

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.

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"Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 13:

SPORTS: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy...Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

Dwight Eisenhower enjoyed a challenge—whether it was in the classroom, at home with his brothers, or playing with his friends. In the years Dwight was growing up in Abilene, homes did not have air conditioning, so children spent much more time playing outside. Boys went fishing, hunting, and camping and organized sports teams. Dwight's favorites were baseball and football, and he began developing his leadership skills playing high school sports.

Abilene High School had no organized sports team supported by school or community funds. Since many boys wanted to play ball, Dwight and several classmates decided to start their own team and play against other nearby schools. For baseball, each boy supplied his own shoes and glove, but they had to raise money for uniforms, balls, bats and transportation. Dues were charged at 25 cents per month to help cover expenses, although no one was excluded from playing if they got behind in payments. At a meeting in the fall of 1908, they officially formed the Abilene High School Athletic Association, electing Dwight president. The first order of business included a decision to focus on football for the fall season. A classmate was selected as Captain, and after two weeks

of practice he chose the football team. Dwight became the right end, while his older brother, Edgar, was named full back.

That first season, the Abilene team played four games; two against Junction City, one against Chapman, and one against the Agricultural College (now Kansas State University). In the 1909 yearbook, Dwight wrote about the Athletic Association, thanking the students and the community for supporting the team and looking forward to future seasons. To help ensure the Association would continue in the future, Dwight wrote a constitution, setting forth the rules and regulations for the organization.

When Dwight went to New York to attend the United States Military Academy, one of his main interests was in athletics. In his first year, he was considered too "light" to make the varsity team, so he set up an exercise program to strengthen his muscles.

By the start of the 1912 football season, Dwight was eager to prove himself, and when he made the varsity football team he put all of his effort into the game. A knee injury in a game against Tufts University permanently sidelined him. He took it hard, and even considered resigning. Eventually his love of the game drew him into coaching, where he built on his

leadership skills. On reflection, Dwight realized that sports instilled leadership qualities in players. Hard work, team play, self-confidence, and dedication were traits learned in sports that transferred to all areas of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were Dwight's favorite sports as a child?
2. How much were dues for the athletic teams?
3. What position did Dwight hold on the football team?
4. List the traits learned in sports that Eisenhower believed made a good leader.

ACTIVITIES

1. Add the information from the article to your timeline of Eisenhower's life.
2. Research how Eisenhower showed good leadership throughout his life. Review his leadership quotes on www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov.

