

Student-athletes learn the importance of sleep, eating healthy

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By Joshua Gordon✉



John Underwood, who has trained Olympic athletes and Navy SEALS, spoke to more than a hundred student-athletes at Algonquin Middle School as part of a tour of the Chippewa Valley Schools district Sept. 19 and 20. (Photo by Erin Sanchez)

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Seventh- and eighth-grade student-athletes at Algonquin Middle School listen to long-time athletic trainer John Underwood during his visit to the school Sept. 20. (Photo by Erin Sanchez)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Alex Allard is an eighth-grade football and basketball player at Algonquin Middle School. He also said he stays up until 12:30 a.m. on most nights.

So when John Underwood, who has trained Olympic medalists and Navy SEALS, spoke to a group of about 150 student-athletes at Algonquin High School in September and stressed the importance of getting the right amount of sleep, Allard took it to heart.

“All the talk about sleeping, it was interesting,” Allard said. “I need to start going to bed earlier because I can’t stay focused in class.”

Underwood spoke to over 3,000 Chippewa Valley Schools’ middle school students Sept. 19 and 20 about living the right life to be a great athlete. It was Underwood’s third visit to the district, which has modeled its Life of an Athlete program after Underwood’s principles.

Throughout a 39-year career, Underwood has developed the Human Performance Project and worked with the top college and professional athletes on getting the right sleep, eating the correct foods and understanding the effects of drugs on an athlete.

Sleep was one of the first things Underwood touched on at Algonquin, saying the average middle school athlete gets about six hours and 45 minutes of sleep a night when they should be getting a minimum of eight hours. In fact, Underwood said he would suggest nine hours and 15 minutes for optimal performance.

“Your performance goes up or down based on how much you sleep,” Underwood said. “As a young athlete, you have two options — you can keep minimizing sleep and maybe you are a pretty good athlete anyway. But I can tell you this: If you start getting that extra sleep, you will perform at a higher level.”

Underwood explained to the student-athletes how the body restores the mind and muscles when sleeping. And with the continued integration of technology in daily life, Underwood said it is even more important to let the mind and body rest.

According to Underwood, people spend just over eight hours a day on their phone, checking it on average 150 times a day. That has caused neuro-fatigue that affects the quality of sleep if technology is used up until the lights go out.

Underwood suggested the students take 10 minutes before going to sleep to do nothing and prepare for a good night’s rest.

Eighth-grader Brooke Hirst, who plays volleyball, basketball and runs track, said she thought it was important for all the student-athletes to learn the importance of good sleep.

“These are things people need to know and a lot of people are oblivious to it,” she said. “I was shocked how sleep affects you and, if you don’t get enough, how much energy can deplete by the afternoon.”

Underwood also talked about what athletes put in their bodies as far as food, telling the students they should stay away from sugar, fat and salt, as well as prepackaged foods, if they want to get the most energy each day.

Having trained professional athletes, Underwood said he has worked with people making millions of dollars and had all the talent, but didn’t get enough sleep, ate bad food and didn’t show up ready to put the effort in to get better.

“Some of you have dreamt of being a good athlete. It is important to you, and maybe others not as important yet, and it is just something you do, but you have the talent to be a great athlete,” he said. “Now is the time to start investing in it and doing it the right way.”

Underwood said studies show about eight in 100 people possess the talent to be “something special” in sports. He said nobody makes it to the top of the sports world without having the genetic gift of talent.

For the athletes at Algonquin, Underwood said if they want to be great, they need to follow his advice and have patience to get to the top.

“You can’t take shortcuts and you have to put in your 10 years,” he said. “Your best years won’t be in high school. At a young age, sometimes you doubt yourself, but you have to try the best you can to try and impact the outcome.”

For more on Chippewa Valley Schools’ Life of an Athlete program, visit www.cvsloa.org.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Gordon covers Macomb Township, Chippewa Valley Schools and the Macomb County Board of Commissioners for the Macomb Township Chronicle. He previously wrote for the Woodward Talk from 2013-2016 and attended Central Michigan University. Josh won Society of Professional Journalist awards for his work with C &G Newspapers. He is an avid fan of the Green Bay Packers, craft beer and movies.
