

Wellspring of Life Initiative Program Overview

The Wellspring of Life Initiative program is designed to be a series of season-long “coaching curriculums” for use in challenging your athletes in their relationship with Christ, both in the midst of their athletic participation and throughout their lives.

The program is dividing into twelve (12) different Biblical disciplines, each of which serves as a central topic for one season’s material. Thus, the entire program encompasses four years, providing enough material for your fall, winter, and spring sport teams each to study different disciplines each year. This will allow each of your athletes to have a different experience with the Wellspring program during each season of each year of high school.

Each discipline-specific booklet (you’ll receive three per year, as part of your NCSAA member packet) contains a section titled “How to Use the Wellspring of Life Program.” These instructions will provide details regarding how to use the program throughout each week of your season. Coaches should take the time to read these instructions before using the Wellspring materials with their teams, in order to fully understand the intended purpose and most effective application of the activities provided in the booklets.

Additional resources (available via the NCSAA web site) are provided to accompany the materials included in each discipline-specific booklet. The most important of these resources are the weekly athlete devotionals. One of the primary purposes of the Wellspring program is to encourage your athletes to develop a lifelong routine of reading Scripture daily — that they might seek to understand their world, lives, responsibilities, and decisions in light of the truth of Scripture (not simply the opinions and perspectives of other people). Thus, be certain to print and distribute these devotional resources to your athletes each week; they are central to the program’s effectiveness. Also provided online are weekly coaches’ challenges, team-building activities, opportunities to interact with college and high school coaches around the country, and access to other tools and resources which you might find helpful as you engage in discipline training with your teams.

Coaches, you should understand that, as your athletes grow in their understanding of and commitment to discipline, they will pass through various levels of maturity and development. Throughout the Wellspring program, we will refer to those stages of development as the *Disciple Athlete*, the *Apprentice Athlete*, and the *Servant-Leader Athlete*. These different levels are often closely associated with age. You might identify freshmen as Disciples, sophomores and juniors as Apprentices, and seniors as Servant-Leaders — and that’s an alright starting point for applying the different levels. However, keep in mind that you will have older athletes who are less mature (and not ready to lead), and you will have younger athletes who are more mature (and capable of more demanding challenges). Treat each athlete as an individual; don’t assume that an athlete of a certain age should be “lumped in” with others his age, when using these challenges to guide him in his submission to discipline.

Understanding the uniqueness of each stage of growth is important, in order for you to effectively challenge each of your athletes in appropriate ways. The three phases of athlete growth are as follows:

- The first level is the Disciple Athlete; he needs to be taught the fundamentals, and his development requires a lot of oversight. Repetition of basic habits is critical at this stage; this athlete’s focus is on *training*. Appropriate discipline-training goals for a Disciple Athlete are to develop the ability to *define* a discipline and *accept* its importance.
- The second level is the Apprentice Athlete; he is committed to improvement, and is actively working at it. His faithfulness to the task can be trusted, so he needs less oversight; this athlete’s focus is on *practice*. Appropriate discipline-training goals for an Apprentice Athlete are to develop a *desire* for discipline (through the challenge and internalization of the truths of Scripture) and to develop *habits* of discipline (verbalizing that commitment and acting upon it).
- The third level is the Servant-Leader Athlete; his habits and example have elevated him to a leadership position, and he understands that leadership is defined by a responsibility to serve others. He does things with care, and he gives oversight to others. He sees the “big picture” of team and is motivated by helping others to learn and grow; this athlete’s focus is on *maintaining*

the health and success of the team. Appropriate discipline-training goals for a Servant-Leader Athlete are to *apply* the habits of discipline to all relationships in his life and to develop the Spirit-driven desire to *serve* others.

When you notice that an athlete's submission to discipline and selflessness elevates him to a level of readiness for the Servant-Leader stage, you may find the following reminders and suggestions to be helpful:

- Athletes who have learned and excelled in the fundamentals of their sport are then called to a higher level of excellence; they are required to “know the game”, to master the intricacies and “intangibles” that go beyond basic skills. We regard athletes as “great” because they have more than skill and athleticism; they have a wisdom about the game and an ability to “make their teammates better” and achieve a level of success that other athletes do not achieve. *Likewise*, athletes who have shown an ability to successfully submit themselves to discipline are called to a higher level of maturity. (“You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.” - Matthew 25:21) They are required to “know others”, to apply themselves to the “intangibles” that demonstrate a selfless priority. These athletes are concerned about their impact on others — teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, fans and spectators, classmates, teachers, parents, siblings, church, community, and others. The actions of athletes at this level are intentional, selfless, forgiving, and abundant.
- Do not allow your team's commitment to discipline to be “words only”; insist that actions accompany their words. As a coaching staff, spend time with your Servant-Leaders (before and throughout the season) deciding upon ways that you will “live out” the implications of Scripture through loving and serving others. Design team commitments, projects, and activities to give players opportunity to extend their discipline beyond the bounds of athletics. When appropriate and possible, invite the players' families or the student body to participate.
- The implications of applying discipline to relationships are complex, and are a challenge with which every person will struggle throughout all of life. A coach who is serious about helping athletes into the Servant-Leader level of discipline and maturity must give careful consideration to relational challenges before he issues them to his athletes, and he must pray faithfully for the hearts of his players. Remember, also, that because these are *relationship* issues, a coach who has not built a good relationship with his players may not be able to deal with these issues. If that's true of you as a coach, your first step needs to be to improve your relationship with your players; they must trust you and know that you care about them before they'll allow you into this part of their lives.

Keep in mind that each of your athletes will not pass through each of these stages in a single year. Younger (or less mature) athletes need to be encouraged in the initial stages, and older (or more mature) athletes may experience growth in the later stages. Don't expect every athlete to respond in the same ways, and do not belittle your athletes for their difficulties at any stage (especially when they are sincere in their efforts and struggles). Do challenge them, help them to see their struggles as profitable, pray with them, encourage them, and always keep them grounded in and accountable to Scripture.

Following are a few additional suggestions to help you as you integrate the *Wellspring* material into your daily routines.

- Coaches, we encourage you to make time for discipline training each day. If you're going to be intentional about making your team's athletic experience something that encourages spiritual growth, you need to build this into your daily routines. All coaches see practice time as a priority, and game days are busy for every team; don't allow your habits to lead to neglect. If you define your sport as having value only in itself (if you fail to discipline your players for Godliness), your players will define their value and success only through their athletic accomplishments.
- Build in time for discipline training not only on practice days, but also on game days; you can set aside time before your games to do so, and it's important that you don't miss important parts of each week's study (which will happen if you don't make this a daily routine). Please be sure to be consistent in this; don't allow other things to become such a priority that your athletes begin to see their submission to discipline as less important than their athletic pursuits.

- In the midst of practice and games, be intentional about modeling the discipline that you've been studying. Ask yourself, "Are my words and actions demonstrating a commitment to [insert discipline here]?" Along with your team, develop principles of behavior and speech that you'll commit together to demonstrating in practice, at games, in school, and out of school. Get serious about integrating discipline into your routines!
- After practices and games, consult with your assistant coaches; ask them to evaluate how consistently you integrated discipline training, and evaluate together the athletes' response to that training. This will help you to adjust your teaching strategies to a more effective method of impacting your athletes.
- Develop pre-game, in-game, halftime, and post-game rituals that continue your discipline training. Allow your Servant-Leaders to participate in designing and leading these activities. Use these habits as helpful reminders for your players; don't allow the hype and focus of "game day" to allow neglect for your focus on discipline.
- Take time to pray together as a team, and encourage players to pray with and for one another. The posture of humility that enables your athletes to submit and grow in discipline is practiced through prayer, and staying grounded in desiring God's will (not our own) is critical to our ability to see discipline as profitable. Only God will make your efforts successful, so be certain to pray consistently for His favor.
- Reconsider the ways in which your coaching staff and team give recognition to your athletes. Are you recognizing and praising athletes for their character, or just for their athletic achievements? How are you recognizing athletes that submit themselves to discipline?

The rest of this booklet contains an overview of the twelve (12) disciplines that are included in the Wellspring of Life Initiative program. This will allow you to preview the disciplines and their implications for your players. Remember that the full season-long "coaching curriculum" for each discipline is provided in the discipline-specific booklets which will arrive (three per year) in your NCSAA member packets. Ask your athletic director if you've not seen those booklets, or contact NCSAA for more information!

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