



# *Captain's Handbook*



***IHSAA Student Advisory Committee  
Publication***



# ***Table of Contents***

## **Introduction**

Page 3

## **What Is a Team Captain?**

Page 4

## **Relationship with Your Coach**

Page 6

## **Relationship with Your Team**

Page 8

## **Relationship with Other Groups**

Page 12

## **Team Building**

Page 14

## **Sportsmanship**

Page 16

## **Social Media**

Page 18

## **Additional Activities**

Page 20

## **Summary**

Page 22

## **About the Authors**

Page 23

# Introduction



This book was created by the IHSAA Student Advisory Committee as a vehicle to encourage captains throughout Indiana to be positive role models within their community. Student athletes from across the state offered their input on this document during the IHSAA Student Leadership Conference. It was written by students and for students, in an effort to effectively communicate ideas between peers. We are providing this for you to understand how to be a positive leader for your team.

We feel it is important to emphasize that no one right way exists to be an effective, dynamic captain. This book offers general ideas of what a successful captain can do and what a positive impact an influential captain can have on their team. Each topic in this book is structured with an introduction, brief discussion, and strategies to put what you learn into action.

This book is intended to be used as a reference or a guide. The ultimate goal of this book is that you use it as a reference or guide in constructing your own Captain's Handbook. Feel free to develop your own notes and definitions that apply to you, your coaches, and your team. Add your own ideas and perspectives, and then pass it down to future captains. This way, you can leave your own legacy.

Best of luck!

Sincerely,

IHSAA Student Advisory Committee

## ***What is a Team Captain?***

***“The most important key to achieving great success is to decide upon your goal and launch, get started, take action, move.” - John Wooden***

Being elected as a team captain is a tremendous honor and privilege that you should be very proud of. However, this new role also brings a great deal of responsibility.

You are no longer just a member of the team. You are expected to be a leader on and off of the court, a role model within your community and school and a conduit between your team and your coaches. Leadership is not always easy and sometimes, in order to be successful, you may have to make difficult decisions to improve your team.

Don't worry, though, because there is no specific style or personality that defines a great team captain. The most important thing is to be yourself. Just because you are now a captain does not necessarily mean you need to change the way you act. You were chosen to lead for a reason; so be yourself. You can be demanding and direct, but never angry, arrogant, or bossy. The best leaders are those who can make everyone around them better.



# What is a Team Captain?



## Qualities of a Good Team Captain:

- Leads by example and always strives to do his/her best
- Recognizes team needs
- Helps the team set goals
- Is not afraid to speak his/her mind
- Keeps the team in line, both inside and outside of school
- Selfless
- Appropriate behavior and conduct
- Strong focus on academics
- Will motivate others
- Honest
- Dedicated
- Inspiring
- Good Communicator
- Good Listener
- Enthusiastic
- Hard Working
- Respectful
- Dependable
- Positive

## Leadership Styles - Team captains can lead in different ways

There are a variety of different leadership styles that result from differing personalities.

- So if you are quiet, be the leader that leads by example. You lead by playing hard, being respectful to officials and by staying focused during practice. You perform well in the classroom and stay away from alcohol, drugs, and other prohibited substances.
- If you are not quiet, however, you may be more comfortable with being a vocal leader. You lead by working hard and verbally motivating the team to maintain a positive atmosphere. On and off the court, you talk with your coach about team issues.

## Action Items

### Part 1 – Captain's Roles and Responsibilities

Think about effective or successful captains from teams you have previously played for. Focus on their characteristics or skills to consider how they contributed to being a better captain. Following this, reflect on the specific duties of a captain. These range from leading warm-up exercises to handling situations involving teammates making poor decisions off the field.

### Part 2 – Rate Yourself

Using your list of captain characteristics, skills, and responsibilities from Part 1, write down the ten most important. Examples include effort, sportsmanship, leadership, communication, ability to lead by example, commitment, and motivation. Next, rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 with regard to your success in possessing each characteristic (1= little or no ability, 5= some ability, 10= high ability). Consider which characteristics are your strongest and which are your weakest. Then, focus on how you can improve your weakest characteristics throughout the season.

*"The strength of the group is the strength of the leaders."*  
- Vince Lombardi

A captain's ability to develop a relationship with the coach will help determine the success of the team. It is important to be a leader and to be the bridge between the team and the coach. Even though you have captain status, however, your coach still makes the final decision relative to team matters.

### **Work with Your Coach to Set Mutual Expectations**

Schedule a meeting with your coach before the season starts. Here are possible topics for discussion:

- What do you expect from me personally this season?
- If you were able to write a job description for me this season, what would it look like?
- How can I help you this season?
- What is the process to address problems and concerns this season?
- What do I need to understand that I may not know?



**Discuss Team Goals** - Setting goals will keep your team motivated throughout the season. It is important to start the season with pre-season, season and tournament goals.

**Determine What Your Coach Expects of You** - What are your roles and responsibilities as a captain? What kinds of issues does the coach wish to discuss with you? What should the coach know about your team?

## Plan Ahead

There are some tough issues that come with being a team captain. For example, a player may approach you with issues about playing time or insufficient grades. Perhaps a teammate is using drugs, or has an eating disorder. Regardless of the problem, work with your coach ahead of time to plan a strategy for resolution.



## Stay on the Same Page Throughout the Season

The relationship with the coach does not end after the first meeting. It is important to take steps to maintain a healthy relationship. Here are some ways to achieve this goal:

1. Schedule frequent meetings.
2. Maintain respectful communication to ensure mutual trust.
3. To prevent preferential treatment of captains, set coach and captain boundaries.
4. Alert coach to other player and team issues.

### Action Items

- Set a date and time for pre-season meeting with your coach. Set team goals and rules.
- Set up frequent meetings during the season. Predetermine a time and location of all meetings.
- After each competition, discuss any major problems with the coach in a private setting.
- During the season, serve as the link when a player does not feel comfortable with coming directly to the coach.
- At the end of the season, discuss with the coach successes and failures. Were pre-season goals met?



## ***Relationship with Your Team***

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*“You won’t win consistently without good team leadership. It’s just that plain and simple. You’ve got to have players who are willing to buy into your system, demand the best from themselves and their teammates, and hold their teammates accountable.”*

**- Pat Summitt**

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Your relationship with the team is one of the more important aspects of being a captain. As a team captain, you must be willing to accept the leadership role and embrace all members. Teammates should also feel as if they can confide in their captain. To maintain a good relationship with your teammates, stay respectful and positive and find ways to work with your teammates.

### **Lead by Example**

*“A leader leads by example whether he intends to or not”* -Author Unknown

As a team captain, it is important to remember that your position holds great responsibility. Many times a team captain is held to higher standards than others due to the fact that his or her actions are more closely monitored by fellow teammates, coaches, and spectators. You need to be aware that your every move, whether good or bad, creates an image that reflects on your entire team and school. As a captain, it is necessary to lead by example at all times because good actions will be replicated and can strengthen a team as a whole.

### **Work with Your Fellow Captain(s):**

In many cases, two or more captains will be appointed to lead a team, and the relationship between the two team members is vital to achieve success. As a team captain, it is necessary for you to have positive relationships with your fellow captain(s). This relationship must be friendly without holding back opinions or constructive criticism. It is impossible for you to be an effective team captain if you do not work together with your fellow captain. Team captains must work as a unit to ensure that spirit, attitude, and effort are 100%. If your team members see a strong bond and union between their two captains, they will be more likely and willing to follow the leaders, and be compelled to work to keep good relationships among the team.



## Stay Respectful and Positive

Focus on ways to instill your team's trust. Respect the ideas of your teammates. Allow your teammates to contribute their opinions. In essence, a team is a family and as a family, it cares about all of its members. Everyone should be treated the same, regardless of age, playing time, or role on the team.



Know the line between helping and being a coach. Instead of taking over practice, pull teammates aside for constructive criticism. Be there to talk with teammates about problems.

Don't talk about others bad play. If you don't respect your teammates, they won't respect you. Hazing is never an acceptable behavior. Hazing refers to any activity expected of someone joining a group (or to maintain full status in a group) that humiliates, degrades or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. Regardless of age or role on the team everyone should be treated with respect.

## Work with Teammates

Goal setting with your team may seem like a small thing to do, but it helps in a big way – it may be just as important as setting goals with your coach because it gets you all on the same page. Tell a teammate how much they mean to you and the team. This makes them feel more accepted and more willing to give their best. Remember, you don't have to be a good athlete to make a huge contribution. Have a close relationship with your co-captains and keep each other informed on important issues. Remind each other of your goals and how you want to obtain them. It's an easier job if you can lean on one another for support.

## ***Relationship with Your Team***

Five core concerns that you should be aware of as you work to build respectful relationships with your teammates:

### **Concern #1: Appreciation**

Every member of your team wants to know that their thoughts, feelings, and actions are valued by the coaches and teammates. Everyone on the team puts in a tremendous amount of time and energy to achieve shared goals. Try to find ways to show your teammates appreciation for their commitment to the team. Encourage teammates to demonstrate appreciation for each other.

### **Concern #2: Association**

Your teammates want to be treated as an integral part of something meaningful. They want to be valued by teammates and not excluded from team functions away from the playing field. That is, each student-athlete will make a deeper commitment to the team when they feel a strong sense of association.



Unfortunately, sport teams all too often breed an in-group out-group mentality. Injuries too can seem alienating to team members. When teammates can't participate because of injuries be sure to keep them close to you and the rest of the team.

### **Concern #3: Self-Management**

Student-athletes want to be respected for their ability to make independent decisions. Most of your teammates will possess a desire to be self-directing. However, this does not mean they don't want your help. It just means you need to help them set their direction and stay on course.

### **Concern #4: Status**

Every team member is concerned with his or her status and their "relative position" to teammates. Bench players, in particular, want to be given recognition and not to be treated as inferior to others. While it is generally evident who the best players are on the playing field, the contributions others make in various roles as teammates should not be relegated to second-class status.

# Relationship with Your Team



## Concern #5: Role

Each of your teammates desires a role to play and truly wants that role to be valued. It's common for athletes to perceive their role in an ambiguous way. Through patience your guidance can help teammates understand, accept, and grow in their respective role. You can point the way by helping teammates make sense of their role on and off the playing field. Your teammates will be seeking out and serving in a variety of roles throughout the season. Some roles are more vital than others. No matter the vitality of the role, each role is important for a successful team. Always pay attention to your teammates and help them to find value in their role.

In summary, each teammate will have a different perception of how his or her 5 Core Concerns are being met. Perceptions should be visible in their various behaviors, attitudes, emotional reactions and thought patterns. Your leadership task is to continually work at identifying underlying problems and find solutions. This is best done when you actively engage in honest conversation with your teammates building solid relationships. Great leaders care to know their teammates.

## Action Items

- After each practice, compliment a player who does not usually receive positive reinforcement.
- Stay positive after every play.
- Find a struggling teammate, work with them during practice or offer to work with them after practice.
- If a teammate does not fit in, offer to be their partner during drills.
- Find an underclassman and go to a sporting event with them.
- If a teammate is new to the school, offer to give them a ride home or hang out with them.
- Integrate underclassman into conversation. Ask them for their opinion.
- After the season, continue to communicate with players. This keeps the bond there for next season.
- When you have a team bonding activity, invite everyone.
- Stand up for your teammates inside and out of school and practice.
- Before the season begins, sit down with your fellow captain(s) and communicate goals and ideas for the season.
- Always support each other throughout the season and never talk negatively about your fellow captain(s).
- Throughout the season, have weekly conversations on how the team is doing, problems facing the team, and ideas for the upcoming week.
- If at any point during the season you and your fellow captain(s) are facing conflict with each other, confront one another and communicate your issues and problems. Do not let one issue escalate to something greater that could harm the team chemistry.



# ***Relationship with Other Groups***

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***“Leadership isn’t really about leading people. It’s about getting them to follow you.” - Steve Young***  
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It is important to develop a relationship with people outside of your team. This includes the student body, fans, parents, game officials, etc. Remember that you and your team are a reflection on your school as well as your community.

## **Student Body**

Every member of the student body is a teammate, whether it’s someone who may potentially be a teammate or even a student that may be a fan in the stands cheering you on. Understand that the little things will help get you support. Smiling at schoolmates, helping someone with his or her extra books or even holding a door – it’s the little things that make the difference between good and great teams. Get to know other team captains within your school. By spending time with each other, you learn new styles and techniques that may help you solve team problems. By getting together with other captains, you will become a more effective captain yourself.

## **Community**

You are a representative of your team, school, and community on the field, off the field and in the classroom. Always remember you are being watched. The kids in your community look up to you, so take close notice of your actions and behavior. Take pride and be active in your community. Volunteer as a team or set up a fundraiser to benefit the community.

## **Officials**

Officials don’t win or lose the game, you do. You can’t control the officials, so focus on what you can control. Just like you, officials will make mistakes. Learn to overcome this adversity and play on. Get a feel for how they are going to call the game, and even then, talk to the referees in a respectful manner about questionable calls. After the competition, thank the officials.

## **Fans**

Fans must realize that a ticket is a privilege to observe a contest and support the high school activities, not a license to verbally assault others. As a captain, you can help promote positive sportsmanship during the contest. Serve as a positive role model during the contest and expect the same of parents and fans. Support participants, coaches, school administrators and fans who display good sportsmanship.



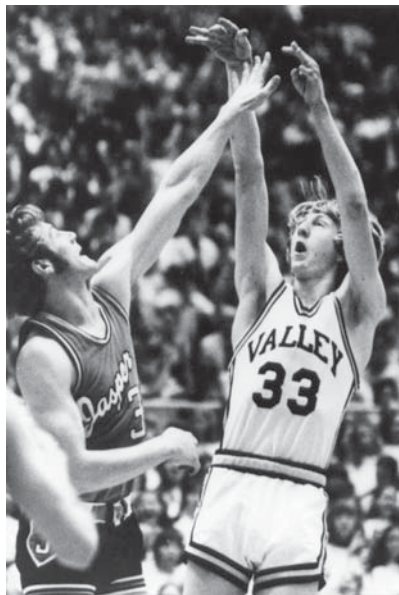
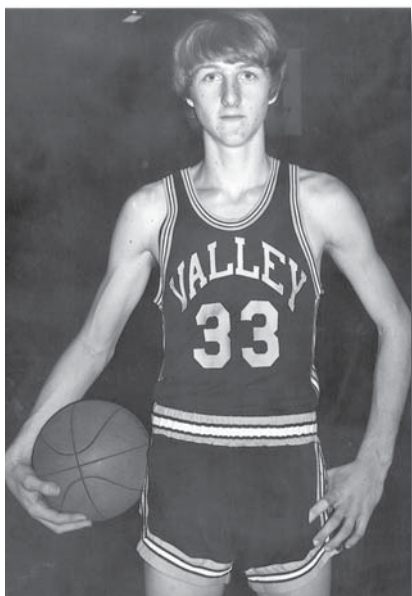
## Action Items

- Don't be a seasonal captain. Continue to exercise your leadership and positive decision making year-round.
- Set up regular communication with other sports captains to brainstorm ways to better your teams or solve a team problem.
- Organize a community service event.
- Promote the idea of good sportsmanship throughout your school by setting a strong example in practice and games.
- During the pregame captain and officials meeting, be genuine in your greeting and build solid understanding between each other.
- After the season, talk with the team about how to improve your relationship with others next year. It may be helpful to write some of these ideas down.
- Develop a Code of Good Sportsmanship and print a copy of it in event programs and post it at each entrance to the school's athletic facilities.



## Team Building

*“Leadership is getting players to believe in you. If you tell a teammate you’re ready to play as tough as you’re able to, you’d better go out there and do it. And they can tell when you’re not giving it all you’ve got.” - Larry Bird*



Team building activities are important because they allow you to form better relationships with your teammates. By building a strong foundation for your relationships, your team will work better together in practice and in games.



## Here are some simple guidelines of team building activities:

- Avoid cliques - Not only can they hurt individual team members, but they can also limit your team's success. A captain's role is to dissolve any cliques and help them realize how it weakens the team as a whole.
- Include everyone at all team events - The more you offer team activities, the closer your team will be. Team building doesn't stop when the season is over.
- Maintain out-of-season relationships.
- Sometimes team building can be more than just performing a simple activity. It requires lots of time, effort, and cooperation between teammates.
- Match up players from different grades and let them be each other's responsibility for a week. They should both be able to learn things from each other. The two can do drills together, sit together on the bus, or just give advice. The younger player will benefit from the experience and the older player will benefit from seeing a fresh point of view. Switch partners periodically throughout the season.
- At practice, split your team up into different groups. For instance, for cross country running split the group up into the teams of people that don't usually hang out and send them on different routes.

## Action Items

- Create a network of phone numbers amongst team members and coaches to assist with communication.
- Organize a team activity – sleepover, laser tag, bowling, putt putt, camping trip, amusement park, movies, secret buddies, set up a scavenger hunt or obstacle course, attend a professional or college sports game, etc.
- As a team, go to a freshman or junior varsity game to support another sport.
- Organize a community project with the entire team.
- Have a team dinner before a home or rival game, and invite the parents.
- Sit with each other at lunch.
- Go out on a dinner with the team after a game as a celebration. That way there isn't as much pressure – just kind of a relaxing time.

*“One man practicing sportsmanship is far better than a hundred preaching it.” - Knute Rockne*

As a team captain it is your responsibility to ensure that your team keeps their composure on and off the field. Many times sportsmanship can be compromised by emotions. It is important to manage your emotions in the “heat of the battle”. Sportsmanship has nothing to do with athletic ability.



Sportsmanship has to do with a team captain using the aforementioned qualities listed in Unit 1 to promote respect for the game, the officials, and the opponent.

As a team and as a team leader you represent your school and community.

Positive sportsmanship is a good reflection on both. The IHSAA represents an outlet for student athletes by allowing them the privilege to play sports and grow as people.





## Action Items

- After practice hold a team discussion about sportsmanship. Ask individual team players to describe what sportsmanship means to them individually and to the team as a whole.
- Discuss the importance of sportsmanship with upperclassman and ask for assistance in leading underclassman related these values.
- Greet the officials prior to taking the field/court before every athletic event you participate in.
- Create a sportsmanship statement with other team captains in your school to be read before every home sporting event.
- Hold a team discussion related to emotional management. Emotional management is a player and a team's ability to control both positive and negative emotions in order to warrant respect for players, officials, and the game.



*"The leader has to be practical and a realist yet must talk the language of the visionary and the idealist."*

**- Eric Hoffer**

In being selected as team captain, you are not only a leader for your team, but a representative and image of your school and community. As a team captain and student-athlete, you have a responsibility to the IHSAA, your school, your coaches, and your teammates by cooperating with the media. Because you are representing yourself, your team, your coaches, your school, and the IHSAA, you need to always be aware of what you say and what you do. Many times during high school athletics, you may be approached by different types of media: the school newspaper, local newspaper, local news station, radio, television, or magazine. In this day and age, social media has a great impact on how others view you; therefore you need to be prepared.



## Media Basics

- The opportunity to deal with the media is a learning experience in developing communication skills.
- Your appearance, what you say, and what you do will stay with you for the rest of your life. Your image is reflected through the media, use that to your advantage and have good judgment.
- The media is not your enemy as long as you handle them properly: give your side of the story, a positive opinion, and your message.
- You are NOT obligated to answer a question you do not feel comfortable answering. A proper response could be, "I'd rather not comment on that question at this time."
- Never agree to a telephone or personal interview unless arrangements have been made by a school official or coach. If you are contacted by the media, tell them to contact your school's representative or coach.
- Always have patience with the media and interviewers.
- Think through every question you are asked before answering, and be sure what you say will not embarrass you or others.

## Media Ground Rules

- Always tell the truth.
- Know the difference between your “public answer” and your “private answer.” We all know we tell each other things we would not want to share with everyone else. Do not share your private answers with the media.
- Know who you want to reach. Who is your audience? In every interview situation, consider how you can impact your audience.
- Know your message. Keep firmly in your mind exactly what you want to say and what you want your message to be. With that focus, you will be sure to say things you won’t regret in the future.
- Resist the temptation to fill the silence. If you have them at hello, say goodbye. It is common to feel compelled to keep talking to fill the awkward silence, but DON’T. It is when you say more than intended that you often make mistakes.
- Never mistake familiarity for trust. You may know the interviewer, but be sure to always stay on topic and never make any “off-color” comments. Assume what you say will always end up in print.
- Keep it under control: Remember that you are in control of the interview. The interviewer is the one asking YOU the questions. You are in control of what statements go into the interview, and whether they are positive or negative.

## Action Items

- Be positive. People are impressed by resilience and a positive attitude. Do not say, “Yeah, we had a bad game. I don’t know what happened.” Instead, say, “This just shows what we need to work on as a team to get better.”
- Accept responsibility. Do not blame your mistakes on others. This demonstrates your courage by showing that you are not afraid to acknowledge shortcomings. Apologize first, then explain later.
- Be humble. This shows you are genuine, real, considerate, and selfless to both your audience and your team. People appreciate seeing this quality in an athlete and a leader. When you share credit, do it by name.
- Always use appropriate language. Avoid slang or words/terms which may cause a reporter or the public to misinterpret what you say.
- Smile and use humor. A smile is worth a thousand words to the media; people tend to find comfort in light-hearted remarks and knowing that you do not take yourself too seriously.
- Be quotable. Carefully prepare your answers and get to the point of your message
- Beware of the Leading Question. Leading questions are meant to provoke an emotional or impulsive response; they are used so a reporter can place words in your mouth. It is crucial to remain calm in the face of aggressive questioning and important to remember it is not personal but a tactic. Social media is available to help promote you and your message to the community. Always remember that you represent yourself, the IHSAA, your school, its fans, alumni, and supporters, so BE A ROLE MODEL.

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*“Make yourself necessary to somebody.”*

**- Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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To better yourself as a team captain, intentionally do something today to better your team. It may be something small like saying hello to a person on the freshman team, or something bigger like planning a team dinner. This list will help you start thinking about something you can do today.

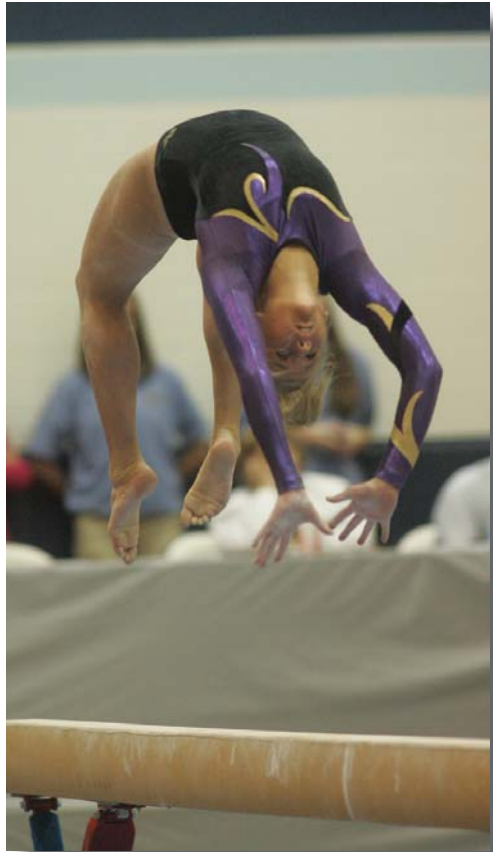
- Make it your goal and find a member of the team in the hallway and start a conversation with them.
- Make a “pump up” CD to give to teammates.
- Make team shirts.
- Offer to attend student/homework table to help those who need it.
- Suggest a practice/drill idea to your coach.
- Be the first to welcome in new players.
- Develop a team motto that will last through the season.
- Talk to teammates about the importance of college and how to better yourself for that challenge. The challenge may be preparing to play sports at the next level, or taking advantage of scholastic opportunities beyond high school.
- Set up a phone tree with teammates for better communication.



## ***Additional Activities***



- Work on your charisma and prepare things to say before, during, and after games to help motivate your team.
- Confront a teammate in private about his/her negative actions and discuss positive solutions.
- Encourage teammates to become better leaders and give them opportunities to do so on the practice field.
- Be accountable for your actions as a captain.
- Schedule a players-only meeting.
- Organize off-season training. Assume more responsibilities and work harder than anyone else on the team.
- Congratulate a teammate for extra effort in practice.
- Set team expectations for performance and behavior.
- Have each player set personal goals on and off the field and record their progress.
- Organize a team fundraiser like a car wash, dinner, or community project.
- Make sure everyone on the team is having fun.
- Say hi to your teammates and be happy even if you are not feeling great.
- Listen to teammates, coaches, game officials, etc.
- Show your teammates that you believe in team spirit by dressing as a team on game day. Set the dress code for important dates and follow through.



Being a captain is a special opportunity. You have the power to make or break your teammates' year. It is not just about winning games; it is about making a difference. Whether it is helping them to a state championship, they will always remember or giving them friendship that will last a lifetime, being an active team captain can make a difference in your teammates' lives. By stepping up and striving to be the best captain you can be, you learn the skills of leadership that will not only give you success in your high school sports career, but can also give you success beyond high school.

Now that you know your strengths and weaknesses, you can utilize the different sections of this book to improve your skills as a captain. It is important to realize that this book doesn't have to answer every question, so you may have to look to others for advice or experience it yourself. Don't forget that all leaders struggle in certain areas. Instead of overlooking your flaws, embrace them and use this book to make yourself a better captain and person.



## Belief Statement

The Student Advisory Committee is a diverse, dynamic group of student athletes focused on providing a means of education and communication for its constituency. The group serves as a conduit between student athletes, administrators, and the Executive Committee of the IHSAA. The Student Advisory Committee promotes all standing ideals of the IHSAA, including leadership, sportsmanship, and integrity.



## About the Authors



The IHSAA Student Advisory Committee represents the entire IHSAA membership of 408 schools, and its structure mirrors that of the IHSAA Board of Directors. The IHSAA began sponsoring the Student Advisory Committee in 2001-02 to give the group of student-athletes hands-on experience and a voice to the IHSAA staff. The SAC meets four times annually – twice each semester – and is responsible for hosting meetings with student peers at the upcoming Fall Area Principals Meetings; assisting with the awards ceremonies at IHSAA state championship events throughout the school year and; planning and administering the annual IHSAA Student Leadership Conference in June.



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*“People acting together as a group can accomplish things which no individual acting alone could ever hope to bring about.”*

**- Franklin D. Roosevelt**  
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***“High school sports: where lessons of life  
are still being learned and where athletes  
still compete for the love of the game  
and their teammates.”***

**– Michael Powers**



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