

# Chalkboard

By

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Congratulations to the Senior Boys' and Girls' Basketball teams on making it to the State Basketball Tournament this week. If you have had a chance to watch any of the games this year you know that the players on both teams have represented our school well. Ditto that for Coaches Conlan Efurd and Norman Mitchell. Both men get really involved in the games sometimes, but I have never been ashamed to claim them as Gentry employees. For a fact, the opposite holds true.

I have always thought it is important to represent yourself well in the public arena. Back a million years ago when I was in the principal business, part of my "speech" to students went something like this. "Now when you get to Little Rock (or wherever the bus was headed) nobody is going to know your name. But they are going to be able to read Hughes (or later, Dumas) on the side of that big yellow bus you are riding. They will not know your name but they remember our school by how you act. When you get on a Hughes bus or put on a Hughes uniform, you become the Hughes School District to the people with whom you come in contact."

After some twenty-five years of being some type school administrator, I have not changed my opinion on that subject although I confess that, from time-to-time, I do not live up to my own expectations. I note that it is easier to maintain a higher level of decorum when you do not have a child of your own playing.

It has been evident this year that our football and basketball programs have had good support from a cadre of fans, both adult and students. I am especially appreciative of all those faithful who no longer have children on Pioneer teams but still make the effort to attend events. Like anywhere else I have ever been, the crowds are always larger when the teams are winning; but for thirteen years I have watched a core of Gentry fans stay faithful through the thick and thin. Many of these are alumni; several are transplants like me.

Though I would never lecture an adult fan on behavior at sporting events, I would note that fans, as a group, get reputations also. Try this simple test. Those of you who travel to away ballgames can shut your eyes and start naming the schools where you thought the fans were boisterous; sometimes even to the point of being obnoxious. You could, couldn't you?

Now notice that in your mind, you named the names of schools not the names of individuals.

A few weeks ago I received a telephone call from a grandmother of an eighth grade basketball player from another school district who called me to complain about the behavior of Gentry fans. As far as she was concerned, our players, our fans, our coaches, and our school district were despicable. I listened to her for some long time before I asked her if she had noticed the behavior of the fans at her own school district. The quality of the call started deteriorating from that point on. Nor did it end on a good, positive note because I probably became too defensive about our school and our fans.

For the record, I will share with you the simple message I ask our school principals to instill in our student fans about being ballgame behavior. Roughly it goes something like this. "Be as loud as you want to be cheering for our team. Don't boo the other team or the officials. Don't call repeated attention to yourself; if you want to be the center of attention then try out for the team. When the game is over, it's over. Go home and let the other team's spectators go home."

There is nothing extraordinary about the above creed for the students. It is just what I think and I think I like for our school to win on and off the court.