



Champion Coach Note: Advice from an Athlete

This week's coach note comes from Louis Nix III, Notre Dame Senior Football Player and Student in "Social Foundations of Coaching" undergraduate course taught by Clark Power and Kristin Sheehan, Play Like A Champion Program Co-Directors.

Coaches, listen to this advice on positive coaching from an accomplished athlete:

Dear Coach,

I want to take a moment to write you a letter to remind you of the importance of your job. I know you put in a lot of time and effort and I can imagine that at times your job feels kind of thankless.

Don't forget, though, that you have a tremendous impact on the young people that you coach. You are simultaneously an authority figure, a role model, and a friend. To sum it up, your team looks up to you. Each and every word, action, and decision you make can affect those kids well beyond the time that you cease being their coach. I am not trying to put pressure on you, Coach, I just want to remind you of the great power you possess and the responsibility that goes hand in hand with that.

As the coach, your team will follow your lead. The most important goal for you and your team should be to have fun. In this day and age, it is very easy to get swept up by the goal of winning. As an athlete myself, I can tell you that winning will always be more fun than losing. However, when winning becomes the "end all be all" for a coach and his or her team, winning becomes less fun. For youth sports especially, it is important to establish that



Louis Nix

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."

~ Benjamin Franklin

Athlete Conversation

Recognize your power as a coach to form hearts and minds as well as bodies by engaging your athletes in a conversation. Discuss these open-ended questions (remember not to lecture, but engage your team in a discussion):

How can we show respect as a team to:

1. each other
2. our opponents
3. the officials

How can we work together more effectively as a team?

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“winning isn’t everything.”

Play Like A Champion teaches that when a coach has rallied his team around the most important things, then winning will be a natural outcome. I completely agree. What are these “most important” things? Well, there are several, but I will mention two of the ones that I think are most important.

Respect

- First of all, Coach, you must remember to respect each and every one of your players. You can demonstrate this in the way you talk to your players, as well as the way you play them. This means when your player messes up (in practice or even in the last few seconds of a close game) you should not berate him. Instead, you could commend his effort and use your words to help him put his mistake in perspective. (Trust me, he will already feel horrible about his mess-up.)
- You also show you respect your players by giving them a fair shot. You might have one boy that cannot catch a pop fly to save his life, but you respect him by still letting him play. After all, you aren’t coaching in the Big Leagues, and it can change a kid’s life when you show that you believe in him.
- You also need to instill your team with respect. They should respect you, their teammates, their opponents, and the officials (as should you, Coach). This means you should not allow the team to make fun of or bully any of their peers, even if they make a mistake.

Teamwork

- You should also help your kids to work together as a team. This means making every person on your roster feel like they belong, as well as teaching them how to work together.

I could point to so many more important aspects of coaching, but I believe that respect and teamwork are the foundation of a great team. If you focus on those two fundamental things, as well as make sure your team is having fun, then I assure you that you will have a wonderful team and you will have a great time coaching. You will also be helping your players

develop into great young people.

Sincerely,
Louis Nix