



Summer Program Teaches Teen Girls Life Lessons

By Jennifer Wake



Camp participants cheer during team building last year at Saint Mary's College

Each day, according to According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the average young person views more than 3,000 ads per day on television, on the Internet, on billboards and in magazines. Young girls are bombarded with images that affect their self-esteem, depleting confidence levels and creating a misperception about what qualities you need to succeed in life.

Two-time World Cup Champion and Olympic Gold medalist Julie Foudy, along with husband Ian Sawyers, soccer coach Todd Smith, as well as soccer enthusiasts Kerri and Edson McClennan, decided to take action. In 2004, they added a leadership component to their already popular national soccer camps, founding the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy to help young girls realize their potential.

"We'd been doing camps for years," Foudy said. "My husband, who is also a coach, noticed that especially with young girls there's this awkward age in teens. We wanted these girls to know that they don't have to be captain of a team to be a leader. There are many types of leaders. Leadership

is personal, not positional."

Foudy and her husband – along with the rest of the team of counselors, guest speakers, and athletes – work with girls ages 12 to 18 at three camps throughout the country. One of this year's week-long residential camps will be held from July 27 through Aug. 1 at Saint Mary's College.

Part of the leadership component is to show the girls that there are no specific criteria needed to be successful.

"We share stories of those people who have done great things in life with no training. They don't fit the mold," Foudy said. "We spend a week opening their eyes that it's okay to be different and to celebrate their strengths. We want to open their eyes to their potential using sports as a medium."

Foudy and the academy staff start on the field, focusing on trying new moves and developing teamwork within the group, and then fold in the leadership component. A typical day at the camp includes functional training, working on team concepts and strategies, and developing leadership skills. Evenings are filled with guest speakers, panel discussions, or

other leadership activities.

"We did not want to lecture them, but engage them in discussion," Foudy said. "Sports these days are so focused on wins and losses, but it's much more than that."

Foudy says she gained her self-esteem and self-confidence from her soccer experience, and often calls on the skills she learned on the soccer field in her daily life, whether it's when she is walking into a board room to give a presentation or giving a TV interview that due to a glitch has to be redone live.

She believes soccer is the perfect medium to teach leadership skills. "In soccer, as in life, you have to learn to make quick decisions," she said. "We want the girls to be leaders in action. We don't want them to just talk a great game."

The outcome from the week-long academy, for many of the girls, stays with them long afterward. Participants are challenged to start a leadership program in their communities, and many have gone on to do things locally such as holding a soccer clinics for under-privileged children, or coordinating equipment drives for girls in other countries.

"I regularly hear from girls



Julie Foudy (left) Photos provided or their parents that the program changed their lives," Foudy said. "These participants are transformed because they're not only told they can make a difference,



2007 Leadership Academy participants work on soccer skills at SMC

but are shown how.

I knew that the leadership academy was going to be a great and wonderful thing – so much more than kicking a ball," she added. "I didn't know the degree we would have an effect."

For more information about the JFSLA, you can visit www.juliefoudyleadership.com.