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## PROGRAM PROMPTS SPORTSMANSHIP

*BY NASH NUNNERY*

**CLINTON, Miss., October 30, 2008** – As a former prep football coach, Dr. Ennis Proctor of Clinton saw his share of poor sportsmanship exhibited by athletes and coaches on high school playing fields across the state.

Now as executive director of the Clinton-based Mississippi High School Activities Association, he wants the bad behavior to cease.

Exit explicit taunts and on-the-field fistcuffs. Enter the STAR Sportsmanship program. Last July, the association's executive committee passed a requirement that all coaches and student-athletes complete "Stop...Think...Act...and Replay" (STAR).

It is a role-playing education program designed to help players, coaches and even parents make good decisions on and off the field. Included in the online course is a section on the dangers of anabolic steroids.

The program is funded by a \$500,000 grant from the state Department of Education and is proving to be highly successful, says Proctor, who has served as leader of the MHSAA since 1991.

"We've cut our ejections 35-40 percent already in our fall sports," he said. "Don Hinton (STAR program coordinator) and Dr. (Phyfa) Eiland have done a great job working with our schools. We believe that students who learn to respect themselves and others will be better leaders for our communities and the state."

An estimated 300-350 Clinton school district athletes and coaches have undergone STAR Sportsmanship training, says Clinton High athletic director Scott Brown.

"It's a good program, but it has been challenging from a logistical standpoint. We've still got to train some athletes that play spring sports, he said. "But it's one more tool to help remind everyone that sportsmanship is important."

Brown said the online training takes about 25 minutes to complete, and added that STAR has been helpful to the Arrows coaching staff at both the junior high and high school level.

For CHS baseball coach Eddie Lofton, the program coincides with his personal coaching philosophy. Sportsmanship, he says, is as basic to his program as hitting the cut-off man or executing a bunt.

"We harp on sportsmanship with our players and try very hard in getting the message to the kids," he said. "Good sportsmanship is an important aspect of the game and as coaches, we try to impart that to our guys. I support the (STAR) program and what Dr. Proctor is doing to implement it."

The STAR Sportsmanship program is the brainchild of Brian Shulman, author of *The Death of Sportsmanship* and a former Auburn University punter.

A father, Shulman often takes his children to high school sporting events in his native Alabama, but is appalled at the taunting, obscenities and 'win at all costs' attitude displayed at games.

"Our junior high and high school athletes are emulating what they see by the pros on television," he said. "I was shocked to see some of their behaviors at the high school level. It wasn't that way when I played in the SEC."

Shulman wrote the book and designed the program, which was first tested in the NCAA's Mountain West Conference. He introduced STAR in Alabama two years ago, and officials there witnessed a 41 percent reduction in game ejections.

"Basically, this program focuses on using sports as an outdoor classroom," he said. "Student athletes are now learning lessons about more than winning or losing."

Proctor said more than 68,000 MHSAA student athletes and 4,000 coaches have completed the STAR program online.

"I would say that 99 percent of the coaches are supportive of STAR," he said. "They've been very accepting of the program, and I feel certain that it's making a positive impact on the field."

The STAR coaching version includes parent training for pre-season orientation meetings, and the program will eventually encompass all MHSAA activities, including cheerleading, debate and band.

Proctor says that poor sportsmanship on the field or in the stands will not be tolerated at MHSAA events, adding that even parents, cheerleaders and band members have been involved in some unsavory antics in recent years.

"Last year, we had a situation in north Mississippi where parents actually came on the basketball court and engaged in fights with players of the opposing team," he said. "We hope to institute a parent module for the program and prevent those types of incidents."

Though punishments for ejections and unsportsmanlike behavior at MHSAA games will remain intact, athletes and coaches can redeem themselves by completing a remedial sportsmanship program. If not, they won't participate in games, says Proctor.

"We are very pleased so far with the success of the STAR program," said Proctor. "(Former Notre Dame football coach) Knute Rockne once said that one man who practiced good sportsmanship was better than 50 preaching it.

"We're taking a pro-active approach in educating our players to compete as good sports."

For more information on the Mississippi High School Activities Association, please visit <http://www.misshsaa.com>.

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