

**PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

Champion Coach Note

Educating and Forming Champion Coaches

What is Love?



Coaches often hear that they must *love* the children and young adults entrusted to their care. From [Super Bowl press conferences](#) to [studies in sports psychology](#), it seems love is "in the air" in sports. You might recall that we also [addressed the topic in a separate Coach Note earlier this year](#). And yet, it's fair to ask exactly what is meant when we talk about the idea of loving the athletes on our teams. What does this look like and how do we do it on a day-to-day basis at practices & games?

[In this week's video](#) (above) *Play Like a Champion* partner Dobie Moser highlights what love means in the context of sports. As he explains, love is often the *why* behind the decisions we make or the way we coach.

Jesus said: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). Saint Thomas Aquinas expanded upon this in teaching that **to love is to "will the good of another."** Using this definition, we understand that to love our athletes is to want what's best for them both on and off the field. Far from being passive or weak as an "old school" approach might have you believe, love often involves pushing athletes beyond their comfort zone and having difficult conversations in order to maximize an athletes' potential and personal growth. In fact, the coach who loves his or her athletes won't settle for less than their best, often working tirelessly to help them achieve both individual and team goals.

The key to practicing love is to remember that it's all about the athlete, not the coach. At the youth level, this means prioritizing development and playing time over results. It means understanding that allowing athletes to make mistakes on the field may be the best way to help them succeed long-term. At the high school level, loving your athletes includes giving them ownership over the team, helping them to set goals, and providing positive support while helping them to maximize their potential as an individual and team.

Take this a step further by asking yourself (and your team) the following questions:

- What do you love most about coaching?
- How can you demonstrate your love for the athletes you coach?
- Does your coaching philosophy emphasize the athletes or the coach?
- What do your athletes love about playing their sport?
- Do your athletes love each other? How do they show this?

Finally, we can't forget that love also applies to your athletes' relationship with the sport itself. Golf legend **Jack Nicklaus once said that "you have to love a sport to play it well, and love grows out of enjoyment."** There's no doubt Nicklaus knew the value of hard work and practice, but he also understood that coaches must take time to make sure athletes enjoy themselves while practicing and competing.

Champion coaching starts with love. If coaches learn to love their athletes while teaching them to love their sport, the culture that develops will foster growth while developing *champions* on and off the field.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ~ 1 Corinthians 13:2

The Sports Stations of the Cross Challenge

The ultimate manifestation of *love* can be found in Jesus

suffering and dying for us on the cross. During the season of Lent, a great way to remember this sacrifice on our teams is to participate in the Stations of the Cross. This exercise involves following the path Jesus took to the cross by meditating on 14 "stations" along the way. *Play Like a Champion* offers a [Sports Stations of the Cross](#), which features meditations designed for athletes and teams of all ages. Teams can make this prayer by visiting your church as a team, setting aside time during practice, or even adding them to existing workouts. [Check out this video](#) of St. Xavier High School (Louisville, KY) praying the Stations of the Cross while conditioning.



During Lent, *Play Like a Champion* is [challenging our partners](#) to join us and follow in the footsteps of teams from St. Xavier HS and St. Josaphat School in Chicago (pictured above) by completing the Sports Stations of the Cross. [Click here](#) to download your copy, then **send us a picture or video of your team praying the stations**. We'll post the picture and encourage others to join as well. Join Champion teams across the country this Lent as we pray for the grace to grow physically, mentally and spiritually through the gift of sport!

Wisdom for Coaches



“Coaching is a profession of love. You can’t coach people unless you love them.” ~ Eddie Robinson

Head Coach, Grambling State University 1945-1997
3rd Most Wins in College Football History

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