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Ryan Eller
Junior
Lowell High School
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Hoosier Hero Application

A hero is not always a person who pulls people out of burning buildings. A hero may be an ordinary person who strives each day to improve the lives of others by taking the ordinary and turning it into the extraordinary. Turning the ordinary into the extraordinary is a daily task for Mr. Don Bales, the athletic director for Lowell High School. Mr. Bales makes a difference in someone's life, whether it is running the school's athletic program, helping out in the community, or giving words of encouragement to someone he comes in contact with in his busy schedule. He not only volunteers vast amounts of his time helping others, but he is also a great role model who seems to change the lives of everyone he touches.

Mr. Bales has had a great impact on the students, parents, and staff at Lowell High School. Mr. Bales's journey at LHS began in the classroom where he taught for seven years. After this, he continued as athletic director for the past twenty-eight years. On a daily basis, Mr. Bales comes into the school's athletic department and leaves after all of the sporting events of the night have concluded, which is often after ten o'clock. He has rebuilt the athletic program during his twenty-eight years of service to the school corporation. When he started, the athletic program was less than adequate and in debt. Over the years he has cultivated the once weak program into a success of which the

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school and the whole community can be proud. In addition, Mr. Bales has helped plan many of the school's remodeled athletic facilities, such as the field house, physical training center, basketball courts, tennis courts, football stadium, indoor and outdoor track, and swimming pool which are now considered to be state of the art facilities. It is because of Mr. Bales's years of hard work that caused him to become nationally recognized by receiving the National Interscholastic Administrators Association Award of Merit and the National Athletic Director of the Year. In addition, Mr. Bales has shown many student athletes the importance of sportsmanship through his pre-season meetings for all athletes. During these meetings he speaks of the importance of sportsmanship, passion, and the general rules of being an athlete. The meetings are open to anyone who wants to come and are very well attended. In fact, during the 2007-2008 season, Lowell High School was one of three schools in the nation to receive the Scholarship Sportsmanship Award for Citizenship. Mr. Bales feels that sportsmanship in athletics is sometimes overshadowed by the desire to win. With this in mind, he instituted the sportsmanship awards, one which is awarded to a Lowell athlete in each sport at the end of the season and one which is given to an athlete of an opposing team at the conclusion of every contest. In addition, Mr. Bales has provided a gateway for numerous students to reach their goal of post-secondary education by raising money to create several scholarships that are awarded annually to students showing leadership, citizenship, scholarship, and service. Mr. Bales and the committees he works with are able to ease the

financial burden for dozens of college bound seniors who would otherwise not be able to attend college. Many people who have worked with Mr. Bales appreciate his punctuality and accountability. As reported in The Post Tribune, “Mr. Bales has always said, ‘If you tell somebody you are going to be on time, then be on time. Your actions and your words mean a lot to people, so you should always be accountable for your actions.’” Whenever he has a meeting, he always makes a point of arriving ten minutes early, so even if he gets held up by traffic, he still arrives on time.

Being the athletic director is not the easiest job in the world; countless complications arise that require an important decision be made at a moment’s notice. In addition, the athletic director is in charge of hosting all of the school’s athletic contests, contracting officials, and scheduling volunteers for the school’s numerous sporting events. Even though the athletic director has all these stressful demands on a daily basis, he always remains calm, resolves issues quickly, and has every sporting event running smoothly even when the weather is not cooperating. Mr. Bales has rebuilt the Letterman’s Club which currently participates in six different service activities such as the Christmas Angel Tree and Holiday Food Drives. He has created the L-Club Leadership Council, a small group of student athletes who are selected by showing leadership capability as well as athletic and academic talent. The council cultivates leadership skills, develops the potential of student athletes, and demonstrates the processes of being good role models.

Mr. Bales brings his vision and commitment to the community in which he lives. He shares his message with a wide variety of community organizations such as the Lowell Lions Club, Lowell Rotary Club, and the Regional Radio Sports Network. He has been active in various sports' programs beyond the school walls, such as Lowell Little League, AAU, and the soccer programs provided by the community. He has been able to touch the lives of many children in the community through these programs, and even with his busy schedule, he still exhibits patience and passion when interacting with the young people with whom he comes in contact. He is a member of the Lowell Methodist Church where he leads a Bible study and gives Sunday services at the local nursing home. One of his biggest joys in the church is when he is able to work with the youth of the church through their confirmation program.

I have known Mr. Bales for many years, but when I chose him to be my confirmation mentor; I was able to see a special side of him. Through the mentoring process, we had many opportunities to sit down and discuss what I see as my purpose in life. Mr. Bales never "preached" to me or "dictated" what I should think. Instead he listened with an open ear, an open mind, and an open heart to lead me on my path to self-discovery. He frequently comes to my cross-country meets and always offers encouragement, support, and inspiration which help me believe that I can accomplish anything that I set my mind to if I work hard and believe in myself.

In conclusion, Mr. Bales has changed the lives of the people he has come into contact with by helping them find their potential. The lessons that Mr. Bales has taught me are priceless and will last throughout my life. Mr. Bales taught me that the best way to lead is to lead by example which is the motto of his life. Finally, Mr. Bales is a strong believer in having a passion for what someone does in life. It is passion, Mr. Bales believes, that drives individuals through life and allows them to stay true to themselves and not let their values become tainted with negative influences. As John Mellencamp related in one of his songs, "You've gotta stand for something, or you're gonna fall for anything." Mr. Bales stands for a great deal, and as my hero and the hero of many others in Lowell, he is a shining example of a true Indiana Hero.