



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 13, 2017

## Your Place — My Rules: Parents Suing Catholic School So Daughter Can Play Boys' Sports

Your school — my rule? This appears the message of two parents who are suing a New Jersey Catholic school for upholding Catholic standards.

The case involves 13-year-old Sydney Phillips, a seventh-grader at St. Theresa School in Kenilworth. After the girls' basketball team was disbanded last October for lack of interest, Sydney requested to play on the boys' seventh-grade team. St. Theresa said no, and, in keeping with the new "American" spirit, a lawsuit was filed by Sydney's father, Scott Phillips.



A judge last month declined Phillips' request that the school be compelled to allow Sydney's participation, correctly stating that religious institutions are protected against such government intrusion under state law. However, Phillips did score one "victory": Sydney and her sister, Kaitlyn, had been expelled from St. Theresa in accordance with its by-laws, after the suit's filing. But a different judge ruled February 3 that the girls must be allowed to return pending a hearing.

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Unsurprisingly, the school has gotten much bad press — mostly because we have a bad press. One exception is *New York Post* writer Naomi Schaefer Riley, who [contends](#) that the Phillips are teaching their daughter "narcissism, not justice." She writes:

Here is a family that decided to send its daughters to a Catholic school, and when the administration acted in accordance with how it interprets Catholic values, the family took its objections to court. There, the family cost the school (which is pretty small to begin with) and the diocese (which struggles to offer a decent education to impoverished families throughout the area) thousands of dollars in legal bills.

Funding at Catholic schools is limited, and if sports are your priority, maybe you should consider going to a public school instead.

The Phillipses live in posh Scotch Plains, where the average household earns \$159,275 yearly. Such areas enjoy a plethora of school choices — government, private, and parochial — within close proximity. Yet after choosing St. Theresa, now they seek to strip the school's ability to choose its own rules.

Such areas also offer ample sporting opportunities, and Sydney certainly could play in other basketball leagues, ones offering better competition (her class only has 17 students). But this isn't good enough for Scott Phillips, who has vowed that he's "still going to fight" — and cost the diocese money that could otherwise be used to help poor children.

Citing other frivolous actions, such as a parent who sued to get a Nativity scene removed from a school and those compelling bakers to cater their weddings, Riley laments that today "there seems to be a kind



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of scorched-earth policy adopted by plaintiffs: If I can't have my way, I'm going to take everyone down with me. Live and let live doesn't seem to be an option anymore."

This certainly seems Phillips' attitude. Seldom mentioned in most media is that he [reportedly signed](#) the school's standard agreement stating that bringing legal action against St. Theresa would result in the expulsion of his children. Yet he wouldn't abide by this, either, and police had to be called when he insisted on bringing his daughters to school despite the expulsion notice.

Yet the problem is that morality has been expelled from America. Many moderns are befuddled at why St. Theresa would take its position, but in accordance with [the principle of Chesterton's Fence](#), it's a good idea to at least know why a standard exists before tearing it down.

A woman with whom I'm close was many decades ago a devoted, sports-loving tomboy. When describing what inspired her to ultimately give up competing with the lads, she mentioned not only their starting to surpass her during early adolescence but something else: During contact sports they sometimes would, as is said, try to "cop a feel."

The point is not that this is acceptable or that authority figures shouldn't try to prevent it, but that the best way to prevent it is to avoid the "occasion of sin" in the first place. It's that the sexual component is real, powerful and foolish to play fast and loose with, and that we've done so is why the illegitimacy rate was four percent in the 1940s but is [40 percent today](#).

Philosopher C.S. Lewis acknowledged sexuality's power when saying, "Sex is not messed up because it was put in the closet; it was put in the closet because it was messed up." His sense of propriety still exists, here and there, [examples being](#) the young schoolboy wrestlers who choose to forfeit matches rather than grapple with girls on the mat. St. Theresa's may be another example.

A common modern response is, "Who are you, the Taliban?!" But who's the true radical here? There's a heck of a lot of real estate between smothering a woman in an eighth-century drape and being a flaming libertine in a thong (we "radicals" call the point in-between "the happy medium").

Sexual modesty is not some extreme notion. It's our current sexualized state that's unusual, radical, and ahistorical (within the context of Western history's last two millennia).

Yet there's another factor. Last year I watched an 11-year-old nephew play in a quasi-pick-up soccer game; on this day a girl showed up and joined in, unusual in the foreign country in which he lives. I noticed that when the boy was close to her, he moved very gingerly, clearly treating the girl with kid gloves.

Today we send boys mixed messages. On the one hand we still, to a degree, tell them to be gentlemen; on the other we force them into situations where, unless they wish to handicap themselves, they must get rough with girls. Can we make up our minds?

Some may now scream "Equality!" But equal access means eliminating separate and protected tours, leagues, and teams for females. It certainly doesn't mean disallowing boys and men from trying out for the girls'/women's arena — all the while claiming a right for the girls to enter the boys' realm and shouting injustice when this double standard is opposed.

(We could also wonder: Would the equality police try to impose their mixed-sex standard on a Muslim school?)

Of course, freedom of association should be enough to justify St. Theresa's right to formulate its own rules, but it isn't today. Nor will my explanation of the sexual realities sway committed libertines or



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equality-on-the-brain types. But at least now, perhaps, some will better know who and what they're stamping out when they tyrannically absorb all and sundry into their collective.



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