

5 True, Must-See Movies to Watch with Your Young Athlete

By David Benzel



It's hard to deny the power of a captivating story, told well. Perhaps, that is why movie nights are such a great pastime and memory maker for so many families.

Watching a **true** story with a **compelling** message can open a door to a unique teaching moment between parents and their kids.

These 5 true, must-see movies are perfect for the sports family. They each center around clear character-building moments and weave an entertaining account of a great sports memory.

Many of these are "Oldies but goodies," and you more than likely saw them when they first came out. However, did you view them with your young athlete?

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Watching any of these through the filter of – how it might impact your child – is a very different experience than watching for entertainment.

1) Hoosiers

The official teaser to [Hoosiers](#) describes it as: “A classic tale of redemption. This film features a volatile coach and a former star-player-turned-alcoholic leading a small-town basketball team on an improbable run to the Indiana high school championship game. This true-story was inspired by the Milan (Indiana) Indians' state title of 1954.”

Big names, Gene Hackman and Dennis Hopper bring to life the challenges that this underdog team faces. In one such inspirational scene, the small, home-town team walks into a massive gymnasium where they are expected to play. It is quite evident that the boys are intimidated by this impressive court.

Gene Hackman – their coach – asks the players to measure the distance from the floor to the rim of the basket. Then he has them measure from the free-throw line to the basket.

Eventually, there is an “a-ha” moment where they realize that the measurements are no different than their home court at Hickory High School. The Coach encourages them to give themselves credit for who they are and not be distracted by their surroundings.

Take-Home Lessons

Talk with your athlete about the “David meets Goliath” message of this film:

- The perspective that you have, when faced with a challenge, can be the difference between victory and defeat
- Redemption is always possible
- Keep your eyes on the goal, not the obstacles

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2) 42

[42](#) is the powerful, true story of Jackie Robinson. According to the official movie clip, “Jackie Robinson rewrote the future of pro baseball when he broke through the racial barrier to become the first African American MLB player in modern history. Both moving and inspirational, the film **42** follows Robinson’s trials and tribulations as he signs on to the Brooklyn Dodgers under legendary team manager Branch Rickey.”

While facing severe push-back for being a black man on a white team, Jackie struggles with how to face the hatred and deal with the haters. In one vulnerable moment he asks the team manager, “don’t you want a player who has the guts to fight back?” Branch Rickey – played by Harrison Ford – replies, “No, I want a player who has the guts **not** to fight back.”

Take-Home Lessons

This story will be a great opener to discuss:

- Having self-control in the face of persecution.
- Treating everyone with respect and kindness.
- Learning to turn the other cheek.



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3) Miracle

[Miracle](#) is the recounting of how... “In 1980, the United States Ice Hockey team's coach, Herb Brooks, took a ragtag squad of college kids up against the legendary juggernaut from the Soviet Union at the Olympic Games. Despite the long odds, Team USA carried the pride of a nation, yearning for a distraction from world events. With the world watching the team rose to the occasion, prompting broadcaster Al Michaels' now famous question, to the millions viewing at home: Do you believe in miracles? Yes!”

Early in the movie, an important scene takes place when Coach Brooks is interviewed by a very skeptical USA Hockey committee. They ask him how he plans to beat an Eastern block team. Herb says that they will need to completely change their approach.

He goes on to explain that the team will have to adopt a style that is a hybrid of the Russian and Canadian teams. At its core, it focuses on team chemistry. This is met with much doubt and pessimism.

Take-Home Lessons

Miracle is a great illustration of:

- The results of teamwork are more than the sum of the individual players
- Nothing can replace the importance of hard work
- Determination can make an “impossible dream” become a reality

4) Chariots of Fire

In [Chariots of Fire](#), “two very different men on the same team vie to win Olympic gold to demonstrate to the world the worth of their deeply held--and strongly opposing Christian and Jewish -- convictions. Yet a friendship builds between the two in this true story that is as strong as their desire to win the Paris Olympics in 1924.”

Compromising on values is not an option for Scotsman, Eric Liddell. When his Olympic race is scheduled for a Sunday morning, he courageously opts to stand by his conviction to not compete on the Sabbath. His friend gives up a spot on Monday for Eric to race and Eric goes on to win the gold medal.

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Take-Home Lessons

This epic tale will open the door for conversation on:

- The power of friendship
- Honoring your values, at all times
- The potential of the competitive spirit

5) Remember the Titans

The snapshot version of [Remember the Titans](#) is... “The year is 1971. After leading his team to 15 winning seasons, football coach Bill Yoast (Will Patton) is demoted and replaced by Herman Boone (Denzel Washington), who is tough, opinionated, and as different from the beloved Yoast as he could be. He is also the first African-American coach at this newly integrated high school in Virginia. How these two men overcome their differences and turn a group of hostile young men into champions, plays out in a remarkable and triumphant story full of soul and spirit.”



A pivotal scene that captures coach Boone’s passion for overcoming the racial struggles on the team happens during a preseason camp. He awakens the team and has them take a run through the woods to a cemetery where the Battle of Gettysburg was fought.

He tells them that 50,000 men died on that hill fighting the same battle that the team is still fighting. Coach Boone states that if the team doesn’t come together right then, on the hallowed ground of the cemetery, then they too will be destroyed.

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Take-Home Lessons

Talking points from this movie are:

- Accepting others in spite of differences
- The value of respect for one another
- Working toward a common goal

6) Bonus Movie: McFarland USA

In the spirit of an encore, here is a bonus feature for you and your family to enjoy... "[McFarland USA](#) is the story of underdogs triumphing over tremendous obstacles. Coach Jim White, played by Kevin Costner, gets hired by a predominantly Latino high school and soon realizes that the boys in his P.E. class are exceptional runners. He convinces the school to allow him to start a cross-country team in spite of a lack of funds and he works to transform the boys into champions."

An amazing career opportunity is presented to the Coach during the season and the temptation to leave the extremely poor community is very strong. However, he ultimately decides to stay and coach the boys to reach their dreams.

Take-Home Lessons

This story is a great visual to teach:

- The importance of a strong work ethic
- The power of family
- Appreciating what you have instead of focusing on what you want

That's a Wrap!

So there you have it, six impactful movies that will open the door to some great teaching moments. Grab some popcorn or ice cream and plan a fun family movie night!

David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](#), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of "*From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great*" www.growingchampionsforlife.com