

THE ATHLETE'S DUTY

An Oration

by
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At the time of the investigation of the famous Black Sox Scandal of 1919, in which a number of ball players threw the World Series, one of the guilty players left the court room. Running from the crowd was a young boy who tugged at the arm of the player, crying, "Say it ain't so, Joe... Say it ain't so!"

That child's world had literally been shaken by the acts of a few greedy men. For it seems that hero worship to a child is an integral part of his developmental years.

Within the past few years, I have come to recognize a tremendous responsibility which older high school students, active in school functions, play with the youth of the community. How much of a responsibility? I can't say, but I still look back just a few years and recall my high school heroes and what they meant to me.

As children mature and witness an ever changing world, one has to wonder how a child can grow into a better person. Let's face it, the evidence they confront must be extremely instrumental in the development of judgment and values. The actions of the older student can have, in many cases, a lasting imprint upon them. I do believe that the Seven Wonders of the World could not have as much an impression upon a youngster as does that of a high school student and his actions through the activities in which he participates.

The child will often mimic every move the older student makes. Especially is this true in the area of athletics.

Hoping that I will not be misunderstood as a braggart, I'd like to testify that the child--high school athlete relationship has really come home to my consciousness. As a varsity athlete, and having been chosen as team captain on the football squad, I became aware of a huge load carried upon my shoulders. To begin with, it was embarrassing to have a young boy or girl look at me with an admiration I hardly deserved. Several kids took it upon themselves to make me, or one of my teammates, their "special friends." At first one attempted to ignore the situation. Then, after some special guidance from one of my coaches, I realized that there is a responsibility going along with the news copy and honors which accompany something as minor as high school athletics.

I recall one evening a couple years ago when I was with our all-state basketball player, Dave. We were seated in a pizza parlor, not realizing we were on "display." A young boy and his mother walked in. Apparently the boy was an avid fan, as you could see him noticing our letter jackets. Then he recognized Dave! "Look, Mom, that's DAVE BAKER!" You would have thought he had seen, in person, Michael Jordan. The lad pointed and said, "He plays for US!"

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