

## What It Means to Wear 18

The coach appears to be struggling as he carries a large box toward the players- Thump!

The box is dropped to the ground.

The team surrounds the box like a bunch of hungry vultures. The coach quickly wards them back. We've all been there. We've all experienced that moment. We all know that feeling of anticipation. Uniforms are about to be handed out.

The veterans feel somewhat secure. The newcomers not so much. It is at that very moment that a key question pops into every player's mind, a question that suddenly becomes more important than the two most basic needs- food and water- that are found at the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. What number do I get?

One of my childhood friend's father idolized Mickey Mantle and wore # 7. My friend would also wear # 7 because his dad did. So would his brother.

I know one summer during American Legion ball I had my heart set on # 23, Mattingly, I thought- "Donnie Baseball!" I had to fight someone for it..

I once had a coach who in the process of warding off the vultures hollered out, "The number doesn't make the player. The player makes the number!"

Maybe he was right.

After all, whoever wore # 99 before Wayne Gretzky? Look at what Mario Lemieux did for # 66, which incidentally is # 99 turned upside down and backward. Gretzky had 'parroted' Phil Esposito who wore # 7 in Boston. After being traded to the NY Rangers, Rod Gilbert's # 7 was already retired so 'Espo' creatively added an extra 7 and came up with # 77. Gretzky had wanted his childhood idol Gordie Howe's # 9. It wasn't available. The rest is history. Gretzky's # 99 is not just retired by the Edmonton Oilers, it is now retired league wide!

So is Jackie Robinson's # 42. Mariano Rivera is grandfathered as the last MLB player to wear it. Rivera's # 42, along with Derek Jeter's # 2, and I believe Joe Torre's # 6 will also soon be retired. Jeter and Torre's numbers will make for the last of the Yankees single digits. Those numbers will be enshrined in Monument Park signifying that those individuals stood out so much in their careers that no one will ever wear their number again.

At LSU, their football program has a different slant. Imagine if a player stands out so much that their number is not retired, but instead it is actually passed down to someone else.

Their tradition began in 2003 with quarterback Matt Mauck, who wore # 18 and helped lead LSU to the 2003 national championship. According to people within their program, the jersey is handed down to a player who "best represents what it means to be a Tiger both on and off the field."

Brandon Taylor, Jacob Hester, Richard Murphy, Richard Dickson, and now Benny Logan have since worn the # 18 jersey.

The player who receives this now prestigious distinction is not necessarily their best player, and not necessarily an NFL prospect either. He is a player who best embodies the qualities of what it means to be an LSU football player. Clearly, # 18 is not about ability. It is about a player's attitude!

Sometimes this is hard to admit, but on every team someone sitting in the locker room is the most committed player, someone else the least. Someone sitting in every locker room does everything the

coaching staff asks of him, someone else does not. Who would be # 18 on your team? Why? Would they consider you? Why or why not?

Who would wear # 18 in your in your classroom, in your office, or in your company?

Who would wear # 18 in your family?