Try to think back when you were ten or eleven years old. I am sure you can think of someone who was older than you thought was really cool. When I was around the age of ten or eleven, I looked up to my oldest brother who is eight years older than me. I thought he was the coolest person in the world, and when he would hang out with me it meant a lot. Everything he did I imitated. I started to listen to the same types of music, tried styling my hair like his, and started to take an interest in the sports he played. It is hard to say if he knew how much of a positive influence he was on me, but he was without a doubt. During my time volunteering with the Pop Warner football team, I hoped to do some of the same things that my older brother did for me. I am not sure if I accomplished this goal, but I sure had a lot of fun trying.

When I first received this assignment, I thought it was going to be a little bit of a pain to have to find someone to volunteer for. I thought at first that I was not going to have enough time to do something like this because I have a very busy schedule. Then one night when I was driving home from baseball practice, which started at 1 o’clock pm and ended at 5:45, I saw a bunch of young kids practicing football. The idea popped into my head that I should ask if I could help out with the quarterbacks, since I have played the position since I was a 5th grader, and started three years at the varsity level in high school. My senior year as a quarterback I earned
all-state recognition, and I decided I was probably qualified enough to teach the younger guys some of the tricks to playing quarterback. The next day I stopped by the practice field and asked the head coach if I could help out. I told him about my accolades and my experience playing the position, and he said I was more than welcome to help out. He told me that practice was everyday usually starting around 6PM and ending at 8PM. This worked out really well with my schedule, and I started helping out the same day I asked.

When I first started out, I worked only with the mini-mites who were from ten to eleven years old. As I expected, the two quarterbacks had pretty poor mechanics. Even basic things like taking snaps from the center was a large task, because about every fifth play the ball was fumbled on the exchange. Handoffs were also a very shaky thing to watch, and when the quarterbacks tried throwing the ball it looked like wounded duck floating threw the air. I tried to point out some basic things to cure these problems, but the kids were reluctant to listen at first. Somehow I had to gain their respect as a competent quarterback coach. This was no easy task, but during the breaks throughout practice the kids would ask me to throw them the ball. After watching my tight spirals, I would throw them from about sixty yards, they seemed to be a little bit amazed that someone could do this. From that point on the kids realized that I knew what I was talking about, but I still didn’t feel like I was getting a whole lot of
respect that a coach needs to have to be successful. I talked this over with the head coach, and he told me that I should take control of the conditioning after practice. Well, needless to say this definitely worked, and by the end of the second week the players and I had a good relationship going. They seemed to understand that sometimes we would have fun messing around with each other, and other times we needed to work hard to get the plays and fundamentals down.

After I earned some respect from my young quarterbacks, there was a difference between night and day with the way they ran the offense. Rarely the ball was fumbled on snaps and handoffs after this point. If they did, both the center and quarterback owed ten push-ups, which I did with them. I think by doing the push-ups with them I gained more respect, and it also showed that I actually cared if they got things done right. The exchanges between the center and running-backs were not the only things that drastically improved. Along with this, the quarterbacks throwing ability was elevated several notches. At first, they threw the football like a baseball with an open palm causing it to tumble end over end. I tried to keep things as simple as possible when teaching new ideas to them after a while. At first, I lost them when I told them about the bursas between their acromium and superspanatious that get pinched and cause shoulder pain if they didn’t point the ball backwards when they loaded to throw. After I said this, I thought to myself, that this would lose anyone who didn’t know about the complexities of the shoulder. I simplified my statement and just
told them to point the ball backwards when they loaded it, and after that
just throw a karate chop with the ball. The results were amazing after they
got used to the new technique. They threw tight spirals more often with
more accuracy and velocity then before.

Meanwhile, when I was teaching the ten and eleven year olds how to play
quarterback the coaches from the mite and peewee teams noticed the
improvement in the mini-mites game. They noticed because all three teams
practice on the same field at around the same time. They then asked if I could help out
teach some of the
same things to the slightly older kids who ranged from eleven to thirteen.
I gladly accepted the invitation, and they older kids responded really well
to what I had to show them. The mini-mite team that I started out with was
the team that I enjoyed coaching the most, because their constant excitement
for playing the game of football.

Along with coaching at practice, I went to all the games except for two.
All of the games were on Saturday and Sunday much to the dismay of my
girlfriend. She is going to school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison,
and would get annoyed sometimes when I couldn’t come there to see her on
weekends. The two games I missed were the games I went to visit her.
Unfortunately, the team lost both games when I wasn’t there, and they
started to think of me as a good luck charm, because we always won when I
was there. It was really hard to tell the kids that I couldn’t go to the
game, so I just went to everyone that I could. Besides feeling bad if I
didn’t go to the games, I really liked to watch them play and use some of
the techniques that I taught them.

A couple of the guys live pretty close to me, and they still come over to
the house to hang out sometimes. My roommates found this kind of weird when
a couple eleven year old kids would come over with a bunch of video games
and just hung out with us. After a while this got out of hand, because
these videogame experts would come over everyday and hangout for hours on
end including weekends. I had to talk to their moms to tell them not to let
them come over quite so much, because I couldn’t flat out tell them that.
Now the situation is under control, because they only show up a couple times
a week. I first I didn’t understand why they were so enthralled with
hanging out at our house. Then I remembered back to when my older brothers
would hangout with me. I thought this was the coolest thing ever. If there
would have been five eighteen and nineteen year old guys that would let me
hang out and play videogames with them, I probably would have been over
everyday too.

I had a really good time volunteering for the Pop Warner football team this
year. After a while, I didn’t view it as an assignment. I just had a lot
of fun doing it, and as the year went on my hours piled up. By around the
end of the second or third week, I had all the hours I needed for the
semester. I really didn’t care about the hours that piled up. The hours
were just another benefit that came along with coaching football.
Volunteering as a football coach made me feel good about myself, because I
knew I was a positive influence on some kids who probably didn’t come from the best of backgrounds. When the other coaches and I were coaching football, it was not our only concern to be the best team we could be. We taught the kids about teamwork, and other things like respect not only for the coaches but the other players on the team. Along with this, some of the guys thought that we as coaches wouldn’t care if they used foul language, but we made it clear that this wouldn’t be acceptable. By the end of the year, we never heard anymore of these obscenities. I was so happy with my experience coaching I think I will do it again next year if I am still around the area. Service learning at first seemed like a burden to accomplish, but it turned out to be very rewarding, and it showed me that volunteering can be fun.