



Three Essential Traits To Crafting A Championship Culture

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TheSeason provides tips, drills and advice on player development for coaches, parents and fans.

Everyone wants to be a champion. But that isn't an every-year occurrence for most teams.

While talent is definitely a factor for many championship teams, equally important is establishing a culture for players to thrive and maximize their potential.

That's what coach Mark Williamson strives to accomplish with the **Starr Mill High School softball team** out of Fayetteville, Georgia. Last season, Starr Mill won a regional championship for the first time ever in large part because of the team-first priorities instilled by the coaching staff.

While there is plenty of credit to the skill level on the field, Williamson takes extra pride in the strong team culture that's been instilled within the program.

"It starts at the top with us preaching to the kids about having each other's backs," Williamson said. "Not allowing any negativity to come into the locker room and always supporting each other. It's not about the individual but more about the team and how successful the team can be."

Williamson believes there are three core values that are needed to have a championship culture:

Integrity

For Williamson and his staff, this is not only an on-field skill but a life skill. People face adversity on a daily basis, whether it's on the softball field or out in the community.

"We want to take responsibility when things go wrong," Williamson said. "We don't want to blame it on someone else."

Character

Williamson preaches to his players about the importance of doing things right no matter the situation.

"Even when people aren't looking, it's about doing the right things that you need to do," Williamson said. "We remind them that there's always somebody watching them whether they realize it or not."

Selflessness

It's the old cliché of there being no "I" in team. In a sport like softball, it's key for each player to understand their role and embrace it for the good of the team.

"We want our kids to be able to be mature enough to demonstrate that trait," Williamson said. "A lot of kids aren't able to do that but we set the standard for our kids to be different."

"It's about putting aside all of your individual goals and desires to instead focus on what's best for the team. It's about pulling for your teammates and not having a selfish attitude."

As part of this, the Starr Mill team followed advice from Bryan Cain, a sports psychologist. He preaches the idea of checking in with teammates and the group as a whole. It's something Williamson implemented this year.

"(We) check in every day at practice and to block out all distractions around us," Williamson said. "We're making sure we're mentally and physically focused every time we step on the field."

These characteristics can translate to most life situations. It's part of the commitment by Williamson and other coaches of young athletes to help shape athletes into good people.

"I think in high school ball we get so caught up in winning, but the game teaches a lot of life lessons," Williamson said. "There's so many things to learn from the game that will help you in the rest of your life. We want to not only develop great players but also great people as well."