

**The Complete Game Plan for Maximizing
Athletic Scholarship and Life Potential**

ATHLETES WANTED



CHRIS KRAUSE

High School Edition

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PREFACE

THE MIGHTY DALLAS COWBOYS might as well be squishing ants under their thumbs. Down by thirty-five points late in the fourth quarter, the Buffalo Bills stand no chance of winning. Super Bowl XXVII is all but over. The Bills know it. The fans know it. And Dallas Cowboy Leon Lett knows it.

The fumble he recovers is just a feather in the Cowboys' cap, and as Lett starts to make the fifty-five-yard run to the endzone, the fans know the Cowboys will score one more touchdown.

Twelve yards. Eleven yards. Ten yards.

The Buffalo Bills have already been defeated. The game is such a blowout that even Cowboys' fans are indifferent to yet another touchdown. And Leon Lett begins celebrating. Ignoring everything he knows, he holds the ball in front of him, his sprint transitioning into a strut.

Nine yards. Eight yards. Seven yards.

Tuck. That. Ball. During the course of his athletic career, how many times had Lett heard those words? How many times had he screamed those very words while watching a game on TV, or while cursing one of his teammate's fumbles?

But the game is over for Lett. He has already won. Tuck that ball? Why bother?



Six yards. Five yards.

Suddenly, the cheers begin to swell. No doubt Lett, who would later admit that he was watching himself on the JumboTron, thinks the ascending excitement is because he is just yards away from another touchdown.

Lett does not see Don Beebe. Scrawny by football standards, Beebe comes out of nowhere, in more ways than one.

After his NCAA eligibility expired years earlier, Beebe transferred from Western Illinois University to Nebraska's Chadron State College, enrollment three thousand, with dreams of an NFL career fading. But in typical Don Beebe fashion, he played his heart out at this tiny school in a tiny town, and he played hard. Invited to the NFL Scouting Combine, Beebe caught more than a few eyes by running a 4.25-second 40-yard dash in a torn sneaker, beating the fastest official 40-yard dash of 4.31 seconds. By the time his plane landed back in Chadron after the combine, the Bills and the Packers were knocking at his door. The Buffalo Bills drafted Beebe in 1989, and he would go on to play six Super Bowl games, four with the Buffalo Bills and two with the Green Bay Packers.

This was his third Super Bowl with the Buffalo Bills. It would also become a defining moment for both Beebe and Lett.

Dallas Cowboy Leon Lett has one hundred pounds and seven inches on Don Beebe. Lett **looks** like a football player. Beebe is 5'11" and weighs 185 pounds.

But Beebe is fast as hell. And when the fans start cheering, they are not cheering for Leon Lett. They are cheering for the scrawny guy in the Buffalo Bills uniform who came out of nowhere.

Four yards. Three yards.

Bystanders can tell you that the cheers are not solely from Buffalo Bills' fans. Team spirit goes out the window as Cowboys' fans watch proof of the human spirit and start celebrating, not because their team is about to win, but because they see a tiny little guy from the opposing team making the play of his life.



This is so much more than just a game. This will be recorded as among the greatest moments in Super Bowl history. Fifteen years later, Don Beebe will tell me that this moment defined him as a player, as a man, as a husband, as a businessperson, as a coach, and as a father.

“At least five times a week, someone tells me how much that moment meant. Just the other day, a sixteen-year-old told me that moment inspired him to be an athlete of character, to work hard, to stay in the game,” said Beebe, who now owns House of Speed, a training facility that teaches athletes to build character through sports.

Two yards. One yard.

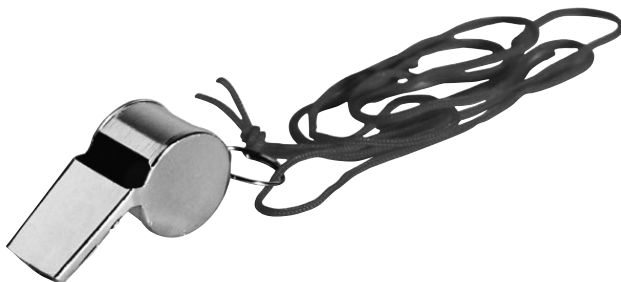
A split second later, and it would have been too late. But fast-as-hell Don Beebe knows that a split second is all it takes, and before Leon Lett can touch his foot to the endzone, scrawny Don Beebe smacks that ball to the ground.

Don Beebe has prevented a touchdown when the Bills had already lost, when no one would have blamed him for simply walking off the field, when it no longer mattered.

The crowd goes wild.

Though the scoreboard accurately reflects a 52-17 Bills’ defeat, Buffalo Bill Don Beebe did not lose that day, and Dallas Cowboy Leon Lett did not win. And contrary to what the scorecard says, Beebe’s play **did** matter. Anyone watching that game will tell you the same thing: Don Beebe was a hero that day. He reflected the kind of character we so desperately want to find. The kind of character an employer wants in his employees. The kind of character a woman wants in her husband. The kind of character a person wants in his friends. The kind of character a parent wants in a child.

Indeed, athletes **are** wanted.



BENEFITS OF ATHLETICS

SURELY, YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS across the country watching Super Bowl XXVII remember Don Beebe and the play that stripped Leon Lett of the goal line on that fateful Sunday in 1993. They dreamt of the glory of professional status, heroic feats of accomplishment, and Super Bowl victories. And these children are not alone. Young athletes of all nations, whether they swim, run, golf, skate, or play baseball, soccer, lacrosse, football, or basketball, all dream of greatness. They dream of swimming in the Olympics, winning the Masters, hitting the game-winning homer in the World Series, or holding the Larry O’Brien NBA Championship Trophy.

Percent of high school athletes who will play at a professional level	
Football	0.09%
Men’s basketball	0.03%
Women’s basketball	0.02%
Ice hockey	0.4%
Baseball (minor and major leagues)	0.5%

But in all truth, the numbers are less than encouraging. Not everyone will be recruited to the NFL like Don Beebe, and those who do play professionally last no more than three seasons on average. Only 0.09 percent of



high school football players go on to play for the NFL. A scant 0.03 percent of high school basketball players make NBA rosters. Fewer than 1 percent of high school athletes are fully funded at the Division I college level, and just 3.04 percent of high school athletes receive even partial funding for college sports at any level. Of the nation's 7.3 million high school athletes, fewer than 7 percent will play at a college level, and most of these opportunities will come from smaller, less-recognizable schools than they might have imagined.¹

«« FAST FACT ««

NFLers Jerry Rice and the late Walter Payton failed to receive a single scholarship offer from Division IA college programs. Chicago Bull Scottie Pippen—who was named NBA All-Defensive Team eight times and All-NBA First Team three times—was forced to walk on at an NAIA school after failing to receive a single scholarship offer.

Student-athletes are not alone in their visions of glory. Every mom and dad believes that their child has all-star potential—the future Peyton Manning, Candace Parker, and Michael Phelps. Although blue-chip players are among us, once student-athletes leave the safe confines of high school, they must compete not only against the cream of the crop from the 7.3 million high school athletes spanning the country, but also against athletes from Asia, Africa, South America, Europe, and Australia.

¹ Statistics from the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the National Collegiate Scouting Association, and the National Federation of High School Associations.



FOREIGN COMPETITORS

Because few countries abroad allow students to compete at an amateur level while pursuing an education, overseas students jump at the opportunity to travel to the United States to receive a college degree while playing a sport. These athletes are attracted to the high-level coaching, facilities, competition, culture, and education that are integrated on American campuses, and this makes them appealing candidates for some coaches, who consider overseas athletes more disciplined than their American counterparts.

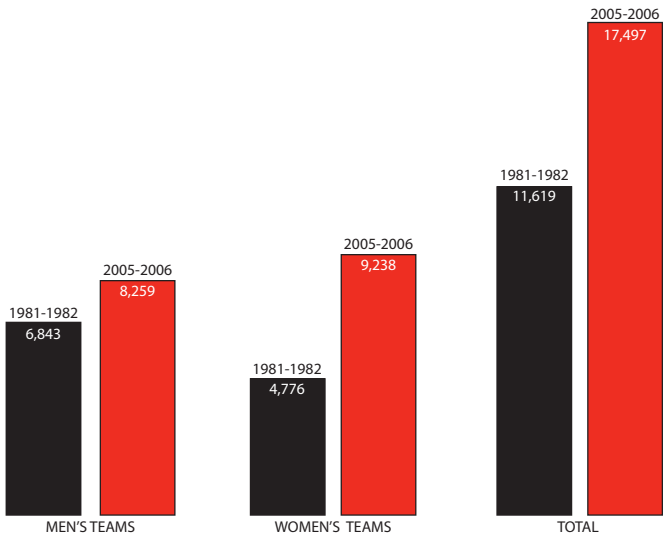
According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the proportion of foreign players has doubled in many Division I sports since the beginning of the decade. In the 2005-2006 school year, foreigners accounted for:

- **23 percent of male hockey players.**
- **14 percent of female golfers.**
- **13 percent of all skiers.**
- **10 percent of all male soccer players.**
- **30 percent of male tennis players.** Half of the top 125 singles players in Division I are foreign, a big jump from 1970, when only eight NCAA men's singles champions came from outside the country.

Despite increased competition, the good news is that opportunities are increasing as well. The NCAA reported that more than half of high school students now play a sport, and between the 1981-1982 school year and the 2005-2006 school year, team membership increased by 51 percent. The number of female teams increased by 4,462, and the number of male teams

increased by 1,416. During the same time frame, the number of athletes playing on NCAA teams increased by 65 percent. The number of female athletes increased by 98,230, and the number of male athletes increased by 61,421.

NCAA Athletic Team Opportunities: 1981-82 school year to 2005-06 school year



SOURCE: *NCAA Executive Summary: 1981-82—2005-06 NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report*

Though most of the opportunities are at Division II, III, NAIA, and junior college levels, the true benefits of sports remain the same regardless of whether the athlete is playing at a Division I or Division III level. Participating in sports **can** help an athlete build critical lifelong skills, skills that build character, and skills that allow the student to win a quality education, job opportunities, and networks that stay with the student a lifetime, regardless of whether the athlete plays second-string on a junior college team or is the star of a Division I college team. In other words, every athlete can be just like Don Beebe in the ways that matter—athletes of all levels can build integrity, character, and dedication through sports.



THE TICKET TO A BETTER EDUCATION

Ask Crystal Smith, a high school track and field athlete from Wisconsin, about the benefits of athletics, and she will tell you that college would have been unaffordable were it not for her ability to throw the discus.

“I could have never afforded the \$40,000-a-year tuition to Wagner College,” confirmed Smith’s mother, Cindy. A single mother dedicated to her daughter’s future, Cindy said that her daughter’s ability to attend college was entirely a result of her participation in track and field.

« « FAST FACT « «

According to the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, the average student loan debt among college seniors was a little over \$19,000 in 2004. Today, 42 percent of college students graduate more than \$25,000 in debt, according to the Center for American Progress, and graduate school students have nearly \$46,000 in debt. Adding to the financial stress, one-third of graduates have more than \$5,000 in credit card debt by the time they graduate.

Crystal admitted that she rarely thought of college while in high school.

“Little focus was put on college, so I never realized how important furthering my education could be,” she said.

Because Crystal excelled in discus, she earned a full scholarship to Wagner College in Staten Island, New York. Smith is now a senior with hopes of graduating on the horizon. After earning her bachelor’s degree in chemistry with a concentration in biochemistry and minors in math and biology, Crystal intends to earn a PhD in pharmacological sciences.



How many people in her hometown have a PhD in pharmacological studies? She will be the first.

While undoubtedly inspiring, Smith's story is certainly not unique. Athletes who compete in Division I revenue sports like men's basketball also have been unsure of their path to getting an education. Jay Straight grew up in the Robert Taylor Homes in the South Side of Chicago. During this time, almost 100 percent of the housing development's residents were unemployed, and 40 percent of households were occupied by single-mothers earning less than \$5,000 each year. Originally intended for eleven thousand people, the homes' number of occupants had expanded to nearly three times that capacity. Gang violence and drug use were commonplace.

Fortunately, Straight was raised by his grandmother, who saw sports as a way out of the impoverished life. From the time Straight was a young child, his grandmother found opportunities for him to play, teaching him to ride the bus across town to attend different basketball practices and clubs on his own. By the time Straight graduated from high school, he was among the best scorers in the country. Recruited by Notre Dame, Marquette, Boston College, Iowa State, and St. Louis, Straight chose to attend the University of Wyoming, graduating from college in three and one-half years.

Today, Straight is a professional basketball player who had a seat in the EuroCup. He has played for teams in Israel, Croatia, Ukraine, France, and Poland.

"Not bad for a kid from the Robert Taylor Homes," said Straight.

For kids like Smith and Straight, attending college is becoming more and more of an obstacle, unless tuition costs are lessened by scholarships and aid. The College Board, a non-profit membership association composed of fifty-four hundred schools, colleges, universities, and educational organizations, reports that despite an increase in tuition prices, federal student aid is decreasing, making college seem out of reach for even children of middleclass families.



According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the average sticker price for a typical four-year university is about \$16,400 a year—which includes room and board, tuition, books, and ancillaries. The year-to-year increase in college tuition and fees is outpacing the general inflation rate. Aggravating matters, the normal public university student now takes more than six years to graduate, which means the average public college degree is close to \$100,000.

But when compared to the student-athlete average scholarship/grants-in-aid package of \$12,850 per year for those who attend public schools and \$21,266 for student-athletes attending private colleges and universities, these tuition prices become within reach.

AVERAGE COLLEGE TUITION AND FEES

(Including Room, Board, and Other Fees), 2007-2008 Academic Year*

TYPE	Average Tuition per Year	Other Charges per Year	Annual Total	Increase Over 2006-2007	Average Grants and Benefits per Year	Average Student-Athlete's Scholarship / Grants-in-Aid per Year**
In state, public, four-year	\$6,185	\$7,404	\$13,589	5.9%	\$3,600	\$12,850
Out of state, public, four-year	\$16,640	\$7,404	\$24,044	5.4%	\$3,600	\$12,850
Private, four-year	\$23,712	\$8,595	\$32,307	5.9%	\$9,300	\$21,266

*SOURCE: *The College Board*

**SOURCE: *NCSA Survey of 6,000 Student-Athletes Reporting from 2006 and 2007 High School Graduating Classes*

**« « FAST FACT « «**

Most parents and athletes do not know the techniques for appealing their financial aid package. A simple act can award a student with an extra \$12,000 to \$20,000 over a four-year college career.

THE KEY TO INCREASING THE ODDS

Other students, of course, are positioned financially, but not academically. Even though I had a 3.8 grade-point average, my ACT score of 21 certainly would not have allowed me to enter Vanderbilt University were it not for my ability as a football player. Vanderbilt, known to produce more Nobel Prize winners than Heisman winners, competes in the toughest athletic conference in the nation and is the best academic institution in the Southeastern Conference. Ranked eleventh in the Division I NCSA Collegiate Power Rankings and first in the Southeastern Conference, Vanderbilt's academic reputation is top notch. Because it needed a linebacker with strong character and work ethic, it welcomed me, despite an ACT score that was at least eight points below the average score of Vanderbilt students, which ranges from 29 to 32.

Though I am a strong proponent of an attitude in which academics trump athletics, the truth of the matter is that some students, despite their best efforts, simply do not have the grades to enter a top-ranked college based on academics alone. However, universities will make exceptions for students they want on their campus. Student-athletes are wanted because they bring leadership, work ethic, character, and determination. Athletes are wanted even more if they help a team win, bring positive public relations and name recognition, and sell tickets.



Consider a study by NCSA of almost three hundred athletes who attended top-twenty-five-ranked *U.S. News & World Report* colleges and universities. NCSA found that student-athletes who attended these elite schools scored on average three points lower on the ACT and 129 points lower on the SAT than their non-student-athlete counterparts.

« « **FAST FACT** « «

An NCSA survey found that some student-athletes were accepted to *U.S. News & World Report's* top twenty-five ranked universities and colleges with GPA's as low as 2.8, ACT scores as low as 21, and SAT scores as low as 920.

And statistics from *College and Beyond* confirm the NCSA findings, as reported in *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton University Press, 2002). At Division I, Ivy League, and liberal arts colleges, intercollegiate athletes scored almost 120 points lower on the SAT than the student body at large. When considering single sports, the difference can be even more drastic. Basketball students scored about 307 points lower on their SAT scores than the student body at large. Football players scored 292 points less. In fact, fencing was the only sport in which student-athletes scored higher, and crew the only sport with no significant difference. For all other sports—cross-country, ice hockey, swimming, lacrosse, soccer, tennis, golf, volleyball, wrestling, baseball, football, and basketball—it pays to be an athlete. In 1999, an athlete had a 53 percent higher admissions advantage than a student with the same SAT score who was not an athlete, minority, or legacy. Minorities had only a 20 percent advantage, and legacies a 24 percent advantage.

This is not to say that student-athletes are less academically strong than their non-athletic counterparts. According to the NCAA Graduation-Rates Summary, student-athletes graduate at a rate 1 to 2 percent higher than



the general student body. So while their admittance statistics are lower, student-athletes fare better in the end than the general student body.

THE CHARACTER-BUILDER

Perhaps more than anything, sports provide a framework for character development during early critical years when students are tempted by peer pressure and searching for their place in life.

LISA'S STORY

Had I not been a hockey player, I would have been lost during my high school years. As a teen, my identity revolved around the sport I loved. The first day of high school, most girls worried about their clothes and whether the "in" crowd would accept them, but I was busy preparing for hockey tryouts. As the only female hockey player, my identity was defined as "the girl who played hockey."

I had to be twice as good as the boys to prove I belonged. I carried a dedication to hard work with me in the classroom, where I pushed myself to be at the top of my class. Playing on two hockey teams—the varsity high school boys' team and a travel-club girls' team—was demanding, but I always completed my homework because otherwise I would face the consequences of a missed practice or, even worse, a missed game. I also knew that the better grades I achieved, the more opportunities I would have to play college hockey. Nothing was going to stand in the way of my dreams, so I practiced and studied relentlessly.

I also remained cautious in social situations because I did not want to compromise my ability to play in the next game. Time and time again, I made one good decision instead of one bad decision. I look back and know that these small decisions meant that I avoided some of the big setbacks many teenagers faced. Every move was guided by my love of hockey. I spent Friday nights resting so I was fresh for early morning skates. Summers



were my time to attend camps and showcases. Rather than attend my own homecoming, I sat by the bonfire at Dartmouth College during its homecoming and my official visit.

I did not attend these events alone, nor would I have attended any of them were it not for two extremely supportive parents. My dad devoted all of his free time to chaperone me from rink to rink. Hockey enabled me to spend hours upon hours of quality time with my dad. Even if I never skated a day past high school, I would be grateful to my sport for the time I spent with my dad.

But it didn't end there. I was offered a scholarship to several schools, though I chose to attend Yale University, where I was eventually named captain of the hockey team. From the moment I walked onto Yale's campus, I had a built-in family of students who valued discipline and goal-setting. In fact, the summer before my freshman year, I received letters from many of my new teammates, so when I started, I already had a tight-knit family of athletes.

After college I was invited to play professional hockey in Switzerland. I was fortunate to participate in several developmental camps at the Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, New York, and I currently coach girl's hockey in Chicago's North Shore community.

—Lisa Strasman, NCSA Director of Recruiting Coaches

Across the board, including coaches, players, teachers, parents, executives, employers, and students, people of all walks of life say that student-athletes have a unique experience to develop character skills they might not otherwise develop, especially when their athletic experience is coupled with strong parenting.

“I try not to laugh when someone asks a student-athlete about discipline, commitment, and leadership,” said Kevin Carroll, author of *Rules of the Red Rubber Ball*.



NCSA Recruiting Coach Joyce Wellhoefer agreed, noting that students who play sports are required to learn how to manage their time appropriately, keeping a careful balance that allows time for both practice and their academic obligations. Owning up to responsibility is a big benefit of athletics, said Wellhoefer, who has coached basketball and softball at NAIA, NCAA Division I, and Division II levels.

“A student-athlete learns that there are consequences to the choices she makes,” said Wellhoefer. “If she fails to study for class, she will earn poor grades, and she will not be allowed to play. Likewise, if she does not execute or play well, the results are not going to be positive. But if she studies and plays hard, she earns favorable outcomes. One way or another, the consequences are up to the student-athlete.”

“If you play a position like fullback in soccer, no one other than you is going to prevent the other guy from making a goal,” agreed Andy Petranek, owner of Petranek Fitness, a CrossFit-affiliated gym that trains elite athletes in Southern California. “The entire team is relying on you to do your job.”

By every measure, high school student-athletes perform better than the general population, and this is particularly true in inner-city schools, said Arne Duncan, former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, who added that student-athletes have higher grade-point averages than their non-athlete counterparts.

« « FAST FACT « «

NFL players with college degrees have NFL careers that last 33 percent longer than those who do not earn college degrees.



Because of sports, Kevin Carroll earned a scholarship, authored several books, became a community leader, and addressed the United Nations. Sports afforded Carroll an opportunity to move away from the restraints of his neighborhood, which offered little in terms of education and opportunity.

“In my neighborhood, if you did not believe that you had a gift or a talent, you were done. The gang members and drug dealers put their nasty hooks in you and pulled you into their abyss,” he said.

For Carroll, discipline is among the biggest benefits of athleticism, but it certainly does not stop there.

“Athletes have to possess a certain level of competitiveness or they would not advance to a collegiate level,” said Howie Jacobson who, along with his partner Ross Lerner, founded Athletes to Business, an organization that connects student-athletes with employers in the business sector. “Employers want competitiveness. They also want organizational skills, and athletes would not get through college if they could not manage classes, games, homework, and practice schedules.”

Jacobson said that his corporate clients are attracted to the idea of hiring student-athletes because they are results-oriented.

“Athletes always walk onto the field with a result in mind, whether it be winning the game, season, conference, or championship,” agreed Lerner. “And almost all athletes have bounced back from some sort of adversity or defeat, so they are considered a resilient bunch, and employers like that.”



ATHLETES WANTED IN BUSINESS

The National Collegiate Scouting Association conducted a survey of more than one hundred CEOs from the Entrepreneurs' Organization* to learn about their attitudes toward student-athletes:

- Of those CEOs randomly surveyed, 94 percent played in either high school or college sports.
- A full 100 percent said they would be more likely to hire a student-athlete than a non-student-athlete.
- More than 60 percent said they would hire a student-athlete with a B or C average before a non-student-athlete with an A average.
- In order of most named, CEOs listed the following as characteristics of the college student-athlete, and one-third said they consider all of these traits to be associated with the collegiate athlete:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Competitive | 8. Goal-setter |
| 2. Hard worker | 9. Assertive |
| 3. Coachable | 10. Reliable |
| 4-7. Tie among the following: | 11. Communicator |
| • Leader | 12. Clutch performer |
| • Dedicated | |
| • Team player | |
| • Works well under pressure | |

**Membership in the Entrepreneurs' Organization is limited to founders, co-founders, owners, and controlling shareholders with businesses with a minimum of \$1 million in annual gross sales and who join before their fiftieth birthday.*



“I learned a lot more on basketball courts than in classrooms,” said Duncan, a Harvard graduate who was co-captain of his basketball team. “I learned so many life lessons and values that transferred later in life: hard work, loyalty, teamwork, and all of those things that have been instrumental in my work outside the athletic field.”

The networks Duncan has built have stayed with him, and Strasman, Wellhoefer, Carroll, Petranek, and everyone else interviewed, echoed this sentiment. Michel Balasis, the head of visual communications at Loyola University and a former kicker from Michigan State University, said the notoriety of being an athlete, and the subsequent client base he was able to secure, allowed him to start a business as a graphic designer before he even graduated. Bridget Venturi-Veenema, the 1990 American Gladiator champion, traveled to Holland, Belgium, France, Japan, Canada, and Taiwan, building a network of amazing people along the way. Strasman was recently a bridesmaid for a woman she first met through sports when she was twelve years old.

“My network of friends includes a lot of former collegiate athletes,” confirmed Duncan. “We have a bond and a camaraderie that would be hard to form in a chemistry lab or math class.”

“You can take all the English classes in the world, and you are never going to learn the social skills or build the networks that an athlete builds,” agreed Bob Chmiel, former football coach at Notre Dame, Michigan, and Northwestern, who added that athletes fly together, eat together, practice together, and socialize together.

**« « FAST FACT « «**

The Department of Defense conducted a study in the 1980s on how to bridge different cultures and age groups for better social interchange. In the final analysis, the best and most common denominator for mixing cultures was an involvement in sports. Bypassing night clubs, restaurants, social events, and entertainment, sports broke through differences in age, race, religion, and gender.

“From an employer’s perspective, the ability to get along with just about anyone is a very attractive trait,” Chmiel said.

Duncan agreed, saying that a candidate’s athletic experience is “absolutely a factor” when it comes to hiring.

“I know that former student-athletes often have leadership skills that others do not have. They have the ability to get along with folks who are different from them, and they have a work ethic that is pretty remarkable,” said Duncan.

A fifty-hour work-week is a piece of cake for a student-athlete accustomed to spending seventy hours a week training, attending classes, studying, and competing in games.

Larry Wert, president of NBC Local Media, Central and Western Regions, echoed this sentiment. A high school and collegiate swimmer and diver, Wert said that goal-setting and discipline are themes that have spilled into his personal and professional life. All the training and competitions contributed to his identity and self-confidence, giving him a healthy paradigm to live inside during his formative years. And before Wert’s résumé expanded to include titles such as sales manager, general manager, senior vice president, and president, his background gave potential employers two bits of information they could assume from his involvement in sports: He was competitive, and he was disciplined. These job skills landed him a job



in advertising sales, a rung on the ladder to his eventual job as president of NBC Local Media, Central and Western Regions.

“If you want to be successful in sports, you have to be committed. You have to be committed to nutrition, to educational studies, and to everything else that goes into the sport. You have to be committed to having successful life habits,” said Augie Maurelli, the director of strength and conditioning at Georgetown University.

THE BENEFITS OF STARTING EARLY

The earlier a child is introduced to sports, the better. When I was in fourth grade, my next-door neighbor was a basketball player. He unwittingly became my mentor. He tolerated my endless questions, played ball with me in the backyard, and counseled me about grades, friendship, and sports. He worked out every day and ate his Brussels sprouts. He became an All-State basketball player, then earned a full scholarship to the University of Illinois, and is now a college coach. I wanted to be just like him.

I wanted to be an athlete.

At the time, being an athlete primarily consisted of playing in the backyard with my friends. It was also a reward for positive behavior.

“Do your homework, or you cannot play ball,” my parents would say.

“Keep your grades up, or you cannot play ball,” they would say.

Athletes come in all ages—some are born into an athletic family, others do not discover sports until they reach fifty. Some mature early and are passed by later in life, while some late bloomers do not mature physically until college. Some elite athletes are naturally gifted; others make up for talent by pouring their heart into the game. One thing is certain: Athletes who start early are at an advantage. They learn how to set goals, manage their time, and practice every day. They benefit from positive mentors and role models.

New skills are more easily formed during the younger years. Like learning a language, early development of athletic habits and abilities embeds these skills into a person’s DNA. Whether learning to swing a bat,



work hard, deal with a loss, or be gracious after a win, engaging in sports at a young age can help shape children in a positive way and determine their later success, not only in athletics, but also in life.

Athletes Wanted is designed as a resource to assist in maximizing a child's athletic scholarship and life potential. Because recruiting is a process, not a one-time event, it can start before a student-athlete enters high school, and it often lasts three or four years. As such, refer back to this book regularly for a refresher.

With the cost of college education increasing faster than the cost of living, the competition for scholarships is at an all-time high. The goal of this book is to give student-athletes an advantage. Combined with the *Athletes Wanted* website and interactive blogging community (www.athleteswanted.org), this book allows students to turn their dreams of playing collegiate sports into reality.

Synthesizing the best practices from more than ten thousand student-athletes who have gone on to play collegiately, this book serves as a complete resource full of Coach's Tips, Fast Facts, timelines, graphs, worksheets, and key point summaries at the end of each chapter. Remember to also check the *Athletes Wanted* website, which has downloadable forms, tutorials, and access to the latest rules, techniques, and success stories.

The pre-high school years mark the best time to begin preparing for college recruitment and guiding a child's abilities so that a student-athlete presents an attractive package to recruiters. If athletes do not start preparing until high school, they might not be too late, but they will definitely be forced to play another game: a game of catch up.

An early involvement in sports will help build the foundation for later success in all areas of life. Remember: The goal is not to be successful at athletics—the goal is to use athletics to be more successful.



Let's not forget, however, the physical benefits of sports. In a nation that is plagued by childhood obesity, early involvement in sports conditions a child for a continued dedication to physical fitness. For this reason alone, any parent interested in her child's longevity and health should incorporate some sort of athleticism into a child's life.

Yet, sports provide a way to condition more than the physical embodiment of a child. By participating in sports, a child will begin to draw larger lessons about life that speak to his mental, emotional, and intellectual character. By learning these kinds of lessons from athletics, a student-athlete will build the kind of character that will bring him success on and off the field. Indeed, as Coach Bob Chmiel is fond of pointing out, character is the top quality coaches look for in a recruit.

The following are nine ways athletics can build a young child's character:

1. Athletics help a child learn to deal with authority.

Imagine that a young college graduate enters the workforce. Because academia was always his focus, this is his first experience as a subordinate. Though he is well schooled and competent, he has questions about how to best fulfill the responsibilities associated with the job. Fresh on the job, he is not comfortable approaching his boss and admitting his uncertainties. He has a brilliant idea about running the office more efficiently, but he is worried about stepping on toes. Should he approach his boss, or just toe the line?

Now imagine that "the dragon lady" hires the young man. She runs a tight ship, demands much, and pays little. She is quick to snap and unwilling to forgive. By the end of his first week, the young graduate feels a tight knot in his stomach each time he steps foot into the door. He wonders whether he should confront his boss or toe the line.



Regardless of a student's career choices, one thing is for certain: At some point or another, an athlete will need to contend with an authority figure without the safety net of Mom and Dad. Joining sports presents an opportunity for students to begin learning to take direction and to communicate with all different types of authority figures. Similar to bosses, coaches come in every size and shape. Some are intense and direct; others believe in positive reinforcement. Some are fair and righteous; others make mistakes often.

"Participating in sports allows a child an opportunity to approach an adult and express himself," said Venturi-Veenema, the athletic director of Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois. "It's hard for a child to approach an adult and say, 'I have a problem,' but sooner or later, every child is going to have a problem that needs to be addressed. Why not allow him to do this in the safest environment? Let him stumble in the double safety net of parents and a school system so that later, when Mom and Dad are not there, he has experience with authorities."

2. Young athletes learn how to lose gracefully and win graciously.

When I was in the seventh grade, I played on a basketball team that was undefeated. We were on top of the world, a world we thought was owned by our seventh-grade basketball team. No one could beat us. I vividly remember my parents telling me that they wished we would lose a game. At the time, I did not understand.

Now I do. Eventually, we lost a game, ending the season with a 39-1 record. Over the course of my life as an athlete, I would go on to lose many, many more games. I learned that a team can work and work and work and still lose in the end. I



learned that a seventh-grade basketball team doesn't own the world. I learned to take it one game at a time—that just as easily, a winning team can become a losing team. I also learned to respect my competitors, recognizing that regardless of a team's record, every competitor has his strengths and weaknesses.

No purer analogy for life's victories and spills exists than this.

3. Young athletes learn to be team players and manage conflict.

I would be lying if I said sports are not accompanied by conflict. Young athletes get hurt, they fight with their teammates, and they feel overlooked by their coaches. But with proper parenting, these athletes work through adolescence and become mature adults, confident to handle and manage conflict, which they accept as a part of life. Because they had parents, a team, and a coach supporting them, they aren't paralyzed when conflict rears its head. After all, they have likely dealt with something very similar in the past.

A child who has experienced teamwork enters adulthood much more equipped, said Coach Chmiel.

"So many things a person experiences while a member of a team are seamless to the workplace: the ability to get along with others, the ability to move forward in a group setting, hard work, and dedication. And let us not forget one of the greatest byproducts: You cannot compete in athletics in this day and age if you are not color blind," he said.

Coach Chmiel uses the football huddle as an analogy for business.

"In a huddle, orders given are unequivocally followed, and if one person does not carry out his assignment, there is immediate failure," Coach Chmiel said. "An athlete cannot look to



the left and challenge someone because of her socioeconomic status. An athlete cannot look to the right and challenge someone because of his race. An athlete cannot go to committee with the play, and there is no room for discussion. An athlete has thirty-five seconds to listen to the instructions, and then he must take them and carry them out.”

Does this teach a kid to be a team player? Absolutely, and this is a big triumph down the line when it comes time to apply for a job. In fact, almost all of the skills a student-athlete learns—time management, leadership, team work, commitment, goal-setting, competitiveness—are traits employers look for.

4. Along with teamwork, athletes learn personal responsibility.

Because each member is a vital part of a team’s success, young athletes learn that other people are relying on them. When a young athlete drops the ball, he learns to accept responsibility and vows to make a stronger effort. In the end, athletes learn to never pass the buck when they drop the ball.

Andy Petranek—who participated in four cycles of the Eco Challenge, a round-the-clock, three hundred-mile expedition adventure race regarded by athletes as among the greatest challenges ever—said he knows two things immediately about people who push themselves athletically: They are reliable, and they are responsible.

“They have to be,” he said. “If an athlete is competing at a higher level, he has to be 100 percent committed and 100 percent accountable, so when I am hiring for a position, the athlete will always have a leg up. The athlete knows what it takes to be a champion. He knows how hard it is to be the best, and I want that person on my team.”



Add to that enthusiasm, teamwork, and leadership skills, said Petranek, and an employer considers the student-athlete an all-around attractive package. Student-athletes are rewarded favorably: A study by College and Beyond reported that former athletes who entered the workforce earned about 15.4 percent more than their non-athlete counterparts.

While this personal responsibility is critical, athletes also learn not to dwell on mistakes. Imagine what would have happened to the Green Bay Packers had its running back, Ryan Grant, focused on his two early fumbles in the 2008 divisional playoffs against the Seattle Seahawks. Going into the game, the Packers were the favored team, but within the first quarter, Grant's fumbles put the team in a two-touchdown hole. Instead of collapsing into the fetal position or allowing his spills to distract him, Grant ran for 201 yards and three touchdowns. As any Packers or Seahawks fan can tell you, the Packers went on to crush the Seahawks, 42-20.

To this end, when a student loses a game, parents and coaches must encourage the athlete to lose the game without passing the buck. If parents or coaches blame the loss on a coach or another teammate, the athlete will learn to shift responsibility, which might temporarily stroke his ego, but will not serve him later in life. Sports teach student-athletes to stop pointing their fingers at other people and start pointing their thumbs at themselves.

5. Athletes learn leadership skills.

Throughout the course of their athletic careers, most young athletes will play many different roles. At some point, whether an athlete is team captain of the soccer team or section leader of the cheer squad, the team will rely on the athlete to take a leadership position. Like learning to deal with authority, being



a leader provides an athlete with an opportunity to interact with a broad spectrum of personality types. As well, it teaches the athlete to be fair, to listen, and to make judgment calls, all skills that are needed later in life.

Leadership means doing the right thing when no one is watching, even if it is not popular. I can remember when some of my teammates decided to cut corners while the coaches were not watching. As team captain, I decided we should all do extra pushups to make up for the lack of effort. The decision was unpopular with many of my teammates, but the team became much more respected (and respectful) that day. Colleges and employees know that athletes who are leaders on the court will be leaders in life.

« « FAST FACT « «

According to a study by the University of Virginia, 80 percent of female Fortune 500 top executives describe themselves as former athletes.

6. Young athletes learn the value of hard work.

As a child, Larry Wert wanted to be an Olympic diver. He set goals and worked hard. In the end, Wert fell short of his goal, but along the way, he won state and national competitions, became team captain of his high school and college diving teams, and was sent to college on a full athletic scholarship. Later, he was afforded jobs at least in part because of the assumptions employers made based on Wert's experience as an athlete. Wert and the employers both knew the same thing:



Hard work does not guarantee success, but success guarantees hard work.

The discipline it takes to master a trade is not something commonly found in a child, and a person takes notice of a student able to embrace this kind of regimented commitment. When a student is able to embrace this kind of discipline, he will be noticed.

Basketball taught Kevin Carroll traits that he carries with him through life. When a student rises at 5:30 every morning for a 6:00 a.m. practice, he starts learning the discipline necessary to master a skill. He carries that discipline with him, and thirty-five years later, when he starts a new job, or picks up a hobby that begins to frustrate him (Carroll is reacquainting himself with the cello, an ambitious instrument for an adult learner), he reflects back and draws from his skills. He remembers how many times he shot the basketball and ran drills before it became second-nature. He remembers that nothing ever comes without practice.

7. Athletes learn to set goals.

To succeed at anything, from business, to health, to life as a whole, athletes learn that they must have goals clearly defined. During junior high, I began looking to high school. What would I need to do to play high school football? What about college? What sort of physical condition would be required of me? What sort of grades did I need?

Goals motivate. They enable us to set priorities, to set a long-range course, to deal with setbacks, and to measure our achievement. When a student reaches middle school and starts making independent and important choices about what he wants out of life, he can begin cementing a life-long



commitment to goal-setting by constructing major athletic and academic goals, as well as the action steps needed to achieve them.

The key to goal-setting is to use the SMART formula—goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, and Recorded over Time.

SMART GOALS

A detailed description = **SPECIFIC**

A number or other objective
standard can be tied to the goal = **MEASURABLE**

Realistic = **ATTAINABLE**

Written down = **RECORDED**

A specific date or timeframe
(years, months, hours, minutes,
or seconds) is set as a deadline
for achieving the goal. = **TIME-BOUNDED**

If an athlete's goal is to simply improve speed or GPA, how will he measure this goal? When does he want to improve his endurance? This year? This month? This decade? Without concrete, actionable goals, students will not make a connection between the activities in which they participate and the achievement of the goal. (For more about goal-setting, download our SMART goals article, available online at www.athleteswanted.org.)



For example, quarterly goals might look something like this:

Goal 1: *Maintain at least a 3.0 GPA for the upcoming quarter.*

Actions:

- *Complete homework the evening it is assigned by 9:00 p.m. and go over with Mom.*
- *Read at least one chapter over the weekend.*
- *Review class notes the following day during study hall.*

Goal 2: *Run 55-minute 10K.*

Actions:

- *Run ten 100-yard hill sprints under twenty seconds each three times each week.*
- *Run three miles once a week in less than twenty-five minutes; two miles once a week in less than fifteen minutes; and four miles once a week in less than thirty-two minutes between now and the next cross country meet.*
- *Lift weights, three sets of eight, ten, twelve, each body part, three times a week.*

One athlete might be hard-pressed to do his homework, much less run one mile, while another athlete might be an over-achiever. Regardless of the starting point, goals simply move a person forward. By setting athletic goals, students begin to see that success is not a mysterious, luck-driven concept. Rather, they see that moving forward in life only requires small, actionable, measurable, specific steps that they can track over time, a valuable concept that, when applied, can help them throughout life.



GOAL-SETTING

A student-athlete should create a written schedule each week based on his goals. Here are the basic steps:

STEP 1: Identify all mandatory items, such as school hours, scheduled practices and games, dentist appointments, and the like.

STEP 2: Student-athletes should set aside sufficient time for activities such as their homework load, upcoming projects, and papers. These activities should be as specific as possible.

STEP 3: With the remaining time, a student-athlete should fill in optional activities, such as additional practices, recreation, and time with friends, referring back to his SMART goals to make sure that he includes activities that propel these goals forward. Eventually, a child should also include time for researching colleges and attending sports camps. Be sure to include blocks of free time. A schedule should be an aid, not a burden.

By preparing a schedule this way, an athlete recognizes that increased demands from his sport must be shifted from optional activities, not from schoolwork.

With the schedule in hand, parents and coaches can monitor athletes, not only to make sure they are sticking to the schedule, but also to make sure the schedule is accurate and realistic. For instance, if a student-athlete regularly crams on Sunday nights to complete his assignments, he has not blocked enough time for schoolwork during the week.



8. Athletes learn to manage their time effectively.

Middle school is the first time a student-athlete has to deal with the challenge of balancing the demands of schoolwork and the demands of athletics. As he becomes more serious about sports, his top priority must be on receiving a good education. Parents and coaches can use the child's participation in sports as incentive. By setting firm rules for participating in athletics, parents and coaches can require the child to make his best efforts in the classroom before he is granted the opportunity to walk onto the field.

Though most schools mandate a required grade-point average for participating in sports, my parents reinforced this system by setting requirements higher than the school's established standards. Each parent requires a different level of academic achievement. For some parents, a 3.8 grade-point average might be the cutoff for participating in sports. For others, a 2.5 grade-point average is sufficient. My job is not to counsel parents, coaches, and athletes on the importance of academia, but simply to show them that athletics can be used to strengthen time management and academic goals, whatever they might be. My parents used this incentive to great success. I was not a "natural" student, and my interests were not in academia. But were it not for sports, my grades would have suffered. The threat of having sports taken away from me was too much, and I kept my grades high because my parents made it a condition of walking onto the field.

Recognizing that education is a priority is not enough. Even a child who genuinely desires to succeed in school and in sports will face difficulties because knowing how to balance competing demands on one's time is an acquired skill.



9. Athletes naturally pick other athletes as role models and mentors.

Children of all ages need healthy role models to flourish, and athletes naturally look to other athletes as role models and mentors. Remember that throughout a student's school years, she will be subjected to peer pressure. The need to be accepted is profound during these years, so children exposed to athletes who are self-confident, assured, well-mannered, and disciplined can combat the negative influences that might creep into life.



KEY POINTS

1. More than 7.3 million student-athletes are walking the halls of the nation's high schools, and millions of foreign athletes want to compete for coveted spots on American college teams. Fewer than 7 percent of the nation's athletes will play at a college level, and just 3.04 percent will receive any athletic scholarship funding. That said, opportunities have increased in the past two decades. NCAA's membership has grown by 2,574 collegiate men's teams and 3,845 collegiate women's teams.
2. More than 80 percent of athletic opportunities are at the NCAA Division II, III, NAIA, or junior college levels, with these schools often providing more playing time, a strong academic department, and a better fit for the student-athlete.
3. The average sticker price for a typical four-year college is \$16,400 a year, and the average college student graduates more than \$25,000 in debt. A student-athlete can offset this cost by aggressively positioning himself for scholarships.
4. High school student-athletes who compete in college win on average more than \$12,850 per year (for in-state, public school students) to \$21,266 per year (for private school students) in scholarships, grants, and financial aid to play sports at a collegiate level for four or five years.
5. Admissions standards are often lowered for athletes. In a study of three hundred athletes who attended some of the nation's top universities, the National Collegiate Scouting Association found that student-athletes scored on average three points lower on their ACT and 129 points lower on their SAT than their non-student-athlete counterparts.
6. College athletes graduate at a rate 1 to 2 percent higher than the general student body.



7. Student-athletes develop critical skills, such as:

- Character development
- Goal-setting
- Responsibility
- Time management
- Camaraderie
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Discipline
- Commitment
- Self-reliance
- Cultural awareness
- Competitiveness
- Reliability
- Enthusiasm
- Hard work
- Ability to work under pressure
- Confidence
- Communication
- Loyalty

8. A survey of CEOs found that 100 percent of employers would be more likely to hire a student-athlete than a non-student-athlete. And 60 percent would hire a student-athlete with a lower grade-point average than a non-student-athlete with an A-average.

9. The student-athlete carries with her a network of friends and a commonality that can be leveraged for career and life opportunities.

10. Student-athletes build successful life habits such as proper nutrition and exercise!



11. It's never too early for children to start playing sports. Regardless of how old or young an athlete is, athletics can help a student learn to:

- Deal with authority
- Lose gracefully and win graciously
- Manage conflict and become a team player
- Have personal responsibility
- Develop leadership skills
- Value hard work
- Set goals
- Manage time effectively
- Benefit from the wisdom of mentors and role models