



## Alex Hummel column: Coaches can teach about respecting women

By Alex Hummel • For The Post-Crescent •  
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Elite pitcher punches girlfriend's father. Super Bowl quarterback suspended, investigated for sexual assault.

World's No. 1 golfer ... you know the rest.

The headlines erupt weekly. Outrage is easy. Helping help end violence and disrespect toward women requires a bit more work.

But not necessarily harder work.

Picture this ...

Players are exhausted. The sun mellows. A productive afternoon practice is about to finish. There are a few minutes left before the shoulder pads are shed and the team trudges to the locker room. Whistles and commands quiet, and the coach, in the center of his huddled team, offers some final thoughts — what went well, what needs improvement, the usual wrap-up.

Today, the topic changes.

"All right, let's go. Guys, good practice today. I'm going to talk about something different, and I want you to listen closely. I've heard a few comments in the locker room and on the field about girls — bad stuff. I've seen a few pictures inside lockers, too. Unacceptable. So, let me ask you all a question: How can you show respect to your friends, your families and your girlfriends?"

There's a hush. Players survey each teammate's face for some affirming confusion. Silence.

"C'mon, guys," the coach prods. "How can you show respect? Let's start with your girlfriends. How?"

Another span of silence. Eventually, a senior speaks up with what sounds more like a question than a confident answer: "Go where she wants to go on a date?"

"Bingo, Jordan. Instead of you calling all the shots, talk it out: Share ideas about where to go and what to do for dates and respect each other's decisions. Homecoming will be here soon. Remember that. What else?"

A palpable willingness to speak up swells in the huddle.

A freshman jumps in with gusto: "Don't call her names."

"Everybody hear that?" the coach asks the squad. "Definitely, no names. When we call a girl names — heck, when we tell each other out here on the field, 'You're playing like a girl' — we're demeaning girls and women. All of them. What are we really saying when we say that stuff?"

Hesitation.

"That girls are weak, are less than us," a player chimes in as a few heads nod.

"You might think it's nothing," the coach explains. "But we're really saying that females are inferior, are less-than. We're saying it not just to the guys we think we're ribbing. We're saying it to our girlfriends, to our sisters, to our moms — to all women. I think that's unacceptable.

"One more idea: How can we show respect to our girlfriends?"

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Not a second passes: "Go to her games or concerts or plays and stuff; cheer for her," a lineman shouts.

A rush of supportive, sincere laughter envelops the huddle.

"Right on, McKenzie," the coach says with a smile. "She supports you. You support her. That's a healthy relationship. All right; everybody get in here."

The huddle compacts. Hands reach into the air and tent over the coach's cap, piling one on top the other.

"I want you guys to keep thinking about this conversation today," the coach stresses. "Respect isn't just a practice-day, game-day, on-the-field thing. We need to respect the girls and women in our lives all the time — in what we say, what we do, everywhere.

"We'll talk about this more this season. We're all going to speak up and challenge one other to do the right things. All right, let's go: 'Respect' on three. One, two three — respect!"

The coach grabs his clipboard as the young men head for the locker room.

"Gonna be a good year," he whispers to himself.

We think so, too.

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The message boys get on the field can go a long way in how t treat girls and women off the field. (Gannett Wisconsin Media photo)

**For more information**

Fox Valley Voices of Men, dedicated to men ending violence against women and girls, has the coaching-conversation topics ready. If a parent, coach or coaching staff member you know can make a little time this season to field some free training and an outline for vital conversations with male athletes, e-mail Alex Hummel at [alex@voicesofmen.org](mailto:alex@voicesofmen.org).

Alex Hummel is the community outreach and education coordinator for Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services in Oshkosh and works with Fox Valley Voices of Men

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