



# ATTITUDE

*These Utah volleyball teams bumped sportsmanship up to a new level.*

**By Charlotte Wood Wilson**

It's game point, and the pressure is on. The volleyball soars over the net in a perfect serve, beginning what could be the final play of the regional championship game. Each team hustles for every return, prolonging the play and anticipation. Athletic battle rages on the court, every team member playing her heart out, desperate to end the game and win the championship.

One player places herself in position to hit a tricky shot—and misses. Game over. One team celebrates; the other is angry at their teammate who missed. They shoot nasty words to her and yell disparaging comments across the court to the other team. The victorious team retaliates, gloating and returning harsh comments.

As horrible as it sounds, some volleyball teams unfortunately play that way. But the Western Hills Eighth Ward (Kearns Utah Western Hills Stake) and Jordan First Ward (Salt Lake Jordan Stake) know better. They realize that having a good attitude, both on and off the court, is what sports—and sportsmanship—are really about.

## **No Longer Opponents**

For the second year running, the Western Hills and Jordan teams were about to face each other in the finals of a multistake volleyball tournament. Despite negative feelings that had developed between the two teams during the previous year's tournament, the Western Hills team invited the Jordan girls to a joint practice to take place before the final match. Jordan's coach, Kathy Holmes,

said that at first she didn't want her girls to lose their competitive edge, but after praying about it, she realized, "Heavenly Father would want us to get to know each other as friends and not as enemies. He wants us to have fun."

The Jordan team responded enthusiastically to the invitation. "We were excited!" says Jordan First Ward's Kim Lolani about the joint practice. "We wanted to get rid of any negativity."

Her teammate Marie Aini explains, "When we practiced together we bonded and got to know each other. Last year we didn't hit it off because we judged too quickly."

The Western Hills young women said they enjoyed playing with the Jordan girls because their attitudes were positive. "I really liked playing with the Jordan team because they wouldn't get mad at each other," says Western Hills' Jessica Ramirez. "Regardless of who won or lost, it wasn't a big deal, because we had fun."

Another Western Hills young woman, Martha Rojas, noticed the Jordan girls' example of good sportsmanship. "Even though they lost sometimes, they were still really happy. They had fun the whole time. When we lost a game, we didn't look as happy as the Jordan girls. I learned from them."

## **Sportsmanship Strategy**

The positive example the teams set for each other resonated with everyone. Jessica says, "A lot of the time there

# ALL-STAR



*The Western Hills Ward team (below) invited the Jordan First Ward team to a joint practice. Getting to know each other as friends made a huge difference. Esther Pena (above) shows her technique.*



## **WE'RE ON THE SAME TEAM**

"We must realize that all of God's children wear the same jersey. Our team is the brotherhood of man. This mortal life is our playing field. Our goal is to learn to love God and to extend that same love toward our fellowman. We are here to live according to His law and establish the kingdom of God. We are here to build, uplift, treat fairly, and encourage all of Heavenly Father's children."

**President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Pride and the Priesthood," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 56.**





## SPORTSMANSHIP TIPS

The Jordan and Western Hills teams gave the *New Era* some tips for developing winning sportsmanship.

- Have a good attitude with all the players, coaches, and referees on and off the court.
- Don't take the game too seriously.
- Don't get upset when others make mistakes.
- Communicate with your teammates.
- Teach others how to play.
- Try your hardest.
- Say "good game" and mean it.
- Have fun!



*Being positive was the attitude the Jordan First Ward team (right) took out onto the floor. Marie Aini (above) gets ready to serve.*



have been problems with other teams we've played, and people get angry with each other. Attitudes aren't always great." But when these two teams got together, they focused on the positive and fostered an environment of healthy and encouraging competition.

The girls learned that competition doesn't have to be negative and that with good sportsmanship, competition can motivate them to play better. Sara Pena, the Western Hills coach, has noticed that healthy competition can bring out the best in the players. "Playing your best can help athletes grow in their own talent and achieve something," she says. "Competition isn't about seeing if you're better than someone else. It's about seeing where your diligence and strength will take you."

The Jordan team agrees that attitude makes the difference between healthy and negative competitiveness. Marie says, "Together as a group, we decided that being too competitive isn't fun."

Kim agrees. "We shouldn't take the game too seriously. We like to make each other laugh instead."

The girls helped each other improve by teaching each other new skills. When Jael Blanco first started playing with the Western Hills team, she didn't know how to play volleyball very well, but Coach Pena taught her the rules and encouraged her to keep trying. "Sometimes when I play a new sport, I feel like people care only about winning," says Jael. "It's not as much fun, because really I just want to learn. Sara taught me how to play volleyball, but she also taught me how to have fun with it."

After the joint practice, the two teams faced each other in the championship match. Kathy says, "The Western Hills girls weren't the enemy anymore. They were just people—friends—and it wasn't intimidating. It

was a completely different feeling playing that last game."

The girls were cheering for their own teams, but the game wasn't laced with tension like the previous year's had been. The Jordan team won in a reversal from last year's championship, but a more significant reversal took place. More than caring about which team won, this year the girls celebrated athletic skill and a good game.

### **A Cultural Exchange**

After Jordan's win, the Western Hills ward approached the Jordan ward and suggested a joint Mutual activity. The Western Hills ward is a Spanish-speaking ward, and many of the young women from Jordan have Polynesian heritage, so they decided to organize a cultural exchange night, where they could share aspects of their different cultures.

The Jordan First Ward hosted the activity, and each ward brought food from their cultures. Once the activity started, it was hard to tell which girl was in which ward. "We didn't sit with our own wards. We all spread out and were meeting new people. I ended up hanging out with the Jordan girls at the cultural exchange night more than the girls from my own ward," Martha says.

Jessica adds, "We mingled with everyone and also got along with all the leaders. Everyone was laughing and busy making new friends."

### **Attitude Is Integral**

These volleyball players know that attitude is integral in sportsmanship. Marie says, "Whatever attitude you choose to have before a game you take out with you onto the court." She also says that it's important to have a positive attitude not only with your own teammates but also with your opponents.

For these two volleyball teams, winning doesn't depend on the score. These girls know that they score the most points when they step outside of themselves, make friends, and radiate a positive attitude. **NE**