

# Encouraging athletes to ‘Play Like a Champion Today’

BY BECKY BERRETH

“Our goal here is to develop the athletes physically, of course, but also into good people,” explained Kristen Sheehan. “People who are emotionally, morally, and spiritually rooted.”

Sheehan is the program director for “Play Like a Champion Today,” an organization dedicated to character education through sports, headquartered at the University of Notre Dame, Ind. She was in Rapid City in late August to promote the partnership with the Rapid City Catholic School System. She was the presenter at a “Coaching as a Ministry” clinic and the “Champion Sports Parent” workshop.

“This is an important program because it brings all the stakeholders, student-athletes, coaches and parents together to help make the child’s experience the best it can be,” explained St. Thomas More coach and local certified trainer for the program, Andy Shaw. “This workshop reminds parents that when their student is playing, research shows that they can best serve their child by pure support for them, their teammates and their coaches.”

According to the Sheehan, the name of the program, “Play Like a Champion Today,” is broken down into three groups to summarize a healthy attitude about sports:

**Play:** Always remember that sports are a game. When kids work hard, a joy

comes from that hard work. When sports become work, it becomes a burden and kids don’t want to participate.

**Like a Champion:** Bringing one’s best self to each game and each practice. Every character trait that we see as indispensable to be a champion — persistence, heart, leadership, positive attitude, heart, grit, integrity, and sacrifice — goes back to the cardinal virtues — the power to do good and bring joy.

**Today:** Every day is a new beginning. Forget about the past and focus on the present.

Carol Cooper, cross-country coach at STM, has been using the program with her student athletes and in her classroom. In her religion class, she has used “Play Like a Champion Today” as a reminder to be fully present in the here and the now.

“To carry the cross you have been given today, to joyfully celebrate the gifts you have been given today, and to respond to the grace to strive for perfection, holiness, and sainthood in the ‘stuff’ of today,” she explained.

“In the coaching realm, I have used the principles of the program to encourage athletes to examine the qualities of champions and to acknowledge, celebrate, and share those qualities which they feel are already well-developed within themselves. I also encourage them to base their personal goals for the season on nurturing one of the

qualities of a champion they desire to further develop within themselves for the greater good of the team,” she said.

During the parents’ session, they received the “10 Commandments for Sports Parents” and a “Champion Sports Parents Code of Conduct.” Both reminded parents to be supportive of the child during their sports journey and to remember that it is a game. Have fun.

LeAnn Wenger, a parent of three students in the RCCSS, attended the parents’ workshop and said what she learned was life changing. “It made me look within and realize what I need to do as a parent to help our children succeed.”

To learn more about the program visit [playlikeachampion.org](http://playlikeachampion.org) or email Andy Shaw [ashaw@rccss.org](mailto:ashaw@rccss.org).

## BACK TO SCHOOL



RED CLOUD INDIAN SCHOOL, PINE RIDGE — Third grade teacher Claire Dille asks her class for help setting class goals. The first day of school for students K-9 was August 22, and the high school started August 23. The school system celebrated back-to-school with a barbecue and a meet the teacher night. (Photo courtesy Ryan Hauck, Red Cloud Indian School)

RAPID CITY CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, RAPID CITY — Fifth graders Madison Schmah and Emily Williams present the gifts to Bishop Robert Gruss during the All Schools Back-to-School Mass, Sept. 1, at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Altar servers Jack Wenger and Imogen Christian, both eighth graders, and Deacon John Osnes assist. (WRC photo)



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