



CHAMPION VALUES – WITH NOTES FOR COACHES AND PARENTS

Gova Sports desires to train and equip young athletes to be champions in life – not just sports! That’s why we compiled the eight Gova Sports “Champion Values.” These values are the key ingredients that make up a true champion. It is our hope that Gova Sports players and coaches embrace and live these values.

VALUE #1: GRIT

It almost goes without saying that, if you want to have a successful team, you need a squad of players that exemplify "grit."

But while we use the term often, how many people fully understand what "grit" really means? We know it's a good thing, but if we can't define it, how can we teach it?

At its most basic level, "grit" is defined as "the perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals." That might seem like an easy enough answer, but there's actually a lot of great wisdom to unpack in that one little definition.

1. Let's start with perseverance. Perseverance is your resolve and your steadfastness in doing something, despite the difficulty in doing that thing, or the fact that you might not achieve success immediately.
2. Then there's passion, which most people understand, even if they don't fully know how to define it: a strong and barely controllable emotion.

Again, there are enormous teachable moments associated with both of those, which you could -- and should -- communicate to your players.

So, start by asking your players: what does "grit" mean? From there, you should work your way down to the fundamental components of "grit."

- When you ask them this first question, a lot of them may not answer or shrug their shoulders indicating that they don't know.
- You can then follow-up by stating the question in a different way: "when we say a player is 'gritty,' what does that mean?"
- That'll provide them a better context for the word, and very likely garner a few responses. Those who think they know will probably give you answers along the lines of toughness, strength, determination, stubbornness, among a whole variety of other possibilities.
- You don't want to discount any of those, because more often than not, they do fall under the general idea of "grittiness." Let them answer enthusiastically, and without fear of being embarrassed by providing an answer that might make them embarrassed if/when it's wrong.



After you see that they're engaged (by the answers they're providing), that's when you help them define it by equating it to a simple math formula: **grit is the sum of perseverance plus passion.**

From there, you make sure you break down each of these two variables:

- Perseverance is how hard you're willing to work at something, especially in situations where you don't see immediate results, and you might even face a setback or two along the way.
 - You can reinforce this phrase with the common colloquialism of "when the going gets tough, the tough get going."
- But then you add in the fact that perseverance has to be combined with passion; in other words, if you don't apply your heart and soul into the process of overcoming obstacles and getting better, you'll never get there.
 - You have to love the work you put into getting better, just as much as you love the idea of getting better.
 - If you don't have the enthusiasm and energy to work at something, you're never going to get through the tough times.

Tell your team: I want you all to be the grittiest team that takes the field every game.

- That means "keeping your eyes on the prize," no matter how tough the road might be, or how many setbacks you face.
- And coming to practice each day with the motivation to work, get better, and do whatever it takes to win the upcoming game.

VALUE #2: LEADERSHIP

Ask your team: "What comes to your mind when someone asks you to think of a leader?"

- Do you think of the President of the United States?
- Do you think of a General in the Military?
- Do you think of the pastor at your church?
- Do you think of your teacher?
- Do you think of your parents?

The truth is, all of them can be leaders. That's because, at a basic level, a leader is someone who oversees a group of people. That can be a whole country, an army, a bunch of students, or even a family.



But the key lesson is: being a leader isn't just about being in a position of authority.

Leadership comes in many different forms, but generally speaking, leaders generally tend to exhibit the following six characteristics:

1. **They're commanders:** they establish a vision, a mindset, and a culture, and hold everyone -- including themselves -- to this. They speak with conviction, they're comfortable taking charge of a situation, and they can make the tough -- if not unpopular -- decisions when necessary.
2. **They're pioneers:** taking calculated risks in the moment when it will make the most impact to them and their team, and willing to be the one to bear the consequences if that risk turns out badly.
3. **They're motivators:** able to build an atmosphere that encourages energy, enthusiasm, and connectivity among their peers. They create a place where collaboration is encouraged.
4. **They're empathizers:** they're constantly thinking about the needs of both the group as a whole, but also of each individual person within the group. Each person is different, and they want to understand those differences, to better understand each person.
5. **They're problem solvers:** they can tackle any obstacle that comes their way with patience and pragmatism, and will work diligently until that problem is not only solved, but better understood such that they don't encounter a similar problem in the future.
6. **They're hard workers:** they're the first ones to work, the last ones to leave, and they hold themselves accountable for anything that can be improved upon by the team as a whole. They see obstacles, and identify them as opportunities.

As a coach, you need to communicate to your players that they don't have to be "in a position of leadership" in order to be a leader. Rather, you should emphasize the idea of "leading by example:" going out there, working hard, and showing others what it takes to get better. That's what a leader is, as opposed to some title someone gave you.

Similarly, as a coach, you need to take a look at those seven traits and honestly assess where you're strongest, and where you're weakest. Just like you would provide constructive criticism to a player with the goal of helping them get better, you need to be able to not only take a self-assessment, but also take that constructive criticism from others. Allow your players to speak with you about issues they're having in general. Seek feedback from those who know you best, or know your work.

That's what leaders do.

VALUE #3: INTEGRITY

This week, I want to spend a few minutes talking to you about "integrity." Everyone's always heard about someone showing or demonstrating integrity, but it's another one of those concepts that doesn't really have a "cut and dry" definition.



The dictionary might tell you that integrity means "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles." But I think there are a few more layers to it than being honest and having morals, even though those are both absolutely true and extremely important.

It's about your honesty, your ethics, and your trustworthiness. Integrity is doing the right thing – even when nobody is looking. It's easy for us to make good decisions when other people are watching. It's what we do when nobody is around that displays our true character.

- You can be honest, and also be a jerk at the same time. You can be honest when you're calling out your teammate when he or she made a small mistake, and basically "throw them under the bus."
- You can be ethical in your own mind, and not in someone else's mind. Ethics are completely subjective, and relative to each person at an individual level. Just because one person finds a behavior ethical or unethical doesn't mean someone else will.
- You can appear to be a trustworthy person at first, and earn the trust and respect of your teammates. But after that, what do you do with that as a player?

That's why you need to communicate to your players that to have integrity means to exhibit all three of those things. Each person on the team needs to know that their teammates are going to be honest and forthright with them, doing things that are in everyone's best interest, and always carrying themselves in a manner that's beneficial to the entire team as a whole.

Once you've outlined this, ask your players: "why is it important to have integrity, or to demonstrate integrity to your family, your friends, your teammates, or even your opponents?"

You should get a variety of answers. Again, never discount any of them, especially if they seem to get the general concept of what you're saying. Integrity can take many forms, and you yourself as the coach need to show the honesty, ethics, and trustworthiness that you're asking of your players.

But what you need to ultimately communicate regarding integrity is that it transcends the playing field. Like so many other things, sports can be a perfect reflection of life in general. In sports, you're surrounded by your teammates and coaches, but just like in life, situations may change and you might find yourself suddenly working alongside people who are your opponents today (if you change teams, leagues, etc.). You don't want to burn those bridges today and live to regret it tomorrow.

The same goes for life overall. Whether it's within your family, among your group of friends, or in the working world, people need to know that you're always going to be truthful, fair, and authentic with them. Who knows what situations you might find yourself in tomorrow, which you didn't anticipate today.

That's why integrity should be the cornerstone of who you are. Regardless of where you are today, tomorrow, or in the future, people should always know what you're about, and what they'll be getting from you.



VALUE #4: RESPECT

"R-E-S-P-E-C-T" is a six-letter word that Aretha Franklin famously sang: "find out what it means to me."

But what does "respect" mean to you? And more importantly, what does it mean to your players?

In and of itself, "respect" is simply having and showing an appreciation, if not admiration, for someone or something.

That might seem simple enough. But, when it comes to sports, we tend to overlook the fact that "respect" actually comes in three different forms:

1. Respect For Your Team
2. Respect For Your Opponents
3. Respect For The Game

In complete honesty, if you don't have all three, you might as well not have any -- and that's what you need to constantly teach your players as a coach.

Breaking each one down:

Respect For Your Team: Respect for your team starts with the idea that it's going to take everyone working together towards one common goal. Even if one person on the team happens to be really good at their sport, as the saying goes: a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Therefore, as a teammate, it's your job to make sure you work as hard at making everyone else around you better, as you do yourself. Similarly, respecting your team is also making sure you take responsibility for doing your part, and working at least as hard as your teammates, if not harder. Finally, this applies to respecting your coaches as well. While you may not want to harp on the idea of forcing your players to respect you, you want to teach them that they need to listen to what their coaches, their teachers, and their parents tell them, because everyone is ultimately trying to help them reach their goal.

Respect For Your Opponents: In "The Art of War," the famous Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu wrote: "If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat." The biggest mistake that anyone, in any competitive situation, can make is underestimating your opponent. That's why you'll hear so many college and professional teams talk about "watching film." It's not just about getting a preview of their upcoming opponents, but also getting an understanding of who they are, what they do, and what is needed to defeat them. No matter how good your team might seem to be, and how inferior the opponent might seem to be, you should never underestimate what they're capable of. After all, that's the mistake the hare made with the tortoise.

Respect For The Game: This simply means going out and playing the game as it was meant to be played, in the way that the heroes of the sport would be proud of. Don't cheat yourself or your opponents. Don't play dirty. Don't



disrespect the officials. Demonstrate sportsmanship, especially in situations where you don't come out as the victor. Always show appreciation for how the other team played, win or lose.

Any game won without the foundation of respect can't be considered a victory overall. As a coach, that is the point you need to continually drill home with your team.

VALUE #5: HUSTLE

As a coach, if there's one word you want to consistently preach to your players, it's "hustle." As much of a cliché as it may be, how much your team "hustles" is often the difference between whether they win or lose the game, especially in highly competitive leagues. That's why it's absolutely crucial that you install a culture of "hustle" amongst your team during practices, because that's how it'll naturally manifest on game day.

But as you continue to tell your team to "hustle" and preach its importance, you want to ask the team: what does "hustle" mean to them?

There are five great ways to describe just what "hustle" means

1. To obtain something by performing energetic activity
2. To hurry up, or hasten your efforts in completing something
3. To make a strenuous effort in obtaining something
4. To play a sport in an alert and aggressive manner

But the fifth -- and most perfect -- way to describe "hustle" is simply: how hard are you trying?

It's easy to get players to play hard during a game, especially in competitive situations. But the difference in those competitive situations often comes down to the details: who executes their game plan better, who does the little things to put their team ahead, who uses the clock most judiciously, and so on.

Here is just a small sample of things to really focus on, when installing the culture of "hustle":

- Quickly getting themselves ready for the next play, as soon as the most previous play is over
- Hurrying to and from the sidelines during player substitutions
- Lining up in their position, or within the right spot in a formation, as fast as possible
- Making sure they perform the "nitty-gritty" responsibilities each and every play, throughout the course of a game.

It's very important to praise players who demonstrate "hustle" just as much as the ones who make the plays. Call out players who ran from one side of the field to the other to make a play, who made the extra effort to run down the field and block for someone else, or even someone who helped another teammate off the field and get in position for the next play. Those are all "hustle." You want to encourage them to always do the little things, which are secretly the most important things, even in situations where they're not the ones that will be in the spotlight.



To inspire your team, recite to them the quote from Abraham Lincoln, one of our greatest Presidents: "Things may come to those who wait... but only the things left by those who hustle."

In other words, the hustlers will go and get what they want, and whatever is left will go to the people who sat there and just let it come to them.

Put another way: winners go out and do the little things it takes to win the game, and losers allow the game to come to them without taking ownership of the outcomes.

Every time your team breaks the huddle or practice, you want them to shout "Hustle!"

VALUE #6: SELFLESSNESS

Everyone has heard the phrase: "There is no 'I' in 'team.'"

At a basic level, we know that means that a player shouldn't be focused on succeeding individually, but rather as part of a winning team.

But when you boil it down even further, that phrase embodies the idea of "selflessness" -- putting the needs, wishes, and welfare of others -- like your teammates -- ahead of those of your own.

Tell your players: some of the greatest players in the history of their respective sport, like Dan Marino, Charles Barkley, or Ken Griffey Junior, never won a championship during their Hall of Fame careers.

Ask them: don't you think that every one of them would give up all the individual accolades and awards they received, in order to forever be known as "winners?"

Remind your players that for all of society's focus on touchdowns and home runs and triple-doubles, the only thing people care about is whether your team won the game. And it takes 53 athletes, all 53 players on a football team, 25 players on a baseball team, or 12 players on a basketball team to do their part in order to win "the big one."

For as much as we all revere athletes like Peyton Manning and Derek Jeter and LeBron James because they were so good at their sports individually, what makes those guys true champions is the fact that they worked just as hard to make their teammates better.

If you can, show your players the best demonstrations of post-game victory speeches from professional athletes: the ones that thank God, their teammates, their coaches, and their fans, for putting them in the position to win the game (and give that speech).



As a coach, one of the best ways to demonstrate selflessness is by designing your scheme and your game plan around the strengths of your players, versus any predetermined philosophy you might have. Great coaches put their ego to the side and make the best of the hand they're dealt, whereas coaches who are focused on preserving their egos are the ones who try to "jam a square peg into a round hole."

When you praise your team, the one word you should never use when discussing the reasons you won the game is "I." Even if it was because of your hard work, your coaching, and your general motivation that the team won the game, you're setting an example for those around you when you attribute all the success to everyone except you.

From an individual perspective, you certainly want to praise the player who made a critical play for his or her team. But you should also spend just as much time praising the player(s) who made the extra pass to put their teammate in the best position, or who made the key block that allowed someone else to make a play.

You need to do whatever it takes to make sure you are not trying to be the "I" in "team" as well.

VALUE #7: COURAGE

Give this speech to your team:

"Show of hands: how many of you, when you're practicing or playing in a game are scared? How many of you feel fear when you're out there playing?"

None of you? I knew I had a tough team!

Now, I'm going to let you all in on a big secret -- one that many of you know but are afraid to admit, or one that many of you might not realize. No matter how big or strong or mean or tough someone might seem like on the outside, deep down, everyone is scared of something. Every single one of you. You might be scared of your opponents. You might be scared of getting hurt. You might be scared of making a mistake and embarrassing yourself. You might be scared of going out there, trying your best, and failing.

But deep down, we all have fears. It's human nature, **and it's perfectly natural.**

But I'm not all of a sudden telling you to become a team of *scaredy cats*. Instead, I'm telling you how you can use that fear to actually improve yourself.

See, what really defines us as people is how we handle those fears. In fact, the idea of "courage" is nothing more than acknowledging your fears, and facing or doing the thing that scares you. Lots of us have buried that fear deep down somewhere, but it's just sitting there and festering inside of us, subconsciously making decisions for us, without us even knowing it. A lot of the time, that's what stops us from getting whatever it is we want in life.



What you may not realize is that a big part of being courageous is simply acknowledging you have that fear in the first place. In fact, you can't have courage without acknowledging that fear, because courage is literally acting in the face of fear. If you weren't scared of it, then you didn't really do anything all that special.

Is it "courageous" when you go to school every day, eat your lunch, and play with your friends? Of course not, because none of those things scare you.

But it is courageous when you look a bully in the eye and tell them that you're not going to take any crap from them anymore or stand up tall for someone that is being picked on by a bully. It is courageous to play against a team who you think is a lot better than you, and still go out there and play your tail off. And it's also courageous when you want to be the one to make the play at the end of the game, because you know the outcome of the game rests on your shoulders.

If you're someone who wants to be known as courageous, I want you to repeat this to yourself in those moments when that lingering fear starts to creep up from way down below: "feel the fear, and do it anyway." Don't deny the fear, don't pretend it's not there, and don't even hide from it. Feel it, acknowledge it, and then do exactly what it is that makes you scared."

VALUE #8: AMBITION

The famous Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius is quoted as saying: *"A man's worth is no greater than the worth of his ambitions."*

When you hear that quote, or when you hear someone say, "so and so is ambitious," what does that mean to you?

Ambition is made up of a lot of things. Work ethic. Competitiveness. Goal Setting. Enthusiasm. Intelligence. All of those things are important for someone who has the ambition to do something.

But what "ambition" actually is, and what makes it different than just "wanting something to happen," is two-fold: it's the desire to do something, to have something, or to achieve something, and the **dedication** to make the effort required, and **continue** to make the effort required, in order to get that something.

See, every time we play a game, we *want* to win. Nobody here steps into a game wanting to lose, right? While we play because we love the sport, nobody loves the feeling of losing. But here's the thing: the other team we're playing? They want to win, too.

That's why Marcus Aurelius said that a person isn't worth more than their ambition. It's because everyone wants something. We all want to be rich, famous, and successful. But how many people actually make those things



happen? It's because they have the "want," but not the ambition. They want to just talk about those things, without putting in the focus and the effort to make those things happen.

Here is the difference between "having ambition" and "just wanting something." Let me give you a real-life example:

Michael Jordan is one of the greatest basketball players in history. But how many people know that, when he first tried out for his high school basketball team, the coaches said he was too short, and he wasn't good enough to overcome that "obstacle," so the coaches actually didn't let him on the team? And instead of just "wanting" to play basketball and pointing the finger at other people as the reason why he wasn't able to play on the varsity team, Jordan swallowed his pride and worked his tail off as a member of the junior varsity team. See, he had the ambition of playing varsity basketball, and he was willing to do whatever it took -- even if that meant playing on the junior varsity team against guys he knew he was better than -- in order to make the varsity team himself. Every time he took the court, no matter who he was playing with, he wanted to win so badly that he spent his entire life, in between games, simply focused on being the best basketball player that he possibly could.

That's what ambition means.

I want you to ask yourself one thing: are you someone who just wants to win? Or are you someone who has the **ambition** to win? And what can you do to prove your ambition to win? Every time you're out here practicing, every time you feel tired in the game, just remember: everyone playing wants to win. But it's the people who have the true **ambition to win** the game - those are the ones that make it happen.