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# Philosophy of Athletics

## As Taught in Great Hearts Academies

New Faculty Orientation - July 2016

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## Philosophy undergirding the GH pedagogy

### I. What's our understanding of and general approach to athletics?

- Athletics has a two-fold benefit for the athletes.
  - First, the training and disciplining of the body leads to an excellence of physique, health, and happiness.
  - Second, "competition" has two Latin parts: "petere" which means "to seek" and "com-" which means "together." "Competition" literally means to seek or strive together. In athletics there is both struggle and camaraderie.
    - The struggle allows the student to be courageous in the competitive environment, where they avoid the extreme of becoming a dishonest savage or cowering from a challenge. The middle between those extremes is the virtue, literally "strength" of spirit that students grow in through competition.
    - The camaraderie formed by teammates struggling for the same goal forms a community that is equally important in all athletic pursuits. Each team member contributes to the victory, shares in the losses, supports the rest of the team, and delights in any glory attained.



### II. How do athletics fit into a liberal arts education?

- In Plato's Republic, the guardian's education required study in gymnastics to develop strength of courage.
- "Anyone who can produce the perfect blend of the physical and intellectual sides of education and apply them to the training of character, is producing music and harmony of far more importance than any mere musician tuning strings" (III412a - Pritchard translation)
  - *Mens sana in corpore sano*- a sound mind in a sound body (Juvenal)
  - A human being is a composite of body and spirit - he is a corporeal being. He needs to pursue "arête," excellence, in all aspects of his being in order to be truly the

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best version of himself. The exercise of pushing his body to strive for a greater ability is to serve more fully his *telos*, and enable him to be more fully free.

### III. Why do we have athletics at Great Hearts?

• In his *Ethics*, Aristotle says, “Both art and virtue are always concerned with what is harder; for even the good is better when it is harder. Therefore for this reason also the whole concern both of virtue [/excellence/arête] and of political science is with pleasures and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them badly bad” (NE II.3 1105a9-13).

• Athletics allows us to perceive the truth of our progress – that we are either getting better or we are getting worse. There is no coasting in athletics or in life. The athlete does not pursue the perfect time, or the perfect season, but to throw better than he did previously; to swim faster that she did previously; to collaborate better with teammates. The emphasis is on getting better, not being perfect. This allows the students to see excellence as the pursuit of getting better every day.

• The effort and discipline necessary to be in pursuit of the “better” help students develop virtue in life. Courage comes from the word meaning “heart.” At Great “Hearts,” we want our students to have great courage too. Competitions provide a real opportunity for athletes to demonstrate courage: to fight for something, even when they think all is spent. The competition allows the teammates of students to know they are striving for virtue alongside their classmates, and there is no isolation in the struggle. Competition, where there are defined winners and losers, gives students the chance to share victory and loss together. “Encourage” literally means “to put courage (or heart) into another.” When students “encourage” each other, they give courage to their peers. They share the great heart within them with their peers.



• When our students demonstrate honor and respect for their opponents, they spread great-heartedness to others. Our students are to be expected to play with the highest great-hearted sportsmanship.

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## Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice, and Love Athletics

### I. What curricular choices has GH made based on the notes above? Is there a path/progression in the discipline of the athletics?



There is a definite path of progression for Athletics.



Our Archway PE lessons consist of traditional and non-traditional sport activities that encourage teamwork (trust/tolerance), leadership (courage/confidence), focus (perseverance), and building concrete habits. Students are to be taught proper form for running, throwing, catching, and the basic moves in the main sports. It is important that the instructor creates a positive environment in which all students feel comfortable to try their best, take risks, and strive for excellence. Peers are taught to encourage their classmates, and any ridicule is not tolerated.



Feedback, both positive and candid, is necessary in all circumstances in order to have progress. Feedback consists of activities & competition that unite all students to achieve and realize the importance of those around them & how their behavior can affect themselves and their peers in a positive or negative way as they strive for success.



In Middle School, we want to train our athletes to master the fundamentals of the specific sport, and to learn commitment as a member of a team. It is important to remember that some of these athletes do not know the fundamentals of the game and have never played on a competitive team. We foster the love of the game, by emphasizing the fundamentals of each sport. Additionally, we teach and demonstrate good sportsmanship, how to lose and win with honor, how to be a good person on the field, and how to carry that into the classroom, on campus, and in the community.



High School athletes have more of an opportunity to compete against the rest of the state. They carry the Great Hearts mantle with them to every venue; they are challenged and expected to demonstrate the great-hearted competitive spirit towards our opponents before, during, and after the competition.



Athletics are co-curricular – not an escape from the life of the academy but supportive of it (recognized for its worth and also held to the academy standard)



Athletics need to be accessible to all, just like the arts and academics. Athletics is not just for the talented, but for everyone. Our sports programs should demonstrate this.

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## II. How do we go about teaching this based on what we believe about it and its purpose?

•🌀 We expect our coaches to create the culture on the team and in the community. They instruct the players and parents how to live the competitive virtues throughout the season. Wooden's Pyramid Success provides guidance on how to build/grow a positive culture within departments and teams.

•🌀 A coach needs to know the specific sport well, but he needs to be steeped in the Great-Hearted culture of the academy.

•🌀 Outside coaches attend an orientation to understand better the Great Hearts culture.

•🌀 In Archway P.E. classes the coach is to create a structured lesson plan that consists of routines & expectations that work together to guide students to grow athletically. Using a five-part lesson plan in each class creates the environment for this to happen. Within these parts of the lesson, the instructor builds the necessary abilities and knowledge a student needs to be a better athlete and a better person.

1. The **introduction** sets expectations of how the students enter the gym and act during roll call. Taking role helps the instructor learn the students' names and helps students respond with proper etiquette: "yes sir." This sets the tone for the rest of the class.

2. The **fitness portion** builds students' confidence by presenting isometric/plyometric exercises, static/dynamic stretches, & movements needed in relation to the sport the lesson is covering. It also allows the instructor to incorporate virtues (for example, perseverance), to relate to other course (e.g. counting up/down in French/Latin/Spanish), and to teach about the muscles and relative bones while using or stretching them.

3. The **lesson focus** builds on the patience needed to master a technique or the patience needed towards a peer to be successful during gameplay.

4. The **game portion** of the class gives students the opportunity to show what they have learned and to show integrity in competition.

5. The **closure** allows the instructor to question or review material from the daily lesson and gives students a chance to ask questions not covered during the lesson. End with closure inspires thought and questioning by the students which gives them a personal attachment to the class.



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# Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice and Love Athletics

## III. Is there is a language of the discipline that we help kids understand during their course of study?

•• Wooden's Pyramid of Success.

•• In Archways: the repetition of inspiring quotes that students will eventually learn by heart, ex. "try your best to reach your best". The coach is to implement strategies for positive feedback used among students. It will create positive habits when competing amongst each other, and later on, when competing with other schools.

## IV. What big questions will/should students be asking in their course of study?

•• How will this make me a better person? What can I do to make my team better? Am I giving all that I can at all times? There are a lot of unknowns in a game. You can easily make a mistake, miss a shot, or have things not go your way: One thing I always tell my athletes is that there are two things we have more control over than anything else: 1. Our Effort 2. Our Attitude. As long as both of those are great, we will have a wonderful season.

•• Big questions being asked by students should be about the human anatomy, and the major techniques used to be successful in a specific sport; what strategies are necessary to overcome a challenge, and how to reflected/react during wins or loses.

## V. What skills and habits should students develop through studying it?

### Skills:

- Recognizing social cues
- Working positively in a group setting
- Completing tasks using strategies & logical execution
- Problem solving
- Self motivation
- Making good decisions while under pressure

### Habits:

- Caring for self and others
- Embracing challenges with confidence
- Executing tasks while staying calm and confident
- Showing sportsmanship regardless of outcome
- Always trying their best regardless of their abilities

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## Epilogue

From the AD Handbook:

- Participation in athletics is co-curricular and all Great Hearts students would benefit from the development of virtue that comes as students are guided toward competitive greatness.
- Any student with the desire to compete athletically for their school should be able to do so in a way that leads them to experience competitive greatness. This opportunity may be through a sport that is not the student's first choice.
- Academic pursuits of the Great Hearts curriculum supersede athletic pursuits.
- Participation in sport requires and develops self-control, alertness, initiative, intentness and sacrifice in a way that forms students as human beings aligned with the true essence of leisure activities.
- The best measure of success of GH athletic programs is found in the character of the students it produces. Sportsmanship matters.
- Respect for human dignity in, victory and defeat, is more important than any person or game. Great Hearts teams should always compete with a relentless, but noble, desire for victory.
- Great Hearts athletic programs must include challenges that develop virtue and programs should be purposefully structured in a manner that demands, supports, and nurtures the mental, moral and physical growth of our students.
- The coaching of character development is generally aligned with, but takes precedence over, coaching for wins.
- All students are capable of leadership and GH athletic programs provide students opportunities to leadership abilities.
- Competition fosters humility as well as engendering a determination and drive to be excellent and to give one's best.
- Competition helps individuals discover their unique gifts and talents, and find the true extent of their abilities beyond their original self-perceptions.
- GH athletic programs are designed to help the enthusiastic, industrious student to become successful in competition.
- It is important to cultivate friendship, loyalty and cooperation.
- Athletic programs foster a sense of cooperation that builds community and creates life-long friendships that students need and desire.
- Athletic programs foster team spirit and encourage the celebration of accomplishments and growth of all members.
- Parental support is imperative to our success.
- The achievement of competitive greatness requires enduring parental support on and off the field.
- Meaningful and positive change in a student's life is more likely when coaches and parents are in partnership with shared goals and interest in the student.