Champions of Character

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

SPORTSMANSHIP

Part 4
The 21st century student-athlete

The role of the student-athlete has changed dramatically. The term “student-athlete” is even new. Why all the fuss?

It used to be that student-athletes were athletes, first and foremost. As long as a team was winning, many schools and coaches didn’t worry about how athletes were performing in class – or attending class at all. History is full of stories about athletes cheating in class or instructors passing athletes not because of their performance in the classroom, but because of their performance on the field.

Those days are over.

You should treat playing high school and college sports as a privilege. Being a true student athlete means giving your best in the classroom and in the athletic arena. Academic dishonesty shouldn’t be tolerated at any level, and schools provide tutoring to help student-athletes reach their academic goals.

Student-athletes are also expected to fill a third role: that of servant leader. Athletes at all levels of play are seen as role models. Just going to class and competing in sports isn’t enough. Now, student-athletes must participate in their communities and set a positive example for the young people around them. It’s a high expectation, but one that challenges student-athletes to be the best they can be.

So what does this mean for young people who hope to be student-athletes at the next level of play?

The key is to understand the responsibilities facing student-athletes and to prepare yourself for each one. You might have a great dunk, but if you don’t pass algebra, it isn’t going to do you much good. Know what you need to do to become a successful student-athlete:

If you’re struggling in a class, get help from the teacher, a tutor or a friend who understands the material.

If parts of your game could use work, ask your coach or a teammate for extra help.

If the idea of servant leadership is foreign to you, look to a trusted role model for guidance.

Student-athletes are well-rounded people who make the most of their time in school, in competition and in the community. This type of achievement is within your reach.

Champions of Character emphasizes five key core values

★ RESPECT
Taking correction as a compliment.
Giving 100 percent / 100 percent of the time.
Listening with your ears and eyes.

★ RESPONSIBILITY
Focusing attention and effort.
Recovering quickly from mistakes.
Staying positive no matter what.

★ INTEGRITY
Your “yes” means yes and your “no” means no.

★ SERVANT LEADERSHIP
Putting your team first in every decision.

★ SPORTSMANSHIP
Reacting correctly even when others don’t.
Big shoes to fill

Developing your leadership skills sounds like a daunting task. You may think leaders are impressive people who are really smart and always say the right thing — people who are nothing like us, right? Wrong!

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes and have a variety of personal strengths. You have the ability to be an effective leader in your home, school and community — you just have to build your leadership skills so that you’re ready for any challenge that might come your way.

This sounds like a big commitment, and it is. Putting the needs of others ahead of your own — putting your team first in every decision — takes some effort. Why is leadership a big deal, anyway?

Being a leader opens so many doors. By developing your leadership skills now, you’ll have a toolbox full of effective strategies and abilities that will serve you for the rest of your life.

Acting as a leader helps you make a positive difference in your community — and in your life. Experience serving your community will help you make good decisions in your own life. And, you’ll have the know-how to help other people make good decisions, too.

A strong set of leadership skills means that you’re prepared for anything — and that’s a great feeling. Your self esteem will skyrocket. Just think: what would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?

Tips for building servant leadership skills

Know yourself.
Part of being an effective leader is knowing your strengths and weaknesses. What types of activities do you enjoy? At what things do you excel? What areas aren’t your strongest? By figuring out what you like and what you’re good at, you’ll prepare yourself for leading others.

Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.
No leader, no matter how effective, is perfect. People make mistakes. Since it’s a fact of life, don’t let the fear of making mistakes paralyze you. Feel the fear and make decisions anyway. Remember: you miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.

Find a role model.
Effective leaders emulate others. Find a person who embodies the traits you’d like to have yourself. Want to be a successful leader? Find a leader in your community and learn from that person. How does that leader manage their time? What are his or her priorities? What advice can he or she offer to young leaders?

Focus on others.
Remember that the best leaders are servants — they serve others first. Find ways you can build your leadership by serving others. Where can you volunteer? Is there a neighbor that could use a helping hand? If you see a need, step in and fill it. Don’t worry about recognition.

Listen. Listen. Listen.
Some leaders seem to do nothing but talk. But the most effective leaders are the ones who spend a lot of time listening. Take the time to learn from the people around you. You’ll find out their challenges and concerns, but you’ll also get suggestions and ideas.

Set goals.
How can you get where you want to go if you don’t even know where it is? Setting realistic goals is like selecting a destination: once you know where you’re headed, you can follow a map and road signs to get there. Know what you want and use the resources available to you to achieve your goals.

A person who is worthy of being a leader wants power not for himself, but in order to be of service.

— Sam J. Ervin Jr., U.S. Senator
Football is a pretty rough sport. After all, for a good number of the players, the object is to push another guy out of the way. So you wouldn’t automatically think that servant leadership is a big part of the sport. But think again!

"Through my coaching experience, I’ve found that football, more than other sports, requires you to trust one another," said Brian Van Hauen, defensive coordinator and linebackers coach at Liberty High School, Liberty, Mo. “It provides an opportunity where everyone has to be willing in order to be successful. Players have to be willing to not let teammates down.

Can’t do your own thing

“If you’re going to be down on the football field doing your own thing, trying to get noticed, trying to make the big plays, you’re not going to do well. If you’re doing your job, trying not to let down the guy next to you, you’re going to be successful.

“So, whether that group is a school group, a youth organization from your place of worship or your family, get together with others and find ways to make a difference. “At South Valley Middle School, our kids do a great job trying to help others with Students Helping Others, the SHO club,” Van Hauen said. “They did a dog wash and a car wash, and they do a great job of helping others.

“Find a group you can work with. It’s hard to do something by yourself, but if you get involved with a group, things become much easier and you’re still serving others.”

Being a responsible teammate is an example of servant leadership. It means asking not what’s in it for you, but what’s in it for your team.

“Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”
— Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader and activist

“Put the group first. True leaders know that the team is a priority.

Have confidence. Know that you will make the right choices for your group and yourself.

Set a good example. Lead by doing.

Communicate. Include everyone in your group.

Be a friend. Treat everyone as you would like to be treated.

Show respect. Servants must respect leaders and leaders must respect servants.

Find a need and fill it. Have courage to make positive changes.

Make a commitment. Plan for the future.

Think of your family. Avoid anything that would embarrass your loved ones.

Develop a sense of community. Work to connect the people in your group.

“Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.”
— President (John F.) Kennedy
Five ways I can show servant leadership.

1. ___________________________ ____________________________

2. ___________________________ ____________________________

3. ___________________________ ____________________________

4. ___________________________ ____________________________

5. ___________________________ ____________________________

Servant leadership in your family

The idea of servant leadership is to put the group first. It means being responsible for yourself and your group, and serving the needs and best interests of your group.

Sounds great for sports teams. We all know there’s no “i” in “team.” But how does servant leadership apply outside of the athletic arena?

The funny thing about servant leadership is that it’s not an idea based on sports — it’s intended for any situation where there’s a group of people — in school, in the community and at home.

We’re all members of a family. It doesn’t matter if your family is biological, or if you all live together or not. Your family is the group of people who support and care for you. And your family is the ideal place to practice servant leadership.

**Serving the best interests of the group**

Think about it: servant leadership holds families together. Do you think a parent wants to work a long day, then come home and fix dinner and do laundry? Hardly! But that’s an example of servant leadership. By taking care of the family’s financial and physical needs, that parent is serving the best interests of the group.

A servant leader puts others before themselves and is never too proud to do work that helps the group succeed. Servant leaders are reliable and consistent. Does this sound like anyone in your family?

Consider the different ways servant leadership is expressed in your family. How have you practiced effective servant leadership in your family within the past week? How have your family members expressed servant leadership during that time?

Effective teams — including effective families — enjoy a balance of servant leadership. One person can’t be doing all the work. It takes effort and dedication from each family member. Your list of examples of servant leadership within your family should be balanced. Are you playing your part? What are some ways you can step up your servant leadership within your family?
Voices across America
Making character an everyday goal

I teach the game of baseball to my players in practice and then step aside and watch their success or lack of success. The next day I start all over again with them. When the rewards are to be handed out, I want to be in the background. That's how I show servant leadership to my team.

— Bill McDonald, varsity baseball coach, Blue Valley West High School, Stilwell, Kan.

Servant leadership is shown by setting examples in terms of behavior and application to the game.

— John Benson, midfielder Brescia University soccer team, Brescia, Ky.

Servant leadership is the willingness to give of yourself for the greater good of the group.

— Scott Wright, varsity football coach, Blue Valley West High School, Stilwell, Kan.

Servant Leadership is the willingness to give of yourself for the greater good of the group.

I have always felt that if a group can succeed then each individual member is also gaining success. By putting my team's thoughts and concerns first I have found that my leadership role has grown. Myself but more importantly, my team, has been successful not only on the court but in the game of life.

— Doug Fessler, head coach, Central Methodist University Lady Eagles, Fayette, Mo.

"I have been fortunate to play for an outstanding coaching staff and with a tremendous group of teammates. I really believe that individual awards are won as a result of great teamwork. My experiences at Carroll, whether it be on the field or in the classroom, have created a lifetime of memories and prepared me for life after college."

— Tyler Emmert, quarterback, Carroll College, Helena, Mont., on being named to the 2005 Scholar-Athlete Class and finalist for the Draddy Trophy, which recognizes an individual as the absolute best scholar-athlete in the nation.

Activities

Servant Leadership

Remember me?
Find the obituary page in the newspaper. How would you like to be remembered in an obituary? Write your own obituary, and include examples of your servant leadership during your lifetime.

Talking points
A servant leader uses words to encourage participation as well as leading by setting a good example. Imagine you are an organizer for a Habitat for Humanity building project. Research the Habitat for Humanity program on the Internet and then write a speech encouraging your classmates to join you in tackling the project. Present the speech to your class.

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Consider a career in athletics!

Athletes and coaches aren’t the only people who work in sports. Think about the environment when you attend an athletic event. Who are the people who make it happen? Who is responsible for the venue? Who is reporting on the game? Who provides the teams with equipment and training? Who keeps score? All of these tasks require skilled workers with a passion for sports.

The types of careers available in athletics vary widely, and the work environments do, too. Jobs in sports can be found with professional teams as well as with small colleges. Minor league teams, organizations that support athletics – like the NAIA – and community recreation programs all have paid staff as well.

Some different athletic careers include:

**• Administration**

Athletics is big business – and like any business, sports need professionals to keep track of people, money and schedules. Athletic administration jobs range from athletic director to score keeper, signage salesperson to director of public relations.

**• Facilities**

Your weekly chore of mowing the yard may actually be training you for a career in turf management! Somebody has to care for those golf courses and football fields. Facility managers oversee everything from waxing the basketball court to scheduling events.

**• Media**

People love to keep up with their favorite teams – and they depend on the media to stay informed. Photographers, videographers, writers and reporters all work to provide coverage of sporting events.

**• Medicine**

No matter what the sport, all athletes depend on the same thing to play their best: good health. Doctors specializing in sports medicine work with trainers, physical therapists and dieticians to help athletes perform at their best.

**• Recreation**

Professional athletes aren’t the only people who enjoy sports. Communities and private organizations around the nation offer recreational programs – programs that require staff to manage leagues, instruct classes and take care of facilities.

The best way to break into sports is to practice a little servant leadership — volunteer! Jobs in athletics are in high demand, and the best way to get experience under your belt is to volunteer with your school, recreation program, minor league team or college. These organizations often have lots of work to be done and not enough folks to do it. Sure, you’ll start out handling pompons or sealing envelopes, but you’ll learn how athletic programs operate.

Most people who work in athletics share a crazy schedule. Games are often played on weekends or nights, so people who work to support these events have to work then, too.

Another shared trait of these workers is a passion for athletics. The work is difficult and the hours are long, but many people who work in sports feel they have dream jobs.
Students in the Olathe School District, Olathe, Kan., have the opportunity to put servant leadership into action — and into the community. Youth services is a partnership between the school district and the city. The program has three areas, based on the three branches of government — youth court, youth congress and teen council.

“Everything the students do through youth services is all real and educational,” said Kory Norris, staff counsel for student services and head of the youth services program.

**Students take active role**

“The work involves partnerships with the community, from service clubs to community leaders to heads of companies,” Norris said. “Students lead all the work, and we are there to support, encourage and serve as advisers, but they are in on the planning and developing.”

Youth service requires that students take an active role, whether they are volunteering for a day or helping lead an entire program. Students get experience trying new things and build their confidence, too. It’s servant leadership at its best.

“Youth court is our most structured program — it’s a real alternative to district court, and it involves the most students,” Norris said. First-time offenders of minor offenses can go through youth court instead of district court, and they are judged by their peers. Students act as judge, lawyers, jury, bailiff — you name it. And the defendants going through youth court abide by the consequences determined by the court.

“The consequences in youth court are an example of peer mentorship,” Norris said. “Another type of service leadership is learning through their peers ... it’s different than traditional community service.”

Youth court volunteers are learning new skills, trying out new activities and serving both their school and their community.

“We’ve had students who always wanted to be a lawyer, but (after youth court) don’t like it,” Norris said. “It’s a real benefit to learn what you do or don’t want in life. It gives you confidence in knowing what makes you tick and what makes you a success.”

**Volunteers develop confidence.**

“Try a variety of things,” Norris said. “If it works for you and is fun and rewarding, great. If not, try other things. But you have the confidence to take part in your community in positive ways.”

Volunteers are truly part of a community.

Olathe had a location and funds for a mural, so it approached youth services. “Our students put a design together and planted flowers,” Norris said. If you’re literally helping build your community, you feel a stronger sense of ownership.

Volunteers have many different strengths.

“The bailiff in youth court provides the oath and oversees the jury room — it’s a huge, quiet role,” Norris said. “He didn’t have to get an A on a math test and didn’t have to recite anything for English class, but he can do something he’s passionate about in youth court.”

**Servant-leadership is more than a concept, it is a fact.**

Any great leader, by which I also mean an ethical leader of any group, will see herself or himself as a servant of that group and will act accordingly.”

— M. Scott Peck M.D., psychiatrist and best-selling author