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Mr. Wilson's 8th period

Four-Way Test Essay

"With integrity, nothing else counts. Without integrity, nothing else counts." - Winston Churchill, Former Prime Minister and Member of the Rotary Club of London.

Choices are powerful; they reflect who you are and what you believe. When Winston Churchill served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, he thought about the effects of his actions. As a Rotarian, he knew to ask himself: "Is it the truth?" "Is it fair?" "Will it build goodwill and better friendships?" "Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" Using this Four-Way Test, he helped shape the postwar world and took part in the establishment of the United Nations. As an athlete, I can apply the Four-Way Test to the choices I make when interacting with my teammates and opponents.

I've been playing lacrosse for eight years. When I was a younger player, still new to the game, coaches could walk onto the field, assisting the referees. If a call was confusing, play stopped while the referee made the call and carefully explained the rule to the players. Coaches reinforced the referees' decisions, sending the message to even the youngest players that sports need rules. This interaction slowed down the pace at first, but kept athletes safe, and established firmly that the rules of the game are not arbitrary and that referees are primarily on the field to help players improve their skills and develop respect for the integrity of the sport.

As I grew older, the interaction between coaches and referees diminished and focus shifted from learning the rules of the game to learning specialized techniques in order to win games. I was expected to practice winning plays based on my field position. At this point, 'building goodwill and better friendships' occurred more often among my teammates than with the opposing team. Rivalries developed and while players may not have openly disagreed with the referees, sometimes we saw a play from a different point of view. We hoped games would be 'fair to all concerned,' but there were times when referees and players on opposing teams did not seem to appreciate the 'truth' of the game as we saw it. Conflicts arose, and as a consequence, the game of lacrosse became less enjoyable for everyone. There were times when I wondered why anyone would agree to referee a game, and times when my team formed opinions of opposing teams that were biased and unfair.

Players with a bad attitude won't last long in any sport. I'm convinced athletes who succeed in their sports learn to apply a code of ethics that is quite like the Rotary Four-Way Test. This is why I admire players who quickly accept the blame if they cause the ball to go out of bounds and acknowledge fault when they make mistakes. It doesn't seem right to consider a game a "win" when your aggressiveness injures an opposing player or risks anyone else's safety or self-respect. For players to remain successful in the long run, they must play by the rules, respect the referees' decisions, and strive to build friendships instead of rivalries. Rotarians created ethical principles to build trust in their actions and their brand. I strive to be a valued player who listens and admits to my mistakes as well as a player who puts the needs of the team over my individual aspirations.

Herbert J. Taylor developed the Four-Way Test to help save his nearly bankrupt business during the Great Depression. At a time in history when economic survival meant competition with other companies whose financial fortunes were equally stressed, the four questions helped Taylor's employees ethically rebuild their company and restore customers' faith and goodwill during financially unstable times.

Although Taylor's situation might not seem similar to my experiences as a youth lacrosse player at first glance, the two actually have much in common. Customers don't want to do business with companies that won't put their ethical values first, and players who think their sport can be successfully played without ethics soon lose the support of their coaches, their fans, and later, their sponsors. In lacrosse, the Four-Way Test is expressed as a desire by the sport's governing institution to educate players and elevate the sport.

The first challenge of the Four-Way Test is to ask yourself, "Is it the truth?" Players have a responsibility to play honestly. It's tempting to exaggerate a foul to have a call made against the other team by turning a small shove into a theatrical production to catch the official's attention. I want to be a role model for younger players, demonstrating that the sport I love can be won by respecting the rules. Before getting the other team in trouble or making a false claim, I've learned to ask myself, "is it the truth?" I've also learned that truths are often more complicated than simple honesty. Sometimes the truth means waiting on the sidelines while stronger players take the field, acknowledging that I need to practice a skill longer or that my specific talents don't fit the coach's exact need at that moment.

Next, the Four-Way Test asks, “is it fair to all concerned?” Games that aren’t fair aren’t fun. Fairness means both teams are given an equal opportunity to show their skills. One team may be more talented than the other, but neither team is afforded special privileges. I know the frustration of playing defense with the sun in my eyes, unable to see the ball in play. I’ve played on unevenly sloped fields where it felt like every step was an uphill climb for me and a downhill glide for my opposition. This is why teams swap ends of the field at halftime. ‘Fairness to all concerned’ in lacrosse ensures that your success is not due to an unfair advantage over the other team.

The third question in the Four-Way Test, “will it build goodwill and better friendships?” is designed to remind us of our purpose. A team composed of players who embrace friendship over conflict will be more successful than one lacking camaraderie. By its very nature, a ‘team’ implies a group with shared goals and interests, thus goodwill, including the willingness to put shared objectives ahead of individual goals, makes a team stronger. Additionally, no team plays only itself--most athletes get to know their competitors and over time a community of players forms. Team rosters often shift over the years, and consequently some of the most fun I’ve had on the field came from games where I competed against friends and former teammates, often sharing a meal or carpooling home together afterwards. We all played to win, but once the final score was posted, we celebrated each other’s small victories on the field regardless of who advanced in the winner’s bracket. Because we share an understanding of the sacrifices required to become better players, no one is able to appreciate my hard work more than a fellow player, even if she plays for the opposing team.

Finally, the Four-Way Test challenges us to consider whether the things we think, say, or do “will be beneficial to all concerned.” Team practice is essential for success in games. However, a strong practice includes learning not just from one’s coach, but from teammates as well. There are only one or two coaches running a practice, but perhaps twenty teammates to help you grow as a player. Together, we share advice to make each player on the team stronger. Not only do we trade advice, we also share words of encouragement. This carries over to games, where players on the field frequently congratulate each other on our successes. We want our words to help each player become the best she can be. Every player adds value. With this mindset, all players experience the benefits of being part of the team, and the team benefits from the efforts of every player.

The Four-Way Test is an integral part of the Rotary Club’s culture because its questions are applicable to so many types of endeavors. Winston Churchill wasn’t referencing lacrosse when he said that “without integrity, nothing else counts,” but his words are still accurate. If I’m not playing with a respect for the rules, and if I don’t take into account the importance of fairness and goodwill between players, coaches, and referees, then the game won’t be beneficial or worthwhile to anyone. Without integrity, a win is not really a victory. In the same vein, even if I lose the game, if I have played with integrity and given the game my best effort, then, as Churchill said, “nothing else counts.” The opportunity to play a sport I love becomes my most prized victory. Winston Churchill and scores of Rotarians were correct: Truth, Fairness, Goodwill, and Beneficence are integral to success in any field, including the ones where my teammates and I play lacrosse.