

the front office

“Old school” out for good?

Talking with a friend during last month's NCAA men's basketball tournament, I said I liked Gonzaga point guard Dan Dickau because he “has an ‘old school’ haircut.” That led to a discussion of our circa-1976 high school basketball uniforms, the style of which John Stockton (another Gonzaga man) still wears in the NBA today—you know, the kind that don't look like skirts on the shorter guys.

Depending on your point of view, “old school” is either the “only way the game should be played” or perhaps “Baby Boomer nostalgia.” It is really more than style or fashion. Though most professional sports have time-honored ways (in hockey, for example, you are probably not old school if you have all your God-given teeth), old school is more than tradition. Is the old school philosophy dying?

I think the term first described those who played for the love of the game and the competition. Think Pete Rose or even Ty Cobb. Here's a quote from the Georgia Peach: “Baseball is a red-blooded sport for red-blooded men. It's no pink tea, and mollicoddles had better stay out. It's a struggle for supremacy, survival of the fittest.” Whoa, Mr. Cobb, have a Kit-Kat bar!

Here's Rogers Hornsby: “People ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I stare out the window and wait for spring.” Gee, I wonder if Jason Giambi stared out any window (besides the bank's) last winter?

Old school means giving 100% on every play. Remember when Carlton Fisk dressed down Deion Sanders, sparking a brawl, when Neon didn't run out a pop up at Yankee Stadium? It's an epidemic now. Today's players aren't about to risk pulling a hammy by hotfooting down the line on routine plays. Old schoolers don't call their agents before they blow their noses. They don't ask to sit down, ever.

Of course there are plenty of professional athletes who hustle and work at their craft year-round that we can admire. But as the years go by, and fewer of our “tribal elders” are around to pass along what the “love of the game” once meant, will our sons and daughters and grandchildren come to see old school as irrelevant, as not “maximizing earning potential”?

Call it old school or “positive personal development” or whatever you will, let's just keep the spirit alive. Let's make sure the youngsters we influence realize our games, while only games, still are meant to be played enthusiastically, with fervor and heart. Let's make sure they understand that while winning is not necessarily important, giving the effort in trying to win is.



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SEE PAGE 65

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