

FIVE GREAT TRANSFORMATIONAL

TEAM ACTIVITIES

Here are five things we did with our players during my time as the head football coach at Roncalli High School that I thought really helped create great team chemistry, while also laying a strong foundation for faith formation. Although I was a high school head coach, I believe these concepts can certainly be beneficial when working with youth players as well, perhaps with some minor adjustments.

1. **TEAM PRAYER** – I firmly believe one of the best team building activities you can have is praying with your team every day. I am convinced the saying “The team that prays together, stays together, and plays together” is certainly true! We would pray after every practice, and before and after every game. We would strongly encourage our players to lead these prayers. This was always a great way to establish team leadership, connectivity, and trust. I would also invite the opposing team to kneel with us in the middle of the field after every game for prayer with both teams intermingled with joined hands. I would invite our public school opponents to join us as well, and most of them would accept the offer! I always felt this helped both teams put life back in perspective after the game!!
2. **THEME OF THE WEEK** – Each week on Monday before we went out for practice, I would introduce a new virtue for that week. I would have a story or a poem to share to emphasize the theme. After this introduction, each of our position coaches would find time during the week to meet with their position players (either with the whole group or one-on-one) to discuss the virtue. I would usually have a few questions for the coaches to help guide the discussion. This definitely built a strong bond between the assistant coaches and their position players! Several samples of these “lessons” can be found at the bottom of this toolbox, and I will be adding more lessons each month to this section. I will also talk more about the SportsLeader program later as well. This is a wonderful organization that specializes in “virtues of the week” for athletes. There is more about SportsLeader under the “Lessons” section of this toolbox.
3. **SENIOR SCRIPTURE** – Every Friday in the fall, we would celebrate Mass in the chapel after school to help us prepare for the game. Our senior players would take turns sharing the Senior Scripture for the week. They would pick a favorite scripture verse or perhaps a poem that they felt tied in with the theme versus that opponent. They would get up in front of the team and read their scripture verse or poem and would then share how they felt this applied to the game for that week. They would then end by leading us in prayer. Our seniors always took great pride in this and did an amazing job! Many of them would then hang their scripture verse on their locker for the rest of the season.
4. **SENIOR LETTER TO THEIR PARENTS** – Each season for our last regular season home game, I would have each of our seniors write a letter to their parents. I would give them three basic guidelines on Monday of that week:
 - a. Thank your parents for the countless sacrifices they make for you.
 - b. Tell them that you love them.
 - c. Let them know you are proud to be their son!

After giving these guidelines, I would encourage them to create something in their own words that would be a keepsake their parents would want to hold onto forever! I would have the seniors turn the

letters in to me in a sealed envelope before the game. I would hand the letters back to the players after pre-game warm-ups to hand to their parents as they were escorting their parents to the middle of the field as they were introduced. The parents could then read the letters after they returned to the stands or after getting home from the game. Over the years, I have had a handful of parents tell me later that this senior letter changed their relationship with their son for the better. They said it opened up their line of communication and provided plenty for them to discuss later. Our parents always appreciated these letters from their sons a great deal.

5. BUILDING THE FORTRESS – Each week this was one of my favorite parts of every game. After the pre-game talk in the locker room before heading out to the field, we would kneel together in a tight circle. After prayer, we would “build the fortress.” The players, still in a tight circle, would stand and touch their helmets overhead, and I would say a shortened version of Saint Patrick’s Breastplate prayer. I would say a line, and the players would repeat it. We would then move to the next line. Here is the shortened version:

“Christ behind me,

Christ before me,

Christ under my feet,

Christ beside me,

Christ over me,

Let all around me be Christ.”

After they repeated the last line I would ask, “With Christ in our hearts, whom shall we fear?” To this the players would respond very energetically, “No one!” We would then head out to the field for the opening kickoff.

We called this “building the fortress” because we felt as if we were creating armor around our team before going to battle. This was always powerful because the players were always extremely focused. As I looked them in the eye, many were usually a bit emotional and would have tears in their eyes. I then knew they were ready to do something special on the field.

These are five team and faith developing activities we did over the years, and I do believe these helped create stronger team chemistry, as well as a sense of playing for a higher purpose. Again, I think all of these can be done effectively at any level of athletics with some minor adjustments to make them age appropriate.

In more recent years, our program began working with SportsLeader, which I mentioned earlier in the theme of the week section. There are some really neat ceremonies that we picked up from SportsLeader, and there is a section at the bottom of the “LESSONS” list that describes these ceremonies and the SportsLeader program in more detail. Check it out!