

GOOD ATHLETE PROJECT

# BEYOND STRENGTH

JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SPORT

**DR. ROBERT  
HIGGINS, MD**

Reflections at the HEART of Leadership

**AFTER THE OLYMPICS**

Now What? Lessons for life after sport

**INTENTIONAL COACHING**

Does Your Behavior Match Your Goal?

IN THIS ISSUE:

**MIKE DITKA**

**LISA FELDMAN**

**BARRETT**

**DR. IAN SMITH**

**MAURICE MCDAVID**

*and more*

Joshua Sisson  
State Record Deadlift Attempt

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Sports have incredible potential to teach life lessons... IF we use them that way. Join the Good Athlete Project team in maximizing the potential of athletics as education.



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# OUR STORY

*T*

he Good Athlete Project was founded at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education by Director James (Jim) Davis.

Though there is great power in sports, power does not always lead to positive outcomes. 'Sports gone wrong' is a daily headline. That's where we come in. We are focused on athlete and coach development, in service of maximizing the potential of athletics as education.

Many strategies that maximize athletic potential have also been shown to lead to lifelong success... IF the coaches craft a culture that supports the transfer of those lessons.

Our **#BeyondStrength** initiative began with a recognition that strength training offered an incredible opportunity for that sort of education.

If an athlete works hard, focuses on technique, challenges himself, takes care of his recovery, and then shows up again the next day (tired or not) in pursuit of long-term goals, then powerful lessons have started to sink in.

We use research-based and experience-proven methods to support coaches in doing this work well. Read on to learn more!

# What Do You Coach For?

By Jim Davis

Leadership – Opportunity – Character

## *“What I say... is the law.”*

He closed the door to the dingy, underground locker-room before taking a seat on an old wooden bench and covering his face with his hand. The team was noticeably upset. Gene Hackman then delivers, in an inspired way, “What I say... is the law. Absolutely and without discussion.”

Movies like *Hoosiers*, *Rudy*, *Any Given Sunday*, and countless Instagram personalities are influencing coaching styles. One successful coach told us that if Denzel Washington (referring to his character in *Remember the Titans*) ran for President, she'd vote for him.

Oftentimes, a coach's first model is the coach they had as a child. Lessons from those early models are entrenched, enhanced, or adjusted by popular media-

professionals who have (or pretend to have) achieved a desirable level of success.

This can set a dangerous precedent. Inspiring as they may be, scriptwriters in popular sports media are charged with telling a compelling story, not aligning coaching methods to psychological research in order to support and model successful coaching - ESPN has no obligation to impart 'life lessons'.

Though it may seem obvious, coaches routinely cite movie clichés or lean into a meter and intonation which mimics a famous coach, real or fictional. This is not to be met with judgement, as we are all susceptible to influence from those we admire.

But it should give us pause. Are we being thoughtful enough about our instruction?

# Moral Learning, Moral Reasoning

Rick Weissbourd, Director of the Human Development and Psychology program at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, acknowledges that sports provide opportunities for "moral learning," enhance "moral reasoning," and develop capacities like trust, respect, and critical thinking... that is, IF coaches use the platform of athletics for this sort of education.

If we do not identify those noble outcomes (or similarly meaningful 'life lessons') in our coaching, then we will undoubtedly default to repeating the methods we have observed.

Imagine if our athletes did that. Football players would be leaping haphazardly across the field, soccer players would be attempting nonstop bicycle kicks, and boxers would throw constant haymakers (Rocky Balboa never held his hands up in defense, after all, taking hundreds of unnecessary punches over the years). A coach who saw a player mimicking the onscreen version of themselves would demand they pause, slow down, and

use the methods outlined for their success.

Coaches, we should follow suit. If we slow down and identify the outcomes we most hope for, then we can align our behaviors accordingly.

**If we want to teach life lessons, we must first identify what those lessons are.** If we want to empower young people to negotiate complicated ideas and think critically, then we should be explicit about those teaching opportunities. In his book, The Parents We Mean to Be, Weissbourd includes a chapter on "the morally mature sports parent," wherein he acknowledges that one way to empower would be to allow "opportunities to co-construct rules and to determine sanctions for violating them."

If you want your athletes to be obedient, then identify yourself as "the law," and remind them that what you say, goes, "absolutely and without discussion." But that's not much of a life lesson...

There is certainly room for the Gene Hackman approach. At times, the coach should be the sheriff. Rules have to be upheld. If we consider following directions

*"If we slow down and identify the outcomes we most hope for, then we can align our behaviors accordingly."*

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to be a tool, rather than an outcome, and simultaneously equip athletes with decision-making power (another tool), then we can begin to see ourselves as builders of culture, rather than wardens. How about adding emotion regulation, growth mindset, empathy, adaptability? It is worth building out a dynamic toolkit of skills.

“The good sports environments can be incredibly powerful,” Weissbourd acknowledged in Episode 11 of the Good Athlete Podcast, recognizing that the field of competition is a fantastic place to help kids manage destructive feelings like anger, violence, and shame. “You can have those feelings, and you can overcome them. And at the end of the game you can shake hands.”

Misguided coaches can fuel negativity. Poorly cultivated environments can permit and encourage aggression and rule-breaking with a win-at-all-costs mentality. There is too much ‘advice’ about heavy-handed discipline and “pay the price” mindsets in the sports world, and not enough self-awareness.

At one Chicago-area school (School A), a wrestling coach became angry with the way an opposing athlete was wrestling. When the teenager, unaware of his indiscretion, walked up and said “good match,” the coach looked the young man in the eyes, shook his head, “nope,” and refused to shake his hand. The situation went unaddressed by coaches from either school – a missed learning opportunity, at least.

Worse still, at the same school, football



Rick Weissbourd, Harvard University

players routinely made attempts at illegal hits to the head of an opposing team. One Friday night, when an opposing player was badly injured, players and coaches *cheered*. When the player from School A was “flagged” with a penalty for one of those illegal hits, School A’s head football coach threw down his headset and stormed onto the field to dispute the call. He was yelling at the referee while the opposing player lay motionless on the ground. (This incident was investigated by the state’s governing organization.)

Though it might be impossible to identify where exactly the sports culture at School A went off track, it should serve as an important reminder that, **more often than not, you get what you coach for**. We are always modeling behavior. How often do we coach for ‘character’ but model volatility?

Regardless of where you are in your coaching journey, the next step is a simple one: identify the outcomes you want.

## *“Does your behavior match your goal?”*

Whether you are aiming for grit and resilience, growth and optimism, or goal-directed behavior and accountability, it is essential to identify your goals and keep them front of mind.

Life lessons are not taught as an ephemeral byproduct of participation in sports, they are taught by you, Coach - intentionally embedded within the culture you create. All coaches should be able to thoughtfully respond to the question, “What do you coach for?”

Once you identify a set of intended outcomes, then you can begin to cultivate an approach which falls in line with those standards. If we do this, we will be on the path to transfer the best of ourselves to the future generations.

And if you ever feel like you are running on autopilot, or you’re not getting the results you seek, return to another essential question: **Does your behavior match your goal?**



**Jim Davis** is a former professional football player and champion powerlifter turned nationally recognized coach, author, and speaker.



LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:



“Leaders shouldn't just be asking their team to give the most that they can give. Leaders should help nurture their team's well-being so that they can continue to grow and go above and beyond the call of duty.”

— Robert Higgins

President at Brigham and Women's Hospital & Executive Vice President at Mass General Brigham

From the Good Athlete Podcast Episode 132



Good Athlete Podcast Excerpt  
Episode 18



# Mike Ditka: Super Bowl Special

Host: Jim Davis  
and Alex Nadolna



## Mike Ditka

FORMER CHICAGO BEARS HEAD  
COACH AND HALL OF FAME TIGHT END

*As the No. 1 draft pick of the Chicago Bears in 1961, Ditka proved not only his skills as a tough blocker but also showcased his ability as an elite receiver. He became one of the first tight ends to catch over 400 passes throughout his career.*



## On Work Ethic

**Jim: You mentioned that, as a player, everything was earned, nothing was given - there was plenty of opportunity, but what you got was earned.**

**Mike:** Yeah, I think that's the most important thing I learned. I appreciated everything. I appreciate all the encouragement and all the help I got from my coaches. But eventually, you've got to go out and do it. You know, nobody can do it but you. And if somebody else does it for you, you'll never know the satisfaction of doing it and being a winner or winning a championship.

And you know, if you're going to do something, anything - trying to be the best student, trying to be the best athlete - work, set your goals high in life. You set your goals low, then it's easy to reach them and you accomplish nothing. So that's what I really felt was important to me.

## On Walter Payton

**Jim: We can't talk about all the good, the potential good from coaching and sports, without talking about the guy that the NFL's Man of the Year is now named after, Walter Payton. And I know you love Walter. What was so special about him?**

**Mike:** Well, I'll tell you what, I was coaching with the Dallas Cowboys when we played the Bears one year in the playoffs. It must have been about 1979. And I worked for Coach Landry, so I had a look at the film. So I'm studying film, and I'm watching this guy, number 34. And I finally went into Coach Landry, and I said, Coach have you watched any of this film? He said, well no, what are you talking about?

Watch this guy, 34. And so well, he knew about him, but he didn't know he was *that* good. He was unbelievable. When we drafted him, it wasn't a great Bears team at that time. He was the team.

Walter Paytons come along once in a lifetime. Maybe once in a hundred years. I mean, first of all, as good as he was on the field, he was better off the field. With people, generosity, great heart, never say die. I mean, he did so much to help young people - encourage them and help them develop.

I think as a role model it would be hard to find one any better than Walter Payton.

## Advice to a Future Leader

**Alex: What advice would you give to a future leader about to embark on a similar journey that you have in your career?**

**Mike:** Well, do the best you can. Be the best you can. You can't sit back and listen to all the criticism that's going to come your way. It's going to come. There's a lot of non-believers, a lot of people going to doubt you. If you believe, you set your course, and you go your course.

Now, you might take a few arrows, you might take a few punches along the way, but if you don't waver, you'll be surprised how far you'll get. And you'll be surprised not only how far you'll get, but how many heads you'll turn on your way going there. To me, I think that's important. I think people who aren't themselves, who try to be somebody else just for the sake of society or to be accepted are full of crap. Be you.

For the full interview, check out Episode 18 of the Good Athlete Podcast:



# LOST BOYZ BASEBALL: THE IMPACT OF A WEIGHTROOM

The donations by the Good Athlete Project to create our workout room have been a tremendous asset. Initially, this room was a storage space not allowing the best utilization of that space.

As usual, Jim Davis, Director of the Good Athlete Project, and his team got wind of what we were thinking and immediately donated several thousand dollars of professional equipment.

In the past years, our youth have gotten stronger and more confident, especially our high school and college-aged youth involved with Lost Boyz.

The Good Athlete Project and their team have been a game changer on the Southside of Chicago.

- LaVonte Stewart  
Founder of Lost Boyz, Inc.



# 3 Ways to Coach for Inclusion, Equity, and Justice

By Maurice McDavid

Character - Opportunity - Leadership

***The role of “Coach” is one of the most impactful positions a person can have.***

The Good Athlete Project firmly believes in the research-backed idea that athletics provide a learning environment that is one of the most adept at producing results.

Imbedded in daily practice, bus rides, and countless interactions within the athletic environment, there is a unique opportunity to influence young people. The way coaches model behavior matters. The language used around those young people matters.

In this place of trust and constant influence, meaningful conversations can and should occur.

The unique qualities of the athletics space – assuming the culture has been well-cultivated – create the ideal setting for tough conversations. Unlike the classroom setting, there is plenty of physical space, implicit trust, and peers holding each other accountable to a common goal.

Here, we can grapple with anything. We should be prepared to grapple with difficult topics like those surrounding inclusion, equity, and justice.

Some will make the argument that athletics are a time for recreation that

## Beyond Strength

should not be interrupted – fair enough. There is time for both a recreational release, AND difficult conversations. That is part of what makes athletics unique. As a coach, you are trusted to provide guidance. Conversations will erupt, and often those conversations go far beyond the realm of sports. For anyone interested in coaching real, necessary life lessons, those conversations should include methods to thrive in the multicultural world in which we are living.

Even if we agree that this is necessary, not all coaches are comfortable having these conversations. With that in mind, here are three easy ways to encourage constructive conversations around these tough topics.

### **1) Bring in a Guest Speaker who has used athletics to overcome Adversity**

There is such power in seeing someone who looks like you or has had an experience like yours who is now successful. A guest speaker can do a lot of things to help motivate student-athletes.

In particular, seeing a former athlete who came from similar backgrounds as your students who can talk about how athletics is helping them be successful in an avenue outside of sports, helps students see how the skills *transfer* from one arena to another. Some of the young men I have coached have not had many positive examples of ‘manhood’ in their lives. It can do wonders to allow them to see success, to have a model to follow and look up to.



Once we allow our athlete to interact with real-world models, we can be explicit about the transfer of lessons learned through athletics to our home and professional lives. Sometimes, students need to hear these messages from multiple voices.

### **2) Teach students about the history of the Sport and include past or current Limitations**

Many sports have a history that includes people not being able to participate due to racism, sexism, classism or some other “ism”.

The history of how people overcame those barriers and went on to achieve greatness is a significant part of the history of the sport. Whether it is Black college running backs traveling into the South during the ‘60s or Billie Jean King growing the sport of women’s tennis, these are moments that allow us to confront issues of equity while building a love for the game.

*"Coaching is more than an opportunity to build programs that win on the playing field. It is a chance to build student-athletes that win in life."*

Not everything was like Disney's "Remember the Titans," but those difficult moments in sports give coaches the platform to talk about building the skill of resilience. Real-world narratives can provide amazing templates for these sorts of conversations.

### **3) Be Purposeful in building Team Relationships across races, socioeconomic status, ability level, etc.**

Speaking of "Remember the Titans," this movie provides a powerful example of purposeful team-building. While it is not always necessary to be as explicit as calling out the race of the players, teambuilding is a necessary step in preparing student-athletes.

Consider partnering students based on ability level, mixing a starter with a student who may be second or third string. The social capital that comes from being a premier athlete can be shared and helps everyone to feel a part of the team. Ask students to be responsible for making sure their teammates without transportation make it to early morning practices and weekend tournaments. This helps to *build social responsibility* in all athletes.

A team culture that pits one group of

athletes versus another will not produce the type of people we should be producing, regardless of the results on the field, though it often lacks production there too.

Coaching is more than an opportunity to build programs that win on the playing field. It is a chance to build student-athletes that *win in life*. While that may sound cliché, we know that is the motivation of great coaches.

Part of winning in our modern world is understanding the multiple cultures that are present in our world and being able to excel as part of a team that includes members representing all those cultures. We should feel free to fold in the idea that we are here on this earth for reasons beyond ourselves. Our ability to empower those around us to have success is exemplified by all of the great athletes throughout history. Modern empowerment must teach people to have conversations regarding inclusion, equity, and justice. Coaches, the ball is now yours to carry.



**Maurice McDavid** is a church pastor, principal at Turner Elementary School, and Co-Host of the Black, Brown & Bilingüe Podcast.



LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:



Good Athlete Podcast Excerpt  
Episode 132



# Dr. Robert Higgins: The Heart of Leadership

Host Jim Davis



**Dr. Robert  
Higgins**

CHIEF OF SURGERY AND PRESIDENT OF  
BRIGHAM & WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

*Robert Higgins, MD is an American surgeon working with heart-lung transplants. He is the president of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Executive Vice President of Mass General Brigham.*

## On Life After Sports

**Jim:** In sports, there's an incredible motivation to win. But when it doesn't go the way that you want, what lessons can be learned from it?

**Dr. Higgins:** Words are valuable, but actions speak louder than those words. So you have to live that and you have to prove to people that you are in this for a reason. That you will be the best doctor, the best scientist, a successful lawyer, a business person, or a physician. That's what distinguishes some of these opportunities.

**Jim:** Where, when it doesn't happen, have we lost it? Where do you think people sort of go astray?

**Dr. Higgins:** People tend to look in the mirror and say "It's about me" and they get pretty singularly focused on their own success. We do have a tendency in the world. It's about me. It's about my successes.

Unfortunately, that leads us to self-serving behaviors, which in some circumstances might be value-added, but for most instances, it's a multidisciplinary team approach that is going to bring you success. Self-serving strategies are often not productive.

It's not the individual contribution that makes all the difference. It's the collective vision for what you are trying to accomplish that makes the difference.

## On Moral Leadership

**Jim:** Having a toolbox of leadership styles that fit certain situations is a necessity, but are there times where it's solely your decision?

**Dr. Higgins:** When you're dealing with ethical

or moral issues, there's no room for building a consensus necessarily or getting an opinion. If something's wrong, you have to stand up for what's right.

You have to have a moral compass that is true North, and sometimes that's not a debate. That's just the way it's gotta be. So you have to figure out how to adapt the message without belaboring your leadership style to the circumstances and the environment in which you find yourself.

## On Building Trust

**Jim:** If you're coming into a new group, what are some of the first things that you do to develop rapport and trust?

**Dr. Higgins:** You have to listen and spend time really processing what people tell you. You have to develop a relationship with those folks. Then in your actions, especially for big things, ask for their opinion about what they believe is the best course of action forward and provide your rationale for why you're moving in a certain direction.

You also have to be true to your word and execute effectively. And then ultimately debrief about the decisions that have been made, what the outcomes were, and what we learned from it, and then process that for the next decision.

If you do that with a group of people, they will then trust the process as much as your leadership. Eventually, they'll say, "Wow, okay, this guy's got pretty good instincts. I'm going to trust his decision, even though it's not what I would have done. And I'll trust that. He will come back to me and ask me for my thoughts about how it worked out." Be true to your word.

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For the full interview, check out Episode 132 of the Good Athlete Podcast:



# Holmes' Story

Holmes Mouthwatering, established in 2008 by the entrepreneurial spirit of 15-year-old Ethan Holmes, draws inspiration from his grandfather's applesauce recipe. Initially focusing on introducing a homestyle, all-natural applesauce to retail markets, the business has evolved significantly.

Since entering the market in 2015, Holmes Mouthwatering has successfully sold over 250,000 units of applesauce regionally, both through B2B channels with prominent retailers like Whole Foods Market, Kroger, and Giant Eagle, as well as online to consumers nationwide. Having graduated from the Chobani Incubator and the SKU Coca-Cola accelerator, Holmes Mouthwatering is strategically positioned for growth.

In 2023, the company has rebranded and relaunched with a competitive product line featuring 3.2 oz applesauce pouches, available in three distinct flavors and packaging types. This innovative approach aligns with the brand's commitment to providing a homestyle, low-calorie snack made from nature's finest ingredients, without added sweeteners or artificial components, and boasting Non-GMO and Kosher certifications.

Holmes Mouthwatering has also contributed significantly to the community, with over 50,000 students exposed to entrepreneurship through company community programming and partnerships with the Young Entrepreneur Institute. The applesauce, crafted with chunks of real fruit, is now conveniently accessible at major retailers such as Walmart and Market District, both in-store and online. This marks a milestone for Holmes Mouthwatering as the first pouched applesauce of its kind, continuing to embody the brand's dedication to quality and authenticity.



*Order Today!*



# Holmes

MOUTHWATERING





OLYMPICS - LEADERSHIP - CHARACTER

# NOW WHAT? LIFE AFTER SPORT

BY CARISSA GUMP, OLY, MPA

At a certain point in their athletic journeys, athletes inevitably confront the daunting inquiry: "Now what?" This pivotal question is not exclusive to seasoned professionals or Olympians but also resonates with young athletes at the recreational level, middle school, high school, and collegiate level as well. The timing of this question varies, arising organically for some and forcibly for others, due to factors such as injuries or the inevitable aging-out process in sports (Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology, 2004). When the moment arrives, it is crucial for the athlete's physical and mental well-being to have a well-defined plan in motion.

While some sport programs acknowledge the significance of having a transitional plan to support athletes, unfortunately,

many do not. This is distressing, as it sends a disheartening message to athletes, implying their disposability. It suggests that they were only valued during their peak performance and not during times of struggle or when they decided to step away from being an athlete. The conversation with athletes and sports organizations needs a transformation, emphasizing that the "W" or the medal is not the ultimate priority.

What truly matters is the well-being of the athlete as an individual. Their identity is not solely defined by their sport; they are individuals deserving of care and consideration beyond their athletic achievements. For many athletes, their athletic journey is a relatively brief but impactful period in their lives. However, this time in their lives shapes their

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character and instill values that will be part of them for the rest of their lives.

Sport Coaches, Strength and Conditioning Coaches, Athletic Trainers, parents, and anyone else who is closely involved in an athlete's life should actively promote and support the athlete in developing a road map for life after sport. Encouraging athletes to envision and prepare for their post-sport life is crucial for fostering well-rounded individuals who can successfully navigate the transition beyond their athletic careers.

We've witnessed athletes retire and flourish, experiencing positive emotions toward life and functioning well both psychologically and socially (Keyes, 2003). We have also witnessed others who endure a life marked by challenges and mental health struggles, frequently arising from the unaddressed and unprepared-for difficulties of transitioning from sports.

The shift away from sports can lead to various impacts on individuals' mental well-being (Knights et al., 2016). Athletes should pursue their athletic endeavors while simultaneously engaging in part-time employment, part-time schooling, and/or volunteering to grow their skills

and experience that can enhance their resume.

By pursuing growth opportunities simultaneously outside of competing in sport, athletes are establishing groundwork for a smoother transition beyond their athletic endeavors, eliminating the uncertainty of the "Now what?" This strategic planning approach ensures that athletes already have a well-defined plan in place for the next phase of their lives.



**Carissa Gump** is a 2008 USA Weightlifting Olympian, the Executive Director of the NSCA Foundation, and a leader in non-profit management.



LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:



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*“The conversation with athletes and sports organizations needs a transformation... what truly matters is the well-being of the athlete as an individual.”*

Good Athlete Podcast Excerpt  
Episode 42

# Lisa Feldman Barrett: How Emotions Are Made

Host Jim Davis



**Lisa Feldman  
Barrett**

NEUROSCIENTIST, PSYCHOLOGIST, AND AUTHOR

*Lisa Feldman Barrett is a Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Northeastern University, where she focuses on affective science. She is the director of the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory. She is also the founding editor-in-chief of the journal Emotion Review.*

## On Cultivating Emotions

**Dr. Barrett:** Our brain is predicting all the time. When it doesn't predict well, and you have a prediction error, you feel more aroused because your brain is attempting to learn what you didn't anticipate so that you can predict it better next time. If you understand that, then you can architect your life a little better. You can put yourself into situations where there are a lot of prediction errors because you want to learn something new.

For example, if you want to regulate your emotions better, stopping yourself from feeling something in the moment and feeling something else is super hard to do. But if you know that you have some challenges that you're facing, what you want to do is equip your brain with a better menu of choices. When you have a little more energy, work hard to cultivate emotions that are new to you. Cultivate awe. Cultivate gratitude. Learn a broader vocabulary of emotional concepts. If you practice them, they become part of your brain's predictive machinery, and then you can use them much more easily.

For example, every single day you can take a moment and find something that you can feel awe about. You can walk on the sidewalk. You can see a weed pushing up through the cracks and you can feel awe at the power of nature. At first, it feels hard and you're like, what am I doing? But if you keep doing it, you can draw on those emotions more easily at other times.

## On Our Brain's Predictions

**Jim: Coaches often default to predictions. Like "Athlete A doesn't care" or "Athlete B isn't excited enough." Which risks pushing people to the side. Does that feel like a valuable thing to be aware of?**

**Lisa:** Your brain is faced with what we call a reverse inference problem. It constantly has to guess what the causes of certain sensations are when all it has access to are the effects, so that it knows what to do. So what it does is it uses its past experience.

When a coach looks at a kid's face, body posture, or tone of voice, the coach's brain is thinking "What is that like from the last time I saw this kid or when I saw a kid do this in this situation?" Of course, none of this is happening consciously, it just happens kind of automatically. The brain uses the past to make guesses about the immediate future, which becomes the present.

A coach or a leader is always guessing. We might guess well or we might guess poorly. But that guessing has an effect on the other person, especially a kid. If you label them, you are helping construct their experience in that moment, in a positive or negative way.

## Advice to a Future Leader

**Jim: What's some advice you would give to a future leader?**

**Dr. Barrett:** Read broadly. Don't just read in the field that you're interested in because you can learn from other fields. Listen closely to the people who do not agree with you because often they're not stupid. You might not ever agree with them, but at the bare minimum, they'll make you work harder to hone your own message and test your own ideas. And they'll reveal to you the flaws in your own thinking in ways that you might not have access to otherwise.

Second, don't let anybody tell you what's true. Figure it out for yourself. Don't take somebody else's word for it, decide for yourself what they say. You can talk to your colleagues, talk to your friends, and talk to people who don't agree with you, but in science, you cannot take somebody else's word for it.

Of course, when you don't know very much at certain points you have to take somebody else's word for a little while. But seeing something differently than someone else is the beginning of, not just a shift in your thinking, but you also cultivate a path that isn't there for other people to follow.

For the full interview, check out Episode 42 of the Good Athlete Podcast:

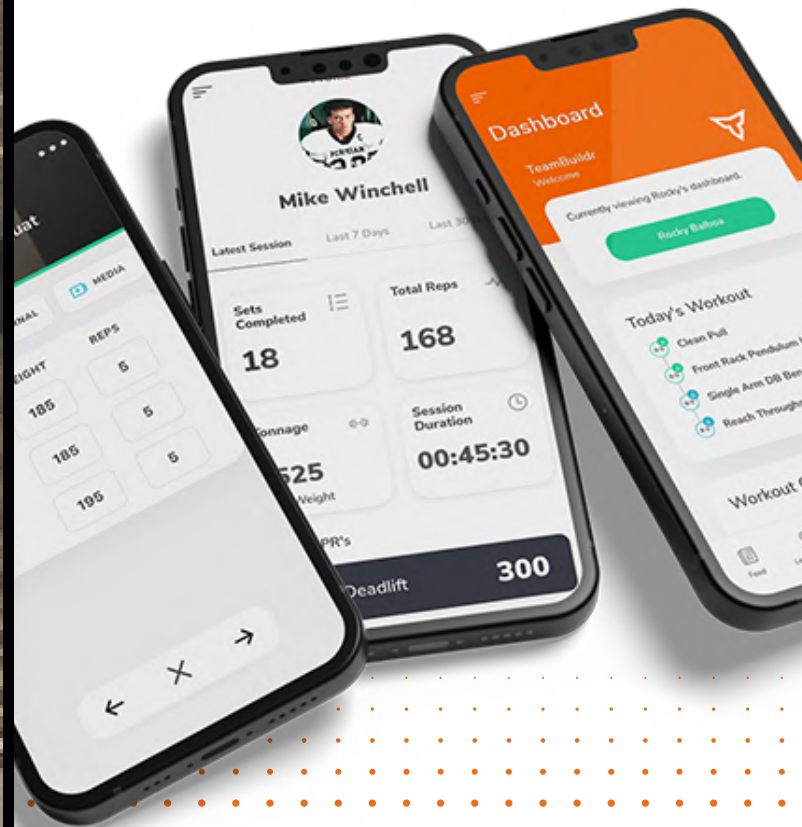




# CRAFTING THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS



# TEAMBUILDER



# Presence Creates Possibility

BY JANZEN HARDING

**SOCCER - LEADERSHIP - OPPORTUNITY**

When I first saw the video clip of Sarah Fuller running onto the field to make a squib kick in Vanderbilt's matchup against Missouri, I felt a surge of emotions: excitement, curiosity, anticipation, inspiration. And if representation can be considered an emotion, I felt that, too.

On November 28 2020, Sarah Fuller became the first woman to play in a Power 5 football game. Two weeks later, she kicked a field goal for the Commodores, becoming the first woman to score in a Power 5 football game. In the course of two weeks, Sarah Fuller had made her mark on football history.

Before her football debut, Sarah Fuller had just helped lead the Vanderbilt Women's Soccer team to SEC championship victory as their starting goalie. Shortly after the



championship, Vanderbilt's football program reached out, asking if she would step in and kick for the football team.

Fuller agreed and donned a helmet with the words "Play Like a Girl" inscribed on it. Perhaps she anticipated that her participation in a predominately male sport would garner media attention, but the impact that her performance made has spread deeper than she could have imagined.

*"Ability was never  
the question—  
possibility was"*

Actress America Ferrara once said, "Presence creates possibility." When Fuller suited up and played in a Power 5 college game, her presence on the team created a possibility that I was not even aware of. Of course, girls can play football: I grew up playing football with my neighbors and played flag football in collegiate intramurals and after college in an adult league. I've seen girls football leagues and an increasing number of female athletic trainers or team managers on collegiate sidelines.

Ability was never the question—possibility was—and Fuller created a whole new dimension of female possibility. Her presence on the field was a visual representation of a woman whose ability transcended the sex barrier that often

precludes women from participating in widely watched sports, like a Power 5 football game.

If you search #playlikeagirl you will find dozens of videos and photos posted by proud parents who are seeing their young daughters kicking field goals in living rooms, climbing into football gear and helmets, garbed in the kind of confidence gained from the realization of unlimited possibilities. For some, the inspiration might drive them to pursue a sport they love. Others, like myself, are inspired to be bold in chasing after opportunities, plowing past naysayers, and leaning into the confidence in knowing that we are good enough for the stages we earn our way onto.

Fuller's participation (furthermore, her success) changed the game for girls. The game she changed is not football—she hardly had enough time to do that. Fuller changed the game that girls play, where girls listen to the rule that they are not allowed, where they give up a sport



because it is not meant for them (or they are not meant for it), where they let social standards dictate their participation instead of letting their skills or talents speak for themselves.

I had never seen a woman represent her university wearing a full football uniform.

What other ways exist where girls and women can put their talents and passions to practice to represent their university that have hereto been discouraged or invisible? What other arenas have women been absent from that could benefit from their participation? How much inspiration have younger girls lost out on because they saw no representation?

Girls love sports. In a way, Fuller gave girls permission to continue to love sports.

As a female coach and educator, my takeaway from watching Sarah Fuller is to take a play from her book and be as visible and representative as I can. She encouraged me to continue pursuing things that I love, regardless of barriers, naysayers, or perception, and this extends beyond sports.

I am emboldened to chase after the things I am passionate about, and my goal is to live that out in order to give permission for my students and athletes to do the same:

The permission to be who you are and to boldly dream big.



**Janzen Harding** is a graduate of Harvard University, a coach, and a wholistic learning specialist for athletes both on and off the court.



LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:



“Be true to you. Find your 'powerlane' and stick to it. Be consistent on who you are, it's gonna pay off in the long run.”

— Lauren Chamberlain

Former All-American Softball Player,  
Founder of LC Management Group, &  
Ambassador for MLB

From the Good Athlete  
Podcast Episode 108





# COMMUNITY SERVICE SPOTLIGHT



For the Powerlifting State Championship, the Board of the Illinois High School Powerlifting Association (IHSPLA) instituted a "diaper drive" challenge to all teams. The "diaper need" dilemma is worse than one might think.

For parents who can't afford new diapers, kids can stay in wet and soiled diapers for an unsafe amount of time. Disposable diapers are sometimes rinsed and reused, unfortunately resulting in a higher risk of rashes and urinary tract infections.

Further, a Yale University study revealed that low-income mothers who experience diaper needs are more likely to develop depression. This unfortunate dilemma impacts the entire family.

Thousands of diapers later, the IHSPLA had gone Beyond Strength to rally their community of athletes around an important social cause. Service has to be named and modeled if we want the lesson to resonate with athletes. Try it with your team today!

## Additional Service work from the IHSPLA Community

"Really grateful for all the teams who brought diapers. They will support families at the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago, a great place with great people doing great work. We try to keep service on the minds of our athletes at all times."

"Being part of a community and serving others, especially those in need, that's part of life. If sports are going to teach life lessons, that part has to be included."

-Brian Buglio  
State Meet Director & IHSPLA Board Member



Thanks to all the Saint Viator Lion Powerlifters who came out to help with the St. Coletta Christmas Party! These athlete are truly dedicated to Service - a core tenant of the IHSPLA!

Glad to see this Warren H.S. powerlifter helping out his community, volunteering at "Feed my Starving Children" - This is what we are all about!! Going #BeyondStrength to support his community!

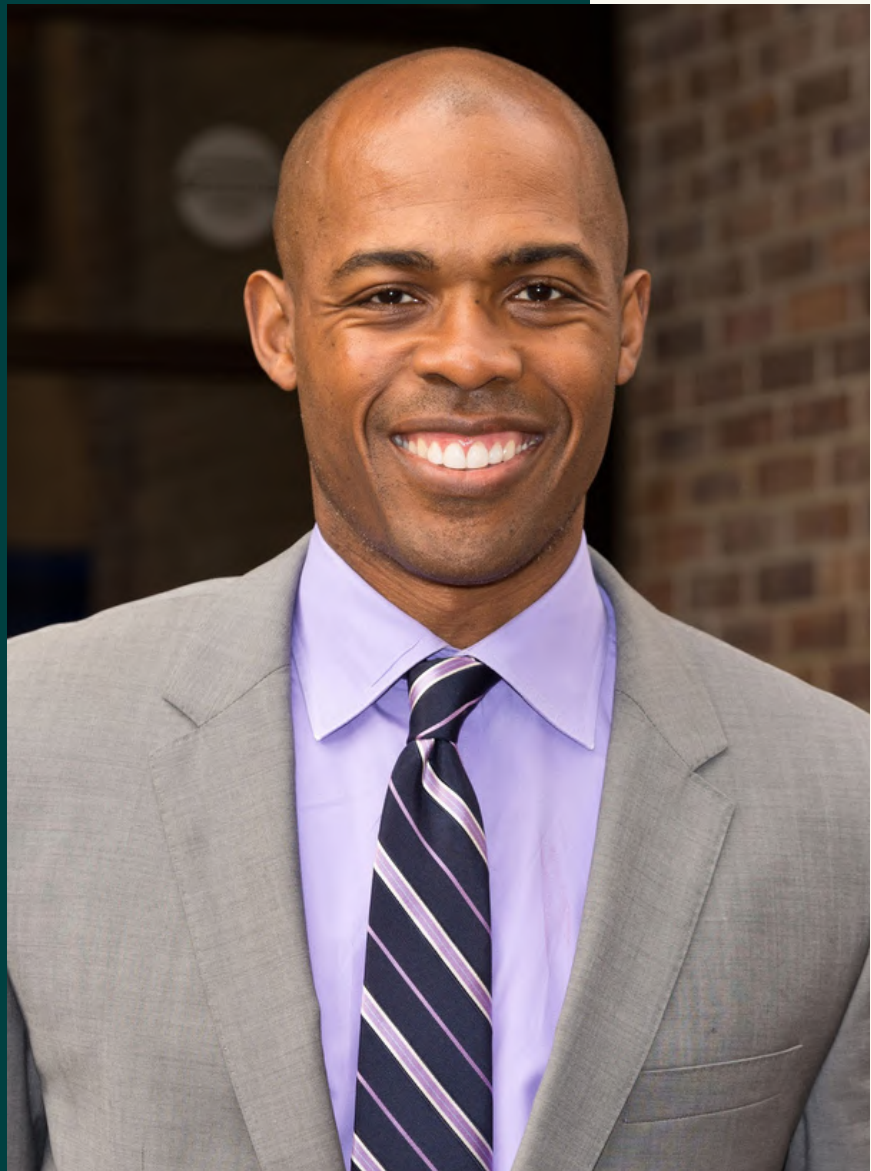


Good Athlete Podcast Excerpt  
Episode 75



# Dr. Ian Smith: Clean and Lean

Host Jim Davis



## Dr. Ian Smith

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR, PHYSICIAN,  
AND TV PERSONALITY

*Ian K. Smith, MD is an American physician, author, and television host best known for hosting The Doctors. In 2007, he launched the 50 Million Pound Challenge, a national weight-loss initiative.*

## On Nutrition Motivation

**Jim: Why is nutrition so essential to all of us? Learners, practitioners, et cetera?**

**Dr. Smith:** Poor nutrition has a major impact on the scholastic aptitude and just the learning receptivity of kids, there's no doubt about it. When people have poor access to proper nutrition, that means that they are suboptimally fueling their bodies. And when you have suboptimal fuel, then you are unable to have peak performance, whether it's in the classroom, sports arena, or work.

**Jim: We try to get people to eat better and focus on their nutrition by reframing the why. There's got to be an understanding. There's got to be motivation.**

**Dr. Smith:** I am of the belief that it often doesn't matter how you bring someone into the tent. It's about getting them into the tent first. Then once they get into the tent, they can see and you can open their eyes to all the possibilities and all the options.

It's hard for people to see themselves 20, 30, 40 years down the road. They can't relate to that. So I say whatever it is to get them into the tent, particularly a young athlete. Like, "if you do this, you have a greater chance of being faster on the track or being able to hit more threes like Steph Curry," these kinds of things.

It's relatable. It's all about how you make the concept and the process relatable to someone.

## On Sports Nutrition

**Jim: What are some cornerstone, bedrock nutrition staples that you would recommend athletes include in their lives?**

**Dr. Smith:** Athletes don't hydrate enough. Even a person who's not an athlete, loses water throughout the day in all kinds of ways. It's not just by sweating. You lose water through your lungs.

You lose it through your elimination, through your skin, through your head, breathing, everything. So hydration is key.

Number two, I don't think they do a good job of electrolyte replacement. You lose sodium, chloride, and potassium. You have to replace these things.

You also have to understand the difference between fast carbs and slow carbs, and when it's important to have fast carbs, relative to your workout, or relative to your game. You have to understand the difference between what nutrition works for practice and training, and what nutrition works for game time. Two different types of nutritional approaches should be had during those times because your demand is different. When your demands are different, your types of food should be different.

## On Self-Talk

**Jim: I'm incredibly interested in self-talk: the language that we use to frame the situations that we engage with and the language used in a potentially complicated situation.**

**Dr. Smith:** I'm always engaged in self-talk and convincing myself that I got it, that I can do this. Self-talk is extremely helpful and important and people have to develop it for themselves. Everyone has to find what it is, whether it's word cues or a situational vision.

Everyone has to find what it is that not just motivates them, but gives them the kind of adrenaline and the confidence that they need to be able to carry out a certain task. For me, I say to myself constantly, "I know how to do this. I can do this. Focus. Focus."

It also looks different for different people, but self-talk is very important. And it's not just in sports. Self-talk is extremely important for life in general.

For the full interview, check out Episode 75 of the Good Athlete Podcast:





STRENGTH - LEADERSHIP - CHARACTER

## 5 KEYS TO EMPOWERING ATHLETES THROUGH STRENGTH

BY JUSTIN LOUDON, GARY MCCHALICHER, AND JIM DAVIS

Sports offer the most powerful learning environment on the planet, IF we decide to use that platform wisely. Power does not always elicit positive outcomes. While 'sports gone wrong' is still a daily headline, intentional, thoughtful coaching can teach lessons that last a lifetime. For those who are willing to go beyond strength and teach those lessons, the weightroom offers a unique opportunity to teach them.

The season lasts three months, offseason training spans the rest of the year – in training, we have an extended teaching period. With a combination of experiences ranging from strength training, teaching, and athletic administration, we have

identified 5 key concepts to ensure you can go Beyond Strength to maximize the potential of the weightroom as a learning space.

### **Build Relationships**

What makes an athlete tick? Motivation requires alignment with the motives of your people – the only way to accurately source an athlete's motives is to ask them. Learn about them. Talk to them. Establishing strong connections allows a degree of education that is difficult to find in other realms of sport. The athletes have their helmets off, they are not face down in the water or tiptoeing a high beam – they are there with you in the same room, in close proximity, and eager to learn... if you're willing to

prioritize a relationship to the human being first.

## **Provide Healthy Challenge**

The adage that an athlete does not care how much you know until they know how much you care (which is why building relationships is a top priority) is absolutely true. When trust has been built, use it wisely. Challenge offers a great way to empower young people. While discipline is crucial, athletes also crave challenges that push them beyond their perceived limits. Even when athletes claim not to like challenges, overcoming them leads to a sense of accomplishment, assuming the coach takes time to frame the experience.



The coach should name the challenge, identify that it is the athlete who has faced it, and acknowledge that success in the face of the challenge is theirs, they earned it. Coaches should provide opportunities for athletes to test their limits and celebrate their successes, no matter how small. As challenge-tolerance increases, the coach can push even further. With an

atmosphere that embraces a growth mindset, the possibilities are endless.

## **Create Small Victories**

Create environments where athletes can collect 'wins'. Each new PR, each attendance milestone, is worthy of celebration. There are few athletic settings where quantifiable improvements, such as a five-pound weight increase, are notable. If a quarterback does everything asked of him but throws two interceptions in a game, he collects feedback that is not necessarily indicative of his process – the process is where transferrable life lessons are often formed. But if that same athlete shows up routinely to training, works hard, focuses on technique, rests well, and shows up the next day (tired or not) ready to keep working and support his teammates throughout... life lessons are truly being learned. And we have data to back it up.

Celebrate the 5lb PR. Celebrate a half-inch improvement in broad jump. Celebrate great attitudes and gritty competitive nature. Reward what you want to see more of and it will stick.

## **Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to see things from another's perspective, to understand the situation and feelings of someone else. It could also be defined as intentional social and human awareness. In some

## Beyond Strength

weightrooms, the term might sound soft. It is anything but. In fact, it can be incredibly difficult but always powerful. Whether it is related to home life, school, injuries, or personal confidence, coaches should adapt their coaching style to accommodate individual needs when possible. If you are working with high school or college athletes, take the temperature of the room and shift to a competitive game day. They will still get work in. Meet them where they are. If you notice an athlete is more reserved and down than usual, care enough to focus on the person first. Fostering an environment where athletes feel seen, understood, and supported will improve all outcomes.

## Be Intentional

Should a swimmer spend a full day doing sprints? Should an offensive lineman spend the day running miles? Strength coaches are intentional about how they train athletes for physical outcomes. They evaluate teaching methods, adapt strategies, and ensure that students not only receive information but also understand and apply it. This applies to all levels of coaching.

Do you want your athletes to be excited about what they are doing? Model excitement. Do you want them to build emotion regulation? Don't throw a chair across the room when someone walks in late. Name the

qualities, physical and psychological, that you are hoping to develop, then align your strategies to those outcomes. When asked the question, "Does your behavior match your goal?" we should all be able to say yes.

## Moving Forward

Empowering athletes in the weight room extends beyond physical training. Note the importance of building relationships, challenging athletes, creating small victories, practicing empathy, and being intentional about outcomes. By intentionally incorporating these principles into coaching practices, strength coaches can create a transformative and truly empowering environment that extends well beyond the weight room.



**Justin Loudon** is the head of Strength & Conditioning at Ezell-Harding Christian School. He was also named the 2021 Colorado Strength Coach of the Year by the NHSSCA.



**Gary McChalicher** is the Chairman of the NSCA's High School Professional Development Group. He is also a Professor in Kinesiology at Towson University.



**Jim Davis** is a former professional football player and champion powerlifter turned nationally recognized coach, author, and speaker.



LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:





# The Good Athlete Podcast

The podcast features conversations with elite athletes, coaches, and educators who go Beyond Strength to teach lessons that last a lifetime.



## Episode 150

Dominique Robinson

Defensive End for the Chicago Bears, Robinson was picked up in the 2022 NFL Draft in the 5th Round by the Bears.



LINK TO PODCAST EPISODE:



## Episode 134

Dr. Tim Dohrer

Dr. Tim Dohrer is the Director of Educator Leadership & Partnerships at Northern Illinois University.



LINK TO PODCAST EPISODE:



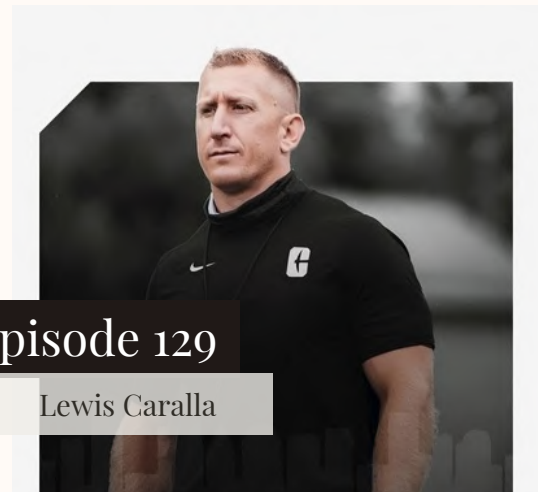
## Episode 139

Abby Seitz

Abby Seitz is an active-duty Marine for more than 10 years and continues to influence the Marine Corps Culture.



LINK TO PODCAST EPISODE:



## Episode 129

Lewis Caralla

Lewis Caralla, is the Director of Strength & Conditioning for the Charlotte 49ers with over 15 years of experience.



LINK TO PODCAST EPISODE:





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Reach out to discover how you can get the Good Athlete Project on your campus. We offer team workshops, professional development, and highly individualized consultation to help maximize the athletic experience on your campus!



“

“I’ve worked with leadership mentors before, but I have not met anyone that balances intelligence, care, and an understanding of the human condition in a more complete way. Jim and the GAP strategies have made our team better. He has made me better.”

”



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Going #BeyondStrength to maximize the potential of Athletics as education.

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