

## What it Means to Be a TEAM Captain?

By Trevor W. Sybert

The coaching staff of the Track and Field Team at Whittier High School does not take the issue of team captains lightly. Being a team captain is not just some title that we give to any athlete on the team or even a title that we give to the best athlete on the team. Being a team captain means sacrificing the glory of oneself for the betterment of the team.

But how does an athlete achieve this role of team captain? Some think that leadership is something you are born with, so natural team leaders and captains will just emerge. On some level this statement is true, but you may be waiting a long time before you actually see a natural leader on your team or you may never see a natural team leader emerge. I believe that leadership is something that has to be taught and or demonstrated to the athletes. We cannot expect our athletes to know what it means to be a team leader/team captain if we do not first teach them or show them ourselves how to do it. There are many books written on leadership, and for a better understanding of leadership, I suggest you read some of that literature as I have done. I want to focus on a few of the characteristics and qualities that are helpful in becoming a team captain.

1. A team captain is **smart** – An athlete's grades in school are important. We emphasize academics at Whittier High, because we know that if they are smart enough to work hard in the classroom, then they will be smart on the track. As coaches, we cannot possibly prepare our athletes for every situation they will face, but we hope the team captains can be wise enough to make adjustments during competition that are needed and then help lead the team with these adjustments.
2. A team captain is a **liaison/trustworthy** – It is very important that the coach has complete trust and faith in the team captain's ability to carry out orders as well as encourage others to do the same. The team captain is also on the coaches' side, anytime the team is complaining about what they have to do; the team captain's are there to guide the team in the direction that the coach intended.
3. A team captain is **humble** – A team captain is constantly sacrificing his/her own desires and putting the best interest of the team first. Being humble also means listening; the team captain is not always yelling or talking down to his/her teammates, but instead listening for ways to help the team.
4. A team captain is **strong/tough** – A team captain is strong mentally and tough physically. This means they may not be your strongest athlete, but they hang in there during all the workouts, when everybody else wants to give up, they don't. It is their strong mental determination and their tough physical bodies that help them achieve this.
5. A team captain has a **positive attitude** – People are attracted to a person with a positive attitude. If some one is always negative or complaining then people will draw away from that person.

A good team captain will display most, if not all of the characteristics mentioned above. To maintain a good communication between the coach and the team captain, I suggest a weekly or bi-weekly meeting between the coach and the team captain. This will help ensure that the team captain understands everything that the coach wants out of the team, and it will help the coach to see or understand any concerns or needs the team might have.