

QUALITIES OF A GREAT “ATHLETE”

From Dr Bruce Brown, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics

Having each of these qualities is at least as important beyond sports.

CONFIDENCE An athlete displays a quiet inner confidence based on preparation, her own and that of her teammates. Confidence is a belief based on your daily work habits and your constant progress. This kind of confidence is contagious within a team, built as athletes subject themselves to tough challenges and practices and see the value in hard work. These athletes develop a “go for it” mentality, become unafraid of failure, remain confident in “rough waters”. They prepare hard every day. When success follows, athletes tell you it’s because of the effort they put into preparation.

The non-athlete has a false confidence, not built on preparation but on factors she doesn’t control. Maybe she is blessed with great athleticism. Maybe she thinks that the team will “carry” her. In either event, she does not put the same effort or attention into practices as do the athletes on the team.

Having true confidence is a choice.

TEACHABLE SPIRIT Athletes want to learn and improve. They bring an enthusiasm for “continuous improvement” every day. They know that correction happens because a coach sees potential in them to get better. They have learned to take correction as a compliment and look at correction as an opportunity to improve. The athlete responds to correction with verbal and physical cues that she is listening and learning.

The non-athlete looks at any correction as criticism, and often responds with an excuse.

Having a teachable spirit is a choice.

PRIDE The pride of an athlete is a shared one. It is found in the “shared joy of the inner circle“, a feeling among team members that no one on the outside can understand. Shared pride involves a desire to become as good as possible for yourself and for your group of teammates. It involves unselfishness, and accountability. Team pride is developed in parts of the game that require more effort than skill, where determination is more important than talent. (Example: “optimistic recovery” by everyone when a ball is lost.)

The pride of a non-athlete is self-oriented, often selfish. Such players often develop a “sense of entitlement“, where she thinks athletic skill should guarantee special treatment.

Developing the right kind of pride is a choice.

ACCOUNTABILITY The athlete is responsible and demonstrates it when she takes personal accountability for what happens to her. When things are not going well, she looks at herself first to see where she can act to make a difference. She becomes a problem solver, better able to cope with stress and more likely to persevere when facing difficulties. She realizes that “you are either getting better or you are getting worse”, that if you are not making steady improvement, you are losing ground to those athletes who are.

The non-athlete blames everyone but herself when things do not go well. She often fixes her focus on things she cannot control rather than those she can.

Being accountable is a choice.

COMPETITIVE PERSEVERENCE The athlete and great teams are not deterred by bumps in the road. Since she is committed to continuous improvement, she can recover quickly from a mistake and refuse to remain discouraged. Positive, competitive, persevering athletes are “mentally tough”, a quality that allows an individual to remain confident, enthusiastic and positive. Athletes, who are mentally tough, simply cannot have their spirits broken. They can lose to an opponent ten times and look forward to the next rematch. They welcome challenges and look forward to the toughest competitions as tests of themselves.

A non-athlete is easily discouraged and allows yesterday’s failures and disappointments to interfere with today. Non-athletes are unable to recover quickly from mistakes.

Perseverance and positive attitude are a choice.

DISCIPLINE This is nothing more than focused attention and effort. To be successful individually or collectively, sacrifices involving discipline (“focused attention and effort”) are required. Great athletes not only accept discipline, they embrace it for the benefit of the team. They have the strength of character to overcome temptations and pressures and will do what’s right for their team at the moment of truth. Discipline is exhibited by attentiveness, enthusiasm, sportsmanship, respecting authority and personal responsibility. Because they display “athletic integrity“, disciplined athletes are better teammates. They are reliable and trustworthy, are always there for their teammates. For a team, discipline can be the characteristic that sets them apart and gives them an edge.

The non-athlete chooses self-indulgence (“I’ll do what I want!”) over self-control and only thinks of discipline in terms of punishment.

Accepting discipline (“focused attention and effort”) is a positive form of teamwork. It is also a choice.

TEAM FIRST Teamwork is a rare gift that allows ordinary people to attain extraordinary results. The process of becoming a good teammate is a decision based on attitude, specifically the choice of interdependence over independence. The athlete intentionally puts the needs of the team ahead of herself. She will **NEVER LET HER TEAMMATES DOWN**. She understands that everyone on a team can have different roles that together can make the team stronger. On a great team all roles have equal value, and great teams are made up of athletes who have given up the quest for individual glory, who willingly and wholeheartedly commit themselves to the team effort. Sports provide many individually satisfying memories, but for the true athlete, nothing can compare with the memories built from being part of something bigger than yourself.

The non-athlete is a selective participant, looking to satisfy her own needs first by being selfish with her effort, attention or behavior.

Putting the team first and not letting your teammates down in any situation is a choice.