

***A Note to Coaches:
What is Accountability for an Athlete?***

When I was a young athlete, my biggest athletic role model was Earvin “Magic” Johnson. I wore his “game face” on the team bus to away gyms; I practiced his junior skyhook and his no-look passes on my purple-and-gold-painted hoop outside our house (yes, in mock games against the Celtics, if you must know); I wanted to make my teammates better, as Magic was credited for doing on the championship Lakers’ teams that he led. During those memorable years of high school basketball, I measured myself by Magic Johnson’s standard; he was the player that I wanted to be.

My aspirations were not completely unrealistic; I didn’t believe that I had the talent to be a professional basketball player. I saw the best in the man whose game and leadership I admired, and I wanted to emulate those qualities. What I failed to realize is that my habits of leadership would not lead to success just because they mirrored the leadership style of Magic Johnson. A well-intentioned and highly-passionate high school junior, I was motivated by my relationship with a role model whose game captivated — but was powerless to change — my heart.

Over the course of the coming years, I graduated from high school (having played under the life-changing coaching of a man who challenged me to lead), was invited to coach basketball (as an assistant to my high school coach, and then later under the guidance of a man who became my coaching mentor), and was set on a collision course with the vocation of athletics (specifically *Christian* athletics, which has become an ongoing challenge and delight to which I’ve given much of my mind and heart during the past 15 years).

Along the way I’ve learned one critical thing, as I’ve experienced and envisioned sports in a new way — a way that puts Jesus Christ at its core. My pursuit of a basketball persona — made in the image of Magic Johnson — was a misguided goal. A man’s life is not brought to fulfillment when modeled after another person’s character; rather, man is created in the image of God, and that relationship gives his life and efforts value.

My passion — as the director of NCSAA, as a coach, and as a father — has become seeing life (and athletics) as the pursuit of a right relationship with Jesus Christ. As I present this study of accountability to you, coaches, I encourage you to challenge your athletes to see that accountability is first a relationship — and, always most importantly, sought with their Creator. That right relationship is the source of all useful training and all success in life; in fact, it is the source of Life itself. Point them in the direction of accountability with Him, above all other objectives. Without it, they have and are nothing.