GAME ENVIRONMENT versus SPORTSMANSHIP

Many of our audiences make a natural assumption that "game environment" and "sportsmanship" are synonyms, but they are not meant to be.

Sportsmanship should be regarded both as a set of attitudes and as behavior that gives expression to those attitudes. It speaks to the concepts of respect and concern for fairness, courtesy, and the ethical conduct of all involved in Division II athletics. It is one of the six core attributes of Division II membership. All of our institutions already should be striving to achieve a high level of sportsmanship.

Sportsmanship should be regarded as a mandatory subset of game environment. That is, an institution can exhibit great sportsmanship without having a great game environment. However, it is not possible to have a great game environment without sportsmanship.

Another way of thinking:

Poor sportsmanship at athletics events can destroy the school's front door to community, which is what the Division II community-engagement effort seeks to create.

As new audiences are drawn in through the athletics program, great care must be taken to make certain that the impressions are positive. The overall production of any athletics event is a reflection on the institution in general. Individuals attracted to an institution through community engagement may feel disappointed or even deceived if the experience at an athletic event is poor.

The game environment can be compromised through factors other than behavior. We should be equally concerned about whether the setting is comfortable and whether the event is lively and entertaining. Three tests come to mind:

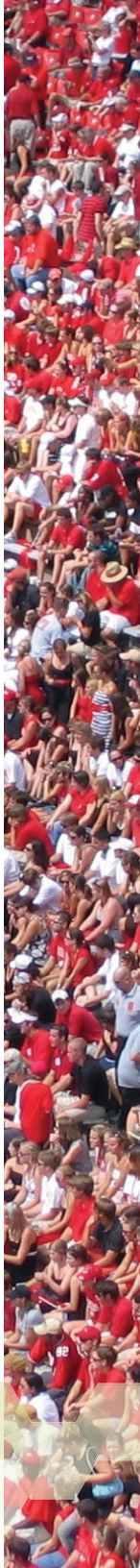
Is it civil?

- What steps have been taken to ensure suitable behavior from coaches and participating student-athletes?
- Are formal plans in place to confront unacceptable behavior in the stands?
- Are steps taken to separate boisterous crowds such as students from families and retirees?
- Are student-athlete fans (for example, football players attending a basketball game) advised in advance of the behavior that is expected of them?

Is it comfortable?

- Are restroom facilities adequate and are they clean?
- Is the seating as comfortable as it can be?
- Is trash picked up?
- Is parking nearby?
- Is the food offered at the concession stands good and affordable (and are healthy alternatives offered)?
- Is the concession stand (including all counters, floors, equipment and condiment areas) clean and serviced throughout the event?
- Are concession employees adhering to all health department standards?
- Are the fans welcomed to the venue by courteous, neatly dressed employees (including ticket sellers, ticket takers, pass gate personnel, ushers and program/souvenir sellers)?

Is it lively and entertaining?

- For events that have cheerleaders and bands, do they develop and maintain positive energy?
- Is signage used to tell a broader message and add color?
- Are steps taken to make the event seem part of something larger (that it's an integral part of the institution's educational offering)?
- Are other educational programs on display at athletics events?

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