



IHSAA

CAPTAIN'S HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	Page 3
SECTION 1: How it looks when it's done right.....	Page 4
SECTION 2: Things to look out for.....	Page 6
SECTION 3: Introduction to Leadership	Page 8
SECTION 4: Leadership Style	Page 10
SECTION 5: Roles and Responsibilities	Page 12
SECTION 6: Positive Modeling	Page 14
SECTION 7: Communication.....	Page 16
SECTION 8: Motivation	Page 18
SECTION 9: Team Building and Team Cohesion	Page 20
SECTION 10: Handling Tough Situations	Page 22
SECTION 11: Leadership in Review.....	Page 25

To optimize your use of this handbook, SAC recommends that you:

1. Express to your coach why leadership training is important. Schedule a time to meet and discuss the handbook.
2. Talk about the topics with other leaders on your team.
3. Don't feel restricted by what's in this handbook alone.
4. Report back to your A.D. or coach your experience with the book.

This handbook was developed by the IHSAA Student Advisory Council to provide a baseline level of training for IHSAA leaders. It was written with collaborative input from IHSAA Athletes, Coaches, and Athletic Directors.

The intended recipients of the information in this book are aspiring leaders of IH-SAA athletics and activities groups. We are providing this guide for you to better understand how to be a positive, effective, and impactful leader on your team.

Each section in this handbook is structured with...

- An introduction to the topic
- Recommendations from current captains or coaches on how to put ideas into action.
- Questions for group discussion that can be led by a coach or team leader.

By the end of this handbook, through your learning or conversations with your coach, you should be better able to answer the following questions:

1. How do I get my teammates to respect me and listen to me?
2. What do I say when someone is slacking off in practices, or conditioning?
3. How do I bring teammates to the realization that they are out of • line by breaking training rules?
4. How do I deal with a teammate who defies and undermines the coach behind the scenes?
5. What do I say to a teammate whose negative and selfish attitude is distracting and demoralizing to the rest of the team?
6. What do I do when two of my teammates are in a major conflict?
7. How do I inspire my teammates and get them to believe that we really could achieve our goals this season?
8. What do I do when one of my teammates is thinking of quitting?
9. How do I step up and be a vocal leader when I am more comfortable being a leader by example?
10. How do I support and show loyalty to my coach in front of my teammates when I sometimes disagree with his/her decisions?

SECTION 1: How it looks when it's done right

Throughout this handbook, there will be references to responses from IHSAA Athletes, Coaches, and Athletic Directors. This first section will highlight positive experiences and behaviors that we hope you as leaders can replicate within your own leadership experience.

IHSAA Athletes were asked to talk briefly about an experience as a teammate (when they were NOT a captain or leader) and behaviors or actions of team captains that made them feel valued, welcome, and a valuable member of their team.

“I love when team captains act in a manner that everyone on the team is equal. They are not above or superior to any other player.”

“I have felt valued within my team when I do something good and my teammates get excited for me. I also have had this feeling when our team talks about our strengths and we all go around to point out something good a teammate is doing.”

“My captains on my track team were always very supportive. they showed up to all my races. They would teach me new things everyday at practice. When I'd get in my head they would calm me down and they always made sure I ate.”

“The older players on the team made me feel comfortable being there and being on the team when I was a freshman on varsity and felt less comfortable compared to now being an older player. It really helped to know that they felt like I was capable of doing as much as they were and when they said positive things towards me it was more enjoyable.”

“Our team captains always showed leadership, whether they were vocal leaders or quiet leaders. They always made the teammates feel welcome by always including their opinions about different things.”

“Something that some of my favorite captains did was they always included me and made me feel like a valued part of the team even when I had an off day and didn't do as good as I could've.”

“I really appreciated captains who were motivational, they were put in the place as a captain for a reason, so it really helped when they not only set the example and held a standard for themselves but encouraged everyone else too.”

IHSAA Coaches and Athletic Directors were asked to talk briefly about an experience as a coach or athletic director when they observed captains or leaders performing specific actions that made other teammates or new players to a program feel valued, welcome, and important members of a team or program.

“Over this past summer, I witnessed my seniors and future captains welcoming and encouraging some soon-to-be freshman players at summer practices. These interactions looked like asking what school they were coming from, giving tips on how to improve their game, and not letting it be a one-off conversation.”

“Any time a captain goes out of their way to “invite” someone new to stay after practice to work on a skill, ask a new student to sit with them in the student section, ride to an away game to cheer for another one of our teams. These personal invitations make students feel like a part of the school. Especially when an upperclassman extends that invitation to a freshman or sophomore.”

“I see that a team builds stronger bonds when captains lead by example and not by voice. When new teammates see the captain doing “underclassmen” duties or helping build skills with someone who’s never played before, it builds trust.”

“Pairing up with new or younger players during practice, organizing team get-togethers outside of practice (dinners, hikes, etc.), listening to younger players’ concerns when they weren’t comfortable going to the coach, encouraging them and giving them positive feedback during games and practices, offering to work with them on a skill outside practice time”

“When the team captain of the varsity introduced themselves to the new freshman team members and welcomed them to the team. The captain also cares for, interacts with, and cheers on every member of the team.”

“The best experiences with captains occur when they are the ones leading practices. When they are the ones preaching core values, building culture, and setting expectations. The teams thrive. I love when captains are the ones to build up teammates after others make mistakes and fall short.”

Group Discussion

1. Talk about experiences where the actions of captains, on this team or another, have made you feel valued, welcome, and a valuable member of that team.

SECTION 2: Things to look out for

This section highlights experiences and behaviors that we hope leaders can learn from to provide better leadership to your respective teams and groups. As you'll see in the examples below, not every captain gets it "right." If you ever feel that a captain or teammate is abusing their power, report it immediately to your head coach or a trusted school official.

IHSAA athletes, coaches, and athletic directors were asked to share their thoughts on an experience as a teammate, focusing on behaviors or actions of team captains that made them feel devalued, unwelcome, or like they weren't a valuable part of the team.

- "There are always those captains who think they're better than the rest of the team just because they got the captain role. They'll yell at you for mistakes and talk behind your back."
- "Sometimes captains act like they're superior to everyone else because of their position. I'd rather vote for the worst player with a great attitude than the best player with a poor attitude. When captains make you feel less important because of their leadership role, that's when I lose respect for them."
- "Captains who don't take an interest in getting to know their teammates, stick to their normal group of friends, and don't include newcomers, can come across as snappy or demanding on the field without building relationships with new players."
- "Value comes from relationships. If captains don't nurture their connections with teammates, it becomes hard for everyone to feel fully integrated into the team."
- "When an upperclassman chooses not to associate with the team, it can really bring the team down."
- "When captains are voted in based on skill rather than integrity, they may belittle newer, less skilled, or younger athletes."
- "Previous team leaders for a former coach went out of their way to push younger players around, both physically and verbally, saying 'that's how I was treated when I was a freshman.'"

Group Discussion

1. Are there negative examples of leadership within our team or school that we have witnessed? What can we do to stop and prevent them from recurring?

Truth is, both good and bad leadership can be hard to explain or define and put into exact terms. However, like great leadership, bad leadership is just as identifiable and you can often recognize it when you see it.

IHSAA Athletes, Coaches, and Athletic Directors were asked to fill in the blank; “I hate it when team captains or leaders.....”

1. Act like they’re better than everyone else
2. Are lazy and voted as captain due to social status
3. Make others feel inferior through their words and actions
4. Undermine the coaches decisions
5. Don’t lead by example
6. Get down on their own teammates especially in public
7. Give in to maintain popularity
8. Talk down to teammates and peers
9. Undermine the coaches decisions
10. Do not listen to their teammates for feedback

What are some of the things a captain can do daily to earn their teammates’ and coaches’ respect?

1. Be the hardest worker at practice
2. Be a spark of energy and enthusiasm
3. Model mental toughness
4. Connect with a teammate
5. Compliment a teammate
6. Challenge a teammate
7. Support a teammate
8. Constructively confront negativity, pessimism, and laziness
9. Build and bond your team
10. Check-in with your coach

Group Discussion

1. What are the consequences within this group if one of our leaders exhibited the “hated” actions?
2. How committed are we to replicating those desirable positive behaviors daily?

SECTION 3: Leadership Introduction

It is estimated that there are over 800 definitions of leadership. Likely, no two coaches at your school or no two players on your team would agree on one of those definitions being the best. For most coaches or athletic directors, we certainly know what good leadership looks like and we definitely know when good leadership is not happening.

1. Leaders Are Both Made and Born

This is an age-old argument but the truth is, both sides are right. Some individuals are born and have natural traits that just make them good leaders. Some individuals do not inherently possess leadership qualities. Leadership is like any other skill in your given sport; with work and practice, it is a skill that can be cultivated and improved.

2. Not All Leaders Are Captains, and Not All Captains Are Leaders

Holding the title of captain does not automatically make someone an effective leader. Leadership is not about authority or control—it is about influence, guidance, and setting the right example. A captain should not simply impose their will upon teammates but should instead inspire and unite the team toward a common goal.

At the same time, leadership is not exclusive to captains. Many teams have informal leaders who play a crucial role in motivating and supporting their teammates without holding an official title. These individuals lead by example, communicate effectively, and contribute positively to the team dynamic. The most successful teams recognize and appreciate both formal and informal leaders, as each plays a vital role in fostering a strong, united group. Our words, actions, and behaviors impact those around us, so it's important to recognize that leadership can come from any player, regardless of their role or title.

3. Know Your Role: Leader or Follower

Understanding the situation is crucial for adapting your style and characteristics effectively. Even the best leaders must adjust to the needs of those they are trying to lead, as well as to the specific circumstances they face. Leaders need to recognize that there will be times when they need to take a step back and follow rather than lead.

Group Discussion

1. How would you define leadership based on your own experiences or discussions with your team or group?

TIPS From Other Captains

- Leaders must first be followers before transitioning into leadership roles.
- It's essential for leaders to continuously develop their skills and commit to lifelong learning.
- Different situations call for varied leadership styles; sometimes a firm approach is necessary, while other times a calm and quiet demeanor is more effective.
- To lead effectively, leaders need to understand their followers.
- Take the time to get to know your teammates so you can interact with them more effectively.

IHSAA Athletes, Coaches, and Athletic Directors were asked to list behaviors or attributes they most highly value in team captains or leaders:

“Willing to be vocal in a constructive and supportive way, takes responsibility, leads by example, communicates with coaches and team in an appropriate and trustful way.”

“A friend on and off the court, stays out of drama, attempts to mend problems, and openly communicates with the coach about concerns the team has.”

“Be the hardest working, honest, responsible, friendly, caring, and respectful towards teammates and opponents.”

“I want captains that are good role models on the floor, in the classroom, and in the community. They are held to a higher standard and expected to give their best effort with academics and attitude.”

“Leaders possess the unseen ‘something’ that makes this person someone the others will follow- not sure what it is or what to call it, but it exists”

“Encourager, hard worker, knows the game well, servant (picks up after practices, offers to do tasks others may not want to), caretaker, notices when a culture or a team pulse is off or negative, able to speak up when changes need to be made, good communicator, kind, sees each and every teammate as valuable.”

Group Discussion

1. What do you see as the most important qualities of a leader?
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
3. How can you continue to develop your skills as a leader?

SECTION 4: Leadership Style

Great leadership doesn't happen by chance; it must be developed and refined through experience and careful reflection. Exceptional leaders recognize that there is always room for growth—both individually and within the team—and they dedicate their efforts to reaching their full potential.

There's no perfect formula for becoming a great leader, so the first step is understanding your leadership strengths and weaknesses. Based on your experience in sports, you probably already know that there's more than one way to be an outstanding leader.

To help you evaluate your own leadership style and abilities, consider the following categories:

Relationship-Oriented Leaders focus on the feelings and emotions of their teammates. These leaders are often skilled at:

- Opening lines of communication between themselves and their teammates.
- Providing quick and effective motivation.
- Speaking confidently in public.

Task-Oriented Leaders focus on leading by example and managing the strategic and tactical aspects of the game. These leaders are often gifted at:

- Ensuring tasks are completed, such as running drills and managing practices or game-time activities.
- Helping teammates stay focused on their performance and achieving goals.
- Clarifying individual roles within the team.

It's important to note that these two styles represent the extremes of the spectrum. In reality, most great leaders integrate both styles. By working to develop your skills in both areas, you'll be better equipped to guide your team toward success.

What kind of leader are you?

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-12, putting 1 next to the statement you value the **most** and 12 next to the statement you value the **least**.

A. Is warm and friendly toward teammates _____

B. Works hard in practice and games _____

C. Instructs team members on specific skills and strategies _____

D. Helps teammates with personal problems _____

E. Helps to organize and run practice and other team activities _____

F. Shows respect for others on your team _____

G. Helps set goals for the team _____

H. Compliments teammates for good performance _____

I. Helps settle conflict among team members _____

J. Expects high levels of performance from self and teammates _____

K. Points out others' mistakes and provides suggestions for correcting _____

L. Looks out for others on this team _____

R SCORE _____ **T SCORE** _____

Instructions for scoring: Add up the numbers you placed by the following letters: A, D, F, H, I, L. Put this total next to "R-score." Add up the numbers you placed by the following letters: B, C, E, G, J, K. Put this total next to "T-score." The R-Score is your Relationship-Oriented score and the T-Score is your Task-Oriented score. The lower score of the two reflects your stronger leadership style.

In the task above, are you a relationship-oriented leader or a task oriented leader? How does knowing which type of leader you are, help you lead?

Group Discussion

1. What are the pros and cons of relationship and task leaders?
2. What happens if there are too many or not enough of one type of leader on a given team?
3. How does knowing what you value help you lead?

Ask Your Coach

1. Have your coach complete the activity from above and compare and contrast your finding.

SECTION 5: Roles and Responsibilities

As a student-athlete, you take on many roles and responsibilities in the classroom, on the field, and in the community. With all these commitments piling up, it can sometimes be difficult to focus on what your responsibilities are as a team captain. Some of these key roles may include:

- Calling the pregame coin toss
- Delivering pregame speeches
- Providing coaches with feedback to improve practices
- Helping organize team bonding activities
- Communicating with officials
- Setting goals and maintaining team standards and expectations
- Managing different personalities on the team
- Serving as the link between the coach and your teammates

It is important to recognize that your roles and responsibilities as a captain may vary from team to another and they may change from one season to the next based on the dynamics of a team.

At times, you may experience role conflict—such as choosing between being a good captain and being a good friend. Navigating these challenges effectively is crucial for strong leadership.

To help guide you through difficult situations, the next four sections will explore four specific areas that can help maximize your impact as a team leader or captain.

- **Positive Modeling** – Leading by example; setting the standard for your teammates through your actions.
- **Communication** – Keeping open lines of feedback and input between teammates and coaches; being clear and expressive in all situations.
- **Motivation** – Inspiring and pushing the team toward common goals and success.
- **Team Cohesion and Team Building** – Building strong relationships and fostering a supportive team culture both on and off the field.

Keep in mind that the amount of time or energy you devote to each of these four areas can vary from teammate to teammate, team to team or season to season.

IHSAA Students Say . . .

One of the best ways to clarify your roles and responsibilities as a captain is by having open conversations with your coaches and teammates. Not sure where to start? Here are some key questions to help guide those discussions.

Questions for Your Coach

- What are your expectations for me as a captain?
- When would be the best time to check in with you throughout the season and how often should this happen?
- What is the most effective way for me to provide feedback, both positive and constructive?
- How should I (or should I at all) handle communication with officials during games?
- In what ways can I use my leadership to help the team achieve our goals?
- What have I not asked that is more important for me to know as a leader on this team?

Questions for Your Teammates

- Why are our team goals important, and how can we stay committed to them?
- What activities bring us together as a team, and how can we strengthen our bond?
- What behaviors, attitudes, or communication styles should we avoid to maintain a positive team culture?
- How can I help keep us focused and accountable throughout the season?
- What motivates you, and how can I encourage you without being overbearing?

Guiding This Discussion

- Divide the team into small groups and have leaders rotate around to each group
- Assign a small group of teammates to each leader and they report back to each other

Group Discussion

1. What roles do you fulfill within your sport? What responsibilities do you have outside of sports?
2. Which of the four areas (Positive Modeling, Communication, Motivation, Team Cohesion and Team Building) do you consider your strengths?
3. Which of these leadership areas do you think you could improve upon?
4. Why is it important for you and your teammates to understand your individual roles and responsibilities?
5. What strategies can help ensure that all team members understand and embrace their roles?

SECTION 6: Positive Modeling

As a leader, your teammates look to you for guidance, whether you realize it or not. Your actions set the tone for the team, making it important to lead by example. By demonstrating positive behaviors, you encourage others to follow your lead. That's why being a **positive model**—someone who consistently sets a strong example—is key to effective leadership.

Own Your Mistakes – Everyone makes mistakes. When you do, acknowledge them, accept the consequences, commit to making things right, and strive not to repeat them.

Treat Others with Respect – Follow the golden rule: treat others how you want to be treated. As a leader, ensure all teammates feel valued and respected.

Lead by Example – Never ask teammates to do something you wouldn't do yourself. If you expect hard work and effort from others, be the first to demonstrate it.

Think Before You Act – Consider the impact of your actions both on and off the field. Before making a decision, ask yourself, "How will this affect my team?" Prioritize the team's success over personal interests.

Be Consistent and Authentic – Your leadership shouldn't change based on where you are or who's watching. Whether in class, on the field, or in the community, always act with integrity and set a strong example.

Strategies for Positive Modeling

- 1. Help Teammates Refocus** – Mistakes happen, but dwelling on them won't help. Encourage teammates to move on and focus on the bigger picture.
- 2. Stay Positive** – A constant negative reaction to mistakes can bring the team down. Keep your energy and attitude uplifting to help teammates recover faster.
- 3. Celebrate the Positives** – Recognize and highlight good moments in practice, especially from younger or developing teammates.
- 4. Value Every Teammate** – Not everyone has the same skill level, but every player brings value to the team. Acknowledge and appreciate their contributions.

5. **Include Freshmen** – They are the future of the program. Make an effort to involve them, mentor them, and set a strong example both on and off the field.
6. **Be an Inclusive Teammate** – During drills and training, partner with younger or less experienced players to show that every teammate matters.
7. **Lead by Example** – Be the first on the court, the hardest worker, and the one setting the tone. Your leadership only carries weight if your actions back it up.
8. **Own Your Mistakes** – A simple “my bad” shows accountability and earns respect.
9. **Remind Teammates of Team Goals** – Keep the team focused on its culture, goals, and expectations—both in competition and in the community.
10. **Stay Positive, Even on Tough Days** – Your teammates look to you. Show them that perseverance and a strong mindset matter, even when things aren’t going your way.

Group Discussion

1. How will my teammates react if I am NOT leading by example?
2. What key strategies or principles can help you be a strong role model?
3. Can you recall a time when you acted as a role model? What impact did it have?
4. Have your leadership responsibilities ever required you to make a difficult decision? How did you handle it?
5. Have you ever made an embarrassing mistake as a role model? How did you recover and move forward?

SECTION 7: Communication

Great leaders are known for their ability to communicate effectively. While verbal communication is important, strong leadership also requires mastering non-verbal cues and active listening.

Keys to Verbal Communication:

- **Be Clear** – Ensure your messages are simple and easy to understand. Misinterpretation can happen even when you have good intentions.
- **Be Direct** – Always communicate directly with the person you’re addressing. Relying on others to relay messages can lead to misunderstandings.
- **Be Specific** – The more detailed your message, the less room for confusion. Explain not just what to do, but why it’s important.
- **Be Consistent** – Communicating regularly and reliably helps build trust and respect among teammates and coaches.
- **Repeat When Necessary** – Messages aren’t always heard or fully understood the first time. You may need to reinforce key points in different ways.
- **Stay Positive** – When giving constructive feedback, use the “sandwich method.” For example: “Good effort! Next time, try to get lower under the ball. I really liked your hustle!”

Keys to Non-Verbal Communication:

- **Face the Speaker** – Always position yourself so you are fully engaged in the conversation.
- **Maintain Good Posture** – Keep your back straight and body upright to show attentiveness.
- **Avoid Closed-Off Body Language** – Don’t cross your arms, slouch, or appear disengaged.
- **Lean In Slightly** – This demonstrates genuine interest in the conversation.
- **Make Eye Contact** – Maintaining eye contact shows respect and attentiveness.
- **Nod in Agreement** – Show understanding and engagement with subtle nods.
- **Smile When Appropriate** – A smile can reinforce connection and attentiveness in a conversation.

Utilizing Digital Communication

In today's digital world, communication extends beyond in-person interactions to social media and texting. While we often hear what **not** to do—

Antagonizing opponents

Articizing teammates

Trash-talking coaches

Excluding teammates

There are many positive ways to use digital communication

Check with your coach or another school official for procedures and policies surround social media usage as well as digital communication between students and adults

Ways to Use Digital Communication Positively:

- Motivate a teammate after a tough game.
- Use group texts for team bonding and inside jokes.
- Send words of encouragement or highlight great moments after a game.
- Text your coach for quick updates or questions.
- Keep teammates organized—remind them about practice times and team events.
- Use social media to promote games and build school spirit.
- Engage the community by sharing team successes and upcoming events.

By using digital tools the right way, you can strengthen team unity and leadership both on and off the field.

Group Discussion

1. How well do you communicate as a student leader to ensure clarity and understanding?
2. Based on the section, what aspects of communication do you do well? What areas could you improve?
3. How can you enhance your communication skills through better speaking, listening, and non-verbal cues?

Ask Your Coach

1. Does our team already have a social media presence?
2. What can I do as a leader to improve or create a social media presence for our team?

SECTION 8: Motivation

When people think of captains, they often picture an emotional pregame speech that fires up the team before a big win. While these moments can happen, motivation is about much more than dramatic speeches. As a captain, your role is to keep your team energized, focused, and moving forward every day.

Ways Captains Motivate Their Teams:

- **Set Team Goals** – Encourage teammates to work hard toward shared objectives.
- **Build a Strong Work Ethic** – Lead by example in practice and training.
- **Keep the Team Focused** – Help teammates stay locked in during games.
- **Support Through Ups and Downs** – Guide the team through challenges and setbacks.

While these strategies are key, motivation also depends on the followers and situation, as outlined earlier. Understanding your team's current motivation levels is crucial.

Signs of High Motivation:

- Players bring energy and move quickly in practice.
- Intense and competitive atmosphere.
- Positive team spirit and strong communication.
- Training and competition are fun and engaging.
- Team goals inspire hard work.

Signs of Low Motivation:

- Little energy or communication in practice.
- Players seem disengaged, and practice drags on.
- Negative attitudes and lack of teamwork.
- Poor body language and facial expressions.
- Tension between leaders and unmotivated teammates.

Recognizing these signs allows you to adjust your leadership approach and find the best ways to keep your team motivated.

Key Motivation Strategies for Captains

One of the first keys to motivating teammates is recognizing that everyone is driven by different factors. Additionally, motivation can fluctuate from day to day and even within a single practice or game. Understanding these shifts allows you to adapt your leadership approach to keep your team engaged and focused.

- Understand your teammates' goals and how they plan to achieve them.
- Make goals visible, track progress, and adjust when needed.
- Be the energy source for your team—lead with passion and positivity.
- Know when to lead by example and when verbal encouragement is more effective.
- Unite individuals to create a more motivated team.
- Ensure coaches, captains, and players share a common motivational approach.
- Use conditioning as a tool for improvement, not as punishment.

Group Discussion

1. What specific motivational responsibilities do you have as a captain?
2. What drives you personally, and what motivates your team?
3. How well do you know each teammate on a personal level?
4. How can understanding your teammates help in setting meaningful goals?
5. How can this knowledge help keep them motivated?
6. What motivational strategies from this section can you apply to different individuals and situations?

SECTION 9: Team Building and Team Cohesion

Strong team chemistry is a key characteristic of successful teams. Cohesion—where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts—helps teams function better, perform at higher levels, and enjoy the sport more. As a captain, fostering team cohesion is one of your most important responsibilities.

Characteristics of Cohesive Teams

- **Unity:** A team that works together, values every member's contributions, and supports each other creates a more enjoyable and successful environment.
- **Team Identity & Pride:** Athletes who take pride in their team put in more effort, make sacrifices for the group, and persevere through challenges.
- **Mutual Respect:** When teammates appreciate and respect each other's contributions, they are more motivated to work with and for one another.
- **Trust:** Trust is fragile but essential. Open communication and a culture that views mistakes as learning opportunities help build and maintain trust.
- **Responsibility & Accountability:** When players take responsibility for their actions and carry their weight, it strengthens trust and commitment within the team.

IHSAA Examples

Here are the best answers that highlight strong team bonding, leadership, and motivation:

1. **Community Service Project** – Making tie blankets and delivering them to retirement homes builds unity and a sense of purpose.
2. **CSI Ropes Course** – A structured activity that fosters teamwork, communication, and trust.
3. **Floating Stick Activity** – Encourages teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving in a fun, interactive way.
4. **Visiting a Teammate in Need** – Supporting a teammate after a personal loss demonstrates strong team unity and compassion.
5. **Football Camp (3 Days, No Phones)** – Forces teammates to bond, communicate, and work together without distractions.
6. **Escape Room** – A creative way to build problem-solving skills and team

trust.

7. **Handprint Paint Activity** – A fun and meaningful way for players to acknowledge each other's strengths and build camaraderie.
8. **Suicide Prevention Run** – Highlights the importance of supporting one another beyond sports.
9. **Ultimate Frisbee in Cross Country** – A fun and competitive way to build trust and teamwork.
10. **Journaling Goals** – Encourages self-improvement and peer support.
11. **Writing Notes to Each Teammate for Bus Rides** – Creates a culture of appreciation and encouragement.
12. **Surprising Coaches for Their Birthdays** – Shows appreciation and strengthens relationships between players and staff.
13. **Team Dinners and Breakfasts** – A consistent way to bond outside of practice.
14. **Bowling During Bye Week** – A fun way to keep morale high and strengthen relationships.
15. **Scrimmage and Tent Sleepover on the Field** – A unique and memorable team-building experience.

Group Discussion

1. How has your team's chemistry affected other parts of your performance and experience in the past?
2. What is the difference between task and social cohesion? Rate your team in each of the two areas.
3. What are some ways that, as a captain, you can build and maintain team cohesion?
4. Can you think of any team-building activities that you do or have done in the past that have helped create team cohesion?

SECTION 10: Handling Tough Situations

Handling tough team situations is an inevitable part of being a leader. The way you respond to challenges can either strengthen or divide your team. By developing key problem-solving skills, you can effectively navigate any team issue. Here are some guidelines to help you make strong leadership decisions:

- **Assess the importance of the decision** - Ask yourself, “How critical is this issue?” Address major problems directly, but don’t waste energy on minor distractions. Prioritize your focus on what truly impacts the team.
- **Explore all options and potential outcomes** - Write down or discuss possible solutions to clarify your choices. Consider the pros and cons of each decision and how they might affect the team. A well-thought-out plan leads to better results.
- **Seek advice** - No leader has all the answers. Consult a coach, mentor, parent, or teammate for guidance. Strong leaders know when to ask for help.
- **Own your decisions** - Not every choice will be perfect. If you make a mistake, take responsibility and learn from it. Likewise, when your leadership leads to success, recognize and appreciate those who contributed.

By following these steps, you’ll be better equipped to handle challenges and foster a stronger, more united team.

Group Discussion

1. What were some tough situations that you’ve had to deal with as a leader in the past?
2. What did you do right in these situations?
3. Is there anything that you wish you would’ve done differently?
4. What are some strategies you can use to prepare yourself to deal with difficult situations before they arise?

Five Tough Team Situations and How to Handle Them

1. A Teammate is Consistently Negative or Complaining

Situation: One of your teammates constantly complains during practice or games, bringing down the team's energy.

How to Handle It: Pull them aside privately and address their frustration in a supportive way. Ask what's bothering them and if there's anything the team can do to help. Encourage them to focus on solutions rather than problems, and emphasize how their attitude affects the entire team. Lead by example with positivity.

2. Conflicts Between Teammates

Situation: Two teammates are arguing, causing tension and affecting team chemistry.

How to Handle It: Step in calmly and remind both players that personal issues shouldn't interfere with team goals. Encourage them to talk it out privately with mutual respect. If needed, involve a coach or mediator. Reinforce that everyone has the same goal—team success—and emphasize the importance of unity.

3. Key Player is Slacking in Practice

Situation: A top player on your team isn't putting in full effort at practice, setting a bad example for others.

How to Handle It: Approach them one-on-one and ask what's going on. Sometimes, there's an underlying issue (burnout, personal struggles, etc.). Remind them that leadership isn't just about talent—it's about effort and attitude. Encourage them to push themselves and set the tone for the team.

4. The Team is Losing Confidence After Consecutive Losses

Situation: After a tough losing streak, morale is low, and players seem to be giving up.

How to Handle It: Shift the focus from past losses to what can be learned from them. Highlight the positives—what the team did well and what they can improve. Set small, achievable goals to rebuild confidence. Remind the team that success is about resilience, and attitude determines the next game's outcome.

SECTION 10: Handling Tough Situations

A Freshman or Younger Player Feels Left Out

Situation: A younger or less experienced player seems isolated and hesitant to engage with the team.

How to Handle It: Make an effort to include them—pair them with different teammates in drills, invite them to sit with the team during meals or bus rides, and give them encouragement. Lead by example in creating an inclusive team environment where every player feels valued.

A Teammate is Struggling with Personal Issues Affecting Performance

Situation: A teammate has been acting differently—distracted, disengaged, or emotional—and their performance in practice and games is suffering.

How to Handle It: Approach them privately and let them know you've noticed they haven't been themselves. Offer support and a listening ear without pushing too hard. Sometimes, just knowing someone cares can make a difference. If the issue is serious, encourage them to talk to a coach, counselor, or someone they trust. Remind them that the team is there for them, both on and off the field.

REVIEW OF SPORTS LEADERSHIP

Effective sports leadership is the backbone of a successful team, combining strong communication, motivation, and positive modeling to drive performance and cohesion. When leadership is done right, teams exhibit unity, trust, and a shared vision for success. Great leaders understand their roles and responsibilities, ensuring they model positive behaviors that inspire others.

A key aspect of leadership is self-awareness—knowing one’s leadership style helps captains and coaches maximize their strengths and address weaknesses. Strong communication fosters clarity and direction, while motivation keeps athletes engaged and performing at their best. Leadership also requires recognizing warning signs of dysfunction, such as poor morale or lack of trust, and addressing them proactively.

Team building and cohesion are essential in creating an environment where athletes support one another and push toward common goals. Leaders must also navigate tough situations, including conflicts, losses, and setbacks, with composure and strategic problem-solving. Ultimately, effective sports leadership blends structure with adaptability, empowering athletes to grow individually and as a team.

Great leaders are not just born; they are developed through experience, reflection, and commitment. Those who embrace leadership principles with dedication set the stage for both personal and team success.

Group Discussion

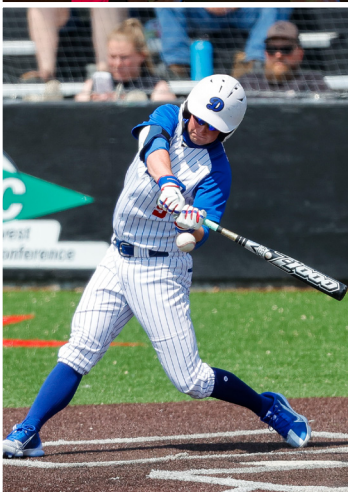
1. What was your overall impression of your experience with **The SAC Captain’s Handbook**?
2. What were some of the most important take-aways?
3. How do you plan to use the information learned in this handbook to become a better leader?
4. In what ways can you share some of this useful information with your teammates?

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A special thank you to all the IHSAA Student Advisory Council members for their invaluable contributions to this book. Your dedication, countless hours of effort, and innovative ideas have provided outstanding insight in shaping and promoting this Captain's Handbook.



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Student Advisory Council

Sportsmanship
Achievement
Character