

The Essence of Sportsmanship

BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

In 1964, an Italian named Eugenio Monti was the world champion in bobsledding and a strong favorite in the Winter Olympics. His nation expected a gold medal and after his last run it looked as if he might get it. The British team, led by Tony Nash, still had a chance to beat him, but Nash discovered a faulty axle that would require his team to withdraw. Instead, Monti removed a critical bolt from his sled and offered it to Nash.

As if to prove that no good deed goes unpunished, Nash won the gold medal and Monti was viciously criticized in the Italian press. Yet he was unshaken. "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt," he reportedly said. "He won because he had the fastest run."

Every real competitor wants to win, but Olympic medalist John Naber says a true sportsman, one who believes in the Olympic ideal, wants to win against his best opponent on his

best day. The sportsman is not elated but disappointed when top competitors are injured or disqualified.

Monti won the gold medal at the next Winter Olympics, but it was his willingness to lose that earned him a prominent place in Olympic history. His act represents sportsmanship at its best: the pursuit of victory with zeal and passion, recognizing that there is not true victory without honor.

Today, with so many athletes willing to cheat or behave badly just to win, we need reminders of the noble potential of sports. And parents and coaches should be teaching youngsters that the real glory of sport is in the striving, not the winning. ■

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