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### For the Long Run

Sports can teach us so much. They keep us physically fit and are good for our emotional health. This goes further though; sports teach lifelong lessons that are applicable to situations throughout our entire lives. There is one sport that takes all of this even further: football. I am a three sport athlete and am familiar with most other sports but have found that football is different from any other sport. Football is what I love the most and where I have found the most success; an all conference left tackle, I enjoy the sport and am growing from the lessons it teaches. Teams will spend a whole week preparing for one massive game. Things are bigger; the crowds, the commitments, the work, and the people. This makes for a sport that is able to teach young men life lessons in abundance. Though all sports can build character and provide future benefits, football can do more in teaching how to respond to adversity, mental toughness, respect for authority/ discipline, the necessity of hard work in order to succeed, and the meaning of ACE at our school.

Responding to adversity is in the end about finding a way to rise above your situation and perform at the level needed to succeed. Anyone can be positive when things are going their way, but what happens when things take a turn for the worse? Football teaches players not to slow down or feel sorry for themselves when things are not going their way, for doing so is strictly detrimental. One also must learn to work as a team under any circumstances and appreciate the contributions of those who go unnoticed by most people, which is an important skill in life. Some of these skills are taught to a degree in other sports; however the difference in football is that if a player takes his foot off of the gas, he doesn't just slow down and get left behind, but gets physically beat down by his opponent. It's about attitude. How will he respond when his

team is down in the fourth quarter? How will he respond the next play when he allowed his quarterback to be sacked the previous play? How will someone respond when they are having problems at work or at home when they are older? Playing football can help a person develop the right attitude to succeed by overcoming whatever comes their way.

In order to effectively respond to hardships, we need an attitude check. "Get your mind right!" is what many football coaches would say on this. In sports players need to get their mind in the box; this is never truer than in football. The box is ones state of mind. An athlete needs to either get excited enough to get the job done, or calm enough to stay focused. In football it is easy to get nervous and make mistakes because there are 10,000 people watching. It is also hard to get up to the box before a practice when it is snowing. A switch needs to turn in a players mind and they need to will themselves to accomplish the task at hand; football takes these situations to the extreme. When a person is older, it could be that they have a baby that starts crying and the parent needs to get up and feed the baby or go to work to support a family when they don't want to. Mental toughness applies to ones physical endurance. Our bodies can do much more than we think they can, but our mind tells us to stop. This leaves us with the decision to overcome or omit.

In many situations however, an athletes' response to adversity is dependent on those around him. A player really needs to trust their teammates. Surrounding ourselves with people we can trust is a life skill that can't be taught anywhere better than on the football field. If one person on the field were to miss their block, another player will often pay with physical pain. Football players also learn that putting together one play takes more than just the person who has the ball. Everyone on the field has a very specific job that has to be done right. But it goes further than that; how did these players learn what to do? They had coaches who spent hours in

meetings, people who scouted the other team, and players that work just as hard as any other player to run the scout team that gives starters a better idea of what it will be like on Friday night. A successful program also needs a community backing and so many more committed people to bring it all together.

Another very important lesson that football teaches is respect for authority/ discipline, for so much rides on the players' ability to learn from their coaches (which doesn't happen without the two said traits). Football is not laid back or loosely run. Everything is strict and tightly run. There is absolutely no questioning the orders of the coach and being late is not tolerated. Coaches can only do so much though. There comes a point when the player has to take responsibility and commit himself to the cause. A decision needs to be made to take advantage of what a coach has given to you and use it to better yourself. It is so important to learn discipline in our lives because this is how we accomplish tasks promptly and proficiently. There are times in a football game when a player needs to resist the urge to break a rule, or do something regrettable on the field, such as wanting to respond to trash talk or holding a defensive player so as not to miss a block. This happens in life too. We will be in situations that will test our patience or self control and the experience of football can prepare us for that.

Once we find our goal, we need hard work to reach it. Hard work is so important. Playing football teaches the necessity of hard work in order to succeed. Before a game, a player could look back on the previous week and the offseason and know that he did everything he could to prepare for the game or he could have regrets and wish he had done more. In football, preparation and performance are almost always directly related. This is the same when someone is taking a test in school or has a job. Football works its players hard. True hard work can bring out the best in a person with the right attitude. Football players work out year round (including

6:15 before school workouts in the spring) and this work reaches a fever pitch on August 10 when two-a-days start. A two-a-day starts at one thirty in the weight room. Next is conditioning on the field. This is followed by one practice, dinner, video session, a second practice ending at 9pm. This happens on a field whose temperature often gets over one hundred degrees and lasts for six days a week for almost two weeks. This is very hard work and it takes a good attitude to focus on what is important *now*, as well as understanding that it is necessary for the reward to come on Friday night. In life it takes hard work to be the best that we can be, no matter what you want to accomplish.

There is a common misconception that football players are generally just a bunch of big guys running around hitting each other. This is true in a sense but one word in the phrase is off-just. The people willing to take on the challenge and magnitude of football are no ordinary people. Many leaders in our society today were football players. As a freshman, when I played on varsity for the last few games, I was surrounded by amazing people. The average ACT score of the offensive line was around 30, and the older players set great examples for younger players as well. This can be attributed (like many good things in our program) to the foundation of our program, ACE. A whole book could be written on each part of ACE. It starts with you attitude, which is necessary in order to learn these lessons. Once you have the right *attitude*, players need *effort* to make something of it. An example from Coach Fellows is the mile run in gym class. There is the person that is not motivated and decides not to try, but keeps to himself as he walks around the track. There is the group that collectively decides that they will not try hard, but the difference from the previous runner is that they will discourage and put down the rare group of people that have decided to give it their all because their heart desires to do well. Some runners come close to success but cannot stand the pressure and after being called a try hard for the tenth

time, they join the group of mockers. Finally there is the runner that sets his eyes on the prize and doesn't let anything discourage him, for he knows his goal and has the attitude and effort needed to achieve it. Football will help us become members of this last group. In football, there is no shame in wanting to be the best a young man can be.

Christ is in the center of ACE for a reason. The spiritual journey of the players is one of the most important things to our program. Our team prays before meals, games, and practices. A senior named Mike Pryor started a player-led team Bible study. Every Monday before practice our team has an hour of spiritual reflection which could include a guest speaker, discussion, or smaller group meetings. Coach Fellows makes an effort to know where all of his players are at in their relationship with Christ and wants to make sure that we grow throughout the season. This is so important because our faith is the most important thing in our life and our relationship with Jesus Christ should shine through/ be present in all parts of our lives. Without faith, we cannot truly learn these lessons. Without faith, what we do learn doesn't accumulate to an iota in the long run.

Football is a sport that is different than others. It is a unique sport that can do so much to prepare us for life. Vince Lombardi (a former football coach) once said, "Football is like life - it requires perseverance, self-denial, hard work, sacrifice, dedication and respect for authority". Some say that violence is the only thing that sets football apart from other sports but in reality this only allows the sport to teach people in ways that other sports never could. Football players will grow up to be more rounded individuals because of the challenges and experiences they went through on the gridiron. There are future benefits that come from football that cannot be found in the same way playing other sports. Football players build as much character as they do muscle. Football at our school is special. This can be attributed to what our program is based on.

Attitude and effort with Christ in the Center, ACE, is what everything starts and ends with. Our school has a unique football program largely because of our coach and players but also because of the community support which is so greatly appreciated, and hopefully supporters and players alike can all learn a few things from the great sport that is football.