, began shouting for the Kenyan to keep running. Mutai did not know Spanish and did not understand - so Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory.

One reporter asked Evan: "Why did you do this?" Evan replied: "My dream is that one day we can have the kind of community life that pushes ourselves and others to win as well."

"But why did you let the Kenyan win?" the reporter insisted. Evan replied: "I didn't let him win - he would win. It was his race."

The reporter insisted and asked again: "But you could have won!" Evan looked at him and replied, "But what is the merit of my victory? What is the honour of this medal? What will my mother think?"

Values are passed on from generation to generation. What values do we teach our children and to what extent do they inspire others to earn them? Most of us take advantage of people's weaknesses rather than helping to strengthen them.