

*The following excerpts are from a college essay written by a recipient of the David M. Perry Sportsmanship Award at the U.S. Youth Sailing Championship.*

The United States Youth Sailing Championship traditionally gathers the one hundred and fifty best sailors from all corners of the country. On the final evening, the competitors congregate for the awards ceremony. Having finished lower than I expected to, I was not expecting to be recognized during the ceremony. The trophies were distributed to the winners interrupted by waves of applause after each name. Once this had concluded I assumed the ceremony was over. However somewhat to my surprise the room, full of over a hundred talkative teenagers, remained silent. The regatta chairman then began presenting a bowl shaped, brass trophy mounted on a tall wooden pedestal. He indicated the trophy was a sportsmanship award named after the legendary sailor and sportsman Dave Perry, and that the recipients of the award were voted on solely by the competitors in the event. As the name of the recipient was being read, I was stunned to hear my name called.

Later that night I was unable to sleep because my mind was still examining all the mistakes I had made through the course of the week. Overall I was still frustrated with my performance and final placing. I kept glancing at the sportsmanship trophy and repeated the line given by the chairman when he presented the award to us, “you have won the respect of your peers.” I pondered that line in my head for what seemed like an eternity. Then suddenly I remembered a famous quote from Paul Elvstrom, a four-time Olympic gold medalist and the “patron saint” of sailing, “You have not won the race, if in winning the race you have lost the respect of your competitors.” In that instant, I gained a whole new interpretation on how I viewed not just sailboat racing, but also life in general. I realized that being successful is not about being content with the final result, but more importantly being content with the nature in which attempting the result was conducted. Throughout the week I had tried my hardest, but had a few unlucky breaks and had made a couple of preventable errors that costs us places. The award however was much more than a couple of places in a regatta to me; it reflected that my competitors truly appreciated the honesty, fairness, and integrity that I had upheld throughout the course of the week, and they appreciated my positive and good-natured attitude on and off the water.

When I returned home I started working especially hard to ensure that I continued to live up to the ideals that I had been recognized for in my everyday life. I began leading my high school team through example at practices and regattas by showing up with a positive attitude and giving my less experienced teammates tips. By the end of a tumultuous season our team finally came together and exceeded expectations by finishing in the top ten in the nation.

At first winning the Sportsmanship Award seemed almost insignificant to me; however now I view it as the most important award I have ever received. It has helped me reaffirm my belief that trying your best and maintaining integrity is more important than winning or achieving goals, especially when victory or success has been achieved by dishonorable means. I now have discovered that my integrity earned me respect. And since I have earned respect my goals are much more easily achievable, and when I fail I am much more content with the results because I know I will learn from my mistakes.