

— A PLACE WHERE — **LEADERS ARE BUILT**

*Does My Contribution
Make A Difference?*

What Small-Town Football Still Gets Right



Where Responsibility Is Real, Standards Are Clear.
— Leadership is Earned. —

Coach Craig Ball

A PLACE WHERE LEADERS ARE BUILT

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Coach Craig Ball

Executive Director, All-State Foundation

The All-State Game

All-State Foundation

A 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization

www.allstatefootball.org

A Place Where Leaders Are Built
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Players, Coaches, Donors, and Parents Speak up about the All-State Game

"Heading up the coaching staff for the 2022 All-State Game was more than just leading a team on the field. I saw young men from small towns across Colorado come together to make their communities proud. The dedication and drive these players exhibited reinforced my belief that the game of football can play a significant role in shaping young men as leaders after high school. It was a great game decided on the game's final play."

JD Stone — Team North Head Coach, 2022 Game | Head Coach, Haxtun Bulldogs | 2021, 2024, and 2025 Colorado 8-Man Football State Champions

"I used to think sponsoring sports programs was just a 'feel-good' expense. But after supporting the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game, I realized it's much more than that. Not only did our business get in front of a passionate community, but we also became part of something bigger. Helping small-town athletes get the recognition they deserve. It's not just an ad in a program. It's an investment in the future of the game."

David Sechler — Sechler Architecture LLC | 2021–2025 Game Sponsor, Black Hawk, Colorado

"I remember thinking my high school football career was over, and I'd never get another shot to compete at a high level. But getting invited to the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game changed everything. The intensity, the coaching, and playing alongside the best in the state gave me a chance to prove myself one last time. It wasn't just a game. It was a brotherhood, and an experience I'll never forget."

Liam Buettenback — Team North, Sedgwick County HS | DE/G MVP, 2024 All-State Game

"Investing in community-building initiatives is a high priority for us. Partnering with The All-State Foundation for the All-State Game was a good fit with our company. The All-State Game, and its Foundation, is transforming the football field into a training ground for young leaders. We're thrilled to be part of building our young men into the leaders of the future."

Frank Stark — US Tarp Inc., Colorado | 2022–2024 Game Sponsor

"I've coached a lot of games, but there's something different about this one. The energy, the passion, the way these kids come together in just a few days. It's special. The Colorado 8-Man All-State Game isn't just a showcase. It's a celebration of what small-town football is all about. I came in as a coach, but I left with new friendships, new memories, and a renewed love for the game."

David Guy — Team South Head Coach, 2024 | Head Coach, Simla Cubs

"My name is Craig Bowker, parent of Brent Bowker, who was very fortunate to have the experience of the 8-Man All-State Game in 2024. When the selection came about we were a little apprehensive because Brent had been chosen for a few all-star events in different sports and many of those were frankly a joke. Well let me tell you, if my words can sway you then listen to me. This game is no joke. The host goes all out and

does it for the kids. The level of competition is top notch. These kids are the best of the best. The atmosphere is truly awesome watching kids that were rivals become teammates. My son said, 'The 8-Man All-State Game was the most positive fun time I ever had on a football field.' To me that says a bunch because he is just finishing his freshman year playing tight end in college. He absolutely loved it and he would encourage all those chosen to take this opportunity to grow as a football player, a teammate, and a human being. It truly is a special moment for the player. Trust me, they still want to win so there were pads popping. It was a football game, not an all-star walk around. I thank all those that work so hard for these kids and encourage all that can to help keep this program funded and going strong. First class events are rare and so valuable."

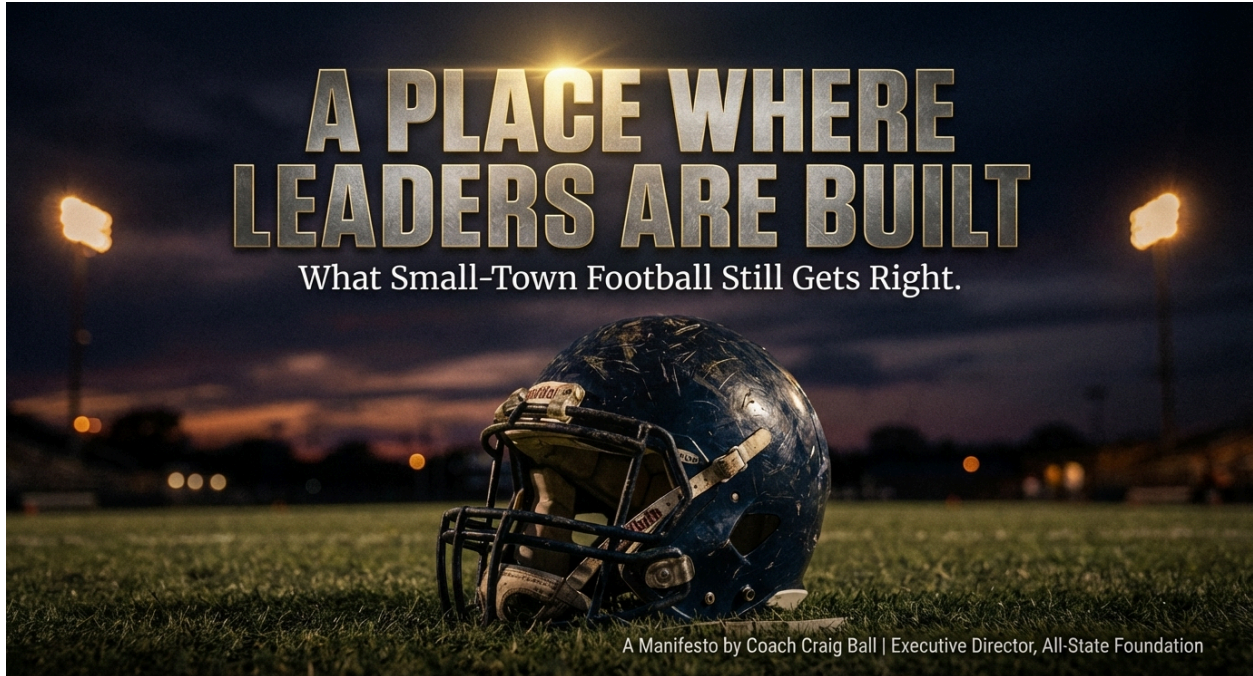
Craig Bowker — All-State Game Parent | Brent Bowker #17, 2024 Game, Simla High School

"After my last high school game, I thought that was it. I'd never put the pads on again. The thought crushed me. Then I got the call for the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game. One more chance. One more game. One more shot to prove myself. That week changed everything. The competition, the friendships, the way we came together as a team. It was the perfect way to end my high school career. If you get the opportunity to play in this game, take it."

Rene' Dominguez — Team North, West Grand High School | RB/CB, 2021 All-State Game

"Every year, I pour everything I have into my team. Then the season ends, and it's over. But coaching in the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game gave me a chance to be part of something special. Watching the best small-school athletes in Colorado come together and compete at an elite level. These kids don't take a second for granted. They show up, they battle, and they leave it all on the field. It reminded me why I love this game so much."

Dan Hiltz — Team South Head Coach, 2021 | Team South Assistant Coach, 2024 | Head Coach, Swink



A Note from the Author

I'll be straight with you. I am not a writer.

I am a football coach. I have spent more years than I can count on practice fields and in film rooms in small-town Colorado. Writing a book was never part of the plan.

But I kept running into people who wanted to support what we were doing and did not fully understand why we do the work we do as coaches. When thoughtful people kept asking these questions, I realized the problem was that nobody had taken the time to explain it honestly.

So that is what I tried to do here.

I started the All-State Foundation because the communities doing this work the right way needed more than a pat on the back. They needed real support from people who actually get what is at stake. But I was not going to ask anyone for that kind of support without first giving them a real answer to the question they were asking.

This book is an attempt to answer those questions. Does my contribution really matter?

This book is not fancy or polished. It's not full of anecdotal stories. It is just what I have seen and lived over a long career around young men figuring out who they are and how they can move to new levels of achievement past high school.

If something in here hits home for you, reach out. I mean that. The people who care about this stuff are worth knowing and I have always learned more from those conversations than from anything I could have put on a page.

— *Coach Ball Executive Director, All-State Foundation*

About the Author

Coach Ball has spent his adult life in environments where responsibility carried real consequences.

Raised in a Southeast Texas football program and coached by Texas Hall of Fame coach Ed Peveto, he learned early that standards matter. He later carried those lessons into the business world, earning his MBA in the Big Ten, where accountability, systems, and disciplined decision-making were reinforced at a different scale.

Before becoming a teacher and football coach, he spent more than two decades as a business owner and operator in Colorado's highly regulated casino industry. Working inside one of the most demanding compliance environments in the country, he learned that leadership requires accountability, discipline, and the ability to make clear decisions under pressure.

Those years shaped how he understands systems, people, and trust. In regulated gaming, standards are mandatory. Preparation matters. Mistakes are visible. Outcomes are real. The margin for error is small, and responsibility cannot be delegated away.

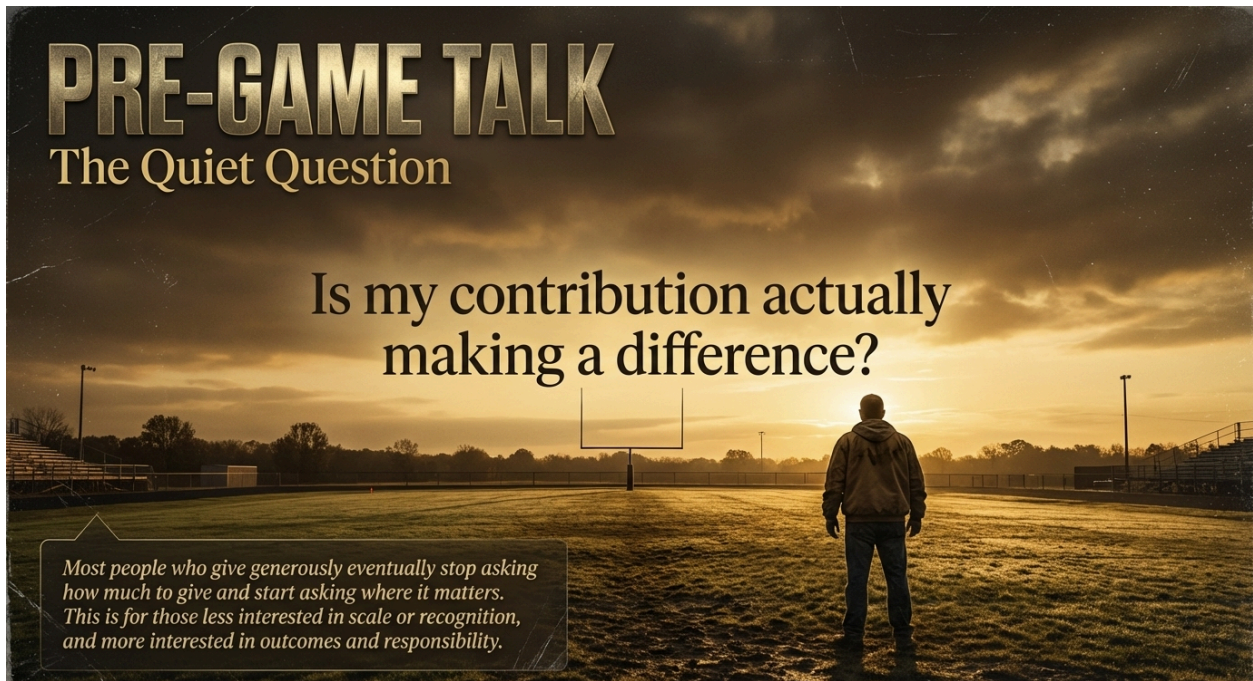
Later, as a father, high school teacher, and football coach in a small mountain community, those same lessons reappeared in a different form. In classrooms and on football fields, leadership showed up in expectations. Whether young people were asked to prepare, to be accountable to others, and to respond honestly when things did not go their way. Coaching reinforced a simple truth: when standards are clear and adults stay present, young people rise to the occasion.

Coach Ball is the founder and executive director of the Colorado 8-Man All-State Football Game and the Foundation that runs it, created to recognize and reinforce leadership already being built in small-town programs across the state. The game is intentionally designed as a leadership environment. One that concentrates responsibility, accountability, and earned trust at a critical moment in a young man's life.

He has also been directly involved in building and improving the physical infrastructure that supports these communities, including the development of local athletic facilities. For him, place matters. Environments shape behavior. Standards live in policies, but also in the spaces where people gather and work together.

Across business, family, education, and sport, Coach Ball has seen the same pattern repeat: **leadership is rare because the conditions that build it are increasingly uncommon.**

This book reflects what he has learned across those worlds. Leadership is built slowly, honestly, and in full view of others. When we find places where that still happens, they are worth protecting.



Pre-Game Talk

Most people who give generously already understand money. They understand success. They have built something real. They have earned what they have. And at some point, a quiet question changes how they think about giving altogether.

Is my contribution actually making a difference?

They already know they were thanked. They already saw their name on the banner. The real question is whether what they gave changed anything that will still matter ten years from now.

This book is for people who care about that question. If you read nothing beyond this section, you will have the whole picture. The rest of the book goes deeper into each idea. But everything that matters starts right here.

The Problem

Leadership is one of the most over-taught and under-built skills in modern life. There are workshops, certifications, retreats, and online courses for every age and profession. Entire industries exist to teach people how to lead. And yet fewer people are actually prepared to do it when it counts.

That is because leadership is built through responsibility. Always has been.

Responsibility forces decisions. Decisions carry consequences. Consequences, handled honestly, shape judgment, character, and self-respect. You cannot download that from a course. You cannot pick it up at a weekend seminar. You have to live it.

Most leadership programs today are designed to be safe. They avoid discomfort. They avoid real stakes. Participants share, reflect, and collaborate. Those are valuable things. But rarely is anyone placed in a situation where other people depend on them to perform. Real leadership begins when your actions matter to people beyond yourself. When others are affected by your preparation, your focus, and your willingness to endure pressure.

Young people, especially young men, do not need more explanations. They need expectations. Clear standards. Clear consequences. Adults who hold the line even when it would be easier not to.

When responsibility is removed, something else fills the gap. Anxiety. Entitlement. Indifference. None of those produce leaders.

Leadership is forged when three things are present at the same time.

First, clear standards, where what is expected and why it matters are understood.

Second, real risk and reward, where success and failure both count.

Third, guidance from adults who stay present, not rescuing and not abandoning. Remove any one of those and leadership formation breaks down.

The Place

Small-town football is one of the last environments in America where all three of those conditions still exist.

The reason it works has nothing to do with resources or facilities. It works because nothing stays hidden.

In a small community, visibility is unavoidable. Everyone knows who you are. Your effort is seen. Your mistakes are remembered. Your growth is noticed. There is no anonymity. When young men realize that their actions do not disappear when they leave the field, they start to understand that effort, attitude, and reliability follow them into classrooms, jobs, and family life.

Accountability becomes real. Enforced from the inside, by the player himself.

In larger systems, responsibility is distributed so widely that it dissolves. In small towns, responsibility concentrates. A missed assignment matters. A lack of preparation shows. A failure to respond affects the whole group. Because the group is small, no one is easily replaced. That creates something rare: **earned importance**. Young men learn that they matter because other people depend on them.

Small-town football also resists specialization too early. Athletes play multiple roles. A player might be a captain, a student, a teammate, a sibling, and an employee all in the same week. That overlap produces maturity. You do not get to be one version of yourself on the field and another version everywhere else. Character has to be consistent.

Coaches in these communities are not interchangeable technicians. They are long-term fixtures. They attend the same churches. They shop at the same stores. They know families across generations. Their authority comes from showing up year after year and doing what they said they would do. When a coach sets a standard in a small town, it does not stay in the locker room. It echoes through the community.

Failure in small-town football is different too. There is no disappearing into the crowd after a bad performance. Losses are discussed. Mistakes are remembered. Recovery is visible. This matters more than most people realize. Because anyone can lead when things are going well. The real test comes when they go sideways, and in a small town, everyone sees how you handle it.

Perhaps most importantly, small-town football preserves something modern culture is quietly losing: **intergenerational accountability**. Parents, teachers, coaches, and community members are not operating in separate worlds. They reinforce expectations together. In a small community, young people know that standards are consistent, not situational. That coherence is rare. And it is powerful.

The Multiplier

The All-State Game takes everything those communities build and concentrates it into one defining moment.

By the time a young man reaches the end of high school, most of his leadership formation has already happened. He has been tested. He has been counted on. He has been outmatched. He has failed publicly and learned how to respond. What remains at this stage is integration. Pulling it all together under pressure. That is where the All-State Game matters.

People assume the game is a reward. A final honor. Recognition matters, but the deeper purpose is the challenge. The game is designed to test who a young man is becoming.

Selection carries a message: You are trusted. You showed up, carried responsibility, and responded when pressure arrived. That earned you a seat at this table.

Athletes are removed from familiar systems. Comfort is reduced. They room with players they have never met. Standards are elevated. They are asked to integrate quickly, to communicate, and to perform alongside peers they have never played beside. In this setting, reputation resets. No one coasts on past success. Respect must be earned again through preparation, humility, and effort.

That design is intentional. Leadership shows up most clearly when familiarity is removed.

The power of the All-State Game comes from concentration. Years of leadership formation compressed into a short, demanding window. Expectations are clear. Feedback is immediate. Consequences are real. There is no time to pretend. Growth accelerates.

The timing matters. At 18, young men stand at the edge of independence. Decisions become theirs. Standards become internal. Character becomes portable. A moment that reinforces responsibility, accountability, and earned confidence at this stage does more than inspire. It anchors.

For many participants, the All-State Game becomes a reference point. A moment they return to when pressure shows up later in life. When work gets hard. When responsibility increases. When excuses are tempting. They remember who they were expected to be and who they proved they could become.

That is leadership multiplication.

The People Behind It

There are over 1,500 high schools in 30 states fielding football teams with fewer than 11 players. Small-town football participation has grown 12 percent in recent years, even as big-school numbers have quietly declined. Small towns are not walking away from football. They are leaning into it.

Behind every one of those programs is a coach who teaches all day, walks across the parking lot when the bell rings, and runs practice until dark. He drives the bus to away games because no one else will. He does it on a stipend that does not come close to justifying the hours. He does it because those are his kids, and because the football field is one of the few places left where a young man can learn what it actually costs to be part of something bigger than himself.

He rarely works alone. His assistant coaches are volunteers. A former lineman who now runs the grain elevator. A local farmer who was all-state twenty years back. They show up every day, unpaid, because the program needs them and because they understand something simple: these young men need adults in their lives who show up by choice. The players notice.

The Overtime section of this book tells that story in full. It is worth your time.

The Investment

The All-State Foundation currently serves 43 small 8-man high school football programs across Colorado. We provide high-tech helmet grants to improve player safety, academic scholarships for young men who earn them, coaching education to raise the standard of mentorship, and an annual All-State Game that brings roughly 50 of the state's best small-school players together for one defining week.

This model works. It works because it was built for small-town communities and the way they actually operate. Relationship-driven. Standards-based. Accountable to people, not paperwork.

Colorado is the proof of concept. Nebraska and Kansas are next. From there, Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas, New Mexico, Utah. Eventually, the larger football states: Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, Florida. The challenges will be different. The mission

stays the same. Find the environments where leadership is already being built and reinforce them at the moment when it matters most.

There is a difference between giving and investing. A donation can relieve a moment. An investment shapes a future. When leadership is missing, resources get consumed and problems repeat. When leadership is present, resources compound and communities strengthen. That is why leadership formation matters more than almost anything else a donor can support.

Every dollar that supports this mission goes directly toward building leadership infrastructure in communities that rarely ask for help but always deliver results. Equipment grants keep players safe. Scholarships reward young men who lead by example. Coaching education raises the adults who set the standard. The All-State Game creates a moment of concentrated growth that stays with these young men for the rest of their lives.

If you are looking for a place where your support compounds quietly, in actual lives and actual communities, you now know what to look for.

What's Ahead in This Book

If this section gave you the picture, the chapters ahead let you walk the field.

1st Quarter: Leaders Are Formed Through Responsibility. A deeper look at why responsibility builds leaders and why most modern approaches get this backwards.

2nd Quarter: Why Small-Town Football Still Works. How visibility, accountability, and intergenerational standards create one of the last honest leadership environments in America.

3rd Quarter: The All-State Game as a Leadership Multiplier. How a single, concentrated experience at the right moment can anchor years of leadership formation into something that lasts a lifetime.

4th Quarter: If You Are Going to Give, Give Where It Multiplies. How thoughtful donors decide where their money actually lands, and what separates support that fades from support that compounds.

Where This Is Going. The expansion plan from Colorado into 30 states and 1,500 programs that share the same DNA.

Overtime: The Small-Town Football Coach's Story. The coaches, the volunteers, and the communities doing this work every week without fanfare. If any part of this book stays with you, it will be this one.

If you would like to learn more about how this work is done, you are welcome to continue the conversation. Quietly. Personally. On your terms.

That is how meaningful things tend to begin anyway.

*Coach Ball Executive Director The All-State Foundation 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization 720.751.8771 Text/Call coachball@allstatefootball.org
www.allstatefootball.org*



1ST QUARTER
Leaders Are Formed Through Responsibility

1. CLEAR STANDARDS
(Expectations are understood, not debated.)

+ 2. REAL RISK
(Success and failure both count.)

+ 3. PRESENT ADULTS
(Mentors who hold the line, neither rescuing nor abandoning.)

= LEADERSHIP FORGED.

Leadership cannot be downloaded. We have confused comfort with care and shielded young people from meaningful failure. Leadership is not information. It is responsibility.

1st Quarter: Leaders Are Formed Through Responsibility

Leadership is one of the most over-taught and under-built skills in modern life.

There are workshops, certifications, retreats, and online courses designed for every age and profession. Entire industries exist to teach people how to lead. And yet fewer people are actually prepared to do it when it matters.

That is because leadership is built through responsibility. Always has been.

Responsibility forces decisions. Decisions carry consequences. And consequences, handled honestly, are what shape judgment, character, and self-respect. You cannot download that from a course or pick it up at a weekend seminar.

Most leadership programs are designed to be safe. They avoid discomfort. They avoid failure. They avoid real stakes. Participants are encouraged to share, reflect, and collaborate. Those are all valuable things. But rarely are those participants placed in situations where someone else is depending on them to perform.

Real leadership begins when your actions matter to people beyond yourself. When others are affected by your preparation, your focus, and your willingness to endure pressure. That is why leadership formation has always been tied to responsibility.

Young people, especially young men, do not need more explanations. They need expectations. Clear standards. Clear consequences. And adults who are willing to hold the line even when it would be easier to look the other way.

Responsibility changes how young men see themselves. When someone is trusted with something real, a role, a standard, a team, they begin to act differently. They prepare differently. They start to see themselves differently. Other people depend on them now. That changes a person.

There is a reason nearly every serious leadership tradition, whether military, trade, family, faith, or sport, has relied on initiation, apprenticeship, and earned responsibility. You are given responsibility before you feel fully ready. That is an uncomfortable reality all leaders face. You are expected to grow into it. You are expected to do what others will not.

That is how leaders have always been formed.

One of the quiet failures of modern institutions is that they have confused comfort with care. Out of good intentions, we have removed friction. We have softened expectations. We have shielded young people from meaningful failure. But avoiding responsibility is the real enemy of growth, and discomfort was never the problem.

When responsibility is removed, something else fills the gap. Think of the epidemic of anxiety, entitlement, and indifference we see in so many places today. Those do not produce leaders.

Leadership is forged when three things are present at the same time. First, clear standards, where what is expected and why it matters are understood. Second, real risk and reward, where success and failure both count. And third, guidance from adults who stay present, who refuse to rescue and refuse to abandon. Remove any one of those and leadership formation breaks down.

This is why leadership cannot be mass-produced. It has to be lived.

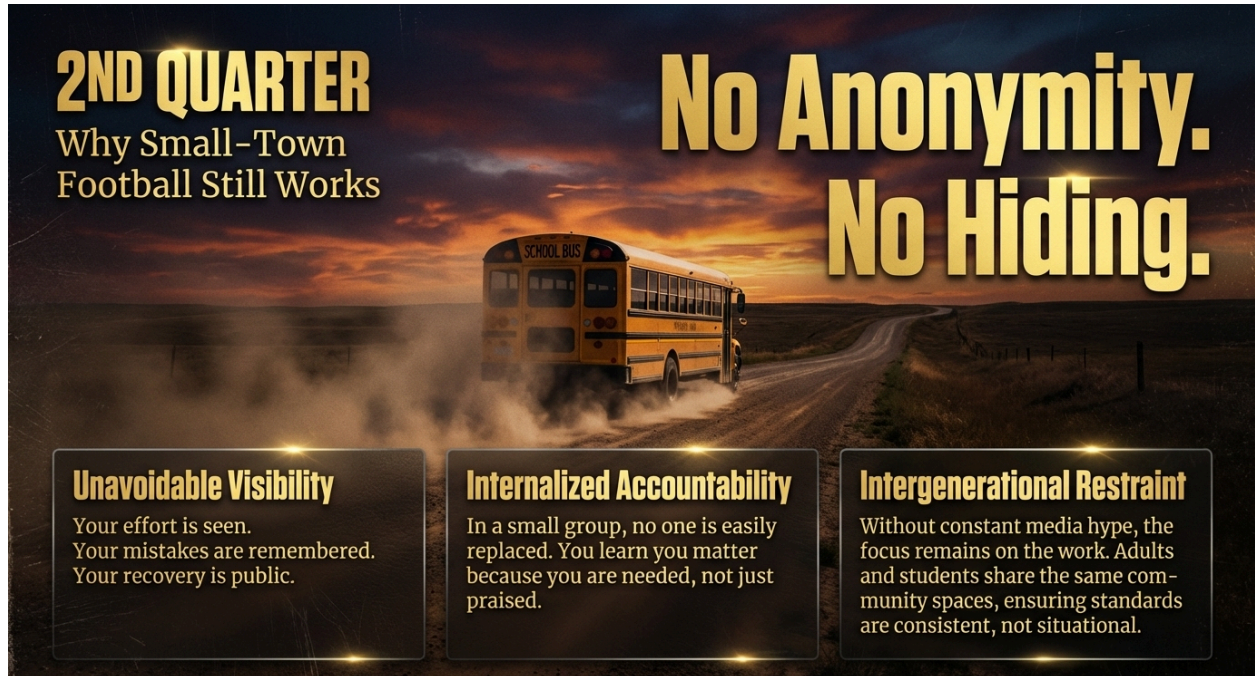
Responsibility also creates something that no leadership course can simulate: earned confidence. The kind that comes from having been tested and having been prepared. From having failed and recovered. From knowing you can be relied upon when

conditions are far from ideal. This kind of confidence does not announce itself. It shows up quietly in decision-making, in composure, in how someone carries pressure. And it lasts.

This is why environments that demand responsibility outperform those that merely encourage participation. Those environments are honest. They tell the truth about what leadership costs. They tell the truth about what it produces.

In the next quarter, we will look at one of the last places where this kind of responsibility is still demanded consistently, and why small-town football communities continue to produce leaders at a rate that surprises most people. That does not happen by accident. It happens by design.

Coach Ball can answer your questions about how you can help our young men directly: 720.751.8771 Text/Call



2nd Quarter: Why Small-Town Football Still Works

From the outside, small-town football can look outdated. Limited resources. Fewer specialists. Old facilities. Long bus rides. To someone scanning from a distance, it is easy to assume that leadership development would be better served somewhere larger, more advanced, or more polished.

But that assumption misunderstands how leadership is actually formed.

Small-town football works because nothing stays hidden.

In a small community, visibility is unavoidable. Everyone knows who you are. Your effort is seen. Your mistakes are remembered. Your growth is noticed. There is no anonymity. That alone changes behavior. When young men realize that their actions do not disappear when they leave the field, they start to understand that effort, attitude, and reliability follow them into classrooms, jobs, and family life.

Accountability becomes real. Enforced from the inside, by the player himself.

In larger systems, responsibility is often distributed so widely that it dissolves. In small towns, responsibility concentrates. A missed assignment matters. A lack of preparation shows. A failure to respond affects the whole group. And because the group is small, no one is easily replaced. That creates something rare: earned importance. Young men learn that they matter because other people depend on them.

Small-town football also resists a modern temptation: specialization too early. Athletes play multiple roles. Students carry multiple identities. Leaders are expected to be adaptable. A player might be a captain, a student, a teammate, a sibling, and an employee, all in the same week. That overlap produces maturity. You do not get to be one version of yourself on the field and another version everywhere else. Character has to be consistent.

Coaches in these communities are long-term fixtures. They attend the same churches. They shop at the same stores. They know families across generations. Their authority comes from showing up year after year and doing what they said they would do. You can teach a young man a lot about leadership simply by being dependable. Just showing up is a marker of success across all domains.

When a coach sets a standard in a small town, it does not stay in the locker room. It echoes through the community. That kind of leadership instruction is slow, but it is durable. It impacts lives and communities far into the future.

Failure in small-town football is also different. There is no disappearing into the crowd after a bad performance. Losses are discussed. Mistakes are remembered. Recovery is visible. This matters more than most people realize. Because anyone can lead when things are going well. The real test comes when things go sideways, and in a small town, everyone sees how you handle it.

Another overlooked advantage is restraint. Without constant media attention, rankings, or hype, the focus remains on process. Preparation. Effort. Trust. Execution. When recognition comes, it is usually earned the hard way. And when it does not come, the work still matters. That orientation toward the work itself produces leaders who do not need applause to stay disciplined.

Perhaps most importantly, small-town football preserves something modern culture is quietly losing: intergenerational accountability. Parents, teachers, coaches, and community members are not operating in separate worlds. They speak to each other. They compare notes. They reinforce expectations. In a small community, young people

know that standards are consistent, not situational. That coherence is rare. And it is powerful.

Small-town football does not produce leaders by accident. It does so because the environment is honest. It demands responsibility. It refuses anonymity. It rewards preparation. It exposes weakness. And it provides a path to recovery. These conditions cannot be mass-produced. They must be protected.

In the 3rd Quarter, we will look at how the All-State Game intentionally concentrates these conditions and why a single, well-designed moment can multiply years of leadership formation into something that lasts a lifetime. The game carries real responsibility, and that is the whole point.

3RD QUARTER

The Leadership Multiplier

The All-State Game is not a reward for who they were.
It is a **challenge** for who they are **becoming**.

(The Compression Effect)

- **Reputation Resets:** Removal of familiarity. Status must be earned again through humility and effort.
- **Compressed Growth:** Years of leadership lessons packed into one highly demanding week.
- **Earned Brotherhood:** Connection built entirely on shared responsibility and collective standards.



3rd Quarter: The All-State Game as a Leadership Multiplier

By the time a young man reaches the end of high school, most of his leadership formation has already occurred. He has accumulated experiences. He has been tested. He has been counted on. He has been outmatched. He has failed publicly and learned how to respond.

What remains at this stage is integration. Pulling it all together under pressure. And this is where the All-State Game matters.

People assume the All-State Game is a reward. From the outside, it looks like recognition, a final honor for talented athletes. And while recognition is part of it, that framing misses the deeper purpose.

The All-State Game is designed to challenge who a young man is becoming.

Selection into the All-State Game carries a subtle but important message: You are trusted. You showed up, carried responsibility, and responded when pressure arrived. That earned you a place here.

That trust changes how young men carry themselves. Expectations rise, because they feel the weight of what they have been invited into. A chance to challenge themselves against the best of the best.

The environment of the All-State Game is intentionally different. Athletes are removed from familiar systems. Comfort is reduced. They stay in dorms with new players. Standards are elevated. They are asked to integrate quickly, to communicate, to collaborate, and to perform with peers they have never played beside before.

That design is intentional. Leadership shows up most clearly when familiarity is removed. In this setting, reputation resets. No one arrives with guaranteed status. No one coasts on past success. Respect must be earned again through preparation, humility, effort, and responsiveness.

For many young men, this is the first time they experience a leadership environment where who you are matters more than where you came from. That moment is formative.

The All-State Game also reintroduces something increasingly rare: **earned brotherhood**. The real kind, built on shared responsibility. Late practices. High expectations. Collective standards. Mutual accountability. When young men are asked to commit to something larger than themselves, even briefly, it leaves a mark. They remember what it felt like to be held to a higher standard. And they carry that memory forward.

The power of the All-State Game comes from concentration. Years of leadership formation compressed into a short, demanding window. Expectations are clear. Feedback is immediate. Consequences are real. There is no time to pretend. And because of that, growth accelerates.

The timing matters. At 18, young men stand on the edge of independence. Decisions become theirs. Standards become internal. Character becomes portable. A moment that reinforces responsibility, accountability, and earned confidence at this stage does more than inspire. It anchors.

For many participants, the All-State Game becomes a reference point. A moment they return to when pressure shows up later. When work gets hard. When responsibility

increases. When excuses are tempting. They remember who they were expected to be and who they proved they could be.

That is leadership multiplication.

The All-State Game is valuable because it produces standards. Standards that do not disappear when the jersey comes off. Standards that follow young men into college classrooms, workplaces, families, and communities. Standards that quietly shape future leaders.

The All-State Game is an investment in leadership infrastructure. It identifies environments that already work, small-town programs built on responsibility, and amplifies what they have already started at the exact moment when impact compounds.

In the 4th Quarter, we will return to the original question this book began with: If you are going to give, where does your money actually make a difference? And how thoughtful people can invest wisely in the places where leadership still gets built.



4th Quarter: If You Are Going to Give, Give Where It Multiplies

Most people who are serious about giving eventually reach the same place. Discernment.

They stop asking how much they should give. And they start asking where it actually matters.

That question is a sign of maturity. And it deserves a straight answer.

There is a difference between giving and investing. A donation can relieve a moment. An investment shapes a future. Both have value, but they are not interchangeable.

When leadership is missing, resources get consumed and problems repeat. When leadership is present, resources compound and communities strengthen. This is why leadership formation matters more than almost anything else a donor can support.

Leadership does not announce itself. It shows up quietly. In people who take responsibility when it would be easier to walk away. In people who hold standards when no one is watching. In people who steady others when pressure arrives. These traits are formed slowly, honestly, and often out of public view.

The environments that produce leaders share common characteristics. They are demanding. They are personal. They resist anonymity. They value accountability over comfort. These characteristics do not scale easily. And because of that, they are easy to overlook.

Small-town football programs, and the All-State Game that grows from them, exist inside this reality. They do not promise transformation. They do not manufacture outcomes. They create conditions. Conditions where responsibility is real. Where expectations are clear. Where young men are asked to carry weight and grow stronger because of it.

That is where leadership multiplies.

Thoughtful donors do not want their money to disappear into abstraction. They want it connected to people, to places, and to standards that last. They want to know that what they support will still matter when attention moves on.

Leadership formation meets that standard.

If you have read this far, you already understand something important. The most significant impact is rarely loud. The most lasting influence is rarely immediate. The important work happens quietly, upstream, before problems ever become visible.

This book was written to clarify. To help you see where leadership is still being built and why protecting those environments matters more than creating new ones.

If you are looking for a place where your support compounds quietly, in actual lives and actual communities, you now know what to look for.

The All-State Game exists because leadership matters. Right now. Right at the moment when a young man is becoming who he will be.

If you would like to learn more about how this work is done, you are welcome to continue the conversation. Quietly. Personally. On your terms.

That is how meaningful things tend to begin anyway.

Call, Text, or Email

Coach Ball

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END GAME
Where This Is Going

Current State
Colorado Proof of Concept.
43 programs served.
Helmet grants provided.
Scholarships awarded.

The Vision
The National Pipeline.
Expanding to the 6-man and 8-man heartlands (Nebraska, Kansas, Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas) to protect the 1,500+ environments where leadership is built.

This is not about growing big for the sake of being big.
It is about reaching the places where the work is already happening.

End Game: Where This Is Going

What we have built in Colorado is a proof of concept. The All-State Foundation currently serves 43 small 8-man high school football programs across the state. We provide high-tech helmet grants to improve player safety, academic scholarships for young men who earn them, coaching education to raise the standard of mentorship, and an annual All-State Game that brings roughly 50 of the state's best small-school players together for one defining week.

This model works. It works because it was built for small-town communities and the way they actually operate. Relationship-driven. Standards-based. Accountable to people, not paperwork.

But Colorado is not the only place where this kind of leadership is being built.

Small-town football communities across the country share the same DNA. The same values. The same conditions that produce leaders. And most of them are working with the same limited resources we started with.

Our vision is to bring this model to the places where it fits naturally. Nebraska and Kansas are next. Those states embody the same spirit of small-town football where the game is a cornerstone of community identity. From there, the footprint expands into Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas, New Mexico, and Utah. States where 6-man and 8-man football programs are the backbone of communities that most people drive right past without noticing.

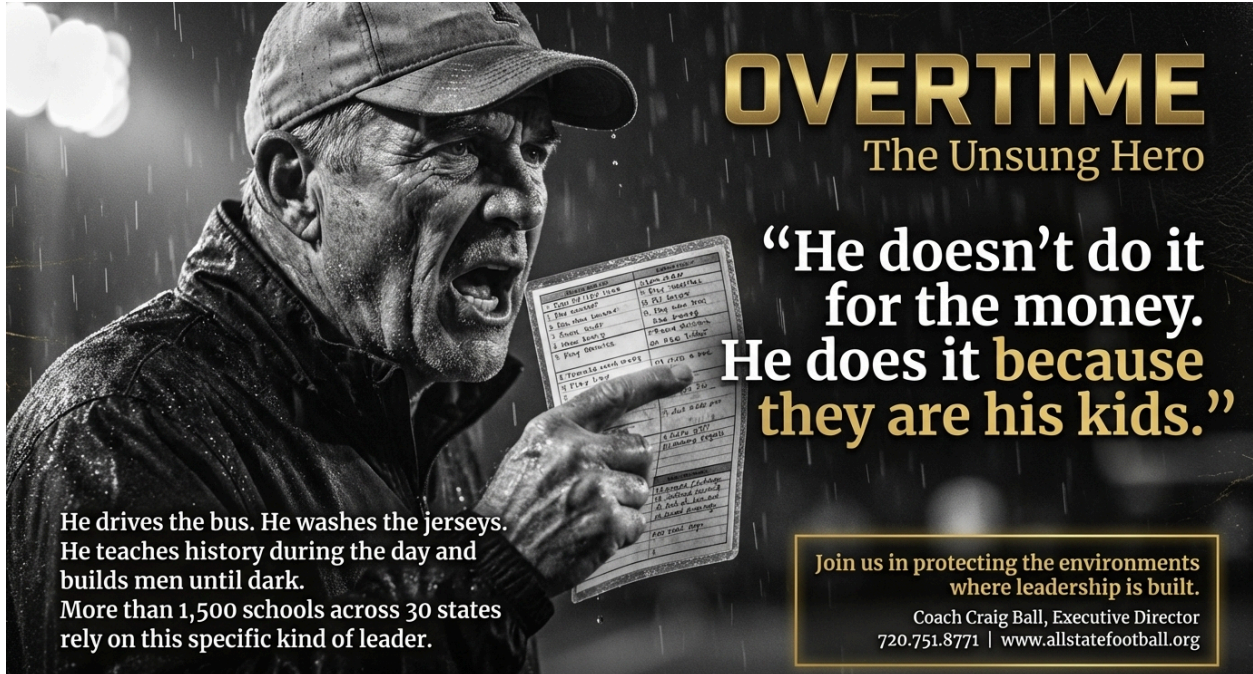
Eventually, this reaches into the larger football states as well. Texas. Ohio. Pennsylvania. California. Florida. The challenges in those places will be different, but the mission stays the same: find the environments where leadership is already being built, and reinforce them at the moment when it matters most.

What does success look like? It looks like small-town football programs across the country with safer equipment, better-trained coaches, and young men who have access to scholarships they earned through character and effort. It looks like All-State Games in multiple states, each one designed as a leadership environment. It looks like communities that feel the investment in the young men those programs send into the world.

This is about reaching the places where the work is already happening and making sure those places have what they need to keep doing it well.

Every dollar that supports this mission goes directly toward building leadership infrastructure in communities that rarely ask for help but always deliver results. Equipment grants keep players safe. Scholarships reward the young men who lead by example. Coaching education raises the adults who set the standard. And the All-State Game itself creates a moment of concentrated growth that stays with these young men for the rest of their lives.

That is what your support builds. A pipeline of leaders coming out of the places where leadership has always been formed.



OVERTIME
The Unsung Hero

“He doesn’t do it for the money. He does it because they are his kids.”

He drives the bus. He washes the jerseys. He teaches history during the day and builds men until dark. More than 1,500 schools across 30 states rely on this specific kind of leader.

Join us in protecting the environments where leadership is built.
Coach Craig Ball, Executive Director
720.751.8771 | www.allstatefootball.org

Overtime

There are over 1,500 high schools in 30 states across this country that field a football team with fewer than 11 players.

More than 1,500 schools spread across small towns in Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Montana, the Dakotas, and beyond are running football programs because their communities need them. And while participation in big-school football has been quietly declining, enrollment in 6-, 8-, and 9-man programs has grown by 12 percent in recent years. Small towns aren't walking away from football. They're leaning into it.

This book was written for those communities.

But more than that, it was written for the coaches.

Let me tell you about the kind of coach I'm talking about.

He teaches during the day. Maybe it's history. Maybe it's shop class or PE or agriculture. When the bell rings at 4:00p, he doesn't go home. He walks across the parking lot to the old gym and game day field and starts setting up for practice.

Practice runs until dark. He drives the bus to away games because the district doesn't have a driver, or because the driver isn't available, or because nobody else stepped up. He may be just sitting in the front seat for a 4-hour ride to a town most people have never heard of, and on the way back, win or lose, he's already thinking about next week.

He doesn't do it for the money. There isn't enough money in a small-town coaching stipend to justify the hours. That was never the point. He does it because those are his kids. Because in a town of 1,500 people, the football field is one of the few places left where a young man can learn what it actually costs to be part of something bigger than himself.

That's the coach this book is about.

What most people on the outside don't see is that this coach rarely works alone and the people working alongside him are even less compensated than he is.

In small-town football, the assistant coaching staff is largely a volunteer operation. These are men who finished their own playing days years ago and never really left the game. A former lineman who now runs the grain elevator. A local farmer who was an all-state linebacker twenty years back. A young teacher who just moved to town and played college ball at a small school nobody's heard of outside a three-county radius.

They show up. Every day.

They study film on Sunday evening, breaking down the previous week's game on a laptop on a dining room table. They're in the weight room before school, spotting teenagers who are still learning how lifting heavy weights changes you. They're on the sidelines in 28-degree October weather, standing in the mud in jeans and a hoodie because they didn't get the memo about the coaching staff polo.

They don't get paid for any of it. The film study. The game planning. The multi hour bus rides each direction for the Friday and Saturday games (many schools don't play under the lights because there are no lights). The Saturday morning film sessions. The conversations they have with a kid in the parking lot after practice because something clearly isn't right at home and someone needs to notice.

They do it because the head coach asked them to, and because the program needs them, and because deep down they understand something that's hard to explain to someone who's never lived it: these boys need men in their lives who show up consistently and voluntarily. Men who chose to be there. The players notice that distinction.

There's a version of this story playing out in towns all across America right now.

In rural Nebraska, a head coach finishes his school day, coaches practice, drives two hours to scout an opponent on a Friday night, and gets home after midnight, only to be back at it in the morning to set up the field and get ready for the game. He does this while holding down a teaching salary that, in many rural districts, doesn't reflect what he is building in the community.

In western Kansas, the assistant coach who runs the offensive line is a wheat farmer. His family has been in that county for four generations. He could be spending his evenings doing anything else. Instead, he's teaching a 16-year-old how to fire off the ball with leverage and violence and somewhere in that lesson is also a lesson about effort, about doing your job right even when it's hard, even when nobody's watching.

In the mountains of Colorado, a program with 23 kids on the roster travels 200 miles each way for a league game. The coaching staff loads gear, manages injuries, keeps kids focused during long rides, and competes against schools happy to have a home game this weekend. They gear up to do it again the following week.

These stories aren't exceptional. They are ordinary. They happen every week, across every state that has small-town football, without fanfare and largely without recognition.

One year my team traveled over 2,200 miles on a bus for games and a summer football camp in Nebraska. Imagine riding a school bus from Denver to Key Largo Florida. That is just one year for our 8-man team in Colorado.

Big-school football and small-town football exist in different universes, and it's worth naming that plainly.

A head coach at a large suburban program can draw a salary that makes it a genuine career, with paid coordinators, a dedicated strength staff, video support, and the kind of institutional backing that lets the program run like a business. That's a reality. Those programs operate at a scale that demands professional infrastructure.

But the 8-man coach in eastern Colorado doesn't have any of that. He has a playbook he built himself, a staff of volunteers who rearrange their lives each fall, and a roster of young men who, in many cases, would have nothing comparable to play for if this program didn't exist.

He doesn't do it for the money. He never did.

What he does it for is harder to quantify and more important than any compensation package. He does it for the look on a kid's face when he realizes he can handle something he thought was too hard. He does it for the Friday or Saturday when a small town's community shows up for a few hours, everything feels like it matters because it does. He does it because someone did it for him once, and he understood what that was worth, and he decided to pass it on.

I've been in this small-town coaching world long enough to know that the most important coaches I've encountered weren't always the most polished. They weren't running the most sophisticated offenses or producing Division I recruits. What they were doing, consistently, quietly, over years and sometimes decades, was showing up for young men who needed someone to show up for them.

That's the job.

And it doesn't get a highlight reel.

The great football writer and journalist John Ed Bradley once wrote about small-town football in Louisiana in a way that stuck with me, the idea that in certain communities, the game carries the weight of everything a town hopes for and everything it fears losing. That the field at game time is one of the last communal spaces where a town can see itself whole. That's every small town in America that still has a program.

The novelist H.G. Bissinger spent a year embedded with a Texas high school football program and produced a book that the country couldn't stop talking about for decades, because what he found there went beyond football. He found identity. He found sacrifice. He found men pouring themselves into something larger than their own ambitions.

He was looking at the big school version of the story.

The small-town version is the same story, told with fewer resources and sometimes more impact.

More than 1,500 programs across 30 states are depending on people like the coaches I've described. They are the infrastructure of something America doesn't have a clean name for. It's the deliberate, unglamorous, volunteer-driven effort to turn boys into men through accountability, hardship, and the kind of belonging that only comes from earning your place in something real.

This book was an attempt to explain why that effort matters and why the places doing it deserve our attention, our support, and our respect.

If you're one of those coaches, a head coach or volunteer assistant, paid stipend or nothing at all, I want you to hear this clearly: the work you're doing matters. What you're building in those young men doesn't stay in your town. It travels into the world with them. Into their marriages, their businesses, their children, their communities. You will likely never get a trophy for it. But you are shaping people in ways that outlast any season record.

That's what this is about, and that's why supporting small-town football is worth protecting.

The All-State Foundation exists to support these programs and the coaches who run them through equipment grants, scholarships, coaching education, and the All-State Game that showcases the best of what small-town football produces--the leaders of the future. If this book resonated with you, as a donor, a supporter, or someone who believes these communities deserve support for what they do for our communities, I welcome the chance to game plan ways you can make a difference--a place to invest in something that matters now and far into the future.

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