



Keeping Cool Around Hot High School Rivalries

It's in the spotlight of competitive rivalries that all teams feel the inspiration and challenge to be at their best. That's a wonderful part of sport, but it takes special attention to also be sure that good sportsmanship, appropriate fan behavior, and a positive sports culture are central to the action.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- **Start early:** Contact your rivals' leadership team and get together to brainstorm themes and activities to keep the rivalry exciting and positive for all. Principals, AD's, coaches, team captains, cheerleader reps, etc. could all be in the conversation. Emphasize the benefits for everyone of having this special rivalry; share ideas about how to emphasize this opportunity in both school communities.
- **Consider getting together on a common local project** that both schools and their team members could support with volunteer effort. It might be a local charity, a Boys and Girls Club, a park or playground that needs refreshing. Parents from both schools can be involved. Whatever the project, people who work side by side on a shared interest develop a respect and appreciation for each other that will pay off on game day.
- **Promote positive aspects of the rivalry in local media.** Feature photos of team leaders, coaches and cheerleaders working together, shaking hands, etc. Urge fans of both schools to show the same respect for their rivals. Use your school website to publicize these same messages, and encourage your students to keep social media messages in line with your goals.
- **Help cheerleaders and other student leaders recognize their influence** over crowd behavior at the game. Encourage positive cheering that supports your team, but be proactive in squelching all attempts at insulting or inflammatory behavior toward your rival.
- **You might consider a short handout for all fans who enter the game**, describing some of the history of the rivalry, the shared projects of the students, and how the highest standards of sportsmanship will continue to make this series so unique.
- **Message bombardment can continue at the gym or venue.** Your spirit club or cheerleaders can create signs that are positive, upbeat, and help set the tone you want.
- **At the game, be sure your PA announcer displays respect for your opponent** and the officials. Make sure their announcing is balanced, praising the good plays for both teams. Introduce and welcome teams, fans, coaches and officials, reminding everyone that treating each other with dignity is what makes a rivalry special for all.

This resource was produced by Will Jackson, PCA Trainer - Atlanta

