



SELECTING AND TRAINING STUDENT ATHLETE LEADERS

The traditional view of athletic team captains – meeting in the middle of the field to shake hands with the opponent for good sportsmanship - has remained unchanged for many decades. However, through the Life of an Athlete Program, we hope to set new standards for choosing student athlete leaders with greater expectations for being a student athlete leader.

John Underwood stated, “We have seen a significant number of incidents involving both drug use and out of character behaviors as well as criminal acts, committed by team leaders in recent years. There seems to be a trend toward pack mentality in sport that has greatly diminished the ability of individuals to impact teams and teammates”. In light of the recent string of high level scandals in world sport, it is important that at this developmental and impressionable level of high school athletics, we are proactive in regard to educational prevention and intervention programs. Realizing that today’s athletes face unprecedented social and behavioral issues, developing leaders is a difficult task and even more difficult is to find potential leaders among the masses. If we can find and train leaders, they can have an impact on their peers.

The Life of an Athlete program encourages team leaders have significant tasks and duties that will help lead the team into a program of excellence.

How we choose potential leaders needs to go beyond skills and popularity. Team leaders must be chosen based on the five C’s of an effective leader: competence, character, civility, citizenship and chemical health. Once chosen, it is imperative to encourage and develop the student as a true team leader. By investing in the students to be team leaders, the student can be a conduit between the coach and the team and reinforce the behaviors wanted for the team. A team leader can help or hurt team dynamics, so it is important a team leader who can model and lead at the same time.

More than ever before in history, we need young leaders to step forward and make a difference for their teammates, school, communities and sport.

A New York coach’s example of an athlete leadership program:

“I don’t have captains anymore—I went to a system of senior leaders. Around the end of February, I go over our senior leadership program with all of the next year’s senior football players and ask if they want to be involved. For seven weeks, I teach a morning leadership class to those who do. They are then responsible for the other players—whether it is behavior, succeeding in the classroom, or working in the weight room, they provide leadership for our program. I decided to teach leadership because I think it’s something that isn’t present in kids as often as it used to be. We have to show kids how to be leaders today. In their Leadership class I talk about leaders setting an example, the responsibility of being a leader, and the idea of being a servant and a giver. I talk about standing up to do what is right when nobody else will, and letting other players know when they’re doing something wrong. I also explain the importance of being a role model—that leaders have to set the tone for other players to follow. I talk



about the respect that they have to gain with other young people. I tell them that everyone might not always like you, but you should act in such a way that they respect you.”