

On the MOVE

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Karen Verna cheers on her son Andrew, the Little Irish's center.



Aquinas Institute football fans (clockwise from upper left) Tonya Campbell, Christy Maier, Rebecca Gartz, Sarah Schallmo and Anne Marie Cherre cheer on their team Oct. 24 at Aquinas.

For football player Josh Eisele, fan support has a big effect on his motivation level.

"If it's a large crowd I say 'Oh, man, everyone's here to see me play. I can't let them down.' But if it's a small crowd, I don't have the intensity," said Josh, 17, a parishioner at St. James Church in Irondequoit.

Colleen Flynn, a senior at Elmira Notre Dame High School, said she loves supporting her school's athletes from the bleachers.

"A lot of football players ask us to go to the games. It gets them ready to play; I think it helps boost their confidence.

(And) I like being loud because it's more fun," said Colleen, 17, a parishioner in Elmira's St. Casimir/St. Charles-Borromeo Roman Catholic Community.

Meanwhile, Christy Maier said she and her friends get vocal when cheering on their Aquinas Institute squads.

"We yell 'Go AQ, go AQ.' We, like, lose our voices the next day," said Christy, 17, an Aquinas senior and parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Margaret Mary Church.

Christy said she lends her undying support to the football team, no matter what the weather conditions.

"I'll be there. It's more fun when it's colder and rainy; it's crazy," Christy said.

However, Josh has observed fan craziness of an unpleasant nature. While playing youth soccer this past summer, he said, an adult ran onto the field — during the contest — and confronted a teammate.

"He had kept screaming the whole game," Josh said.

More recently, Josh watched the father of an Eastridge High football teammate threaten their

coach after a tough loss. The father eventually grabbed the coach in the parking lot and was arrested, Josh said.

Josh's mother, Micki, said she witnessed the melee with disgust.

"It's just a game — a kids' game. I just don't understand how people could act this way," she commented.

On the other hand, sporting events are surely designed to spark more passionate responses than, say, study hour in the library. Take a closely contested game against a fierce rival, while you're watching your classmate/boyfriend/girlfriend/child get knocked around, and it can be mighty hard to remain quiet and withdrawn.

Colleen, who also plays girls' basketball for Elmira Notre Dame, said she hears opponents' fans loud and clear when she commits a foul with substantial physical contact.

"They boo. I try to ignore it, but it's hard. I just try to laugh it off," Colleen said.

Yet Josh said he expects to hear jeers when he's on the football field.

"Taunting is just part of the game; you have fun with it. But there is such a thing as going too far," said Josh, who listed racial slurs and throwing items on the playing surface as examples.

Stephen Cook, a member of the Aquinas freshman football team, said he's careful not to cross that line when he cheers at varsity games.

"The (Aquinas) coaches, if they realize it's you, you're in trouble. I'm part of Aquinas, part of the team," said Stephen, 14, from St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece.

Although Stephen said he's generally subdued while watching a game from the stands, he does get excited "when something big happens or the ref misses

Fan support: what's fair, what's foul?

Story by Mike Latona
Photos by Greg Francis

the call."

Ah yes, the poor men and women in striped shirts, the targets of endless abuse. Christy said that when she and her friends disagree with an official's ruling, she sometimes has to bite her tongue.

"We'll talk among ourselves and say, 'What? What?' But we don't say anything bad. We don't want to be non-sportsmanlike," Christy remarked.

Sara Wallitt speaks from experience when assessing relationships between fans and officials. Last winter, the Elmira Notre Dame senior refereed youth basketball for the first time.

"A lot of people try to be nice because I'm young and learning. But some people do yell anyway," said Sara, 17, from St. Mary's Church in Elmira.

Sara, who attends a number of sporting events at Elmira-Notre-Dame, feels that spectators have the right to protest an official's decision — to an extent, she said.

"If a ref makes a bad call, they need to know it's a bad call. But they shouldn't be made to feel bad," Sara explained.

Christy charged that adult spectators seem to have a harder time overlooking referees' decisions than students.

"They pay more attention to the game, and we're just there to have fun. They take it more seriously," Christy said. "They think their kids can't do anything wrong."

Sara said that overcritical fans should really try to lighten up.

"I think they need to remember it's only a game. It's not that big a deal," she said.

Otherwise, Colleen said, these emotionally charged situations can escalate into senseless violence.

"It's not like the ref is going to change back the call. And if you hit someone, you only get in more trouble," Colleen said.

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