

SAMPLE CHARACTER REFERENCE LETTER – COACH/MENTOR

The Honorable Rebecca Lawson

United States District Judge

[Address of the Court]

Dear Judge Lawson,

My name is Thomas “Tom” Whitaker, and I have been coaching youth athletics in Brookfield County for more than twenty-five years. During that time, I’ve had the privilege of working with hundreds of young athletes, many of whom I still keep in touch with long after their playing days are over. I am writing to share my perspective on one of those athletes, Christopher “Chris” Dawson, who now comes before your Court.

I first met Chris in 2007 when he was a fourteen-year-old freshman trying out for our high school basketball team. He wasn’t the tallest or the fastest, but he impressed me immediately with his attitude. While other kids groaned through conditioning drills, Chris encouraged his teammates, clapping and shouting words of motivation. Even then, he understood that success wasn’t just about individual performance, but about lifting up those around him.

Over the four years I coached him, Chris became not only a starter but also the team captain. That role wasn’t handed to him—he earned it by example. I recall one night after a tough loss, when most of the team left the gym frustrated, Chris stayed behind to sweep the floor. He told me, “We didn’t play like we should have, but I can at least leave the place better than we found it.” That small act captured the humility and work ethic that defined him as a player and as a person.

What makes Chris stand out most to me, however, is what he did off the court. He volunteered every summer at our youth basketball camp, working with kids as young as eight. One parent told me how her shy son, who rarely spoke, blossomed under Chris’s encouragement. Chris would kneel down, eye-to-eye, and patiently explain drills until the boy gained confidence. Years later, that same boy played on our varsity team, and his mother still credits Chris for sparking his love of the game.



Even after graduating, Chris stayed connected to our program. While in college, he returned on weekends to run clinics and mentor younger players. When I saw him with those kids, it was clear he understood that being a role model was as important as being an athlete.

I am aware of Chris's conviction. When I spoke with him about it, he was candid and remorseful. He told me directly that he had let down his family, his community, and himself. I believe his acknowledgment of wrongdoing is sincere. The Chris I know is someone who accepts responsibility and learns from setbacks. That's the same resilience I saw in him as a teenager after a bad game, and I believe it will guide him through this difficult season of his life.

I also want you to know that I intend to stand by Chris. I've seen too many young men drift away when they lose support. That will not happen here. I will remain a mentor to him, providing encouragement, accountability, and, when the time comes, opportunities to continue serving as a positive influence in our community.

Thank you for considering my perspective. I hope these examples help you see Chris Dawson not only as a defendant in a courtroom, but as the young man I've known for more than fifteen years: a leader, a mentor, and a person who has consistently shown the capacity to inspire and uplift those around him.

Respectfully,

Thomas Whitaker

Youth Basketball Coach and Mentor

