

Be the Sixth Player

IN THE COMMENTS

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Responding to Online Harassment

HATE ONLINE

We've all seen it before – a storm of hateful posts online. Whether it's hurtful slurs, harassment campaigns, or targeted hate against your favorite female athlete, digital words can hurt just as much as anything said offline. When you witness an instance of hate or harassment, it's like you've been passed the ball right before the buzzer: you have the opportunity to take a game-winning shot, or you can let the clock run out and do nothing.

Hate and harassment online isn't always easy to spot. Sometimes harassment looks like "harmless" locker room talk or gets passed off as "just a joke." Other times, the intent to hurt someone is obvious. So, what can you do to help the team?

KNOWING HOW TO HANDLE A FOUL

For example, say you see dozens of posts or comments like, "women's sports aren't real sports," "they need to get back to the kitchen," or "she doesn't belong in the league!" Don't click back - don't amplify online hate. While it might be tempting to share your own outrage, firing back comments feeds the algorithm fans the flames and spreads the post. Instead, report the harmful posts. Reach out to those affected to say you see them, and you stand with them.

Maybe it's closer to home: an online account piles on a local high school sports coach after a tough loss, picking apart her looks instead of her qualifications. Maybe a player gets mocked online with hateful slurs after a missed point. Local moments of hate don't always make headlines, but your response matters just as much. Calling out hate doesn't have to be loud; respond to local rumors or slurs with facts, leave a supportive comment, or send a private message of encouragement.

Being a good teammate online doesn't require a perfect response every time, just a willingness to show up, recognize when something's wrong, and speak up if you feel safe to do so. Don't stand on the sidelines. Be the Sixth Player.

Be the Sixth **Player**

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The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't amplify online hate or feed the algorithm by firing back in the comments of hateful viral posts
- ✗ Don't stand on the sidelines
- ✗ Don't worry about giving a perfect response

DO

- ✓ Do evaluate your own personal safety and well-being before engaging
- ✓ Do report hateful posts
- ✓ Do reach out to those affected and say you see them and stand with them

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Want to know more about calling foul on hate and harassment? Click on the resources below to learn more:

- ▶ [PERIL. Not Just a Joke: Understanding & Preventing Gender- & Sexuality-based Bigotry \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [PERIL. Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [University of Illinois. Bystander Intervention Strategies.](#)
- ▶ [Right to Be Bystander Training. The 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention.](#)