



## **A Positive Experience Helps Teammates Form Lasting Bonds**

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Posted July 7, 2007 in the Green Bay Press-Gazette

When kids are allowed to experience sports in the purest form possible - as games - the individual life lessons they can learn are quite remarkable.

If I listed all of the possible life lessons, it would be quite a long list.

But one of the most valuable lessons is that, through sports, you can make life-long friends. When you are involved in a positive environment, uniformly committed to a goal with your teammates, and work diligently toward that goal, some incredible friendships are bonded. Wholehearted trust in each others' efforts is absolutely necessary if goals are to be accomplished.

This wholehearted trust can only come through a positive environment. When kids have this positive environment, they can relax, have fun, and really get to know their teammates. This leads to trusting and admiring other kids, some of whom they will really click with, and eventually becoming friends. In professional sports, they refer to this as team chemistry.

Some teams have it; others don't.

Do teams with positive environments experience more success because of the friendships encouraged? Or do teams with a coach riding the players all of the time in an environment of doubt and mistrust?

One of our country's presidents experienced team chemistry through the sport of football.

Last December, the death of President Gerald Ford revealed many little known facts about his life.

Everybody remembers him as the man who took over after President Richard Nixon's resignation. But most of the people at President Ford's funeral spoke about him as a quiet man, with an incredible work ethic, integrity, honesty, and openness.

Many people weren't aware sports and faith had played an integral part in developing the leadership skills President Ford utilized while in office. Some people may have read or heard President Ford played center for the University of Michigan football team, and, after college, was offered contracts to play for the Green Bay Packers and Detroit Lions. Nonetheless, it was Ford's experiences and friends while playing high school football that played a part in helping him through those difficult couple of years as president.

In 1930, on Thanksgiving Day, Ford helped his Grand Rapids South High School football team win the Michigan state championship. As a way of celebrating, they formed a club they called the 30-30 Club, representing the 30 varsity lettermen who won the state title in 1930. From then on, the 30-30 Club met somewhere in Grand Rapids every year on Thanksgiving Day.

In 1974, while Ford was in office, he invited the members of the 30-30 Club to the White House to celebrate Thanksgiving in Washington. Given the unrest in Washington with his administration, perhaps he felt the need to be with people he trusted. It was natural for him to turn to those 30 men - his teammates - who once shared and worked with him toward a common goal.

In January, Marquette University celebrated its 90th year of basketball by hosting a reunion for its basketball players. Many former players returned to reunite with teammates they hadn't seen for years.

Many schools host events like this. It's a way to bring everyone back together to celebrate those great times they had together as teammates and to rekindle friendships that live on in our hearts, even when the last shot has been taken or the last point scored.

The value of friendship is incredible. When fostered properly through sports, those friendships can last a lifetime.