

The Effects of Sports on Student Willpower

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"I think we can all say you taught determination..."

I walked into the gymnasium for my first P.E. class at Sylvan Meadows Adventist School wondering how I would use one of my strengths to earn my students' trust. With only eight students, I realized that most team sports would be a challenge so I decided that I would have to play with my students--something I did not mind at all.

Many times small schools have low to non-existent school spirit. Interestingly enough, weak P.E. programs are often also found in such schools. I wondered how my students would react to a P.E. major. "Should I be hard on them, or should I take it easy at first?" From the 'get go' I sensed that, to my students, P.E. meant 'a time to grab a ball and play b-ball'. Well, did I have a surprise for them!

I decided to work them hard. Every day we warmed-up, stretched, and did a workout before getting into the day's P.E. lesson. Our warm-ups consisted of running laps, doing jumping jacks, star jumps, and 'burpies'. We finished the warm-up by stretching all our major muscles. After the warm-up, one of the following workouts was on the agenda: a leg workout, pull-ups, abdominals, push-ups, or running for up to 20 minutes straight. You try this for a week and you'll get the picture. I have taught P.E. before and I was used to kids complaining about moving a pinky, but this bunch surprised me. They proved me wrong; they showed me that kids today want to be physically fit.

One student told me he appreciated seeing me do the workouts and playing with the students. In fact, I had to push myself to keep up with them, but it was well worth it. I earned their respect through sports, a big part of a teenager's life, and in the process I kept fit as well! (Not to mention the fact that my students were too worn out to become discipline problems!) I always heard people say, "lead by your example," I just didn't know it would work so well.

The students worked hard and did mostly everything I asked them to do without complaint. Sure, at first they were out of shape, but as the weeks went by they built strength, and stamina. But they also built something else; they built self-esteem, determination and school spirit. I made sure they knew that their grade was based on how much they improved individually by the end of the year. The result was students who worked hard to beat their last best efforts. The lessons learned from pushing the body beyond the first signs of fatigue and pain during a P.E. class translate directly into how much will power a person has to deal with other school subjects, how they see themselves, and how they deal with relationships. A grade 9 graduating student proved my point in his graduation speech:

"I guess I'm up here to make a tribute to all the people I would like to make a tribute to. Well, first of all I'd like to thank my teacher Mr. O. Mr. O. if it wasn't for you this year would have been quite the drag. You have no clue how much you've helped this school out, and the children here too. I remember last year none of us could run like eight laps without being just wrecked, I mean like out of breath, bagged for the rest of the day, and it was even hard to get up and walk again. But now, heck, I, and the rest of us are here running a mile and ½ in under 15 minutes, or we're running for 20 minutes straight, and then after that we still have enough energy to play a game of some sort. It is amazing; I never thought I'd be able to

run. And you were always there to push us farther, and make us work harder, I think we can all say you taught determination, and to keep going even past when our bodies or minds told us to stop."

I would like to draw your attention to the lesson this student learned through a consistent, challenging physical education program: "determination, and to keep going even past when...bodies or minds tell us to stop." Yes! I am very proud of my students. They don't go to some big school that has all kinds of equipment to do all kinds of sports, yet they have a much better thing going for them, they have heart. I think we too often get into a rut of saying that we can't do this or that with P.E. because we don't have this or that. I challenge you all to rethink where your P.E. program stands right now, small school or big. Take a look at this example...it doesn't take all the bells and whistles but good, down-to-earth, home-grown desire, heart and will power. Do you have it?