

Pass It On®...

The History of Us.

How a football coach develops young men by teaching them their own history.

James (not his real name; he prefers not to be known for his work off the field) is a college football coach. He knows that in football, you are judged by winning and losing. But in life, character endures. So James focuses on teaching players about their past so they can improve the future.

Football brings kids from all different backgrounds together and requires them to sacrifice for each other, be selfless and do the job they are asked to do. Creating a team from players with disparate racial, socioeconomic, religious and geographical backgrounds and different styles of upbringing can be quite challenging.

James has found that most kids coming out of high school don't know much about their history, the history of the country they live in, the history of their teammates. So, one night a week, he leads a class that focuses on Black history, Hispanic history, Polynesian history, American history, world history and religious history — and how those lessons inform the decisions we all make today.

What emerges is not a discussion on diversity but rather on unity. Turns out that every one of us is different in some way, and our shared experience grows out of our ability to take those differences and turn them into advantages. Respect grows with understanding.

This past year, James' team had its best year ever in the program's history. The team is one of the most diverse in the nation. Yet the two words most often heard uttered by the players describing the program are "love" and "family." One alumnus returning to the team, now as a coach, said: "It's like coming home. This is where I learned to change who I was, to become a man. I want to help other kids do the same."

Each of us has a history, good or bad, that can teach us something about ourselves. But most importantly, when we learn the history of others, we discover a world that makes room for all.

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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