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**Coming to Austin...University of Notre Dame Program Aims to Renew the Culture of High School Sports.**

Winning-at-all-cost coaching, sports specialization and parent “sports rage” are just a few of the problems occurring within the culture of sports today. The Alliance for Catholic Education at the University of Notre Dame has developed a new approach. The Play Like A Champion Today Character Education Through Sports initiative supports schools and sport leagues in promoting: athletics as ministry to youth and families, building teams as moral communities, character development, spiritual growth, intrinsic motivation and responsible decision-making.

The program is designed to provide children and adolescents with the highest quality sports experience possible. Drawing on the expertise of members of the Notre Dame coaching staff, the research of developmental and sport psychologists as well as leaders in Catholic theology, Play Like A Champion aims to renew youth sports by educating coaches and parents to nurture personal and spiritual development along with athletic excellence.

St. Dominic Savio is partnering with Play Like A Champion Today in bringing their coach clinic and parent workshop to their school community. University of Notre Dame Play Like A Champion Program Director and former Notre Dame Cheerleader, Kristin Sheehan, ND '90, '93 will join athletic directors, Crystal Clark and Orlando Florez at St. Dominic Savio on August 1 to conduct the trainings. St. Dominic Savior will become the first Austin-area high school to partner with Play Like a Champion Today. Several local grade schools do embrace the initiative.

Play Like A Champion Today workshops are nationally accredited by NCACE, National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education. The initiative enjoys partnership with thirty Catholic dioceses and exists in over forty cities across the United States and Canada. Play Like A Champion has educated over 50,000 coaches and 20,000 parents who in turn have impacted the lives of over a million athletes. Play Like A Champion is excited to welcome in partnership St. Dominic Savio. One partner Director commented about the program, “Play Like A Champion emphasizes presenting sport as a form of youth ministry and challenges us to view sports as a means of developing the whole person: physically, mentally and spiritually. This is an exciting program that challenges the ‘win at all cost mentality’ currently draining the fun and excitement from sports participation.”

The Parent Like A Champion program is an interactive workshop for sport parents that seeks not only to respond to all too frequent incidents of “sideline rage” but also seeks to give parents sound advice on how to guide their children through their youth and high school sport careers. Parents receive education and materials that help them reinforce the goals of character development through sport stressed by the program. Parents also receive guidance on how they can help their children to form habits of spiritual reflection, perseverance, sound decision-making, team work, good nutrition and regular exercise.

Workshop evaluation data confirm the effectiveness of the initiative. For example, 93% of coaches attending the clinic were satisfied with the experience while 92% agree that they will fully implement the Champion approach to coaching for character development. When asked about the impact of the workshop, sport parents strongly agreed that they would commit to being a more positive presence from the sidelines by avoiding coaching their child from the sidelines (86%). This was a 21% increase from before to after the parent workshop.

Notre Dame’s own research on player, coach and fan behavior at youth sporting events documented unacceptable levels of unsportsmanlike and aggressive behavior. One might expect Catholic programs to fare better than their secular counterparts, but Notre Dame’s research indicates that in many respects, Catholic programs are worse.

“If Catholic-sponsored sports programs are going to achieve their full-potential as envisioned by Pope John Paul II, Catholic schools and dioceses are going to have to invest in preparing coaches and sport parents to understand sports in a holistic perspective in teaching athletes the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance directly through their sport experience.” says Kristin Sheehan, Play Like A Champion Program Director.

For more information on Notre Dame’s Character Education Through Sports Initiative, visit their website at [www.playlikeachampion.nd.edu](http://www.playlikeachampion.nd.edu) or you may contact Kristin Sheehan through email, [ksheehan@nd.edu](mailto:ksheehan@nd.edu) or phone 574-329-0266.