

**PLAY LIKE  
A CHAMPION  
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

# CHAMPION COACH NOTE

## The Joy of Play



*Cross Country Runners Hit the Course in Seattle*

*College rowing coach Susan Saint Sing has a quote that often appears in our Play Like a Champion coach clinics. Sing says, "A child at play is in touch with the purest essence of the energy of God." Meant to refer to both the athlete's connection to God and the importance of play among children, these words capture an essential element of the ideal youth and high school sports experience. They speak to the importance of joy.*

*The presence of joy may be the difference between a positive experience and one the athlete would rather forget. In environments that prioritize joy, children participate with broad smiles. The sound of laughter is heard echoing from the fields of competition. Athletes compete with a freedom and confidence that comes from being fearless. They work hard, but it's evident they are enjoying the opportunity to give their best effort.*

*Too often we see the opposite. Where joy is absent, play quickly becomes work; the child burdened by expectation and afraid to fail. Instead of smiles, the faces of young athletes seem heavy with pressure. A team often lacks cohesion and the athletes often seem lethargic, as though they can't wait to be finished with the practice or game. It feels as though something is missing.*

*Perhaps that's because it is in joy where God feels most present in sport. It is in joyful environments that God's essence seems to consume the competition. We are reminded that our children participate in an activity intended to be fun, one where we seek to develop virtue and to allow children to use their God-given gifts to glorify Him. Watching a young athlete truly at play, it is as if nothing else matters but remaining in that moment, in that presence of God and a game He*

created.

*No matter the age group, our programs should always strive to embody the connection between authentic joy and sport. At all levels, our goal is to provide opportunities for children to play, to develop skill, and to grow in their relationship with God. The ultimate source of joy is God, so if we use our athletic gifts to glorify him, then competition can exist as a manifestation of the joy we find in Him. Too often we believe that joy comes from winning a game. While winning is great, the joy we seek is not contingent upon results but comes from the approach and the journey of an individual or team.*

*Together we can make sure joy remains an integral part of our teams and the games we love.*

## **The Weekly Game Plan**

**Add two things to your practice plan this week that remind your team that sports are meant to be played with joy. These could be...**

- **Fun Drills**
- **A Team-Building Activity**
- **A surprise designed to break-up the hard work they've been doing as they prepare for the season.**

**No matter what you choose, intentionally working to assure that practices and games are played with joy will help your team in many different ways this season!**

*Each week we'll provide a short reflection or challenge related to the note's topic. These are designed to help coaches, parents and athletes consider how you can bring the Play Like a Champion approach to life in practical ways at your parish, school or league.*

## **A Prayer for Coaches**

Lord, thank you for the gift of the young athletes you have entrusted to my care this season. Grant that I may have the graces necessary to help them develop physically, mentally and spiritually. May they experience the joy of play and competition in the practice and games ahead. Help me to teach them so that individual and team will maximize the gifts God has given them. May our team always exhibit sportsmanship consistent with our Christian values and may we strive to glorify You in all that we do. Help me to set a positive example as a coach. May I always seek to serve Christ and His children through this role of Coach Minister. Amen.



You may request Play Like a Champion's "God Be In My Sport Prayerbook" through email: [information@playlikeachampion.org](mailto:information@playlikeachampion.org)

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