



Champion Coach Note: Virtue in Sport -- Humility

The Play Like a Champion Today® philosophy teaches that sports can and should be a virtuous activity. In this week's Coach Note, we explore another virtue that the youth sport experience has the potential to instill: Humility.

Every team has one. The prodigy, the elite athlete, the all-star. She was competing against teenagers before she could walk. He's committing to Division I schools before his voice has changed. Everybody loves having them on their team, but fears having to play them.

A wealth of natural talent is absolutely a blessing, and a gift that rightfully should be displayed and maximized to the fullest. There is no shame in being good at something, and talented athletes deserve to be congratulated on their skill and dedication. But that praise must be tempered in young people, because they may not fully appreciate what an adult would realize: that talent is God-given, it can be taken away, and that it doesn't always translate off the field. As coaches of young people, coaching star athletes can be a tricky situation because you must balance developing their skills with making sure that they are developing into good, humble people as well.

Part of the reality of sports is that it will naturally humble young athletes. Eventually, great teams lose. Injury tragically ends



"Do you wish to rise?
Begin by descending.
You plan a tower that will
pierce the clouds? Lay
first the foundation of humility."

~St. Augustine

promising careers. Skill stops growing exponentially. Big fish in small ponds eventually move to bigger ponds. Still, it is important when dealing with superstars, for coaches to teach humility as best they can, so that when careers end, or passions wane, athletes aren't left feeling a void of purpose. Teaching humility may not be as explicit as teaching math, there are things coaches can do to develop good athletes and good people:

- Praise effort over performance. Talent without dedication will eventually lead to a fall.
- Focus on appropriate goals. Talented athletes should have more challenging goals, and coaches should focus on personal mastery rather than comparing the athlete to others.
- Keep a positive attitude in losing efforts. Athletes who measure success in wins and losses will be crushed when a loss comes.
- Pray with your team in thanksgiving for the gifts you have been given, reminding them that their gifts and skills are God-given.
- Comfort athletes who have a "fall from grace." As much as we hope to teach children that their athleticism does not define them, some will let that take them over. Be there for them when that happens.

Teaching young athletes to embrace humility through sport will lead to developing virtuous individuals in life.