

# PRACTICE

**Building Character Through Soccer**



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## Integrity:

*Adherence to moral and ethical principles, honesty  
Synonyms: incorruptibility, honorable, virtue*

## Integrity Story

The English Premier League is a high-pressure soccer environment where getting the win is essentially all that matters. However, in December of 2000 during a West Ham versus Everton match, Italian striker Paulo Di Canio displayed a brilliant act of character and integrity in a league where sportsmanship is of secondary importance most of the time.

Having just equalized the score with only 7 minutes left in the game, West Ham were pushing for the winner. A promising attack was made even better when onrushing Everton goalkeeper Paul Gerrard collapses outside the box. With the keeper lying on the ground and an unmarked Di Canio waiting in the box for a pass, this was the perfect opportunity for West Ham to score and claim a vital victory.

During the confusion as the keeper fell, Trevor Sinclair crossed the ball to Di Canio, who had an open goal at his mercy. But seeing that keeper Paul Gerrard was still lying in agony, Di Canio did the unthinkable and passed up the opportunity to be the hero. Rather than score he elected to catch the ball to stop play and sportingly pointed towards the keeper. The referee then allowed the player to be treated.

"I saw the goalkeeper doubled over. I saw his knee twisted in the wrong direction. With outfield players it is different, we occasionally have a fall. But I guess he is heavier and got his studs caught in the pitch. I could hear him screaming in pain and I understood right away it was serious. That is why I was yelling at Trevor Sinclair (who crossed the ball in) to stop so Paul could get some medical attention".

A reporter asked if he thought he would have scored given that the goalkeeper was not in the goal when he received the ball. He replied gracefully, "you can't say for sure, but without the goalkeeper and a big, wide open goal, I'm sure I'd have had a good chance."

Ultimately the game finished 1-1 and the act of sporting integrity earned Di Canio a standing ovation from both his own and Everton fans.

Additionally, Di Canio was nominated for and won the 2001 FIFA Fair Play Award for what the football ruling body described as a special act of good sportsmanship.

He stated humbly, "It seemed like the right thing to do. I did not expect the praise I am getting now".



