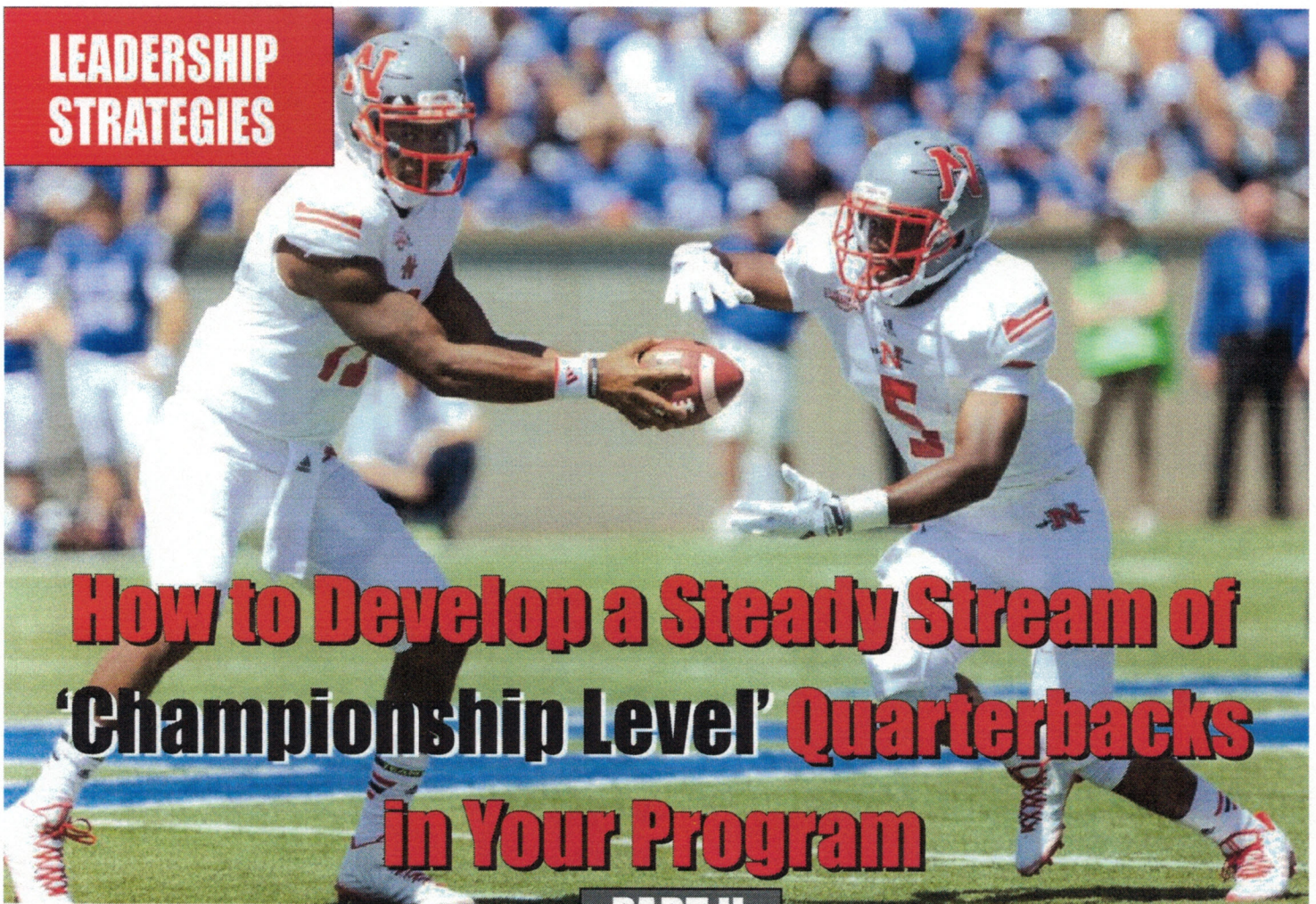


## LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES



# How to Develop a Steady Stream of 'Championship Level' Quarterbacks in Your Program

## PART II

By Eric Smith - Director and Coach - Winning Edge Skills

I will challenge you to stop reading right now and think for a moment about any organization in sports or business that 'consistently' succeeds at a high level without top notch leadership. Sure you'll get short term exceptions from time to time but they're rare and never long lasting. What I'm focusing on in this article is building a consistent 'championship level' program - one that's predictable year in and year out.

So let's talk about leadership. What is leadership and what does that look like to a young student athlete in the midst of their developmental process?

It seems so common for me to hear coaches preaching to athletes whom they think should be team leaders with this common phrase... "be a leader out there!" or "Hey you seniors... you need to be

Leaders!!" The problem is they don't know what that looks like or how to begin doing it so they often resign to being vocal and sometimes even yelling at their teammates. This behavior often ends up coming across in a condescending way. Either that or these 'appointed leaders' act in some sort of 'entitled' way like they have special privileges over their teammates. This normally ends up creating resentment.

In the end, their efforts to be leaders ends up having the opposite effect of its intent. Obviously, this is not good for the culture of a program and its overall success. One of the fundamental breakdowns in the beginning is that leadership cannot be 'appointed' to someone. It doesn't come with a 'title' like team captain or a 'position held' like a quarterback or a

'class' such as a group of seniors. It has to be 'earned' but before it can be earned it has to be learned.

Harriet Tubman was born into Slavery in 1822. As an adult in 1849 after escaping to Philadelphia to gain her freedom she worked to save just enough money to go on 13 separate missions to save over 70 slaves through the underground railroad. She later went on to work in the Woman's Suffrage movement until she died in 1922 yet she is revered as being a great leader in American history although she had no assigned 'title' or wasn't part of a special 'social class'.

How is Leadership defined? It's many things but in its simplest form I say leadership is 'Influence'. Really it's nothing more or nothing less. There can be good leaders who influence others in a posi-

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tive way and there can be bad leaders who influence in a negative way. Adolph Hitler comes to mind here. He was a leader who influenced an entire country toward one of the greatest tragedies of all time where 6 million Jews were killed in The Holocaust from 1933 to 1945.

Who is capable of being a leader? Anyone, because leadership is a learned behavior. It can be taught. There is no such thing as a 'born leader'. Obviously better athletes and certain position types such as quarterbacks have an advantage because others already look up to them due to their performance on the field but that can backfire if you rely on that as the sole criteria in selecting your team leaders.

So the question becomes what do people want from their leaders and how do you break it down into a teachable way to young people? If leadership is influence then one needs to inspire others to act... to do something. In order for someone to follow someone a few key elements have to first be in place. One of these elements is 'trust' which comes from honesty and integrity. Call it character. That's why in the model of success character is the foundational element.

Once a person trusts someone they may be willing to follow them. Secondly, they should 'like' them. In order for someone to be likable they need to know how to 'connect' with others. It is ALWAYS the leader's responsibility to be the one to reach out to connect with someone. Leaders can't depend on others to reach out to them. The problem is kids don't necessarily know how to do this and the high tech culture that they live in now isn't helping them learn these interpersonal skills! One simple approach to teaching kids how to connect is to teach them to stay in a mental state of genuine curiosity when trying to connect with someone. It's almost as if they were writing a research paper on the person and had to learn about them. I teach the F.O.R.D. acronym <http://www.nicknotas.com/blog/conversation-tips-new-people/>

**F Family** – Tell me about your family? How many brothers and sisters? Where are you from?

**O Occupation** – What's your dad do? Does he enjoy it? How about your mother?

**R Recreation** - What do you like to do outside of school? What else do you like to do?

**D Dreams** – What do you hope to do after finishing school? College plans?

The key is two fold... 1.) stay in curiosity and 2.) be genuine. When I teach this to kids I can literally see their faces light up! And hey, let's be honest. It's a great way for them to meet girls too! The truth is, I met my wife this way. We laugh about it all the time. She tells me it felt like she was being interviewed. But it worked!

Once a leader has someone's trust, is well liked and has connected with them, then they are in a position to motivate and inspire movement...to affect change. Now you have a culture within your organization that true leadership can operate and thrive. From there, it's just a matter of sharing your vision on a regular basis (daily) to your leaders and teaching them how to empower others. In addition, teach them the importance of being vulnerable themselves so that they can show compassion and communicate love to their teammates. Have you ever met someone who is genuine, caring, self-deprecating, vulnerable, inquisitive in getting to know you and selfless in their actions that you didn't like? I doubt it.

Finally, leadership cannot exist without understanding that it's all based in 'service to others'. That is, being a man built for others. It's service above self! When a leader has a solid understanding of these core leadership virtues then watch out. You're not only going to reap the benefits from their service to their peers but you're going to get much more out of that individual because you've helped them transform themselves in a way that they never

thought possible. You're now the chief architect in shaping their life. They will see you as an agent of positive change. With the deep respect that this will bring, your leaders will run through a wall for you and others will follow them.

Knowing this, let's circle back to choosing a quarterback who is capable of being a great leader. When deciding who to invest your time and attention to, it becomes very important to choose an athlete who has character. One who doesn't have to overcome huge obstacles in being highly likeable by his peers. Jeff Trickey of the Trickey-Wright QB Passing School puts it on the T-Shirts they give to kids... "Accept the Risk of Leadership" because to a young man who hasn't been trained to be a leader that's what it is...it's RISKY! The great news is that we now know leadership can be taught therefore minimizing the risk.

We've discussed the importance of work ethic, character and leadership when selecting a quarterback worthy of investing your time and effort as you build your program for consistent high level success. The next character trait is competitiveness. It's another foundational virtue of a great quarterback. Your quarterback needs to feel like he needs to win every play. Most of the time, that simply means getting the play call, establishing control of the huddle or the call at the line of scrimmage, ensuring proper alignment of the offense, successfully executing the exchange and properly handing the ball off to the ball carrier. Often it requires quite a bit more... passing or running. Passing game aside, it's important that your quarterback takes pride in handling the huge responsibility of simply running the team! I heard Jim Harbaugh talk once about quarterback play and he went on and on about the quarterback understanding the importance of 'winning the handoff'! It seems simple but it's true.

There is reference in medicine which says 'First Do No Harm'. In other words, don't make the injured patient worse than he already is. This can be applied to quar-

terbacks. Don't get in the way of a successful play. Get the play call in, the ball snapped on time, handle it properly and put your team in a position to succeed. 'Win the handoff!! Here, your quarterback is 'competing' on every play.

A strong competitive spirit is imperative at this position for so many reasons. So many things can and will go wrong during a game but a competitor will tend to have a shorter memory and continue to compete and execute. In the off season, a competitor will challenge himself to put the hard work in, to focus on the repetitive details that will make him great over time. In addition, as the natural leader on your team, others will find inspiration on the strong work ethic of your quarterback.

"The harder you work and the better you play the more you can demand from others"

- Jon Gruden

### Coachability

When you find the virtues outlined above of work ethic, character, leadership and competitiveness you've got yourself a highly coachable quarterback. That is, one who will be a student of the game, one who is willing to put in the time required to be great both from learning the mental aspect but also by dialing the mechanical aspect into 'automatic mode'.

It's very important to understand the importance of mechanics when it comes to quarterback play. Think for a moment about combining the complexities of the mechanics... from footwork, to throwing, to eye discipline and ultimately tying them all together in a split second all while reading and reacting to a defense and to your receivers. Suffice it to say there is a lot of mental processing going on at one time! You have to understand that IF a quarterback's mechanics are not on autopilot THEN your QB is thinking about mechanics and the all-important reading and reacting part of the game will not take place effectively. Or, IF the reading and reacting

is taking place then there will be a mechanical breakdown and he will be thrown off target or off trajectory. Bottom line - mechanics have to be on auto-pilot which means they are as simple and as passive to the athlete as breathing.

From a mechanical requirement alone, if an athlete isn't highly dedicated and doesn't have the work ethic and discipline necessary, he probably won't put in the time required to wire the neuro-muscular pathways well enough to be highly effective at this position. In order to wire them 'properly', he'll have to be highly coachable. The only way to accomplish this is being dedicated to the tens of thousands of repetitive motions required. The term for it is 'neuro-muscular programming' and it all starts with a culture of learning that drive behaviors that eventually shape our habits and results. (Chart).

If your quarterback is a person of high character, then you are at a great starting point because you are building from a very solid foundation. From there, he can be taught to be an effective leader capable of connecting with and inspiring others to follow him toward the greater cause of the team... a cause greater than himself.

If you think about the sheer awesomeness of opportunity that 'being a quarterback' and not just 'playing quarterback' can be for a young person and future life benefits that will follow as a result of this transfor-

mation, then you should be excited about being in the position as a coach where you can make such a huge contribution to society. You can also get excited about the 'predictable' success to your program that will follow.

Let the journey begin...

About the Author:

Eric Smith is the director and coach at Winning Edge skills, a program "to give quarterbacks the proper foundation of mechanics, physical and mental skills, and leadership attributes so they have the opportunity to succeed at the highest level." Coach Smith played quarterback at Bowling Green from 1984-1988 and spent a number of years in both the pharmaceutical business and the real estate industry.

