

PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY

A Team for Every Child

Champion Athlete Note

Educating and Forming Champion Athletes

An Attitude of Gratitude

Quick, think of three things for which you are grateful!

This may be a difficult request. 2020 has been a year unlike any other as we endure the challenges of a global pandemic and racial unrest. We have all experienced disappointment, loss and even tragedy. **Why should we focus on being grateful, and how can we do this?**

One of the first things your parents likely taught you when you were small is to say, "Thank you." Think of the countless times your parents said "what do you say?..." to prompt you to utter these words when you were a child. What's the difference between being thankful and grateful? And how can that translate to help you build a strong team culture?



According to research, practicing gratitude has benefits that go beyond being a polite kid. **Studies show that people who practice gratitude feel 25% happier, are more likely to be kind and helpful to others, are more enthusiastic, interested and determined, and even sleep better.** Kids and teens who regularly practice gratitude get higher grades, are more satisfied with their lives, are more integrated socially and show fewer signs of depression. Research within sport has identified a relationship between gratitude amongst adolescent athletes and increased team satisfaction, less athlete burnout, and greater overall well-being.

But what exactly do we mean by gratitude? According to Greg Chertok, M.Ed., CC-AASP, a sport psychology counselor, fitness trainer and member of the American College of Sports Medicine, gratitude can be defined as "an estimate of gain coupled with the judgment that someone else is responsible for that gain." Estimating and appreciating gain (performing well; recognizing physical improvements in strength or endurance) and identifying that other people were involved in making it happen, are important steps towards feeling grateful. In other words, you can be thankful that you did well on an exam, and you should be grateful to your study partners (teammates) for helping prepare you to do well.

So how can athletes practice gratitude in meaningful ways so that you learn what it means to be thankful and grateful? Here are a few ideas for you and your team:



- Say a prayer of thanks with your team at the beginning of practices and games for the opportunity to play sports.
- Engage in a team gratitude circle. Have players take turns going around the circle and express what they all appreciate about a teammate. Make sure that the gratitude is spread around the entire team. The first few times you do it, it may feel uncomfortable, but stick with it and you will start to hear the amazing things teammates will say to one another. Don't be surprised if it quickly becomes a favorite team ritual.

- Thank your coaches after every practice and game.
- Thank officials after contests and encourage fellow student-athletes to do the same.
- Practice Mindfulness. So often today we go through the day distracted, out of sync with our environment and the people around us, especially when many are distance learning/training. Be intentional about noticing the little things that you can do to connect, care for, help and support each other and your team. This will help you to be fully present in relationships and to pay more attention to your environment.
- Make a gratitude jar or box with paper and pens next to it, so team members can write down things they feel grateful for and place the paper in the jar/box. You can also create an online folder to engage in the activity virtually. Comments can be entered anonymously to heighten the surprise. Open the jar/folder once a week and read as a team what everyone has written.
- Develop gratitude team traditions to reach out to others in your community – collection for a food pantry, thank you cards for hospital workers, honoring appropriate fan behavior, expressions of gratitude to officials and opponents all help athletes connect as part of a larger human community.

Here's a great example Chertok shares in his article. One of the greatest Olympians of all-time, Carl Lewis notes in his autobiography *Inside Track: Carl Lewis Biography* that feeling grateful to his competitors became part of his pre-competition routine. He wrote that, without opponents, he could not have been personally challenged to the extent that he was with opponents. He could not have experienced victory without opponents. There would be no gold medals without opponents. Lewis chose to embrace the presence of his competitors as required figures in his quest for performance excellence. It was an attitudinal shift that served him well.

In the spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday, take time to be thankful for food, shelter, friendship, education, safety and the joy of sports. Even if you are not able to play right now, eventually we will joyfully compete again. *Play Like a Champion* encourages athletes to adopt an **ATTITUDE of GRATITUDE** this Thanksgiving week and through the rest of this year. We know times are tumultuous. Expressing gratitude is an important practice that helps us endure difficulty and stay rooted in Christ.

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

***Play Like a Champion* recognized by President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition as a NYSS Champion**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is pleased to recognize *Play Like a Champion Today* as a **National Youth Sports Strategy (NYSS) Champion**. The NYSS, released in September 2019, calls for a national strategy to increase youth sports participation. As a NYSS Champion, *Play Like a Champion Today* has demonstrated their organization's support of youth sports and commitment to the NYSS vision. *Play Like a Champion Today* is recognized along with other NYSS Champions on [health.gov](https://www.health.gov) as part of a

growing network of organizations partnering with HHS to improve the youth sports landscape in America. "We know children who obtain regular physical activity gain important physical and mental health benefits, which are more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic," explains ADM Brett Giroir, M.D., Assistant Secretary for Health at HHS. "I'm thrilled to acknowledge the work of the NYSS Champions who are furthering the mission of the NYSS and helping to foster a lifelong love of sports and



physical activity for our Nation's youth."

Play Like a Champion's Executive Director, Dr. Clark Power comments, "*Play Like a Champion* understands the total value of youth sports as well as the challenges that surround the current sport climate. Our organization is perfectly aligned with the NYSS mission to work toward an environment in which all youth have the opportunity, motivation, and access to play sports, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, ability, or ZIP code. We pledge to work together collaboratively with other national organizations united to reach the common goal of creating *A Team for Every Child* .

Read More About This Recognition By Clicking Here!

Sacred Spaces in Sports



We loved [this ESPN video celebrating the sacredness that sports brings to our world](#) . During this week of Thanksgiving, our *Play Like a Champion* community is grateful for the sacred spaces of fields, courts, rinks, pools all across the country that provide a place for our children to grow, to excel, to experience the divine through their play.

Play Like a Champion's "Daily Prayers for Champions" page has been updated! Visit www.playlikeachampion.org/prayer for more than 200 prayers plus resources that can help you and your team grow closer to God while participating in sports.

**Access Resources & Learn More at
www.playlikeachampion.org**

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