



Champion Athlete Note

Educating and Forming Champion Athletes

LEAD: A Team Discussion

Each February, *Play Like a Champion* joins in the celebration of Black History Month, remembering the pioneers who have recognized the dignity in every man and woman, fighting for justice in sports and beyond. While legendary figures like [Jackie Robinson](#) leap readily to mind, we also celebrate lesser known trailblazers such as [Mamie "Peanut" Johnson](#) as well as those just now receiving their due, like hockey's [Willie O'Ree](#).



Yet there is still much work to do in the quest for racial equality. Just as sports have played a major role in the advancement of social justice throughout the past 150 years, youth and high school can provide an excellent foundation for the next generation. These years mark an excellent time to have team discussions about many important topics, including race.

The coach or the team captain can lead a discussion following the framework of L.E.A.D. L is for "Listen" with the goal to obtain E – "Equity" and A – "Awareness" through the D – "Dialogue."

Here are some questions to begin and guide your conversation:

- When did you first realize there were people who didn't look like you in your world?
- Have you experienced an incident of racism?
- How can and should we respond to a racial incident?

For a subsequent discussion, have the team [watch this clip](#) and discuss the following questions:

- How do you feel listening to these stories of racism in sport?
- Many of these individuals defended their remarks/actions. What would be the right way for them to respond?
- Athletes can use their platform for the good as well. What are instances when you have seen this happen?
- What does this mean for you as a younger athlete?

The "Peace Circle" Process

Play Like a Champion suggests the "Peace Circle" process as a guideline for LEAD so that players and coaches express themselves in a safe and honest group environment

where players practice listening to each other and reflecting on how they can help each to develop a caring team community.

Sit in a Circle. Sitting in a circle reminds coaches and players on your team that you are all equal parts of a whole. If you have a large team, you will want to break your team into smaller circles led by coaches. Ideally your circles should have from 5 to 15 members.

The Talking Piece. The talking piece is an object with some significance to your team (e.g. an autographed baseball or sneaker) used to let people know whose turn it is to talk while everyone else listens. Only the person who has the talking piece may talk.

The Center Piece. The center piece is placed in the middle of the circle and reminds members of the team that we are one. The center piece, like the talking piece should be an object that has special meaning for the team's identity.

The Keeper of the Circle. The keeper's role is to facilitate the circle process and to make sure that it is respectful. The keeper is also responsible for keeping track of time so that everyone has a chance to speak during each round of the discussion. In the opening round or two, it is usually helpful to ask everyone to answer in a sentence or two. The keeper should have one or two questions in mind for each meeting. Initially, the keeper may want to ask a simple question to get everyone talking. The keeper's questions may address problems or concerns that may have arisen within the team or perhaps an issue that arose during a game. The keeper can be the coach or one of the athletes.

Guidelines. Before starting the circle discussion, it is important to establish guidelines that everyone must agree to follow. We recommend that you suggest these guidelines and explain the purpose of each one.

1. **Speak from the Heart** When it is your turn to talk express ***your own*** feelings and thoughts. Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements. Do not comment on what other people said whether to agree or disagree. You may do this after the first two rounds if time permits.
2. **Listen from the Heart** Listen actively and deeply with an open mind, even if you disagree with what the person is saying. The deeper the listening, the more impactful and transformative the peacemaker circle can be for everyone.
3. **Speak Spontaneously:** Wait for your turn before you decide what you want to say. If you are thinking about what you are going to say, then you are not listening completely to the person who is speaking.
4. **Speak Leanly:** When you speak, keep in mind that many others would like a chance to speak, and that there is only so much time. Use only those words necessary to get your point or story across. Try to just share what is most essential. If you are not ready when it is your turn, you can pass, and speak later if you wish. At the same time, everyone is encouraged to be brave and to share your truth with the circle as much as you are able.
5. **Confidentiality:** All personal information should be kept private. "What is said in the circle stays in the circle."



Closing. End the meeting by reviewing what agreement(s) may have been reached and, if time permits ask everyone to say in a word or two how they are feeling as the meeting comes

to a close.

February is a great month to start discussions about race, but don't let the conversation end there. This should only be the *beginning* of the discussion in your community and your efforts to create a more just society where every child has an opportunity to play sports in a positive environment, where they are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. ~ Romans 13: 8,10

Register Now: The 2022 *Play Like a Champion* Conference Returns In-Person This June!



After hosting virtual conferences the past two years, the 2022 *Play Like a Champion Today Sports Leadership Conference* will once again be held **in-person June 17-18, 2022** at the University of Notre Dame. We are excited to once again gather with our national community to *connect* with each other, *learn* from a great group of speakers and be *inspired*. This special gathering will mark the 15th anniversary of the annual conference!

Register before March 1st to get our special Early Bird Registration rate of \$499 (a savings of \$101). You'll also be entered for a chance to get your registration fee reimbursed! We'll be drawing one lucky name on March 2nd and another on April 2nd from all those registered and the winner will have their registration fee covered by Play Like a Champion. All you have to do to be entered is to register before those dates. Register by March 1st for TWO chances to win!

This year's theme is ***Mens Sana in Corpore Sano: A Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body***. As we celebrate our return to this in-person event, it's important that we emphasize both the physical and mental health of the athletes entrusted to our care. The conference will highlight important topics in mentoring and coaching youth athletes in today's world, while continuing our mission to provide *A Team for Every Child* in communities everywhere. With a great lineup of speakers and an opportunity to connect once more with peers from across the country, the 2022 *Play Like a Champion Today Sports Leadership Conference* offers something for everyone. Click below to register now!

Register Today for the 2022 Play Like a Champion Sports Leadership Conference!

Drawings for free registration will take place on March 2nd and April 2nd. Winners will be notified and have their registration fee refunded to the payment method used at checkout. Sweepstakes does not cover additional cost of dorm rooms or donations.

A Prayer for Athletes

The following is a team prayer for healing. Each of us have experienced the difficulty of a loved one who is sick or suffering in some way. Our teams provide a tremendous community where we can pray and support each other. Begin this prayer by asking for any special intentions from the kids for friends and family who are sick, then pray this prayer together for their healing.

Heavenly Father, you teach us to care for the sick and gave us the example many great saints who cared for those who were sick. We ask that you remember now those for whom we offer this prayer, all our family and friends who are sick. Help us to care for them as Jesus taught us. We thank you for our health, for the blessing of being here with the ability to run and play. Bless our practice that we may be kept safe from injury and bless all those in our classes and on opposing teams that they may be healthy and safe this season. Amen.



Play Like a Champion's "Daily Prayers for Champions" page has been updated! Visit www.playlikeachampion.org/prayer for more than 200 prayers plus resources that can help you and your team grow closer to God while participating in sports.

Access Resources & Learn More at www.playlikeachampion.org

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