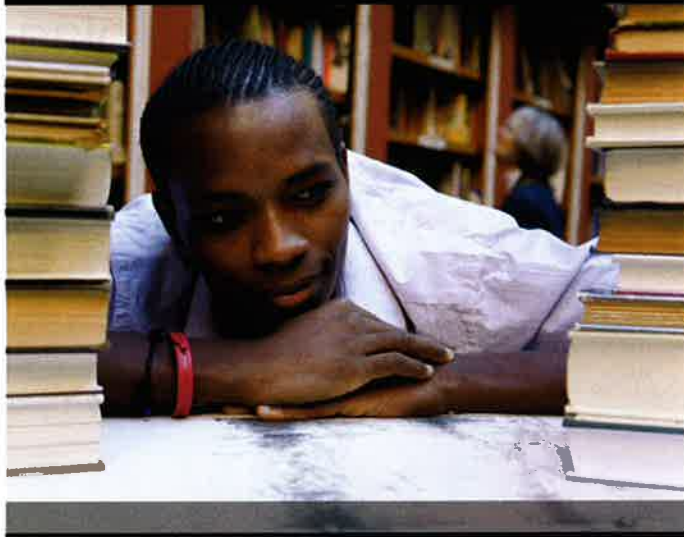


# A Coach's Role in *"Developing Champions for the Future."*



By Rudy Aragon

**E**ach generation of teachers and coaches has a great opportunity to positively affect the lives of student-athletes. Think about the teachers and coaches who inspired you to choose this most noble profession. Their inspiration came from those who preceded them, just as your student-athletes will someday be inspired by what you have instilled in them. In this day of specialization, maybe it's time to start thinking about what your role might be in developing "champions for the future."

During this most crucial developmental period, coaches are in a better position to influence student-athletes than most anyone. Since only a small percentage of high school athletes will compete at the collegiate level and even fewer professionally, coaches should help influence aspects of student-athletes' personalities that will serve them throughout their lives. To be successful in today's world, a young person must be armed with a myriad of skills, probably none more important than the ability to work cooperatively and communicate effectively.

## Teamwork

In most practice sessions, coaches emphasize the need to work as a team and to function as a single unit. They strive to show their student-athletes that their greatest strength comes from a unified source and talk to them about caring for one another and doing whatever they can to help teammates reach their potential. Student-athletes must learn to put the team ahead of themselves and that they should never let one another down.

Coaches should encourage their athletes to become involved in other sports and activities in hopes of making those programs more successful, rather than focusing on one sport. The question we need to ask ourselves is "Am I all

about we, or all about me?" Future champions should have a solid understanding of this concept as they navigate through their personal and professional lives. The best way to teach them is to lead by example.

## Experiences

One of the greatest educational tools available to young people is the variety of opportunities provided for them within the school setting. Student council, speech and debate, drama, music, chess club, etc. provide our youth with competitive experiences that will introduce them to a diverse group of new friends and ignite passions within.

As a coach, do you encourage your student-athletes to become involved in these kinds of activities or are you of the mindset that activities will detract from their athletic focus and time commitment? Future champions compete in many different activities during their school days and will have an appreciation for and understanding of the strengths that are developed by having vast interests and experiences.

## Post-secondary Preparation

Acceptance into colleges and universities and meeting criteria for earning college scholarships is challenging to say the least, yet there is a tremendous amount of money available for those who qualify. There are three major factors that selection committees take into consideration.



Initially, a student must have an outstanding cumulative grade-point average in the core courses. When one-fourth of those grades are earned in athletic class, sports fitness, etc., they don't necessarily contribute to a strong curriculum and can actually hinder a student's chances of being accepted.

Second, a student must score well on national collegiate entrance exams. Statistics show that strong readers generally fare well on these tests. And finally, a resume and essay which depict a well-rounded, open minded individual with a track record for helping others, is a must.

Certainly, coaches should be helping students in these critical areas. Coaches should ensure that their students' course selection is challenging and will benefit them in the long run. They should make sure that they take advantage of test preparation opportunities, even those that may cause an adjustment in practice time.

Coaches also should challenge their athletes to read at every opportunity, perhaps even making reading a required component of participation in the program. In addition, initiatives

should be provided for students with an awareness of the importance of giving back to their community.

Providing more than "lip service" as to what really matters is a great way to let young people know that you truly care about who they are and, more importantly, who they will eventually become.

## Character Development

Champions understand that winning is important, yet it does not truly define who they are. Character is exhibited through all activities, day in and day out. Awards and accolades do not define champions, rather how they react when opportunities are denied. The commitment to effort and attitude defines champions. Coaches should help their athletes to have a firm grasp of these concepts and, more importantly, be living examples of these principles.

Many of these concepts are not generally viewed as responsibilities of the coach. But, in reality, they are. Dur-

ing the time that students are part of the athletic program, and many times beyond, the coach is the central figure in their lives. The coach – not the guidance counselor, principal or math teacher – has the ability to be their greatest advocate, advisor and motivator.

When coaches encourage their athletes – not so much by words but through actions – to prepare for life beyond sports, they will listen. Don't miss out on this opportunity to make a difference in those places that most people will never see! **CQ**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Rudy Aragon joined the New Mexico Activities Association three years ago as assistant director. He oversees the 16 activity organizations sanctioned by the NMAA. Prior to joining the NMAA, Aragon was a highly successful cross country, track and basketball coach for 28 years in the New Mexico Public School System.



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