

RONALD REAGAN CENTER ON CIVILITY AND DEMOCRACY

Spring 2025 Newsletter



► A MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR FRED RYAN

Inspiration from Sports

Good sportsmanship is democracy in motion: competitive, principled, and grounded in respect.

Sports have always had a unique power to bring people together. Americans on opposite ends of the political spectrum still high-five over a shared touchdown, rise together for a walk-off home run, and rally behind hometown heroes. On the field, athletes learn to compete with intensity and integrity, while still honoring the skill and effort of those on the other side. That ethic of striving together, playing by the rules, and showing grace in the face of both victory and defeat offers a model for civil society.

Ronald Reagan [understood](#) this deeply as a lifelong participant in the world of sports. He played football in college, broadcast baseball games on the radio, portrayed “the Gipper” on screen, and established the tradition of welcoming championship teams to the White House. A decade before Major League Baseball integrated, Reagan used his radio platform to challenge segregation in the game, recognizing its power to break down barriers and bring people together.

That same spirit animates the sportsmanship and civility initiative the Center on Civility and Democracy (CCD) has launched with our partners at the Rose Bowl Institute. Together we are

engaging a vibrant coalition of sports trailblazers to catalyze a multi-sport messaging campaign promoting the values of good sportsmanship in broader civic life. In March, we officially kicked off that effort by convening dozens of leaders for a dialogue at the Rose Bowl Stadium. **You can learn more about our [sportsmanship and civility initiative](#) online.**

Our guest contributor this quarter is Sam Acho, an author, speaker, ESPN football analyst, nine-season linebacker with the National Football League, and a former vice president of the NFL Players Association. He offers his thoughts on the power of sports to model mutual respect in American life.



► GUEST CONTRIBUTOR SAM ACHO

What Happens After the Game Ends

Step onto an NFL field, and you'll see 22 men flying at each other at full speed, giving everything they have to win. It looks like a war zone. But when the clock hits zero, something different happens, though the TV cameras don't always capture it. Opponents kneel together in prayer. I did it many times during my nine seasons in the NFL. I've held hands with men I just tried to knock off their feet, like Russell Wilson. We'd pray for each other's health and families, for safe travels home, for success. In that moment, you see the truth: Sports are about more than competition.

I've been in locker rooms across the country, from Arizona to Chicago to Buffalo to Tampa. One of the most surprising things I learned? A lot of guys on opposing teams are actually close friends. We grew up together. We trained in the same gyms, played at rival schools, were drafted in the same class. Many of us still train together at facilities around the country. You'd never know it from watching us go head-to-head. But when the game ends, the respect is real.

KEEP READING



► NATIONAL CIVILITY SURVEY FINDINGS

More Than Seven in 10 Americans Want to Play a Part in Restoring Civility in America

The Center on Civility and Democracy (CCD) recently commissioned a national survey to assess the state of democracy and civility in our country. Designed to support CCD's pillars—promoting civil discourse, finding common ground, and encouraging informed patriotism—the survey offers insight into the challenges we face, as well as opportunities for progress.

Democracy is not a zero sum game. An overwhelming 72% of respondents expressed a desire to be part of the solution in restoring civility to our national life. Most Americans reject the idea that public discourse must be defined by bitter conflict or humiliation and instead support a more constructive path forward.

► [Read the Press Release](#)

► [Dive Into the Findings](#)



► UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Join Us for Upcoming Events!

A Common Ground Forum with Governors Cox and Lujan Grisham

On May 19, Utah Governor Spencer Cox (R) and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) will join the Center on Civility and Democracy at the Ronald Reagan Presidential

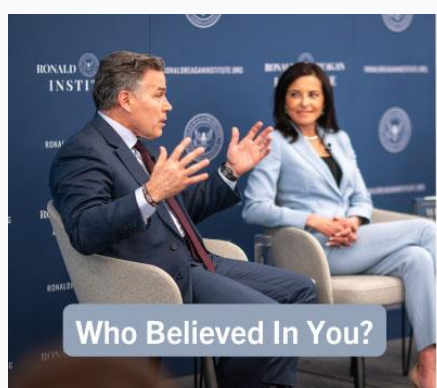
Library in California for our second Common Ground Forum. Join us in person or online as they discuss bipartisanship, mutual respect, and the value of healthy conflict.

► [Register Today](#)

The American Revolution with Ken Burns

On July 18, acclaimed documentarian Ken Burns will join the Center at the Reagan Presidential Library in California for an exclusive preview and conversation about his upcoming series, [The American Revolution](#). Join us in person or online by registering below.

► [Register Today](#)



► RECENT EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

“Civility is like a good referee: you don’t notice it when it’s working, but you miss it when it’s gone.”

**– James Washington,
President of the Rose Bowl Institute**

The Center on Civility and Democracy is catalyzing civility through engaging athletes, journalists, elected officials, and other important cultural influencers.

Respectful Rivalries at the Rose Bowl: CCD and the Rose Bowl Institute kicked off their inter-league sportsmanship initiative with a convening at the Rose Bowl Stadium, hosting athletes, coaches, business executives, and scholars for a discussion of what rivalries teach us in sports and beyond.

► [Watch the Recap](#)

► [Get Involved with the Initiative](#)

Conversation with Mark Halperin on 2WAY: Center Director Fred Ryan spoke with noted journalist Mark Halperin on the interactive live video platform 2Way about CCD’s national civility survey and what it reveals about the path forward for American democracy.

► [Watch the Conversation](#)

Thoughtful Engagement in an Age of Social Media Outrage: Center Director Fred Ryan penned a syndicated op-ed for the *DC Journal*, an *InsideSources* publication, about the downsides and potential strengths of social media for democracy.

[▶ Read the Op-Ed](#)

Mentorship and Democracy with Pennsylvania Senator David McCormick and Dina Powell

McCormick: The McCormicks joined the Center for their first joint event discussing their new book, [Who Believed In You? How Purposeful Mentorship Changes the World](#). The authors reflected on the power of transformative mentorship to mend our nation’s crisis of trust and renew its democracy.

[▶ Watch the Conversation](#)

Civil Discourse Project Oratory Finals: The [Ronald Reagan Oratory Competition](#) Finals were co-hosted by CCD, inviting the top five middle school and the top five high school student competitors out of thousands of applicants to deliver speeches modeling civil disagreement and thoughtful citizenship.

[▶ Meet the Winners](#)



▶ FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations Advancing Civic Impact Through Sports

The Rose Bowl Institute: The Rose Bowl Institute champions sportsmanship, leadership, and citizenship. Through educational programs, focused dialogues, and awards, the Institute leverages the power of sports to unite people everywhere.

[▶ Visit Website](#)

Yes, Coach!: *Yes, Coach!*[™] is a groundbreaking initiative backed by the U.S. Soccer Foundation, Stand Together Foundation, and New York/New Jersey and Philadelphia World Cup Host Committees to equip 100,000 coach-mentors with essential training to support 3 million young

people on and off the field.

[▶ Visit Website](#)

thletes for Hope: Athletes for Hope educates athletes on their potential to make a positive impact on the world, connecting them with the causes they care about and inspiring others to do the same.

[▶ Visit Website](#)

Sport for Impact: Sport for Impact helps athletes make a positive impact in their communities and works to reshape the sports philanthropy landscape by centering athlete influence in charitable efforts.

[▶ Visit Website](#)

If you have ideas related to this newsletter, please share them with us.

EMAIL US



▶ TOP READING PICKS

"Sports can help heal our divisions, but there must first be a will to use it; a call for unity that can be reflected and amplified."

**– Ethan Bauer,
Magazine Staff Writer at *Deseret News***

Here are timely and timeless reads offering insight on the connections between sportsmanship and civility:

NFL Views Improving Sportsmanship as Critical for 2025: Reporting in *NBC Sports* covers how the NFL is encouraging its players and coaches to be better examples of good sportsmanship in 2025.

[▶ Read Article](#)

Can Sports Unify a Fractured America?: Writing in *Deseret News* explores how sports have sometimes unified people and at other times mirrored societal divides, arguing that sports can

serve as a tool for healing when the conditions are right.

[▶ Read Article](#)

Civility Is Good Sportsmanship: This blog post for the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism (2Civility) discusses how good sportsmanship in sports parallels civility in public discourse, highlighting the importance of respectful disagreement for a healthy democracy.

[▶ Read Article](#)

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Promoting constructive solutions to restore
and renew American democracy.

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