

Grace in a Basketball Game

John Franklin, a senior forward for the Milwaukee Madison High School basketball team, was not scheduled to play that night against DeKalb High School. After all, his mother had just died of cancer.

But to everyone's surprise, John walked into the gym midway through the second quarter, determined to play. The only problem was that his name hadn't been placed on the roster. That meant a penalty of two free throws would be assessed against his team should John take the floor.

The coaches of both teams met with the game's referee, begging him to make an exception to the rule. But the referee refused to break the rule, regardless of extenuating circumstances. That set the stage for something extra-special to happen.

DeKalb's Darius McNeal – a player on the opposing team – stepped to the free-throw line to shoot. Instead of an earnest attempt to sink the ball, however, McNeal intentionally shot the ball several feet short of its target. The referee picked up the ball and bounced it back to McNeal, who did the same thing with the second shot.



The crowd exploded with applause. Later, in an interview with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, McNeal said, "I did it for the guy who lost his mom. It was the right thing to do."

Merriam-Webster defines sportsmanship as "conduct (such as fairness, respect for one's opponent and graciousness in winning or losing) becoming to one participating in a sport." It is a quality too often ignored in the desire to win at all cost.

It is tempting in certain situations to say, "The heck with the rule" – especially in light of a young man losing his mother. But rules and laws must be kept if we are to live, and play, with integrity.

The story of John Franklin and Darius McNeal provides a beautiful picture of how it is possible to show grace without violating the law.

Of course, the ultimate example of this is found in Jesus Christ. He entered the world to rescue us from the penalties of God's law, not by setting the law aside, but by honoring it and keeping it in our behalf.

As Jesus declared: *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill* (Matthew 5:17 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter