

BUILDING COMMUNITY

COD Weightlifting with COD football players—Coach Matt Foster

In my opinion, a critical prerequisite in having a successful football program, family, business or community, is selflessness, helping others achieve their goals. In order for our program to achieve this objective, we collaborated with WDSRA, piloting a weightlifting program four years ago. The program blended two diverse populations into one unit, focused upon helping each other become the best we are capable of becoming. The collaboration has had an incredible impact on everyone involved in such positive way- it is transformative in nature.



Our collaboration with WDSRA is centered upon a simple core value- helping and caring about others. Athletics is a vehicle that teaches so many wonderful life lessons. Our partnership not only assists all participants in becoming the best athlete they can be, but more importantly, the best person, teammate, friend, leader and role model. Being a champion in athletics or life starts and ends from the inside out. Through our partnership with WDSRA, we are allowed the opportunity to develop our young student-athletes from the inside out, to become championship athletes and individuals.

To help illustrate this point, I would like to provide a general overview of the young men we work with every day at the College of DuPage.

Our typical college freshman or sophomore comes to us with a singular focus-football and themselves, simply stated-selfish. Their world revolves around themselves, social-media, cell phones, classes, homework, interpersonal relationships, and transitioning from high school. Their viewpoint is very narrow and self-focused as it relates to a team and the world around.

The Special Olympics weightlifting program has transformed our players and their viewpoint.

Every Monday evening, COD and WDSRA athletes hit the weight room together. A WDSRA athlete is partnered with an experienced COD athlete. The COD players teach technique and challenge the WDSRA athletes to give their all so they can compete at their highest level, just like they do.

Both sets of athletes get a chance to bond over a common interest and build a relationship over the year working together to achieve their goals.

The space is tight with about 50 athletes in the weight room. But once the music gets pumped up you can see the camaraderie build.

At the end of our session together, we have a team dinner together, further bonding our relationships. Our program has also connected with a network of local community members that take turns bringing and serving dinner every week- further expanding upon our goal of helping others.

This program literally helps change people for the better.

The WDSRA athletes love it. Not only do they build relationships but also they begin to see themselves as peers. Athletes working out with other athletes. Everyone pushing each other to be the best they can

be. Taking pride in that new weight they lift, the extra reps they make or reaching a new goal.... Maybe the one they did not think they could reach.

The partnership transforms my players. They quickly realize that all of us have both abilities and disabilities. We work to maximize our abilities while strengthening our disabilities. We all have individual and team goals that we work on daily.

Most importantly, my players learn to never judge a book by the cover, but to look beyond the exterior to what really matters most in athletics and life- the inside of a person, and the things you can't tangibly measure.

During the past four years, over 400 of our student- athletes have been afforded the opportunity and guidance to grow, become better role models, leaders and individuals.

Working with the WDSRA athletes and their parents has been a true blessing in so many ways.

In my head and my heart, I truly believe we—myself and my players—get more out of this program than we put in. And I know the WDSRA athletes are helping build champions.

Thank you WDSRA.