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Coaching America's youngest college football team: My plan

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By [Trent Figg](#), Op-ed contributor |



Calvin University's football team | Calvin University

I'm coaching America's youngest college football team this year.

Calvin University is building its football program from the ground up, and one of my top priorities as the head coach has been recruiting young men to form our inaugural roster.

I've traveled across the country, meeting athletes and their families. I've had the chance to share my vision for building a winning football team — and more importantly, for shaping them into champions for life.

From the start, I've made it clear that being a champion isn't just about football. The time a young man spends playing college football is some of the most formative in a young man's life, and I refuse to let that time be wasted focusing solely on the game. I'm committed to shaping their character and preparing them to win on the field and in their future roles as husbands, fathers, leaders, and men of faith.

As their coach, I have the privilege of walking with them through the highs and lows that will define their lives for decades to come. I'm not just here to give them the tools they need to succeed — I'm here to teach them how to use those tools, stepping into their challenges and guiding them along the way. That's not just a coaching responsibility; it's a calling.

Too often, college football programs focus on stats and championships, measuring success solely by wins and losses. But football is temporary, and even the most talented players' careers end all too soon. After graduation, 99% of college athletes will leave the game behind, and even the 1% who make it to the NFL face an average career span of just three and a half years. What happens after that?

A football program that only prepares young men for the game is failing them. They deserve more — so much more. And that starts when the coaches and other authority figures around them realize what's at stake for their players. That's why I believe our football program at Calvin is transformational, not transactional. I'm building champions for life, young men whose faith and character will endure long after they've hung up their cleats.

The football field is the most extensive classroom on campus, where my players will learn how to be great bosses, employees, husbands, fathers, sons and community leaders. We take this responsibility seriously. That's why we bring in guest speakers, teach financial planning and interview skills, and encourage community involvement. We challenge them to grow in faith, excel in the classroom, lead on the field and serve others.

We train holistically, and I hold my players to a high standard. There's no doubt it would be easier to focus only on their performance on the field, but if we did that as coaches, we'd be missing the point. We have to be intentional about creating *lifelong* champions. And we also have to be intentional about giving them a good example to follow.

Don't get me wrong, I love to win. I'll train my players to win. But their success off the field matters most in every aspect of their lives.

My greatest hope isn't just to watch this team win games in the years to come, but to see them grow into men of integrity, faith and purpose. I hope to see them marry, meet their children, and become true champions for life — not just on the football field but in everything they do.

Fellow coaches, educators and mentors: We all need to lead with this kind of hope — hope for a greater type of success for the generation coming up behind us. Invest in your players with their future in mind and remember that they're watching you on and off the field. Help them catch hold of a vision that will stick with them long after this season ends.

Trent Figg is head football coach at [Calvin University](#).

