

## What Does This Mean?

Welcome to the Michigan District State Basketball Tournament! Congratulations on a great season and God's Blessings on your two days in Ann Arbor. Upper grade students in Lutheran schools are very familiar with the words in the title of this article from memorizing the Ten Commandments. This question separates the meaning of the commandment from the actual words and helps clarify the desired action.

I often attend sporting events and notice an emphasis on "**positive cheering**" which we desire here also! I thought it might help to explain **What does this mean for us in Lutheran Schools?**

**Positive cheering** is spectators loudly and enthusiastically cheering for their school and their children (and God's children) who represent that school and community. It means providing encouragement to the athletes and setting a good example. It unites a community of spectators to support a group of student athletes who are seeking to reach a goal. This community of spectators is reminded that athletics teach us about life and how we handle disappointment, not playing well and not achieving goals instantly. These are often tough lessons to learn, but often sports help us grow into a future that will certainly hold both success and disappointment.

**It does not mean** yelling at and against your opponents, cheering for them to play poorly or verbally assaulting referees, yelling at other fans and booing the success of other players or the calls of officials. ***This is not God-pleasing athletics!*** I officiated basketball for twenty plus years and football at the high school level for seven years. Every official I knew did it because they loved the sport and wanted to give back to those now playing it. We never gathered before any contest and said "Let's do a bad job" or "I really want that team to lose," but instead usually said a silent prayer asking that God would help us do a good job. My wife came to see me officiate only once! She couldn't understand why people thought it was okay to yell terrible things at officials in high school sports. I still wrestle with that especially given our calling in 1 John 3:1 to be called "**Children of God!**"

Should the coach, athlete and spectator be different in a Lutheran tournament than a tournament not featuring faith-based teams? I believe they should because God calls us to be different than the world. I am not telling athletes to not compete but instead compete ferociously while respecting your opponent. I am not telling parents not to cheer but instead encouraging all of us to cheer in a God-pleasing manner. John Wooden, the old UCLA men's basketball coach has a TED Talk (you can google it) about the difference between winning and success. He defines winning as beating someone else, but success is when you play to the best of your ability. We desire our children to be successful in sports and life. Help them by "**cheering positively**" which helps them follow an example that doesn't blame the officials, coach or other team for defeat, but instead acknowledges that we can help them handle disappoint in the big issues of life by practicing it in the little issues of life like athletics. I will continue to pray for our athletes, coaches and spectators; that God uses these two days to help your children grow as His children and that our tournament shows the lasting impact and difference we all desire Lutheran Schools to have in their lives and in eternity.

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