FIELDS OF FAITH

A GOD FIRST APPROACH TO FOOTBALL
Football is an amazing game. It teaches so many valuable life lessons that go beyond the field. I have had the opportunity to coach youth football since I was 18 years old and 17 years later I’m still learning every day. Every season brings about new faces, new personalities, and new challenges. In all my years of coaching I have never had a season where a player did not have some sort of life altering event occur during the season that didn’t challenge me as a mentor not just a coach. During this time I have helped players deal with everything from problems at home, school, loss of a family member, you name it and the odds are I have a story about it.

As a coach I have been blessed with the ability to motivate and inspire young athletes but even more blessed with the opportunity to speak to them about Jesus. With God being removed from our public schools it is important that these kids get a few minutes of worship each day between Sundays to build a stronger spiritual foundation that can benefit them far more than learning x’s and o’s. Every year since the league began we have included First Things First but this year I wanted to take it one step further. I hope each of you as coaches, athletic directors, whatever your title may be can take something from this and help not only build a stronger foundation of faith for your players/cheerleaders but maybe even for yourself. Thanks and God Bless!

Matt Lawdermilk
PBYFL PRESIDENT
THE ATHLETES PRAYER

LORD, PLEASE CLEAR MY HEAD OF ALL DISTRACTION, AND MY HEART OF BURDENS I MAY BEAR, SO I MAY PERFORM MY VERY BEST, KNOWING THAT YOU’LL ALWAYS BE THERE.

PLEASE LIFT ME UP BEFORE THE MOMENT, SO THROUGH YOUR EYES I MAY SEE, AND HAVE A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING, AS THE GAME UNFOLDS BEFORE ME.

WITH GREAT COURAGE I WILL MEET THIS CHALLENGE, AS YOU WOULD HAVE ME DO, BUT KEEP ME HUMBLE AND REMIND ME, THAT MY STRENGTH COMES FROM KNOWING YOU.

THEN WHEN ALL EYES ARE UPON ME, AT THE END OF THIS GAME, I WILL TURN THEIR EYES TO YOU O’LORD AND TO THE GLORY OF YOUR NAME.

-AMEN
“TAKE A KNEE”

This phrase means different things depending on your situation and that which you wish to achieve. In regards to football Wikipedia gives the following definition:

“In American football, a quarterback kneel, also called taking a knee, genuflect offense, or victory formation occurs when the quarterback immediately kneels to the ground, ending the play on contact, after receiving the snap.”

Over the past few years this gesture has been used to be show of faith by many athletes, most notably Tim Tebow. It has also been used as an act of defiance or protest by players such as Colin Kaepernick. As a league our stance is obvious and consistent. We are a Christian based league and make no apologies for our faith. The First Things First program is one of the ways that we not only mentor but minister to the youth that we have been entrusted with.
STRENGTH

Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

This is one of my all-time favorite bible verses. It applies to life in so many ways and in regards to football it is especially useful.

So many times in the course of off season conditioning or even during regular practice I hear a kid utter the dreaded “I can’t” and as a coach that is a pet peeve. Not just because it conveys a negative attitude but also because it shows the athlete has self-doubt. A lot of times coaches see potential in a player that they may not yet see themselves so as a coach this is a frustrating thing to hear. God gives you abilities to use to glorify his name. Those abilities can be physical, mental or whatever the case may be. The fact is if you’ve chosen to play the sport of football you’ve done so knowing the physical, mental, and emotional toll it can and will take on you. Saying “I can’t” is accepting failure and defeat and those are two things that are not tolerated on the football field and should not be tolerated in everyday life. Take time to teach your players the value of mental toughness as well as physical for without the brain leading the way the body goes nowhere.
COURAGE

Joshua 1:9

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

It’s easy for us grown men to tell these boys to “get back out there and don’t be scared to get hit!” but once upon a time many of us were their age out there shaking in our cleats hoping not to get the snot knocked out of us……or worse. Courage isn’t inherited it is learned through experience. It is forged out of hours on the practice field building confidence through repetition.

Honestly it is much easier to be courageous on the field than in real life. On the field there are rules that are in place to protect you. You wear padding and helmets that have as much scientific testing as the first NASA space shuttle. Coaches giving you direction and parents cheering you on. Unfortunately much more courage is needed once you walk off the field. Be it the dreaded “talk” on the way home about your performance or maybe something at home or school that has nothing to do with football at all. But rejoice in the fact that God follows you wherever you go. He is there on the field with you smiling as you play. He is in the car with you protecting you on your way home. He is there in your time of need at home or at school. He can give you the direction you need you simply have to ask…and LISTEN. Ephesians 6:11 says “Put on the full armor of God”. This is of course not literal but figurative. If you walk with the Lord wherever you go there is nothing to fear. Your faith in him will protect you like the equipment you wear on the field protects you. It would be foolish to play without a helmet but not quite as foolish as living without faith in him.
HUMILITY

Matthew 23:12

“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

I like to call it the “Manziel Effect”. For so long people heap praises on you. Coaches build schemes around you. You’re constantly told how good you are and slowly you start believing your own hype. You become arrogant and complacent. Coach can’t tell you anything you don’t already know and mom and dad are right you SHOULD be starting both ways. Then reality hits. Be it injury, coaching change, or somebody who is actually better than you comes along and BOOM ...... you’re humbled.

Now you have a choice to make. Do you quit or do you put your ego aside and work for it? What should be a no brainer unfortunately more often than not results in a tremendously gifted athlete walking away from the game. I’ve seen kids with all the talent and potential in the world walk away, or worse yet be pulled by parents, because they were not the star. Being humbled is not the end of the world, it’s quite the opposite actually it’s the beginning of change. You already have the ability it’s a mindset issue. A wise person once told me change your attitude and you change your world. Put the team before yourself. Become coachable again. Be a leader instead of a distraction. Humility is not a punishment it is a way to remain grounded. No single football player has ever won a game nor have they lost one. It’s a team sport so above all else be a team player.
LEADERSHIP

Timothy 4:12

“Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, our conduct, your love, faith, and purity.”

Some people assume maturity comes with age. Referring back to my “Manziel Effect” I think it’s safe to assume that is a myth. Maturity comes with life experience and attitude in my opinion. There are many things you are taught in football such as team work, value of hard work, unselfishness etc. and these can be beneficial on the field it is important that it carries over into your home life and school as well. Like the verse says some will assume your this or that based totally on your age but most will judge you by your actions….good or bad. Many of football player has fallen from grace not by their actions on the field but because of their actions off of it. How you treat others, how you conduct yourself in public, your relationships with people as well as with God are how you will be perceived to the public. It is essential that you maintain good grades, be respectful to your parents, teachers and other authority figures. There is a fine art to balancing being a monster on the field and a gentleman off of it but when you master it the possibilities are endless.


Proverbs 24:16

“All men fall but only great men rise again.”

Football is by its very nature a violent sport. NFL players have compared it to getting into 45 car crashes in one day. The physical toll it takes on your body is astounding. Getting knocked down dozens of times within 60 minutes can wear you down physically as well as mentally. You have to make the choice in your mind each and every time to get back up and go again 30 seconds later. It takes a ton of physical toughness to achieve such a task. I think the mental aspect of it is overlooked quite a bit though. When my oldest son was 5 to 6 years old playing flag then tackle he got knocked down..... a LOT. There were several times he would stay down for longer than he should. You could see him contemplating in his mind “if I stay down I get a break and some water........”. More often than not he would slowly get up and give me the ok sign. It is those mental battles throughout the course of a game that will not show up on any stat sheet but reveals the most about you players.

Success in football is measured in large part in wins and losses. This is reinforced by one of the founding fathers of football Vince Lombardi’s famous quote “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing!” My question to you as coaches is do you agree? If your team plays their heart out and lays it all on the line for you for 60 minutes but comes up short on the scoreboard is it a complete and total loss? Of course the records will reflect this but what about you? Showing your team how to be gracious in defeat and learn from their losses means really you never really “lose” per say.....you win or you learn. Rise up, dust yourself off and give it 100% on the next play.
PREPARATION

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified from the prize.”

There are so many parts to this passage in the Bible. It could be broken down many ways to prove several points but we will focus on the subject at hand. Every kid on every team is playing for the championship rings. Play to the best of your ability and help your team in any way that is asked of you. I want you to keep in mind however that the rings will tarnish and be outgrown. Many will be stored away or even lost. If your only purpose is to win the ring you’re missing out on so much. “We do it to get a crown that lasts forever” is not about a crown at all but a place in Heaven. Do not do anything without purpose and practice what you preach as players and coaches. Your kids look up to you and just as there are expectations of their behavior off the field this applies to you as well. Prepare these boys and girls for life not just the next game. Show them the right path and be an example. Preparing for a game is simple when compared to preparing these kids for the real world. Don’t just be present at practice, be present in their lives as much as you can. Some may not have a father figure, some may need an ear to listen. Prepare them for the crown not just the ring. As it pertains to practice, well that’s easy. Coaches have you practice plan laid out ahead of time. Don’t wait until the kids are stretching to ask your other coaches ‘hey what should we work on today. If you plan to utilize cones or dummies or anything else have them laid out and ready to go. This indicates to the parents and players that you are organized and well prepared. I know
this takes time and you may need to recruit your other coaches and maybe a parent or two to assist but you will find your practice is much more productive. Kids need to come to practice physically and mentally ready. Be focused even when you’re not in the drill pay attention. The saying goes “you play how you practice”. Do not waste the opportunity to improve. Do not half heartedly go through a drill or play. Every repetition is an opportunity to get better! And remember Colossians 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.”
After getting injured early on in the NCAA National Championship game and watching his team fall to Alabama an ESPN reporter talked to Colt McCoy as he walked off the field. Years of hard work culminating in a National Championship appearance only to be injured, nobody would have blamed him for being upset. What he said to the reporter though speaks volumes to his character and faith.

Reporter: “Colt what was it like for you to watch your last collegiate game from the sideline?”

Colt: “I love this game, I have a passion for this game. I’ve done everything I can to contribute to my team and we made it this far and it’s unfortunate that I didn’t get to play. I would have given everything I had to be out there with my team. Congratulations to Alabama, I love the way our team fought. Garret Gilbert stepped in and played as good as he could play and he did a tremendous job. I always give God the glory. I never question why things happen the way they do. God is in control of my life and I know if nothing else I’m standing on the rock.”
The Bible defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 as:

“The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

What does faith mean to you? In a football sense you have to have faith in your coaches to teach you correctly. You have to have faith in your teammates to do their assignment on every play. These are things though that you can visibly see, you know that your teammates are there. In the Bible it also says “we walk by faith, not by site”. Having complete and total faith in that which your cannot see is hard. In biblical times Jesus performed miracles in plain view and still many doubted him. Now days those miracles are much harder to recognize some times and the evil of the world makes it even harder.

If you have accepted him into your heart and confessed with your mouth and believe in your heart that he is your Lord and Savior it becomes easier. Living a Christian lifestyle and having a relationship with God is one of the most satisfying things you will ever experience. You will be tested and you will be tempted but faith in the Lord will give you the strength to rise above the ways of the world. Pictured below is Patriots special teams captain Matthew Slater. If you don’t know him find out about him.
RESPECT

2nd Corinthians 5:20

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled with God.”

Much like the section on Leadership this stresses a good attitude towards others especially those in authoritative roles such as parents, teaches, coaches, and officials. All too often now you see stories in the news or videos on social media of coaches and or parents attacking officials both verbally and physically. There are also several documented cases of parents assaulting coaches and if you watch Friday Night Tykes a coach assaulting a player. None of this is tolerated by the PBYFL. The coaches are volunteers and their donation of time to these kids invaluable. In recent news there was a story of two football players assaulting ref supposedly at the direction of their coach. This is far from a Christian attitude. Teaching the boys to respect the officials regardless of the calls will teach them respect and accountability. This will be more easily instilled in the players if they observe you as coaches interacting with the officials in a mature respectful manner. Be mindful a lot of what kids learn from us is through observation not just by what they are told.