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PROJECT SCORE:

By Trent A. Petrie, Ph.D., & Gretchen M. Jones, M.A.

BUILDING SUCCESS IN SCHOOL, SPORTS AND LIFE

Project SCORE, which stands for Self-responsibility, Commitment, Optimism, Respect, and Excellence, is a life-skills program developed by the UNT Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence. Through Project SCORE student-athletes learn about the skills and strategies that form the foundation for success in school, sports, and life.

The goals of the program include:

- increasing student athletes' year to year retention rates
- improving four-year graduation rates
- developing pride and commitment in being a student athlete
- improving classroom academic performance and grades
- improving the behavioral conduct of student athletes in and out of school (e.g., decrease in suspensions, classroom disruptions).

The Project SCORE curriculum addresses different issues during each of the four years the student athlete is in high school. In the following sections, we overview the focus and the expectations of Project SCORE at each grade level.

Ninth Grade – During 9th grade, student athletes learn about the skills and strategies associated with success. In weekly meetings, students are introduced to topics, such as: goal setting and motivation, building confidence, coping with stress and pressure, managing anger effectively, communicating effectively, taking notes in class, reading textbooks, preparing for tests, developing self-responsibility, to name just a few. In addition, information about the school's history and spirit as well as expectations about personal conduct are included across the academic year.

During each class, the Project SCORE leader introduces the topic and then helps the student-athletes see its relevance in their lives. In addition, student-athletes develop an action plan for implementing the skill and, where relevant, practice it in class. The consultant also monitors the student athletes from week to week to ensure that they comply with the expectations of the program and follow through in their other classes. Hence, the focus of the ninth grade year is on introducing all student athletes to essential life skills, establishing the expectations for conduct and behavior in school, sports, and life, and developing support, and friendships.

Tenth Grade – During a weekly class with the Project SCORE leader, 10th grade students are reintroduced to the main life skills taught during the ninth grade with a focus on establishing academic, personal, and athletic goals for the upcoming

school year. Following this reintroduction during the first two months of the school year, the focus of the class turns to “community outreach and involvement.” During this year, the student athletes learn about, develop, and then implement a community outreach program. Through this project, the student athletes develop important skills and personal characteristics, such as becoming familiar with information resources, working together as a team, developing an action plan, setting and following through on a goal, and learning to behave altruistically. Throughout the project, students keep a weekly journal about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about what they are doing and learning. At the end of the project, each student writes a paper that summarizes their involvement in the community outreach project, the impact the project had on the community, and how they changed as a result of being involved in the project.

Eleventh Grade – During the fall term of the 11th grade, student athletes are introduced to the topic of career planning through biweekly seminars and given the opportunity to set and work toward job-related goals. Whether this involves attending a four-year college/university, a community college, a technical school,

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# Achieving Success Through Commitment and Trust

By Eric Rosmith, M.A., & Scott Martin, Ph.D.

*“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime.”*

~ Babe Ruth ~

Coaches realize the importance of developing a cohesive team that allows their athletes to function together in a more efficient manner. Cohesive teams have individuals who are concerned about the team’s overall welfare as well as that of each teammate. Teammates form a close, tight-knit group that is characterized by an “us against them mentality.” To develop this mentality, a team must be totally committed to achieving common, definitive goals as well as trusting one another.

Commitment represents the relative strength of each individual’s identification and involvement with the team, and can be characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the team’s goals, a willingness to expend effort to achieve these goals, and a desire to be a member of the team. Commitment involves each athlete understanding his/her role and responsibility on the team. As Vince Lombardi avowed, “Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

Trust develops once athletes and coaches are committed to common goals, value each other’s opinions and roles, communicate effectively, and maintain composure. Gary Barnett, head football coach of the University of Colorado Buffaloes expressed this in the following testimonial, “We know what a person thinks, not by what he tells us he thinks, but by his actions.” Only through this process of matching actions and words, will teammates develop respect and eventually learn to trust one another.

The old axiom that the whole is greater than that of the individual pieces is impor-

tant to remember. But, how do coaches get their players to commit to a common goal? How can coaches ensure that their team is developing complete trust in one another? To help you accomplish your goals in these areas, we offer the following guidelines.

## INVOLVE YOUR ATHLETES

Whenever possible involve your athletes in establishing team goals. When involved in the goal setting process, athletes often feel that they “want to” rather than “have to” do the necessary work to achieve the team’s goals. Further, this involvement infuses athletes with a sense of accountability and ownership. Marty Schottenheimer, former head coach of the NFL’s Kansas City Chiefs, underscores the importance of involving athletes, “The most successful teams that I’ve been around were those where the players drove the machine.” To put your athletes in the driver’s seat, you could allow them to have a hand in establishing team goals, choose their own team captains, run /plan a practice every once in a while, and/or let them come up with disciplinary actions for violations of the team conduct code.

## ESTABLISH ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The five fingers on a hand are very different but work together in harmony to accomplish many tasks. To get athletes to work together as a cohesive unit, coaches must clearly outline the athletes’ roles in behavioral terms. For example, the coach can meet individually with each athlete to discuss expectations and responsibilities, and have teammates clarify what they need from one another in order to become a successful team. Every athlete plays a role in attaining the team’s goals, so let each athlete know that his/her contribution is valued.

## ENCOURAGE TEAM IDENTITY

Developing a team identity, such as the Dallas Cowboys being known as “America’s Team,” can create team unity,

promote feelings of uniqueness, and reinforce individual commitment to the team. A team identity can be developed through the use of slogans and/or themes, and whenever possible, athletes should be involved in this process. Slogans or themes could then be printed on t-shirts or shorts, or put on posters that hang in the team locker room, around the school or in the training facility.

## DEVELOP EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

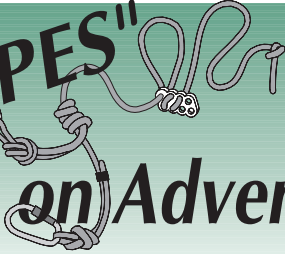
Communication, both on and off the field, is critical when building a successful team. To be effective, such communication should be direct, specific, unambiguous, and easy to understand. It is also imperative that verbal communication be consistent with your nonverbal messages. If keeping cool and calm under pressure during game situations is the message you want your athletes to receive, then show that in everything you do! Your athletes pay close attention to your behaviors (non-verbals) and often base their own actions on what they see you doing. When listening to your players, be sensitive, empathetic and encourage openness and honesty. By communicating and listening effectively, you can help your team stay committed to its goals.

## DEVELOP GOAL CONTRACTS

Once team goals have been established, write them out and make sure that each athlete signs his/her name on the goal contract. By signing, each athlete is letting the team know that s/he is fully committed to the team and to the attainment of its goals. After all the athletes have signed the goal contract, place it in a public place so as to remind the athletes of the team’s goals and reinforce the individual commitment that each athlete has pledged to the team.

By following these ideas, you can develop a trusting and cohesive team that is committed to common goals and ready to perform at its best.

# Learning The "ROPES" on Adventure Challenge Courses



By Michelle Joshua, M.S., & Karen Cogan, Ph.D.

## Looking for an innovative and fun way to improve team cohesion and help your athletes perform at their best?

Then consider the opportunity for a unique learning experience on a R.O.P.E.S. course (acronym stands for Reality Oriented Personal Experiences). In this article we interview Jeff Turner, M.A., R.O.P.E.S. course designer, facilitator, and founder of Excelleration, LLC, and introduce another way you can gain the mental edge on your competition. Although R.O.P.E.S. courses can be done as stand alone events, we often "team" with Jeff to provide them as an initial part of ongoing sport psychology consultation.

## What are the R.O.P.E.S.?

The R.O.P.E.S. are a set of controlled and safe initiatives/challenges designed to encourage cooperation and team building. Although some of the activities do involve the actual use of ropes, many do not. In addition to the low and high elements, which are conducted off the ground, many of the activities and initiatives are ground-based. Successfully completing the activities is highly likely, provided that the group stays focused on their task and works together as a team.

## How does it work?

Groups work together to complete each initiative. Once done, they discuss their performances to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as a team. Learning is achieved through successive approximations, with each activity building upon the last. For instance, once a team can successfully work together on the ground, Jeff will move them to a low ropes initiative, and finally to a more challenging high ropes element. Through these activities, participants learn valuable skills, such as goal-setting, communication, and teamwork, that can be transferred to other life areas, such as athletics.

R.O.P.E.S. also promote individual growth by encouraging people to work outside their normal comfort zone. The activities can challenge one's ordinary level of participation and commitment to the team. By facing these potentially scary challenges and accepting help from teammates, athletes can develop higher levels of esteem, increased confidence, and the ability to effectively handle anxiety. Adapting to change and learning new ways of thinking are life-long skills that are fostered through R.O.P.E.S.

## Who can participate in R.O.P.E.S.?

Jeff encourages any athlete from high school age and older to try. Even people who have completed previous adventure-based activities are encouraged to re-experience new challenges. Every course is different, says Jeff, and every group is different. As a result, no two experiences are ever identical. Coaches can also benefit from R.O.P.E.S. Coaches can learn about teamwork skills and experience some of the challenges faced by their athletes who are learning new skills.

## When should a team do R.O.P.E.S.?

One of the preferred times for R.O.P.E.S. participation is during the team's off-season or during the earliest parts of the season. This gives new and returning team members an opportunity to develop trust and cohesion. In addition, it offers a place to discuss goals and expectations team members have for each other. The beginning of a season, however, is not the only time groups can benefit from R.O.P.E.S. Sometimes when teams are not performing up to their potential, these experiences can bring issues to the forefront and stimulate performance improvements.

Ideally, R.O.P.E.S. are a part of an ongoing sport psychology consultation. Initially, Jeff provides basic R.O.P.E.S. information and expectations for participation. In conjunction with the CSPPE,

the individualized program is developed. The team, Jeff, and CSPPE consultants then meet at the challenge course for a half or a whole day's experience. After each initiative, team members are encouraged to talk about their experiences and incorporate their learning into the following activity. At the end of the day, participants reflect on their experiences, many leaving with a new respect for teammates and a stronger sense of team pride. Follow-up to this initial learning is provided as the CSPPE staff member works with the team throughout the year.

## Are these experiences safe?

According to Jeff, there is minimal physical risk involved for participants and safety is of the utmost concern. For example, the cables used in some of the activities can support up to 10,000 pounds, far exceeding the weight of an average human. In addition, the activities are individually tailored for the developmental and fitness levels of the group members. Finally, no one is ever forced to do anything he/she does not wish to do, allowing each person to choose his/her level of involvement.

## Bottom line, what would this unique kind of experience cost?

Fees are determined based on the needs and financial resources of the group or organization, as well as whether the R.O.P.E.S. activity is done in conjunction with an ongoing CSPPE consultation. Regardless of the fee charged, Jeff always offers the highest quality experience.

*The CSPPE would like to thank Jeff Turner for sharing his expertise and passion. Recently, Jeff has partnered with Performance Solutions AMR Training Group. For more information regarding R.O.P.E.S., call the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at (940) 369-7767 or Jeff Turner at (972) 506-0883.*

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## BUILDING SUCCESS IN SCHOOL, SPORTS AND LIFE



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or obtaining a job, students are encouraged to look beyond their senior year in high school and to think about what they want to do with their lives.

**Twelfth Grade** – During the 12th grade, student athletes become mentors for the 9th and 10th graders. Seniors work in a variety of roles, depending on their interests, abilities, and previous success in Project SCORE. These peer mentors are Life Skill Assistants in the 9th grade Project SCORE classes, Community Project Assistants in the 10th grade Project SCORE classes, individual

tutors for 9th and 10th graders during established study sessions, peer advisors for teammates who are struggling or need someone to talk to. These students are selected based on their personal, athletic and academic successes and how well they represent the characteristics of Project SCORE.

Support for Project SCORE has been provided by local professional sport organizations, such as the Texas Rangers, Dallas Stars, Dallas Mavericks, Texas Motor Speedway, and Dallas Burn. These teams have donated a wide range of incentives, such as free tickets, t-shirts, hats and other items, to be used as rewards for

those student athletes who adhere to the specific behavioral standards of academic and personal conduct during each six-week term. In addition, speaking appearances by players and coaches regarding character and success in life are a part of the program.

If you are interested in learning more about Project SCORE and how we could implement it at your school,

please contact

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at

(940) 369-SPORT (7767)

or through our website at

[www.sportpsych.unt.edu](http://www.sportpsych.unt.edu).

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