

G-BOARD: ON COACHING

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Seven Characteristics of a Character-Building Coach



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By Barry Feldman

Every coach strives to build champions. However, what's the definition of "champion?" The answer will vary greatly. In my experience as an athlete, coach and sports fan, I believe the individuals who make the most important mark on the lives of those they coach are champions of character-building. Though their legend may be reflected in weighty trophy cases, their true legacy lives in the hearts and minds of the athletes who grow to value personal growth, fairness and respect.

The journey is more important than the destination. If you agree, I hope you'll find the following pointers valuable. I believe the characteristics of a character-building coach are:

Focus on character.

Great coaches demand their athletes place values such as hard work, poise, teamwork, and leadership above victory. Define the values that matter most and hold your players accountable to them.

Honor honesty.

Insist on an uncompromising commitment to honesty from your athletes, their parents, and your coaching staff. Make it clear you have zero tolerance for lies, deception, or cheating.

Honor humility.

Admit your mistakes openly and honestly to demonstrate real integrity. Have everyone on the team understand it's more important to try your best than be the best. Promote skill building regardless of the outcome. Help players understand there is no shame in making mistakes only in not recognizing and learning from them.

Lead by example.

Keep your commitments by walking the talk, that is, your actions are far more believable than your words. So take an excuse-free approach and encourage sportsmanship always.

Respect their role.

Sports generally involves four roles: coaches, players, officials and fans. The boundaries between them should never bend. You play one role at a time. Everyone must understand their role and respect the others at all times.

Know the game.

The masterful coach is a master of the game with a thorough understanding of its rules and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. There's no substitute for preparation.

Communicate clearly.

Players and their parents should be told exactly what is expected of them. They must support each other and offer only positive feedback and directed guidance toward achieving a common cause.

Hey coach, please remember sports doesn't teach character. You do.

