



Natalie  
Williams

**DOIN'  
THE RIGHT  
THING**

# Natalie Williams

## BASKETBALL, TWO-TIME OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST

A team is a beautiful thing. A bunch of unique peeps all coming together to play. Being part of a team is absolutely the best part about playing basketball. But, it can also be the hardest part. Mish-mashing 10 to 12 players—all with different tastes, values and vibes—can be tricky. There is always going to be a girl on the team that you're not cool with. The key to making the most of your game is figuring out how to get along with everyone on the team—as if you were a big family. Great players learn to respect all their teammates and opponents in the same way that they respect themselves.

In junior basketball, when I was about 13, there were two distinct groups of players on my team. One group had skills, and one group didn't. Some of the less skilled players had positive attitudes, and some were always being sarcastic and pessimistic. Attitude made a big difference. Those girls who were positive got more help, high fives and training tips from the better players. The girls with attitudes didn't. Nobody wanted to even talk to them, let alone play with them. In the end, the players that checked their sass at the door became better—because they were open and willing to be part of a team. The players

who are talking smack to others don't get to stay around too long. It sets a bad example and ruins the team vibe.

Respecting the rules is also huge when it comes to an athlete doing the right thing. I missed curfew once—so the coach didn't let me start in the championship game. We lost. It was a good lesson for me.

You break the rules—you pay. Part of respecting the rules

means not bad-mouthing the referees. I have always been bigger and stronger than most players, so I get fouled a lot. It gets frustrating when the officials don't call those fouls. But I learned that staying calm was the best answer. If you flip out or swear at the refs, you and your team will be hurt—technical fouls and more calls against you for sure. If you stay calm, you can stay focused on your game.

Nothing is perfect in sport. There are going to be mistakes. Someone is going to make a bad play. You can't go getting in someone's face for every human error that happens. Girls who play dirty against other teams or intimidate players on their own team hurt team spirit. Winning is not worth losing your self-respect, and teams that fight aren't teams that win. Keep your head in your game and value the contributions of everyone on your team.

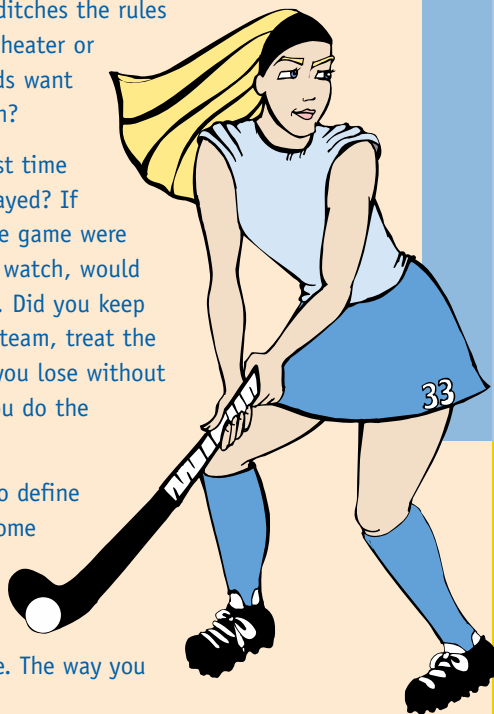
**WINNING IS NOT WORTH  
LOSING YOUR SELF-RESPECT.**

# DOIN' THE RIGHT THING

**W**ho are you? What do you value? It's your decision. Are you the one who always cheers for the worst player on your team, shakes the ref's hand after the game, plays clean and respects your opponents? Or are you the one that hacks other players, talks smack to the refs and ditches the rules to win? Are you a good sport or a bad sport? A cheater or someone who respects the game you play? Do kids want to be on your team or are you no fun to play with?

Right now, stop for a second. Think about the last time you played a sport. Are you proud of how you played? If every single thing you did for every second of the game were broadcast on the news for everyone you know to watch, would you hold your head high? Forget about the score. Did you keep your frustration under control, respect the other team, treat the officials right and support your teammates? Did you lose without complaining or win without rubbing it in? Did you do the right thing?

Every athlete has a personality that they create to define themselves. Check out pro sports on television. Some athletes pride themselves on being thugs and others on keeping it real and playing by the rules. How you act on the field, court, track or whatever tells people what kind of person you are. The way you



## RED FLAGS

### Do You...

- Play dirty?
- Cheat?
- Dis the officials?
- Make fun of others?
- Have temper tantrums?
- Blame everything for your mistakes?
- Talk smack?
- Believe a win is more important than acting right?

### YOU MAY BE HEADED FOR...

- Hurting people
- Getting disrespected
- Ruining team bonding
- Getting booted out of a game/competition
- Getting booted off your team
- Turning off potential coaches
- Getting in all kinds of trouble

Cheating is lame. It just means you're not good enough to win the real way.

play reflects who you are. When you throw an elbow on purpose, you're defining yourself as a chump. When you scream your head off at the line judge during a tennis match, you're defining yourself as a hotheaded brat. But when you offer a hand to help an opponent up when they're down, you're defining yourself as a classy athlete. When you keep your trap shut when a ref makes a terrible call, you look mature, confident and together.

Choose to be a true athlete. Play hard to win, but don't throw blame, whine and scream if you don't. Never play to hurt someone—physically or emotionally—on another team or on your own. Love your game and understand that all the kids, coaches and refs involved probably do it for the same good reasons. Respect them as you would want to be respected. Be positive and get down with following the rules. Sports are a big training ground for life—choose to keep it real.

## Resources

✿ [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

✿ [www.youth-sports.com](http://www.youth-sports.com)

## THE ULTIMATE SPORTSWOMAN

Flo Hyman was one of the best American volleyball players ever, a three-time All-American spiker and captain of the 1984 U.S. Olympic women's volleyball team. The sad part is that Flo died after collapsing during a match when she was only 31 years old. She had a rare disorder called Marfan Syndrome, which affects the heart.

Even today her legend lives on. She was more than just a hot volleyballer. She was a quality person. Courageous, honest, generous, friendly—Flo played in the true spirit

of the game. When she won, she didn't rub it in, and when she lost, she didn't make excuses. She played fair and respected the officials and the other team. She was an example of the ideal athlete.

Every year, the "Flo Hyman Award" is given out by the Women's Sports Foundation to a female athlete who plays and lives like Flo—with "dignity, spirit and commitment to excellence." If you had to present this award to someone you know, who would it be? Use this checklist to give your award:

■ Compassionate—kind and caring

- Honest—plays fair and never cheats
- Courageous—brave enough to do the right thing even when others don't.
- Dependable—someone you can count on
- Levelheaded—can walk away from an argument and solve things peacefully.
- Determined—won't give up; will keep trying, even after mistakes.

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