Introduction:  
Training to be a champion

In athletics, training is everything. You can’t expect to build strength without spending time in the weight room. You certainly won’t be the fastest if you don’t put a few miles in at the track. And getting all those teammates to move together? There’s a reason why they say, “Practice makes perfect.”

Training for life is much like training in sports – you have to build your skills in order to succeed.

On, off the field

The Champions of Character program teaches young people the values needed to be a success on and off the playing field. By focusing on five core values, Champions of Character teaches student-athletes of all ages how to make solid decisions in all aspects of their lives.

Champions of Character was established in 2000 by the NAIA. Widely seen as a leader in academic achievement and commitment to sportsmanship, the NAIA started Champions of Character to help improve the culture of sport.

The goal of the program is to help students develop positive habits and good character that will serve them throughout their lives – whether they play sports or not.

What’s the NAIA?  
Why care about character?

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) runs the athletic programs at almost 300 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada. Established in 1937, the NAIA focuses on learning as much as it does athletics.

The organization and its members work to help student-athletes develop skills that will serve them both on the playing field and in life.

Personal growth a priority

NAIA colleges and universities require student-athletes to work toward a degree, and personal growth and development is a priority.

This focus on personal growth led to Champions of Character. The NAIA felt it was time to address how sports and society were changing — and not in a good way. This meant a more formal emphasis on character development at every educational level, and especially in the sports arena.

Through awareness, education and community involvement, Champions of Character strives to create an atmosphere of integrity in sport.

Champions of Character teaches and models five core values: respect, responsibility, integrity, servant leadership and sportsmanship. The program helps those influenced by sports – student-athletes, coaches and parents – know what is right, do what is right and value what is right in all areas of their lives, not just on the playing field.

Know what is right, do what is right, value what is right.

Communities affected by Champions of Character have teams whose actions follow the five core values. In these communities, coaches and parents model proper behavior and the organizations leading youth are changing the culture of sport. Student-athletes serve as positive role models in the classroom, in athletics and in the community. And area businesses support the Champions of Character mission.

To learn more about the NAIA, its member institutions and its 23 national athletic championships, visit www.naia.org. For more information on the Champions of Character initiative, visit www.championsofcharacter.org.
Participating in a team activity has always meant a little bit of pressure. Teammates are depending on you. People are watching your every move. Do you have what it takes?

Since the beginning of sport, these stresses have added to the adrenaline rush of playing a game. But now, many athletes are falling prey to other pressures off the field. Sports are changing. What was once recreation is now big business. Guys and girls who were once identifiable only by the numbers on their jerseys are now household names in their communities. Some go on to fame in college sports. And then there are those athletes who find their faces splashed all over television, magazines and advertisements. At each step, the pressure to win and win big is felt like never before.

In addition, those once anonymous athletes are expected to play well, but also to live well. Athletes are now expected to be role models and set positive examples in all that they do. And they’re supposed to make the big plays. And they’re supposed to reach the next level of play. And they’re eventually supposed to make lots and lots of money.

**Whatever happened to playing the game because it was fun?**

When little kids play T-ball for the first time, they aren’t thinking about getting endorsements as a major leaguer. These kids are trying to remember which direction to run around the bases. They play because it’s fun and because their friends are there. What could be better?

Instead of focusing on the external pressures surrounding today’s athletes, it’s time to get back to the basics of athletics. Rewind back from the big crowds, from being recognized by strangers. Start at the beginning, when sport was a fun educational experience.

Champions of Character starts at this foundation and builds strong leaders with integrity.

**The great thing about team activities is that they teach life skills when nobody’s looking.**

Think you’re learning how to pitch a softball? Guess what? You’re also learning how to communicate with the catcher. Working on improving your sprints? You’re also working on your problem-solving skills. Sports offer opportunities to develop skills that aren’t just important on the field – they’re important in life.

It’s these skills that help student-athletes find balance in their lives, balance that helps deal with the pressures sometimes associated with sports. This balance makes it easy to act as a role model for others as well – when you know who you are and where you’re going in life, it’s easy to lend a helping hand.

Don’t be fooled: the real winners in athletics aren’t always the ones with the best records or the most recognition. The real winners are the student-athletes who make the most of their opportunities to learn and lead.

*Quick facts:*

- Started in 2000.
- Targets three groups:
  - Student-athletes, youth to college
  - Coaches of youth to college sports
  - Parents
- Teaches three courses:
  - Redefines “athlete” — program for student-athletes on choices based on effort and behavior
  - Teaching character through sport — program for coaches focusing on the coach as the key
  - The role of parents in athletics — program helping parents create positive experiences for children
- Goal is to improve the culture of sport
  - Today 70 percent of all youth quit playing sports by the age of 13
  - Too many stories in the media highlight poor choices by athletes, coaches and parents
  - Each person must play a role to create a positive environment
Respect

Showing respect in athletics can take many different forms. It means listening to coaches and officials and doing as they say. It means treating your opponent as you would like to be treated. And it means appreciating your teammates’ efforts.

To be truly successful in sports — and in life — you must treat all the people around you with respect. Respect shapes how you see any activity in which you participate.

“You have to have respect for the sport,” said Tim Nixon, head coach of the Liberty High School cross country teams. “You hear about it a lot at the pro level, talk about people who respect their sport and those who don’t. There’s a way you carry yourself where it’s obvious whether or not you respect your sport. The same, I think, is true at our level.”

Respect in Your School

“I have over 100 eighth grade science students,” Nixon said. “Sometimes in class it concerns me how they talk to each other and about each other. They don’t show respect.

“It’s a privilege to get an education, a privilege to be a part of an athletic team. Kids take these things for granted, and that’s what leads to some of the disrespect that we see from time to time.”

Everybody has a bad day, and it’s easy to get caught up in gossip or overwhelmed by the demands of school and sports. But maintaining a positive outlook — a gratitude attitude — can help you treat teammates, opponents, coaches and friends with respect.

“There are ways you can carry yourself and show you respect the sport,” Nixon said.

The Golden Rule

Treat others the way you want to be treated. “Why are we so quick to do things to others that we wouldn’t want done to us?” Nixon asked. “The reason is that we don’t respect them. We take them for granted.”

Look for opportunities to show gratitude. Congratulate your teammates — and opponents — on a game well played. After all, without them, you wouldn’t be able to participate! Start building your respect for the sport by showing your appreciation of those around you.

Like physical strength and skill, respect is developed one practice at a time. Take time in your workouts to build this asset. Your game will improve!

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

- Mother Teresa, humanitarian awarded the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize for her work in India

Ten Ways to Demonstrate Respect for Family

1. Listen. Acknowledge what other people have to say.

2. Support family members. Your encouragement makes a difference.

3. Represent the family well. Your actions reflect on your parents and siblings.

4. Ask questions. Show your interest!

5. Be honest. Integrity is the basis of all strong relationships.

6. Speak politely. Avoid put-downs and express a positive attitude.

7. Take care of family property and the environment you live in.

8. Set a good example. Family members are looking to you for guidance.

9. Care for yourself and your body. Your health is an important family asset.

10. Share your feelings. Communicate with your loved ones.
Five ways I can show more respect to self and others:

1. __________________________
   __________________________
2. __________________________
   __________________________
3. __________________________
   __________________________
4. __________________________
   __________________________
5. __________________________
   __________________________

Trying your best deserves respect

Your classmate raises her hand, sure she knows the answer to your teacher’s question.

Except she gets it wrong, really wrong. And the whole class laughs at her.

“She won’t raise her hand again,” said Bruce Brown, former teacher and coach. Brown, who goes throughout the country presenting the Champions of Character program for the NAIA, said it’s all a matter of respect.

“If a student says something that is wrong, you should at least appreciate his or her effort,” he said. “The standard of respect has to be a main part of the classroom.”

Brown said if every mistake — mistakes that are the result of real effort and attention — made in a classroom or at home is dignified with praise for trying, then students are more willing to try again.

Or even fail again. “Failure is the lifeblood of learning,” he said. “Think about skiing. If you quit after you fall down for the first time, you will quit after your first lesson.”

Falling down in front of others is embarrassing, though. So is saying the wrong answer for the whole classroom to hear. A classroom that follows some basic rules of respect, however, will make any effort comfortable, Brown said.

“The first thing we say is, ‘If you have something good to say, share it,’” Brown said. “‘If you have something negative to say, keep it to yourself.”

Students, teachers, parents — everyone — should respect differences in opinions, cultures and the way people look, too.

Think how you feel when you are in the spotlight.

If you know that your parents, teacher, classmates and friends will not make fun of you or be mad because you missed the ball in kickball, spelled encyclopedia wrong or forgot your lines in a school play, then you will try your best again.

And next time, you may get it right.
Voices across America
Making character an everyday goal

“Earlier this preseason, my co-captain and I had the team together in a circle to trace our hands. Inside the circle of hands, we wrote what we wanted on our team. Outside the circle were written what we were not going to allow in our program. Inside were the words commitment, character, class, love, family, sportsmanship, heart and hard work, among others. Among the words outside were laziness, negativity, drama, bad attitudes and giving up. We stand for what’s inside our circle. To get to where we want to be in the end, we see to it that the words written inside our circle are nourished through our time together. We stand for those things and we do not back down.”

– Katrina Morgan, soccer co-captain, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Fla.

Catalyst for change

The NAIA has always been a leader of change. From civil rights to opportunities for women in sports, the NAIA continues to be a forward-thinking organization.

Focused on promoting education and character development through sports, the NAIA has played a role in countless milestones. The student who was the first in her family to earn a college diploma. The student-athlete who exceeded his expectations on the field. The team that focused on sportsmanship instead of the final score.

True champions of character know some of the most important milestones don’t go in record books – they go in family photo albums.

1937
James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, works with business leaders to create an association that becomes the NAIA. The first national small college basketball tournament played in Kansas City.

1948
NAIA integrates sports when black student-athletes play in basketball tournament.

1953
NAIA includes predominantly black schools, ushering civil rights into collegiate athletics.

Get real
The bad example

Look in the newspaper for examples of entertainers, government officials, sports figures, business leaders or others not showing respect for their fans, constituents, community or employees. How do their actions show lack of respect?

Chose an article and tell how you would respond differently in the same situation. Present your version of the story to the class.

Top 10 do’s, don’ts

With a group of your classmates, make a list of 10 phrases that show respect such as “Can you please help me?” and “You did a good job.” Then list 10 phrases or words that show disrespect. Combine your results with the rest of the class and create a poster for your classroom bulletin board.
2000
NAIA launches Champions of Character program.

The NAIA by the numbers:

650,000
Students attending NAIA member schools.

50,000
Student-athletes participating at NAIA member schools.

Almost 300
Colleges and universities that are NAIA members.

23
Championships offered by NAIA.

13
Sports supported by NAIA.

5
Core values stressed in NAIA's Champions of Character program.

1980
NAIA establishes national championships for women in response to Title IX.

You have to listen to everyone and get their ideas. You have to show them respect. And they have to respect you to trust you.

— Lexi Horn, 8th-grade cheerleader at Indian Trail Junior High School, Olathe, Kan.

“I believe today’s student athletes are tomorrow’s leaders. Teaching character through athletics is about building great teams. Not only teams that will perform at a high level, but teams that will take what they have learned through participation in sports and use it to succeed in life. Just participating in sports will not necessarily help develop character in an athlete. Character has to be taught.”

— John Spotts, Director, District Activities, North Kansas City High School, North Kansas City, Mo.
SPOTLIGHT

Debate teams show respect through competition, courtesy

James Makkyla started debating when he was in seventh grade.

“It’s fun,” he said. “It seems nerdy at first, but really when you get down to it, it’s not much different than the kinds of things I was doing in the summer – I played sports all the time, and with debate, you’re always competing and getting that thrill and excitement...It’s just a different form of competition.”

Now as a debate coach at University Academy in Kansas City, Mo., Makkyla helps students develop their communication and persuasion skills — and have fun.

*Whose argument better*

“Debate as an activity is a contest between two teams who are trying to persuade the judge that their arguments are better than their opponent’s arguments,” Makkyla said. “The issues vary...some focus on national policies like education or health care, while other debates focus on values like freedom, waiving the right to privacy versus safety. Other debates are more personal and deal with questions of what is going on in your community or school.

“There are many kinds of debates, but they’re all about talking about ideas, supporting ideas and trying to persuade others to agree.”

So where does respect fit in debate competitions?

“You can’t have an effective debate unless you have people who respect each other,” Makkyla said. “There’s a difference between arguing and debating. We debate in such a way that we both hope we’ve learned something from it, which means we have to expose ourselves to the idea that we might not always be right, and listen to what other people have to say.”

*Acknowledging skills*

Respect doesn’t exist in any competition without acknowledgement of the opposition’s skills. Likewise, competitions don’t exist without, well, someone with whom to compete.

“In debate, both teams realize that as parties of this competition, everyone wants to do well,” Makkyla said. “The work that each team has put into the debate shows itself as an appreciation for that work. Without the other team, the debate wouldn’t be possible.”

Debate students show respect throughout the competition.

Prior to a debate, participants introduce themselves in an informal setting and learn each other’s names. During the debate, students refer to each other by their first names.

After a debate, students shake hands and look each other in the eye. These courtesies show that the debate is against an argument, not against an individual.

Outside of competitions, opponents often work together and help each other learn. “The ultimate sign of respect is when people work together to help each other even though it’s a competitive activity,” Makkyla said.

“As we grow as unique persons we learn to respect the uniqueness of others.”

— Robert H. Schuller, author and pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, Calif.