



Abusive Spectator Behavior

The human side

The harm

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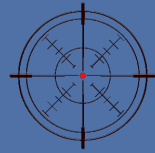
Spectrum of spectator behavior

(I am going to focus on the most problematic forms)



**Personally
target and
threaten
athletes**

Stalking,
threatening,
infringing on
personal lives



**Personal
attacks**

Race, gender,
families,
mental health



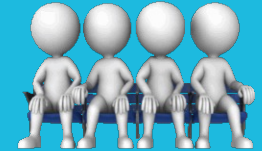
**Aggressive
heckling**

Personal
attacks,
sometimes
uncontrolled



Heckling

Purely sport
related, not
personal,
controlled



Cheering

Sport-focused
support, net
positive



*Everyone is fighting a
battle you know
nothing about*



Case 1

Targeted

U SPORTS VBALL ATHLETE

- Attended university away from her home province
 - Very successful- Conference Rookie of the year, all star
 - Home for the summer, worked out of town coaching camps across the province
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BACK TO SCHOOL

- “Fan” approached her during team training camp, had photos in his hand, said “I was close, wasn’t I? I was near your family. Where were you? I couldn’t find you.”
 - He had photos of her family home, her parents- it was clear he had “staked them out”
 - Said he was her “special fan” and she was “very important to him”
 - Scared, she ran out of practice
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Case 1

Targeted

REPORTING

- ++ scared, told coach and parents
- Coach: “he hasn’t done anything, he’s harmless”
- Parents: called president of the university
- “Fan” was banned from watching practice but not from games
- After games he waited for her outside the gym and told her she made him angry
- Watched her in the weight room, brought white roses to her residence

RESOLUTION

- She had to create safety protocols involving teammates and friends, eventually she graduated and left the school
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Case 2

It's Personal

U SPORTS BBALL ATHLETE

- History of traumatic childhood (domestic violence, chaotic family, father jailed for trying to strangle mother- in front of the kids)
- History of anxiety, depression, self harm, suicide attempts
- Successful career, key player- Conference all star, All-Canadian
- Team making a play off run

ON THE COURT

- Final minutes of a “must-win” game (away team)- fouled and sent to the free throw line
 - Needed to make 1 to tie, 2 to win
 - While getting ready for the free throws, the crowd started chanting his name, taunting him, telling him he “sucked”
 - Missed the first- the crowd cheered loudly. Chants rang out again
 - Missed the second- the crowd erupted, spectators yelled that he was a failure, that he choked, and should jump off a bridge
-



Case 2

It's Personal

THE AFTERMATH

- Several triggers for this athlete: letting the team down, feeling disappointed from the loss, specific mental health triggers from spectator behavior:
- Aggressive language
- References to mental health and death

OFF THE COURT

- Over The next week, the athlete did not attend classes, withdrew from his social group, and had a serious suicide attempt
- He required hospitalization and never returned to the team

MAIN ISSUES

- Sport-related disappointment
 - Spectator-triggered trauma- "how could they possibly know?"
 - Everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about
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Case 3

Relentless

U SPORTS HOCKEY

- **Away game- big rivalry**
 - **Home student athletes set up behind the Visitors bench and penalty box**
 - **Air horns, vuvuzelas, pots, pans, cow bells, yelling throughout the game, pounding on the glass especially when visiting player is in the penalty box**
 - **Relentless noise, chanting, taunting the goalie, targeting certain players, profanity, encouraging violence, racial slurs**
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ALSO IN THE STANDS

- **Family with two children distressed by the overwhelming noise, targeted comments, and calls for violence. They leave the game early and file a complaint**
 - **Other spectators are unable to enjoy the game due to the relentless noise and disruptive behavior**
 - **Spectators feel threatened and offended by the racist, aggressive language**
 - **Multiple complaints are filed**
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Final thoughts

Sports should be...



Safe for the participants

Physical Health

Mental Health

Psychological Health



An opportunity for competitive integrity

The Spirit of Sport must be preserved (for all)

Sport integrity can be preserved while requiring appropriate spectator behavior



Safe for others

The sport experience includes participants, coaches, officials, game day managers, volunteers, and administration

We have a responsibility to require appropriate behavior from spectators, and to protect everyone involved with the sport experience



Thank you!



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