

## ***Student Athletes as Leaders in our Schools & Communities!***

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How many times do we ascribe the title of “leader” to kids involved in interscholastic sports and ask them to be positive role models, yet do not offer them any kind of training or insights as to *how to become an effective leader*? Student athletes have a great opportunity to impact their schools and respective communities, yet far too often are only given the “C” for captain on their uniform but no set of instructions about how to carry these duties out in real life! If your child is involved in interscholastic athletics, discuss the following key points so that she can be prepared to embrace the role of being a student athlete and positively impact the people around her.

- ***The status of being a student athlete.*** Remind your child that it is a privilege, not a right, to play for his or her school team. With the privilege of representing the school and community comes responsibility, including being a role model (whether your child likes it or not). Athletes today have an ascribed status of “role model” if for no other reason than having others watch their every move. As your child leaves the house wearing school colors, varsity letters, and other school gear it is important to remember how visible this makes your child, and as a result, how accountable he is for his actions. The good news is that this ascribed status of “athlete” comes with many privileges as well, perhaps none more important than the opportunity to get peoples attentions and make positive change! For example, when a group of student athletes decide to work together and volunteer their time to help the elderly, assist the park & recreation department, or develop a message for kids to stay away from drugs and alcohol, people usually listen!
- ***Responsibility.*** Your child will be awarded many great opportunities being a student athlete, as well as some unique privileges and sometimes even more autonomy and latitude in his or her actions. How will your child make responsible decisions about studying, staying away from drugs & alcohol, getting to practice on time, and maintaining a minimum grade point average for eligibility? Student athletes often have to “grow up fast” juggling their responsibilities, so it is imperative to take time out as a family and discuss all the intricacies of being a representative – not only for your child’s sports team, but the school and community as well!

- **Integrity.** Honesty, truth, and responsibility all comprise features within the word “integrity.” Help your child understand the word integrity by talking about examples that he or she can relate to in sports. For example, how does a wrestler lose weight in a safe and legal manner? How does a football player increase strength by doing it the right way and not by discretely using anabolic steroids? How does a student athlete struggling with grades come to the decision of working harder rather than sitting closer to a smart student on test day and copying from his answers? Your child will be in many situations where it will be possible to “get away with something,” but how can you help him make *the right decision* in those situations?
- **Positive attitude.** The world is a mirror and emotions are contagious! Furthermore, our attitudes are under our control, for better or for worse (so choose wisely!). Does your child know the importance of maintaining a positive attitude every day? As a school and sports leader, does she understand the magnitude of keeping a positive attitude, and how her positive energy and spirit will rub off on others and help with problem solving, motivation, decision making, and so much more?! Rather than sit back and hope for other students to lead, encourage your child to step up, smile, promote optimism, and build strong relationships with her peers and watch all the great things that will unfold.
- **Calculated risk taking.** Oftentimes when we think of the term “risk taking,” we think of spontaneous, dangerous endeavors that we should avoid at all costs. While this mindset may be advantageous in some situations, it may not always be the best way to go when acting as a leader. For example, if your child is aware of several student athletes using a dangerous performance supplement, should she sit back and *hope* nothing bad will occur, or when the time is right should she approach the athletes and voice her concern for their health? Calculated risk taking often requires great forethought, strength, confidence, empathy, and communication skills – all qualities of great leaders! Talk to your child about calculated risk taking and how she might act in certain situations this upcoming school year.

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Dr. Chris Stankovich, known as “The Sports Doc” for his segment on Ohio News Network and featured column in Columbus Parent magazine, is a national expert in the field of sport psychology and offers an entire line of peak performance educational training products for student athletes, coaches, and parents. Please visit [www.drstankovich.com](http://www.drstankovich.com) to learn more.