



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Discussion Guide: *The Express*

The Express (2008) follows the college career of Ernie Davis, who was the first African-American to win the Heisman Trophy in 1961 as a running back for Syracuse University. The film explores the many obstacles Davis faced as a Black player on the field as well as the discrimination and racism he dealt with during the beginning of the Civil Rights Era.

Take advantage of the teachable moments presented in *The Express* by using these questions to help guide a discussion with your team or children.

- 1.) Growing up with a stutter, Davis felt that he did his best talking on the field through action. How did he demonstrate character on and off the field?
- 2.) In what ways did Coach Ben Schwartzwalder (played by Dennis Quaid) succeed as a coach and a mentor and in what ways did he fall short? How does Coach Ben Schwartzwalder use sports to battle racism, and where does he fall short?
- 3.) The film shows racist fans screaming at him and throwing beer cans at the West Virginia and Texas games. He had to enter hotels by back doors and sleep in servant quarters. What emotions does this evoke for you?
- 4.) How did Davis use his platform to advocate for social justice?
- 5.) What current athletes come to mind when you think of players who use their platform to advocate for something larger than themselves? How does Ernie Davis use sports to battle racism?
- 6.) After learning about the legacy of Ernie Davis, what actions would you want to take to be a better player on and off the field?

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