

Weaving Academics and Athletics: An Understanding for Excellence

BY ROBERT TESLOW,
USSA CENTRAL DIV. REGION I

The student/athlete can both compete in a sport and achieve in a demanding academic program. The very qualities that makes one an outstanding athlete are also the qualities that one needs to be outstanding in school. It is the role of the school to develop the whole person, and challenge every student to attain his or her potential in all aspects of life.

School's must offer a program that demands academic accountability while providing a supportive environment for students to excel in athletics. The opportunity to develop personal strengths and interests in both academics and athletics will not be denied when a shared commitment is understood by a cooperative effort between the school, the athlete, the parent, and the coach.

Central to this understanding is an underlying shared philosophy that are universal expectations for attitude and behavior. Among these expectations are integrity and honesty, respect, support, trust, and personal accountability.

The question is how to assure or enhance the potential for athletes to be top students, to meet their own expectations and to achieve at their highest potential both academically and athletically at their home schools. This is not easy and is a task that challenges the will of schools, parents, student/athletes, and coaches.

The Alpine Skier Responsibilities for Weaving Athletics and Academics:

1. Students' responsibilities are based on pride, performance, integrity, and commitment. Maintaining an attendance record that illustrates consistent effort is essential for development of trust and maintaining a good attitude. They should take the initiative to research class scheduling based on clear and concise academic goals. Completing assignments on time sets a pattern that is consistent with high expectations. Students must maintain a minimum grade in every class. Achieving success toward graduation needs to be a personal commitment. They must provide teachers with a schedule of training and competition dates giving teachers enough time to review and make recommendations. Students must offer "future absence" forms to teacher for early dismissal and pre-arranged absences.
2. School and teachers' responsibilities are based on support. Faculty should review dates to determine and report on how they see these absences affecting

course of study. Teachers should provide course syllabus so that the student/athlete can anticipate needs of the class. They should not penalize students for pre arranged absences and should allow students the number of days absent to make up work after returning to class. Teacher must make sure that assignments are available prior to absences when appropriate. The school must communicate in a timely manner any concerns it may have in regard to student progress and make the coach aware of any disciplinary action or restrictions that are imposed by the school.

3. Parents' responsibilities are based on communication. Parents of the elite athlete must meet with the administration prior to or soon after the beginning of the school year. They should open the discussion with a letter explaining the potential for early dismissal and extended absences. Parents must be available to meet with faculty. Parents must make a commitment to support academic goals and not enable the student/athlete to be absent from class for any reason other than illness, emergency, or scheduled training and competition. They must distribute to the coach a school schedule and calendar of family traditions that may conflict with training or competition. Parents must set a family agenda that does not add additional absences for extended vacations. Parents must support and acknowledge that the student/athlete may need outside academic support (tutors) to satisfactorily complete course work.

4. Coaches' responsibilities are based on teamwork. The coach has a very important role in the relationship between the athlete and his or her school. They should be available to meet individually with the school and the parents to work toward a common plan for the academic and athletic development of the student/athlete. The coach can best define concrete schedules as well as possible additional dates based on competition results to the student/athlete, parents, and school. The coach has a unique insight into the well being of the student/athlete. They must take every opportunity to communicate with the school and parents any concern that may arise on or off the hill that directly affects the student/athletes capacity to meet personal expectations in the broadest sense. The coaches must support any disciplinary action or restrictions that are imposed by the school. They must respect a school attendance policy that denies training if a student is late or absent from school due to illness. The head coach or ski club director must develop a description of their program for the school administrator to review. This description should highlight the goals set by the athlete and the program as it relates to the competitive level of the individual athlete.

A Special Note to Club and School Coaches

The club coach and the school coach must respect each others program and acknowledge to the student/athlete the advantages of participating in parallel activities: The biggest problems arise when the student/athlete begins to feel caught between the advice of his/her club coach and school coach. Emphasis should be made by both coaches that an agreement has been made by all parties involved to

take an active interest in the athletic development of the competitor. Coaches must be centered on the athlete rather than their program.

Special thanks must be given to:

Laurie Beck, Athlete Concerns- Park City, UT,
Bonnie Bower, Park City Winter School, Park City, UT,
Jack Facht, Acting Athletic Director- The Blake School, Minneapolis, Mn.

Please send comments and inquiries to:

Robert Teslow,
MED, University of Minnesota
Past President- MN. State Alpine Coaches Association
511 Kenwood Parkway
Minneapolis, MN, 55403
Ph.612.988.3712 Fax.612.988.3705
<robert_teslow@blake.pvt.k12.mn.us>

Future Absence Form

All planned absences from school - college visits, family trips, etc. - must be cleared in advance with the Dean of Students' office. A Future Absence Form must be completed.

Name _____ Grade _____

Will be absent beginning _____ (Day) (Time) (Date)

Will return to school on _____ (Day) (Time) (Date)

Reason for absence _____

Teacher Initials:

Teacher Comments:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(Signature of Parent) (Date) Signature of Dean of Students