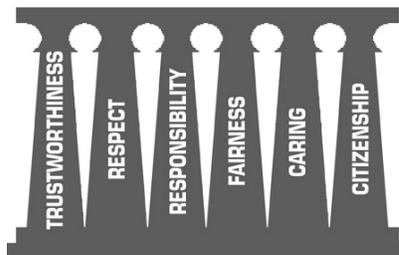


# COACHES MANUAL



Knox County  
Parks & Recreation



# **KNOX COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COACHES MANUAL**

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How to incorporate the Six Pillars into coaching

**“Sports do not build character. They reveal it.”  
-John Wooden**

**"If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, we did it. If anything goes really good, then you did it. That's all it takes to get people to win football games for you."  
-Bear Bryant**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The goal of this manual is to help provide a safe and enjoyable program that enhances skills, improves physical fitness and teaches positive values through sports.

Each year thousands of players and coaches participate in Knox County sports programs. The rapid growth of participation and the public interest in sports has created both opportunities and problems for our programs.

Volunteer coaches are critical to the success of the program. Without your unselfish dedication children would not be able to participate. We hope this program will give you some basic guides concerning coaching and help you become a better coach.

This program is not sport specific. Additional training is available through Knox County that is specific to your sport.

## **2. CHARACTER COUNTS! FOR SPORTS**

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### **WHY CHARACTER COUNTS! FOR SPORTS**

Sports provide a tremendous opportunity to teach values such as teamwork and discipline. Coaches, officials and parents need to recognize the impact they can have on today's youth. While the overwhelming majority of sports experiences are positive, many negative perceptions and influences are becoming more prevalent in sports world. The media often reveals problems in professional and amateur sports at an increasing rate.

Coaches especially have a unique position in setting the tone for participation for both players and their families. Coaches and officials have the opportunity and the responsibility to determine acceptable and unacceptable behavior on and off the field.

### **WHAT IS CHARACTER COUNTS! FOR SPORTS**

The CHARACTER COUNTS! program has been implemented in Knox County Schools for several years. In 1999 the CHARACTER COUNTS! FOR SPORTS program was initiated by the Josephson Institute of Ethics. The program is based on shared beliefs and consensus values called the "Six Pillars of Character." In 1992 a diverse group of education, religious, youth and civic leaders developed the core values designed to "transcend cultural, religious and socioeconomic differences." While the six pillars do not endorse a specific religion, they are compatible with all major religions.

## **THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SPORTS**

Listed below are just a few examples of the positive impact of sports. We want to be sure that we maintain this positive influence and take advantage of the profound impact we can have on developing character.

“About 92% of sports participants do not use drugs.”

“Sports participants receive above average grades and do above average on skills tests.”

“Boys who participate in high school sports do better in school, do not drop out and have a better chance to get through college by a 2-to-1 ratio.”

### **SIX WEEKS OF CHARACTER COUNTS! FOR USE AT PRACTICE**

The following is a suggested guide for discussion during practice. However, please look for the “teachable moments” to discuss the six pillars. Game and practice situations and current news stories are good opportunities.

#### **WEEK 1**

##### **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

**Be reliable and loyal to your team.**

Discuss the importance of coming to practice and being on time: “*Your team mates count on you to have a good practice.*”

Coaches need to be able to trust their players. What happens if the coach feels a player can’t be trusted? “*Do you like to play with someone you can’t trust?*”

#### **WEEK 2**

##### **RESPECT**

**Show respect to officials and coaches, even when you disagree.  
Win and lose with honor.**

It is important to realize that the decision of a coach or official is made with authority and is often not negotiable. “*How do talk to a coach or official if you disagree with something? When is the right time for such discussion? Being disrespectful will not help you make your point.*”

Think of how you want to be treated when you are losing. Win with dignity and lose with respect for the other team. Always shake hands or give the other team “five” at the end of the game. “*Do you like to play with a poor loser or a bragging winner?*”

#### **WEEK 3**

##### **RESPONSIBILITY**

**Use self-control. YOU are responsible for your behavior.**

Always remember that in any situation the only thing you have control over is your own behavior. You should always be striving to control yourself in difficult situations and pursuing

excellence whenever you can. *“What do you think when you see players fighting? How about when you see someone overcome great obstacles to achieve?”*

Relative to the age group, discuss tobacco, alcohol and drug use. *“There are no benefits to tobacco (or other) use. Why?”* Discuss both health and legal concerns.

#### **WEEK 4 FAIRNESS**

**Play by the rules, don't bend or break them.**

Rules are created to keep the game fair and safe for everyone. *“What happens if we start bending the rules or try to break them when no one is looking? Would you feel good about winning if you knew you or a tea mate cheated?”*

Treat people fairly, don't pre-judge them based on something you think you know. *“How do you feel if someone judges you before they know you?”*

#### **WEEK 5 CARING**

**Make new players feel welcome. Help someone in the park today.**

Try to get and keep a “help others” mindset. This is the ultimate embodiment of the Golden Rule. *“What are some opportunities where you could help someone on your team or in the park/gym?”*

Avoid groups (cliques) that alienate others, remember, we are a team. *“What happens when you leave someone out because they're not a part of your group? How does this affect the team?”*

#### **WEEK 6 CITIZENSHIP**

**Help keep the park clean; it's your park!  
Follow the park rules; they help keep everyone safe.**

What are the rules for the facility you use? *“Why is it important fore everyone to follow the rules? What would it be like if we did not have rules for the park/gym (speed limits, trash, parking, and smoking)?”*

### **3. RESPONISIBILITY CODES**

The following responsibility codes are intended to help coaches, players, officials and parents understand what is expected. We hope that by clarifying our expectations, we can provide a more positive experience for everyone in our program, but especially the youth we are training for tomorrow. Being a good sport is a taught skill, we need to reinforce it, live by example and encourage good sportsmanship at whenever the opportunity arises.

## **COACHES RESPONSIBILITY**

1. Realize that as a coach you wear many hats and have many responsibilities. You are first and foremost a role model for your players. They will follow your lead concerning appropriate behavior on and off the field.
2. Have fun. Lack of fun is the leading reason for dropping sports participation.
3. Attend training sessions and become familiar with potential opportunities and problems related to your sport.
4. Let players and parents know your expectations and county guidelines at the first team meeting or practice. Be aware of rules that may penalize children for situations beyond their control.
5. Use positive coaching techniques. Reinforce the six pillars and your personal expectations throughout the season.
6. Be reasonable about your demands on young player's time, energy, ability, performance and enthusiasm.
7. Follow the guidelines for your sport concerning player participation in games. Remember, everyone should play, that's what we're here for!
8. Treat other teams as you would like to be treated. Avoid running up the score or having excessive celebration. Pursue victory with honor.

## **OFFICIALS RESPONSIBILITY**

1. Be a positive role model before, during and after the game. Be on time, dressed appropriately and in good physical condition so you can keep up with the game.
2. Discuss your expectations with the coaches and captains before the game. Let them know abusive and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and people displaying such behavior will be required to leave the facility.
3. Keep player safety and fair play foremost at all times.
4. Enforce the rules fairly and as they are intended, but also be a teacher of the game.
5. Compliment players and coaches that display good sportsmanship. Inform the Park and Recreation administration of outstanding examples of sportsmanship.
6. Encourage and enforce the guidelines for the sport you're officiating concerning player participation in games. Remember, everyone should play, that's what we're here for!

## **PLAYERS RESPONSIBILITY**

1. Respect the authority of the coaches and officials. Never argue or complain about a coach's or official's decision.
2. Support your teammates verbally and by working hard as a team.
3. Get yourself ready for practice and games so you arrive on time.
4. Help out by volunteering for the team, park or gym.
5. Control your words and actions.
6. Cheer positively for good play by both teams.
7. Play by the rules and the spirit of the game.
8. Remember, you're here to have fun, learn skills and be a part of a team.

## **PARENTS RESPONSIBILITY**

1. Respect the authority of the coaches and officials. Never argue or complain about a coach's or official's decision.
2. Discuss concerns with coaches in private not during games or practices.
3. Get children to practice and games on time. Let the coach know if you will be late or absent.
4. Help out by volunteering for the team, park or gym.
5. Support your child by providing positive encouragement at all times. Let them know that hard work and improvement are more important than winning to you.
5. Cheer positively for your team, not negatively for the other team.

## **4. PRACTICE AND FITNESS**

All practices should include the following components. Well run practices will improve the fitness levels of participants. Increase time with age and fitness levels.

- Before practice:
- Plan the practice
  - Tell players to arrive early
  - Players are to bring water and appropriate equipment
- Warm-up 5 minutes of light activity
  - Stretching 5 minutes of slow, deliberate stretching held for a count of 10 at each stretch
  - Review 5 minutes of discussion of the last practice or game
  - Instruction 10-20 minutes introducing new skills, plays or drills
  - Breaks 5-10 minutes twice or more during practice of rest and water relative to temperature and fitness levels
  - Scrimmage 10-20 minutes of various styles of scrimmage designed to improve playing ability and endurance
  - Cool down 5 minutes light activity and stretching

## **5. PREVENTION AND CARE OF INJURIES**

### **Prevention**

Be aware of environmental conditions that can present hazards

- Wet conditions
- Dry conditions
- Extreme heat or cold
- Damaged playing surfaces
- Damaged playing equipment
- Storms
- Structures such as seating or sprinkler heads

Take steps to help prevent injuries

- Be aware of changing conditions and alter activity if needed
- Inform the appropriate persons about hazards
- Check player and field/gym equipment regularly
- Allow breaks and be aware of fitness levels

- Be aware of special medical conditions of players
- Stop unsafe play
- Teach correct techniques
- First-Aid and CPR instruction is strongly recommended

## Care

- Maintain appropriate first-aid supplies or know where they are available
- Know the location of the nearest telephone
- Follow appropriate first-aid procedures
- Complete accident report forms and submit to field/gym director

## Basic First-Aid

Render only basic and immediate first aid. Refer all questionable injuries to a medical professional. **When in doubt call 911!**

## Bumps/Bruises

- Causes: Direct blow to the muscle tissue, which causes swelling, discoloration, and pain.
- Signs: Pain and point tenderness  
Swelling  
Discoloration  
Localized warmth  
Possible muscle spasm or limitation of motion
- Care: Apply cold compress as soon as possible  
Control swelling for at least 48 hours
  - Ice (20 min on, 20 min off)
  - Compression (elastic wrap)
  - If on arm or leg raise it above the heart
Monitor healing process  
If on fingers, face, neck, or genital area, refer to a physician

## Bone Injuries

- Signals: Pain  
Bruising and swelling  
Limb deformity  
Skin discoloration  
Inability to use the affected part normally  
Loss of sensation
- Care: Avoid movement or activity that causes pain  
Do not move the victim unless the injured area is totally immobilized  
Do not attempt to straighten the suspected fracture or dislocation  
If you cannot immobilize at the scene, call 911  
Splint only if the victim must be moved. Use a soft splint only, to avoid further injury, splint the injury in the position that you find it  
Check for circulation  
Prevent shock by keeping the victim from becoming chilled or overheated.



## 6. RISK MANAGEMENT

### Liability

As a coach you are responsible for the players on your team during practice and games. Volunteer and Good Samaritan Laws protect you from civil liability so long as you are acting within the scope of your responsibilities and training, and not in a way that would be considered reckless conduct, gross negligence or related actions.

This program is a part of your training to insure you understand the scope of your responsibilities. To insure the safety of all participants in our program coaches are asked to comply with the following procedures:

- Complete the Volunteer form and return it to the Commission/County
- Attend the Coaches training and abide by all policies
- Stay updated on rule changes and new procedures

### Conduct

A coach's conduct is held to a high standard. The following policies will be strictly enforced.

- Use or distribution of alcohol, tobacco products, fire arms, fire works and illegal drugs is prohibited in all county youth sports programs.
- Abusive language or behavior is not permitted.
- Inappropriate touching is not permitted.
- Coaches shall not be alone with any children that are not their own.
- Wait for all children to be picked-up by a parent or guardian after a game or practice
- Keep Youth Player forms with you at all times when coaching the children (these contain emergency information).

## 7. JOB DESCRIPTIONS

### COACH

#### DUTIES

- Abide by the policies of Knox County, the governing sports body and the local recreation commission.
- Attend meetings and training provided by Knox County and the local recreation commission.
- Maintain the equipment of the team and park.
- Communicate changes and necessary information with the County, recreation commission, players and parents.
- Follow the policies, procedures and philosophies outlined in the training programs.
- Conduct and attend all practices and games in a timely fashion or coordinate with assistant coaches in your absence.
- Have fun with the kids.
- Respect the differences in abilities.
- Play every child every game if at all possible.

- Enforce the rules in an unbiased way.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

- Enjoy working and playing with children.
- Patience with, and respect for, children.
- Attend coach's training/certification programs.
- Basic understanding of the rules, plays and positions of the sport.
- Read and understand the coach's manual.
- Read and understand the by-laws and rules for your particular sport.

## **ASSISTANT COACH**

### **DUTIES**

- Abide by the policies of Knox County, the governing sports body and the local recreation commission.
- Attend meetings and training provided by Knox County and the local recreation commission.
- Assist in maintaining the equipment of the team and park.
- Communicate changes and necessary information with the County, recreation commission, players and parents when coach is absent.
- Follow the policies, procedures and philosophies outlined in the training programs.
- Conduct and attend all practices and games in a timely fashion or coordinate with coach in your absence.
- Have fun with the kids.
- Respect the differences in abilities.
- Enforce the rules in an unbiased way.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

- Enjoy working and playing with children.
- Patience with, and respect for, children.
- Attend coaches' training/certification programs.
- Basic understanding of the rules plays and positions of the sport.
- Read and understand the coach's manual.
- Read and understand the by-laws and rules for your particular sport.

## **8. FORMS**

PLEASE SEE THE KNOX COUNTY WEBSITE AT  
[knoxcounty.org/parks](http://knoxcounty.org/parks)  
OR YOUR COMMISSIONER FOR ALL FORMS

## **9. APPENDIX**



## CHARACTER COUNTS!

### How to incorporate the Six Pillars into coaching

#### **T**rustworthiness

Role Models- Tony Dungy, Annika Sorenstam, Kurt Warner

Teaching Idea- Trust is the key to teamwork, your teammates need to know they can trust you to do the right thing, be at practice, do your part.

#### **R**espect

Role Models- Pat Summit, Bear Bryant, Jerome Bettis

Teaching Idea- Being respectful means listening to the coach and treating the other team how you would want to be treated. How do we show respect to the other team after the game? Respect the official's decision.

#### **R**esponsibility

Role Models- Cal Ripken, Jackie Joyner-Kersey

Teaching Idea- It is your responsibility to be ready for practice and keep up with your equipment. This helps your parents, coaches and teammates.

#### **F**airness

Role Models- Bruce Pearl, John Wooden, Mia Hamm

Teaching Idea- Playing by the rules makes the game fun and fair for everyone. Why do we want to be known as fair players?

#### **C**aring

Role Models- Donovan McNabb, Chamique Holdsclaw, Ken Sparks

Teaching Idea- Help up a fallen teammate or competitor, encourage teammates after a bad play.

#### **C**itizenship- Pat Tillman, David Robinson, Steve Nash

Teaching Idea- Picking up your and others trash around the field or gym. Help out on a community project as a team or organization.

#### Good story resources for your kids:

Character Counts! For Sports- sign up for the newsletter  
[charactercounts.org](http://charactercounts.org)

USA Weekend – Annual Most Caring Coaches and Athletes Awards  
[usaweekend.com](http://usaweekend.com)

AT&T National Sportsmanship Awards  
[nationalsportsmanshipawards.com](http://nationalsportsmanshipawards.com)

NCAA Sportsmanship Awards  
[ncaa.org](http://ncaa.org)

Most pro sports organizations have annual sportsmanship awards  
Joe Ehrmann- Season of Life

# Jeter takes home Clemente Award

## Yanks captain recognized for charitable efforts, superb play

Jeter, 35, was selected from a list of 30 nominees, one from each Major League club, by a panel that included Selig and Vera Clemente. Fans also were able to vote at MLB.com for one of the 30 nominees. The winner of the fan vote was tallied as one vote among those cast by the selection panel.

"Major League Baseball is proud to honor Derek Jeter for the lasting impact the [Turn 2 Foundation](#) has made on youth in communities across the country," Selig said, referring to the charitable organization Jeter started in 1996. "In a year of career milestones for Derek, receiving the Roberto Clemente Award will inspire future generations of ballplayers and fans to give back to those in need. I would also like to thank Chevy for their continued support in honoring Roberto Clemente's legacy and spirit."

Selig told Jeter: "You're a wonderful role model not only for the youth of America but also for our players. You have been the face of baseball for many years, and you're truly deserving of this award. I don't want to embarrass Derek, but a player like Derek Jeter, it makes me very proud to be the Commissioner of baseball."

For Jeter, winning the award was another highlight in a special season, one in which he set the Yankees' all-time hits record and led his team back to the ultimate stage.

"This is a very special day for everyone involved with the Turn 2 Foundation," Jeter said. "Thank you to everyone at Major League Baseball, Chevy, and especially the Clemente family for this recognition. The Steinbrenner family and the Yankees organization have supported my work in the community my entire career, and I am very grateful for their encouragement. It is truly an honor to be mentioned alongside Roberto Clemente and the others who have won this award over the years."

Jeter is the third Yankees player to win the award, and the first in nearly a quarter century. The others were Ron Guidry and Don Baylor back-to-back in 1984-85. Jeter joins a distinguished group of [winners](#) that includes 13 Hall of Famers, such as Willie Mays (the first winner in 1971), Brooks Robinson, Al Kaline, Willie Stargell, Lou Brock, Rod Carew, Phil Niekro, Ozzie Smith and Kirby Puckett.

Cardinals first baseman Albert Pujols was last year's winner, and he said at the presentation that it was the most important individual honor he had received.

In 1996, Jeter turned a lifelong dream into reality when he established the Turn 2 Foundation to give back to the various communities that are a part of his life, including Western Michigan (he is from Kalamazoo); Tampa, Fla.; and New York. Since its launch, the Turn 2 Foundation has awarded more than \$10 million in grants to create and support signature programs and activities that motivate young people to turn away from drugs and alcohol and "TURN 2" healthy lifestyles. Through these ventures, the Foundation strives to create outlets that promote academic excellence, leadership development and positive behavior.

## Florida Pitcher Stacey Nelson Wins the 2009 Softball Lowe's Senior CLASS Award

**May 26, 2009**

(Oklahoma City, OK) – University of Florida pitcher **Stacey Nelson**, who has earned the rare distinction as both a softball All-American and Academic All-American, has been selected as the winner of the 2009 Lowe's Senior CLASS Award in the softball division.

The award, chosen by a nationwide vote of coaches, media and fans, is presented annually to college softball's outstanding NCAA Division I senior student-athlete. The announcement and trophy presentation were made today by Lowe's, an Official Corporate Partner of the NCAA, during the NCAA Women's College World Series Opening Ceremonies in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

An acronym for Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School, the Lowe's Senior CLASS Award has grown into the nation's premier tribute to college seniors. The award identifies personal qualities that define a complete student-athlete, with criteria including excellence in the classroom, character and community, as well as competition on the field.

"I am extremely honored to be the 2009 Lowe's Senior CLASS Award recipient," Nelson said. "Just to be considered was an honor and to come out on top is something I never dreamed of. I want to thank all the people who have been here for me in my collegiate career. I want to thank the University of Florida for the opportunity and tools to allow me to excel in the classroom and reach out in the community. I want to thank the UF softball program for giving me the opportunity to play softball and to the Lowe's Senior Class Award committee for giving me the chance to be a part of this great award."

As a senior, Nelson has led the Gators to the No. 1 ranking in the nation and the top seed in the NCAA Tournament. The two-time All-American recently was named the 2009 Southeastern Conference Pitcher of the Year with a 39-3 record, including two no-hitters. The right-hander has the lowest ERA (0.41) in the country and is second in wins. She was also named to the All-SEC first team and the SEC All-Defensive team for the second straight year. It was her second Pitcher of the Year Award. With 134 career wins, Nelson ranks seventh all-time on the NCAA victories list and second in SEC history. Her 1,025 strikeouts are first in the UF record books and seventh in the SEC's

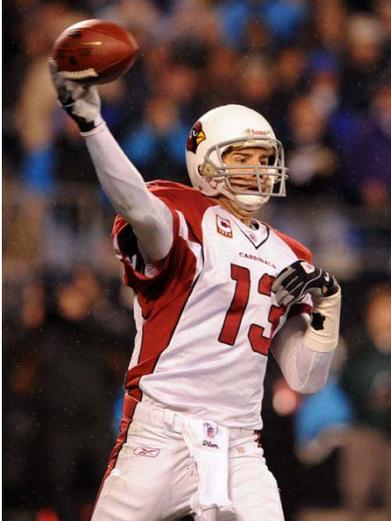
In the classroom, the Academic All-American is a philosophy major who has been a member of the SEC Academic Honor Roll. Her ambition is to attend law school where she would like to study humanitarian law and work for the International Criminal Court.

The number of Nelson's extra-curricular activities rivals her athletic awards. A representative for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), she was a co-chairman of Climb for Cancer, which gives children with cancer a chance to play sports with UF student-athletes. She also has spent time at various elementary schools in the Gainesville area, reading to children and being a mentor. As a member of the softball team, Nelson helped build a home for a local family through Habitat for Humanity and has spent the last four holiday seasons delivering sneakers to children through the UAA's Gator Tracks program.

"This is a tremendous honor for Stacey, for our softball program and for the University of Florida," said Gators head softball coach, **Tim Walton**. "Stacey truly exemplifies what it means to be a class act on and off the field. On behalf of the entire softball program, I want to thank Lowe's for recognizing a great person."

## **KURT WARNER NAMED USA WEEKEND'S MOST CARING ATHLETE FOR 2009**

Posted - 11/17/2009 at 3:02PM



Tempe, AZ - Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner has been selected by USA WEEKEND as its Most Caring Athlete for 2009. Warner will be featured on the cover of the November 20-22 issue of USA WEEKEND (image attached), which has 50 million readers in 700 newspapers.

A four-time Pro Bowl QB, three-time Super Bowl starter and two-time league MVP, Warner is one of the most accomplished passers in NFL history. However, for all of his on-field accomplishments, Warner's community work remains his biggest source of pride and the Most Caring Athlete honor is a reflection of that commitment.

Kurt and Brenda Warner established the "First Things First" foundation in 2001 and have personally contributed more than \$1.5 million since then to host trips to Disney for Make-A-Wish families, furnish homes for low income single moms, and host Punt, Pass and Kick clinics with Special Olympic athletes, to name just a few of their initiatives. After visiting flood-ravaged regions in 2008, he created a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to sponsor home builds throughout the Midwest and those efforts have raised over \$675,000.

Just before kickoff of Super Bowl XLIII between the Cardinals and Steelers last February, Warner received the 2008 Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award, the only league recognition that acknowledges a player's off-the-field community service as well as his playing excellence.

Also last year, Kurt was nominated by his teammates to receive the 2008 NFL PLAYERS JB Award for his commitment to achieve excellence off the field through building better communities and stronger families.

Each year since 1995, USA WEEKEND has bestowed the Most Caring Athlete Award on professional sports figures who give their time, talents, and name to a host of worthy causes and inspire their fans to do the same.

In recognition of the honor, USA WEEKEND is contributing \$5,000 to "First Things First" ([www.kurtwarner.org](http://www.kurtwarner.org)). The foundation also received a 2009 NFL Charities Player Foundation grant in recognition of its outstanding work in the community.

**USA Weekend Most Caring Athlete Awards**

## **2006 Jerome Bettis**

**Jerome Bettis** came to South Bend, Ind., in 1990, ready to play football and get a good education. Almost immediately, Bettis remembers, he was transformed by Notre Dame in ways that went far beyond the Fighting Irish's storied sporting traditions of "Touchdown Jesus," Knute Rockne and 11 national titles.

In fact, it was the Catholic university's culture of community service that sparked the young man's passion for helping others. "Notre Dame is about a lot more than football and tradition," says Bettis, taking a break during a photo shoot for this weekend's magazine cover. "You're in the national spotlight all the time, and they stress community and character there. Man, I was never exposed to anything like that. Shortly after I got there, I understood that Notre Dame could be used as a platform to try to influence other young people's lives and hopefully do some good."

So the freshman Bettis returned to his Detroit home on breaks, determined to reach out to other inner-city young people at churches and rec centers about making the right choices in life. Since then, Bettis has continued to take advantage of his place on the public stage when it comes to making a difference. His Detroit- and Pittsburgh-based Jerome Bettis The Bus Stops Here Foundation, among other efforts, has sent more than 5,000 inner-city kids from ages 8 to 18 to the JB Football Camp in Detroit, has awarded no fewer than 30 college scholarships, has built or renovated playgrounds in struggling areas and has attempted to bridge the digital divide by teaching computer literacy to more than 200 children. The latter effort is called the Cyber Bus program, and Bettis is especially gratified when he gets a sense of the impact it makes.

## **2007 STEVE NASH**

Nash has never resembled a typical superstar athlete. He's listed at 6-foot-3, 195 pounds -- a scrappy whirlwind of a player as opposed to a dominating dunker. His hair -- often long and scraggly -- flies wildly as he races about the court. And although not preachy, Nash has used his fame to raise discussion about world politics when he has felt it's needed. A month before the Iraq war started, for example, Nash wore a T-shirt on the court that said, "No War -- Shoot for Peace." At the time, such sentiment wasn't fashionable, and expressing political views often can lead to fallout from fans and sponsors. Nash, however, had no reservations about sharing his thoughts. "I never want to put myself on a soapbox all the time because that can wear thin on the public," he says. "But I also need to be myself. I did that because I felt it was an important time in this world, and the general public should examine the issues."

Today, his unique worldview still guides him. Nash's foundation touches people all around the world, from Phoenix (where he plays for the Suns) to Canada (where he was raised) to Paraguay (where his wife, Alejandra, hails from). Just recently, Nash headed out to China to launch an all-star game and fundraiser with Yao Ming of the Houston Rockets. Together the two raised \$2.5 million to improve educational resources in poor rural communities there.

Other Nash activities include supporting AIDS awareness efforts in Vancouver; meeting with cancer patients in New York before a Suns/Knicks game; refurbishing basketball courts for young people in Phoenix; and a fundraising campaign for Hospital de Clinicas in Asuncion, Paraguay, one of that country's oldest hospitals. Nash took special interest in the hospital after he heard some heartbreaking stories about child care there through his wife and her friends. "We found out about a little boy there who needed heart surgery as a newborn, but they simply didn't have the equipment to do it," Nash says. "My wife has a friend who works in the hospital who told us that she saw another baby there turning blue. She asked why the baby wasn't in an incubator. They told her that there were only two incubators, and

they were occupied by babies who had a better chance to live. It's amazing that the things we take for granted here amount to a dream over there."

### **2008 Annika Sorenstam**

When Annika Sorenstam was introduced to American country clubs more than 15 years ago, she got a rude awakening. As a young girl growing up in Sweden and developing her golf game, she was used to practicing on equal footing with boys at the local club. That wasn't the case with many private clubs in the United States. "The men's clubs were for men," she says. "In Sweden, you never hear of such a thing as 'ladies golf on Wednesdays' policies. In Sweden, it was never about men and women. It was about golfers trying to be the best."

That's why Sorenstam is focusing on leveling fairways for young women. She teed off her foundation just a year ago and has already developed a number of scholarship and training programs for female golfers. "It's not about having them make a lot of money," she says. "It's about becoming the kind of person and athlete you can be and discovering that you can achieve anything."

She has launched the ANNIKA Invitational, a golf tournament with the American Junior Golf Association. Under the program, the top 60 junior female players in the world will play golf and receive media training as well as information about the importance of good nutrition for health and fitness. As part of the tournament revenues, the association itself will receive funding for charitable grants. Sorenstam also works with the Swedish Golf Federation to arrange for Swedish golfers to visit colleges in the United States and provide private practice sessions, among other benefits.

Next up for Sorenstam: Working with local educational leaders in Orlando, where she now lives, to improve physical fitness programs in schools. "It's where I live, so we need to start locally and see where it can go from there," Sorenstam says. "Schools nationwide are dropping physical education as a class, and children today simply are not as active as they need to be to stay healthy. When I grew up, we had gym class three days a week, and I golfed and played tennis and soccer, too. Kids need this. The benefits go far beyond building muscles and getting faster. It's about team building and working together toward a goal."

### **2009 Kurt Warner**

**You meet a beautiful woman** named Brenda in a country music bar, and she tells you that she's divorced with two kids. Instead of running away, you show up the next day on her doorstep, a rose in hand. You ask to meet her children, one of whom has special needs. But that pushes you forward, not away. You commit yourself to this family. When her parents are killed in a tornado that levels their home, you help her make sense of it.

All this time, you're trying to make it as a pro football player while stocking groceries at a Hy-Vee food store in Cedar Falls, Iowa. You play for a low-level Arena Football League team before getting a shot with the St. Louis Rams. But coaches scream at you after you misfire pass after pass. Teammates shake their heads in disgust. You start to question why you try at all, why everything in life seems to test your worthiness.

But when you're Kurt Warner, now the Arizona Cardinals' quarterback, you don't let challenges break you. You respond with an inner resolve time-tested through trying circumstances.

These episodes, Warner explains, were never easy. But they made him who he is today -- not only a Super Bowl champion, but also one of the most active NFL players on the charity front. For this reason, he is USA WEEKEND's 2009 Most Caring Athlete.

"Brenda's parents were killed, and I was struggling in football," Warner says of a dark time in 1996 that led to a spiritual renewal. "It seemed like everything was falling apart. So we simply put our lives in God's hands. That's when we felt comforted, not scared. Since then, we have sought to share ourselves and our faith and to touch other people's lives."

The Warners have stayed that course during their 12-year marriage. Through their First Things First foundation, they oversee a staggering range of outreach efforts. They've raised more than \$675,000 for victims of last year's Midwest floods. Their most recent annual winter coat drive in St. Louis, where Warner won a Super Bowl for the Rams in 2000, brought in 15,000 donated coats. They've shipped hundreds of care packages to troops overseas, a project close to Brenda's heart (she's a former Marine).

This Christmas, the Warners and their seven kids will stuff more than 50 stockings with gift cards, coloring books and sunglasses, a family tradition. The whole group will personally deliver them to Sunshine Acres in greater Phoenix, a non-profit that takes in needy children. They've arranged to have 10 tons of snow delivered. "These kids have never seen snow," Warner says. "So we're going to have a snowball fight and show them what Christmas is all about!"

The couple also makes annual visits to Orlando, where they have hosted Disney World vacations for 65 seriously ill children and their immediate families. At the end of the most recent Disney week -- one filled with Aladdin-themed magic carpet rides and visits from Mickey Mouse -- Warner says goodbye to the kids and their families. "You are the light of the world," he tells them. "All of you have been just that to me this week. Now go out and share that."

Carly and Brian Magee of St. Louis have had two children -- Gabe, 12, and Ariel, 10 -- go to Disney World with the Warners. Those memories will last forever. "Whenever we're having a down day, Gabe will pull out a scrapbook and point to the pictures and say, 'That's the time that I saved Kurt and Brenda from that big elephant!'" Carly says.

Warner's goodwill embraces a great range of needs, but he's motivated by his deep religious faith and makes no apologies for using his fame to energize his foundation and, in turn, reach more people with his Christian message. He stresses that his foundation is inclusive: "The main thing is to live your life the right way, by example, not by standing on a soapbox."

As for the future, the Warners have discussed life after football. He envisions becoming a minister, or a motivational speaker, or both. He certainly has a compelling story. "I constantly prepared for my chance," he says. "The fact that it took so long to get there? There was a reason: There had to be a humbling process, so that, by the time I got here, what I was doing was about far more than me."