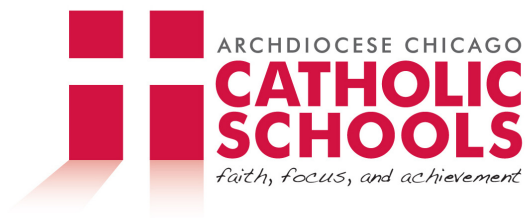


**HANDBOOK
FOR ATHLETICS
IN THE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
2011**





faith, focus, and achievement

Office of Catholic Schools

P.O. BOX 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690-1979

Phone: 312-534-5200
Fax: 312-534-5295

May 2011

Dear Catholic School Administrator,

Like all extracurricular activities which help our young people develop and serve, athletic programs must be driven by Gospel values. The teachings of Jesus need to be present in every aspect of the sports programs of Catholic Schools.

This *Handbook for Athletics in Catholic Elementary Schools, 2011* is intended to guide those who govern, manage, finance, and participate in interscholastic athletic programs. The 2011 revision tries to address several issues and concerns raised since the publication of *Athletics in the Elementary School, 2001*.

Participation in sports at any level requires adherence to regulations and guidelines, “the rules of the game.” **It is expected that the policies, procedures and regulations in this handbook will be followed by the schools of the Archdiocese.** They are not optional. Local school policies, procedures and rules may not contradict the practices included in this handbook.

Long requested by administrators and pastors, the revised directives given here are offered to promote an active integration of Gospel values into the entire athletic program. These guidelines can strengthen the local programs offered while simultaneously enabling these programs to become healthy and holistic experiences for all involved...as well as promote fairness across the leagues.

For easy reference, this handbook can be found on the Office of Catholic School’s Resource Portal. In a spirit of complete transparency, principals are encouraged to share the content of this manual with parents, students, and all those involved in school athletics. The life lessons learned, friends made, and skills stretched by experiencing adults who understand the real value of the Gospel in athletics are indeed “the values that last a lifetime.”

Sincerely,

Sr. Mary Paul McCaughey, O.P.
Superintendent

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THE MISSION & PHILOSOPHY OF FAITH BASED INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC PROGRAMMING

CREATING A WELL BALANCED SCHOOL ATHLETIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

The educational impact of participating in a sports program is highly significant. Participation in athletic programming can produce the following outcomes:

- » improve and educate for life-long health
- » increase self-confidence and self-esteem
- » promote higher academic performance
- » nurture the development of an inner sense of fair play and good sportsmanship
- » provide a bridge to unify different populations
- » contribute to the “sound body, sound mind” philosophy so essential to the character-building process

A well-balanced school athletic education program is built on a strong foundation. This foundation includes three critical components:

1. A comprehensive physical education program for all children that promote good health and physical fitness
2. Intramural Athletic Programs in which children have an opportunity to practice and further refine specific athletic skills that they have learned in physical education classes
3. Interscholastic Athletic Programs that promote and develop good sportsmanship, team play, competitive spirit, and school loyalty

Unlike intramural programs, interscholastic athletics are more structured opportunities for the student athlete. In Catholic Schools, the main focus of interscholastic sports is on good sportsmanship through competitive activities where skill development, teamwork, team achievement and personal growth are emphasized.

Intramural and interscholastic sports programs complement and enhance the school's physical education program. In essence, they are a natural extension of the school's physical education curriculum.

OUTCOME GOALS OF INTERSCHOLASTIC PROGRAMS

Interscholastic athletics is an integral component to the Archdiocese's goal of educating the whole child, and the outcomes from such participation are far reaching. The desired results of interscholastic athletic participation include the following:

- » to instill in the student athlete a sense of responsibility by demanding consistently high standards of behavior and making the student athlete aware and respectful of the needs of others
- » to enhance the commitment level in the student athlete by directing him/ her to an acceptance of the goals of the team and an appreciation of the needs of his/her teammates, coaches, opponents, and officials
- » to nurture unselfishness in the student athlete by requiring that his/her actions on and off the playing field be consistent with the goals of the team as a whole and not be directed towards individual honors
- » to generate in the student athlete a willingness to sacrifice his/her time and energy towards the fulfillment of shared goals
- » to further senses of personal discipline on the part of the student athlete by demanding abstention from activities that limit his/her athletic, academic, and personal potential

DEVELOPING AN ATHLETIC HANDBOOK

It is important that each school that supports and maintains an interscholastic athletics program prepare, publish, and distribute a Handbook of Guidelines for the program. The information presented in this document may be adapted and expanded to fit the needs of local programs. Ultimately, the written rule is easier to enforce than the one given orally. In addition, explicitly stated rules and expectations provide the necessary protection for the school, the student athlete, and all other program participants.

The athletic handbook should include, but may not be limited to, the following subjects:

- » A statement supporting the value of athletics
- » Mission and philosophy statements of the program
- » The goals of the program
- » The governance of the program
- » Financial guidelines, fees, procedures and accountability
- » The selection, training and monitoring of coaches
- » Eligibility requirements and regulations for student athletes
- » Parent/guardians expectations
- » Recognition and awards
- » Other local concerns

A statement of non-discrimination must also be included in the handbook. A sample of such a statement is:

Saint ____ School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national or ethnic origin in its admission or hiring policies, educational programs, loan or scholarship programs, athletics or any other school-administered program.

Every parent/guardian, student-athlete, and coach should be given a copy of the handbook. They all must sign a form stating that they have read the rules and agree to be governed by them.

Periodic review/revision of the handbook and its guidelines and expectations is imperative.

DEVELOPING MISSION STATEMENTS AND PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS

Each individual school is responsible for developing guidelines for its athletic program that include a Mission Statement and a Philosophy Statement. Naturally, these statements must be congruent with the local school's mission and philosophy statements, as well as the Archdiocese's mission for interscholastic athletics as outlined in this handbook. In order to facilitate the faith based components to a Catholic School education, it is essential for ALL Mission and Philosophy Statements to include the development of character traits and Gospel values as explicit goals.

A mission statement is a short, formally written narrative defining the purpose of the organization. The mission statement should guide the actions of the organization, spell out its overall goal, provide a sense of direction, and guide decision-making.

Sample of a Mission Statement:

The Saint _____ Athletic program provides a safe sports environment that serves as an extension of the school's academic and religious programming. All participants will learn the fundamentals of each sport and be given the opportunity to cultivate strong, healthy and disciplined minds and bodies. Participants will also develop a sense of good sportsmanship, fair play, and team spirit, as well as facilitate and enhance the moral and ethical development of all those involved.

While the mission statement focuses on the purpose of an organization, a Philosophy Statement is a concise narrative outlining the values, beliefs, and practices of a particular organization. The philosophy statement should clearly define the organization's objectives, methods, and theories, as well as intended outcomes.

Sample of a Philosophy Statement:

Saint _____ Catholic School is concerned with the development of the WHOLE person – the religious,

moral, social and academic dimensions, as well as physical development. We believe that participation in athletics is an important component to a well-rounded educational experience. Through participation in the Saint _____ athletic program, students will develop ethical and moral standards, life-long skills, and positive values. These values include leadership, healthy living habits, self-discipline, integrity, teamwork, respect for rules and regulations and the ability to participate with dignity and grace.

GOALS OF THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

In describing a clear sense of purpose for the athletic program, it is important to identify the goals of the program. These goals should be explicitly stated either in the philosophy statement or somewhere else in the school's athletic manual, and they should be visible to all those involved in athletic programming – the athletes, coaches, and parents.

These goals may include the following:

- » developing sportsmanship
- » giving students the experience of being part of a team
- » fostering school spirit
- » promoting the development of strong, healthy and disciplined bodies and minds
- » helping students maintain good health through physical fitness
- » providing an enjoyable recreational activity that can be sustained into adulthood
- » encouraging values of self-discipline, self-confidence, fair play, and cooperation
- » teaching the proper attitude toward winning, losing and competing with dignity
- » further enhancing Catholic values and teachings

ESTABLISHING A CODE OF ETHICS

The athletic program should develop a CODE of ETHICS that includes the goals and purpose of the athletic program and guidelines for student conduct, parent conduct, and good sportsmanship. This CODE of ETHICS may be printed in the athletic handbook, communicated at meetings, displayed in the locker room or gymnasium, and reviewed periodically or read before each game.

The Code of Ethics usually contains statements that describe good sportsmanship, playing by the rules in letter and in spirit, positive attitude, trying one's best, displaying honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility, respecting the rights and dignity of others, and bringing honor to one's self, one's team and one's school.

The IHSA Code of Conduct is a great example of an effective Code of Ethics. (www.ridgenet.org/documents/IHSA-Code-of-Conduct.pdf)

AWARDS/TROPHIES

Awards, trophies, and letters of recognition are frequently given to student athletes for program participation. If this is the local custom, criteria for the presentation of such awards should be established and communicated to all parties. Special trophies for "Most Valuable Player," "Most Improved Player," "Leadership" or other individual awards are highly discouraged. Ultimately, handing out individual awards or recognizing individual accomplishments is inconsistent with the team first concept that coaches demand from their players.

RECRUITMENT OF STUDENT ATHLETES

Under no circumstances can schools recruit student athletes to their schools and/or athletic programs with the promise of tuition, special considerations, or any other incentives. All improper activities should be reported to the proper Archdiocesan and local high school authorities.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION POLICY

No alcohol of any kind may be distributed or consumed at school and/or parish-sponsored sporting events or athletic banquets where children are present, whether on or off campus. This policy is non-negotiable. Parents, relatives and guests attending games and athletic banquets are expected to follow this policy. Expectations and restrictions are the same for indoor and outdoor activities.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANCE PROCEDURES—SCHOOL EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Archdiocese of Chicago Application for Employment or Volunteer Service (Form 7703) is to be completed by all prospective employees at the time of their interview.

When employees or volunteers accept a position in the Catholic School system, they are expected to complete the list of all the tasks/trainings outlined below in order to be in compliance with the Archdiocesan mission to protect children and young people. Volunteers are not fingerprinted nor are they mandated reporters.

1. **Complete an online criminal background check at www.archchicago.org** Scroll to the Protecting Children button. Select Background Screening. Follow eAppsDB Instructions for Employees.
2. **Present themselves for digital fingerprinting within three business days of hire.** (School Employees only). Online at www.archchicago.org
 - Scroll to the Protecting Children button and select Fingerprinting
 - Go to Accurate Biometrics fingerprinting location.
 - Take completed Fingerprint Application Form and a government issued ID
 - Ask the principal for the school's ID number that is required on the form
 - Return receipt received from fingerprint technician to the Principal
3. **Attend Virtus/Protecting God's Children for Adults™.** Online at www.archchicago.org
 - Scroll to the Protecting Children button and select Virtus.
 - NOTE: All participants must pre-register online to attend. Virtus Certificate received at the completion of training to be placed in employee's personnel file at the school.

- NOTE: If you have attended Virtus training in another diocese, call 888-847-8870 and ask that your Virtus registration be transferred to the Archdiocese of Chicago. Give the principal a copy of your Virtus certificate.

4. **Read and sign Code of Conduct at www.archchicago.org**
 - Scroll to the Protecting Children button and select Code of Conduct
 - The signed copy of the Acknowledgement Form is filed at the local school
5. **Complete Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking Form (CANTS) at www.archchicago.org**
 - Scroll to the Protecting Children button and select CANTS
 - Return the completed form to the Principal
 - The original form will be sent to DCFS; a copy is filed at the local school
6. **Complete Mandated Reporter Training – All School Employees.** If Online at www.dcfstraining.org/manrep/index.jsp, the employee is to:
 - Print three copies of the Mandated Reporter Training Certificate
 - Retain a copy for personal file
 - Present the copy to school administrator for school personnel file
 - Send a copy to Myra Flores, Office for the Protection of Children and Youth at the Archdiocese of Chicago, 737 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 900, Chicago, IL 60611

Archdiocese of Chicago, Office of Catholic Schools
Office for the Protection of Children and Youth
January 2011

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVELY ADMINISTERING INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC PROGRAMMING

Since school-sponsored athletic programs are an extension of the school and its curriculum, these programs are subject to the authority of the pastor by virtue of his office (Archdiocesan policy) and the principal (Archdiocesan policy), as well as any pertinent policies of the local school board.

The principal is the primary authority over the athletic program in the school. The assistant principal, an assigned athletic director, and/or an athletic committee may be delegated the responsibility to supervise the athletic program.

In a parish-sponsored athletic program, the principal shares responsibility with the pastor or his designee. (A parish-sponsored program is one that welcomes all children of parishioners whether they attend the parish school or not).

- » Non-Catholic students are never allowed to attend parish religious education programs for the sole reason that they may play sports in a parish program
- » Parishes develop local guidelines regarding admittance of children of parishioners who are home-schooled into parish-sponsored athletic programs
- » Only those students enrolled in a Catholic day school program may participate in the school's athletic programs

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL

The principal establishes and implements 1) a comprehensive program of physical education for all students; 2) an intramural program; and 3) an interscholastic athletic program that is in union with the mission and purpose of Catholic education.

In regard to the interscholastic athletic program, the principal should:

- » Establish an athletic board/committee and/or hire an athletic director
- » Provide the athletic board/committee and/or the athletic director with a role description
- » Supervise the athletic board/committee and/or athletic director's activities and ensure that delegated responsibilities are carried out in an appropriate manner
- » Establish and communicate the Mission/Philosophy of the athletic program
- » Determine local eligibility requirements for the student athlete and ensure that these are fairly and uniformly enforced
- » Ensure that all legal and safety aspects of the program are in compliance: i.e. verification of athlete's age, insurance coverage, parental permission in writing for participation, yearly physical or other verification of fitness, and emergency information
- » Verify that all paid employees and volunteers meet safe environment compliance procedures (see page 9)
- » Approve and sign all team rosters
- » Ensure that all adults in the program, especially the coaching staff, uphold and model behaviors that are consistent with Catholic teachings. Establish communication and accountability mechanisms among all participants of the program
- » Describe how the finances of the program are integrated into the school budget
- » Receive a quarterly financial report and arrange for a program audit yearly

- » Meet with the parents and review the program expectations, eligibility guidelines and parental expectations
- » Meet regularly with the athletic director and/or athletic committee to monitor the program

It is imperative for the principal to establish the importance of good Christian sportsmanship in the minds of the entire school community. This is an underlying goal of interscholastic athletic programming throughout the Archdiocese.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

The responsibility to organize and manage the interscholastic athletic program may be delegated to an athletic director, an athletic board/committee, or a combination of the two. The nature of the governance (i.e. whether managed by volunteers or a paid director who performs the duties) determines the kind and amount of responsibility that are given to the athletic director and/or athletic board/committee. For example: the pastor/principal may maintain greater control over a program managed by a volunteer athletic board or an athletic committee. Schools that employ an athletic director may give this person greater responsibility to manage the program. Whatever the model, the Athletic Director or the athletic board/committee administers the athletic program in consultation and collaboration with the pastor and/or principal, and is accountable to them.

THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Appointing an Athletic Director is the most preferred method for managing and directing the school's interscholastic athletic program. The areas of responsibility of the athletic director are listed in the section titled "Responsibilities of Managing an Effective Athletic Program."

Large athletic programs may also employ an assistant athletic director, enabling the athletic director to appropriately assign several tasks and responsibilities to an able assistant. Naturally, responsibilities must be explicitly delegated and divided, enabling the athletic

director and the assistant athletic director to work collaboratively and in unison with one another.

THE ELECTED OR APPOINTED VOLUNTEER ATHLETIC/BOARD COMMITTEE

In some schools where appointing an athletic director may not be feasible, the athletic program must be administered by a volunteer Athletic Board/Committee. Members of the athletic board/committee, the coaches, and others give their time to organize and maintain such a program. The athletic board may be appointed with the approval of the pastor and/or principal or the board may be chosen by vote once a slate of candidates has been approved by the pastor and/or the principal. The athletic board/committee may be a standing committee of the local school board with appointed board and non-board members. Each school develops broad guidelines for the selection of athletic board/committee members.

The athletic board/committee develops a Constitution/Bylaws that articulates the following:

- » organization and purpose
- » membership
- » selection
- » terms of office
- » accountability
- » responsibilities

The Constitution and Bylaws are approved by the pastor and/or principal and are submitted to the local school board.

ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

The administration of interscholastic athletic programs can be delegated to an athletic director, an athletic board/committee, or a combination of the two. The athletic director and/or the athletic board/committee, with the approval of the pastor and/or principal, develops procedures that govern the scope

and direction of the interscholastic athletic programs and student participation in such programs. The athletic director and/or board work in cooperation with the pastor, principal, the local school board, faculty and parents.

If the school decides to utilize both an athletic director and an athletic board/committee to administer its interscholastic athletic program, it is critical for each party to understand their specific roles and responsibilities. Responsibilities must be explicitly delegated and divided, enabling the athletic director and the athletic board/committee to work collaboratively and in unison with one another. The strict delegation of important responsibilities will also help ensure that all responsibilities are met in an efficient manner, and all those involved with the administration of athletic programs can be held accountable for their work and evaluated for their performance.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGING AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

It is the responsibility of the athletic director and/or the athletic board/committee to manage and maintain the interscholastic sports programs.

These responsibilities include:

- » To act as liaison between all parties – coaches, parents, students and the school
- » To develop a local handbook and guidelines for the interscholastic program. (This handbook includes the Philosophy of the program, a written code for academics and behavior for student athletes, a code of conduct for coaches and parents and other program volunteers, and other local needs.)
- » To set criteria for the monitoring of coaches
- » To communicate the philosophy of the program and ensure that it is clearly understood and consistently followed
- » To coordinate, schedule and supervise all other program volunteers
- » To determine league participation
- » To determine how teams are slated when there is an insufficient number of registered and eligible players per grade or age level
- » To determine how teams are slated when the number of registered and eligible players is large or their skills are greatly varied
- » To decide whether an athlete can participate in more than one sport per season
- » To coordinate the schedule of practices, games and tournaments
- » To prepare and present a budget for pastor and/or principal approval and set participation fees
- » To approve expenditures according to local fiscal guidelines
- » To submit regular financial reports to the pastor and/or principal
- » To communicate and maintain standards of safety
- » To develop and communicate an Emergency Plan* for unexpected occurrences at games and practices. The Emergency Plan, when developed, is an integral part of the inservice of coaches. The coach then rehearses the Plan with the team. Assistant coaches and players are designated to handle specific responsibilities (e.g. calling parents, phoning for medical assistance, taking an injured child for treatment, etc.). All participants should know the name and address of the facility where they are practicing/playing. Student athletes also should know the proper behavior expected of them in the event that the coach might leave the group unattended because of an emergency. Coaches and other adult participants must be aware of the procedures for reporting accidents and incidents.
- » To develop a plan for “crowd control” to be put into effect as needed at home events
- » To provide appropriate discipline to address infractions of the discipline code
- » To establish a procedure for conflict resolution
- » To review and evaluate rules, regulations and eligibility standards regularly

- » To perform any other duties to fulfill the program objectives
- » To provide coaches and volunteers with opportunities for continuing education in appropriate coaching techniques and child development related to the physical, psychological and emotional well being of children
- » To regularly monitor and supervise coaches at practices and at games
- » To oversee practices, intramural and interscholastic games and tournaments
- » To provide assistance to coaches working with students with special needs
- » To monitor and supervise volunteers
- » To handle conduct reports and inform the pastor and/or principal of these
- » To receive and disseminate communications and information regarding athletic business
- » To update and purchase equipment and uniforms with principal approval
- » To perform any other duties and assignments as designated by the pastor and/or principal

CONSIDERATION OF COUNCIL MANAGEMENT OF THE INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Principals of a Council may develop and communicate athletic program guidelines and procedures for all of the schools within a Council. This uniformity of expectations and procedures ensures that all aspects of the athletic programs within the Council are governed and managed fairly and in the same manner. Schools in a given Council may elect to hire an athletic director to assume responsibility for all interscholastic programs within the Council. The salary and benefits package would be shared among the schools.

FINANCING THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

There are several modes of financing the interscholastic athletic program. If physical education, intramural sports programs, and interscholastic athletic programs are considered a part of the core curriculum, these programs are funded as part of the regular school budget.

Athletic fees should be set to allow as many students as possible to participate. Provisions for children of needy families should be made to allow their participation as well. Booster Clubs or parent groups may raise additional funds according to local parish and school guidelines for the purpose of meeting program needs. Whenever fees are collected for participation in a particular sport, parents/guardians should be given an itemized summary of what expenses are included in the fees.

A realistic budget to operate the athletic program should be developed and submitted to the pastor and/or the principal for their approval. A good system of accounting, developed in accordance with Archdiocesan and parish guidelines, should be in place as well. Regular financial statements should be given to the pastor and/or principal, and they have the final approval of all expenditures.

The salary of an athletic director is part of the school and/or parish budget. Some programs offer stipends to head coaches or persons who are required to put forth a considerable amount of time for the program. These stipends should be included in the budget as well.

An area of frequent concern is the management and disbursement of the funds raised to run the interscholastic athletic program. All income and expenses of the total school program must be accounted for in the line items of the budget. The inclusion of these figures gives an accurate picture of the actual costs to educate a student. While the funds may be raised by an outside group (e.g. Booster Club) it is critical that all monies are properly reflected in the annual budget.

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC PROGRAM

FACTORS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Only students in Grades 4-8 may participate in interscholastic play. Participation in interscholastic athletics at earlier grade levels is not encouraged, as younger students should be focusing only on instruction rather than competitive play.

Guidelines for the participation of transfer students, especially those enrolling after the opening day of school, must be explicitly established. The age when a student becomes too old to play in an elementary program should also be defined and communicated.

The number of practices and games, in addition to the time of the practices and games, are determined in consideration of the student athlete's age, physical development, academic responsibilities, and the opportunity for family life.

The following are non-negotiable maximums for schools to use as they outline participation parameters for their athletic programs.

BASKETBALL & VOLLEYBALL GUIDELINES:

Games:

- » Grade 4 : 10 to 15 games and three tournaments (not more than 20 games total)
- » Grade 5&6: 15 to 20 games and three tournaments (not more than 25 games total)
- » Grades 7&8 : 20 to 30 games and three tournaments (not more than 35 games total)
- » Each tournament entered counts as one game with a recommended maximum of three tournaments

- » League playoffs that follow the regular season are counted as one tournament
- » No more than two games should be scheduled per week
- » Grade 7 and 8 games start no later than 8:30PM on days when there is school the following day and no later than 9:00PM on other days. For Grade 4,5, & 6, these times are 7:30PM and 8:00PM respectively.
- » Practice games played before the start of the season should be limited to TWO games. Scrimmage games prior to or during the season should be limited to THREE games. These games are included in the maximum totals.
- » Tournament participation takes into consideration the distance traveled and whether or not tournaments are held within the regular season. Every effort should be made to keep the expectation of participation "family-friendly."

Practices:

- » Grade 4-6: 1-2 Practices per week (not to exceed three hours per week)
- » Grade 7 & 8: 3-4 Practices per week (not to exceed six hours per week)
 - Monday, Wednesday, Friday Schedule is recommended for a 3 day per week practice schedule
 - Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday Schedule is recommended for a 4 day per week practice schedule
- » Practice sessions should include warm-up and cool-down times

- » No practices or games should be scheduled for early Sunday morning, as families should be allowed the opportunity to attend Mass together

Participation:

- » The number of leagues in which teams participate per season should not exceed two leagues
- » Consideration should be given to publishing “won-loss” records and team standings for Grades 7 and 8 teams ONLY
- » It is expected that every student enrolled in the program who meets eligibility requirements be allowed to play a reasonable amount of time in every game

It is intended that the spirit of these basketball and volleyball guidelines be adopted and applied in other sports, such as baseball and soccer, as well.

TACKLE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES

According to the National Youth Safety Foundation, collision sports like ice hockey and tackle football should not be allowed until age ten. But even then, the different levels of performance within a given age group result more from differences in physical maturity rather than differences in pure skill. With that being said, classification solely on the basis of chronological age is not always the safest way to differentiate levels of competition when building a youth football program. Rather than grouping student athletes by age, in many cases it may be best to use physical maturity assessments as a basis for matching athletes for football. Youth who are not sufficiently mature should be advised to go into one of the many sports in which there is less risk for injury.

Mandatory pre-participation physical exams are one of the most critical aspects of injury prevention in youth sports programs, especially contact sports such as football. The purpose of the exam is to (1) detect conditions which could make football playing (or any other sport for that matter) life threatening or disabling and (2) detect medical or musculoskeletal conditions that could result in injury or illness during practice or competition. It is recommended that the performance of this pre-participation physical exam

take place six weeks prior to preseason practice, allowing adequate time for the correction of identifiable problems such as use of specific strengthening or flexibility exercises which are highly critical for contact sports such as football.

The use of proper equipment is of utmost importance. Helmets must be fitted by a knowledgeable person experienced in this process. All equipment – helmets, shoulder pads in particular – should be constantly inspected for cracks, frayed strings or straps, loose rivets, and other possible failures.

The coach has the ultimate responsibility for the safety of the athletes. It is the coach’s responsibility to teach safety principles to the athletes; to see that athletes are properly conditioned; to require a proper warm-up; to teach appropriate techniques; to avoid unsafe environmental situations such as practicing on dangerous field conditions or during inclement weather; and to prevent players from competing beyond their fatigue level, especially in hot conditions.

It is recommended that coaches teach athletes information on safety by giving the players check lists, lectures, and showing training films. Communication on safety should be documented, reminding coaches, administrators, and officials that safety instruction is a priority. These same safety principles should also be presented to parents so they can reinforce the message.

Practice:

Pre-season practices are the most injury prone times. Controlled activities should be emphasized at this time, and coaches should be particularly vigilant about technique. Because a significant percent of injuries occur during contact practice drills, the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation recommends that a reduction in the amount of contact practices should be considered. Such a reduction is certainly feasible as the season progresses, after athletes are beginning to grasp appropriate technique for blocking and tackling.

In addition, the National Athletic Trainers Association recommends a minimum of fifteen minutes of warm-up before any game or practice and a cool down period afterward. Athletes should also warm up at

least five minutes during any prolonged breaks in activity (half time, etc).

Youth football organizations with younger participants should develop a preseason acclimatization plan that has a greater emphasis on allowing athletes to safely learn the game and adjust to the demands of the sport. **YOUTH LEAGUE PLAYERS SHOULD NOT PRACTICE MORE THAN FOUR CONSECUTIVE DAYS.**

A suggestive model for youth league players is outlined by the following program parameters for preseason practice:

- » 8-10 acclimatization episodes with 30-45 minutes of conditioning, at a rate of one per day or one every other day
- » No one practice session should last more than two hours (including warm-up, conditioning, instruction, breaks, and cool-down)
- » Practices are limited to one session per day and 8 hours total in a week
- » First Week (up to 8 hours total): Shorts, shirts, and helmet only, with an emphasis on heat acclimatization and basic skills
- » Second Week (up to 8 hours total): First 5 hours in helmet and shoulder pads, and the remaining 3 hours in full pads, without live contact (limited contact with blocking dummies and sleds permitted after total of 12 hours of practice – weeks one and two combined)
- » Third Week (up to 8 hours total): Full pads with live contact permitted
- » Regular Season Practices: Up to 6 hours per week, with no practice session lasting longer than 2 hours (including warm-up, conditioning, instruction, breaks, and cool-down)

Training Safety in the Heat

Youth football coaches should adopt strategies to acclimatize players to perform in the heat, along with a fluid replacement in anticipation of young players who begin practice already dehydrated. Practices should be modified to reduce intensity, duration, and

equipment depending on the environmental heat stress. The team support staff must closely monitor ALL PLAYERS, instead of only focusing on those with an excessive body mass index, for signs and symptoms of developing heat related injury during football practices and games.

Measures to help players safely acclimatize during pre-season and reduce the risk for heat injury during all practices include:

- » Allow easy access to fluids. Players must have unlimited privileges to adequate drinking water and/or other beverages that are chilled, flavored and contain sodium that help promote fluid intake during and after training
- » Regular breaks should be scheduled to limit excessive physical activity and allow fluid replacement
- » Utilize the shade whenever possible during rest breaks
- » Schedule a pre-season for at least two weeks, with gradual and increasing exposure to intensity, duration, and protective equipment
- » Use the “Buddy System” to monitor players (two players assigned to keep an eye on each other)

Games:

- » Maximum of one game per week with a minimum of nine games plus playoffs

CHEERLEADING GUIDELINES

As with any sport, safety should be of utmost concern for all participants. As with most sports, cheerleading inherently carries some unavoidable risks. Proper information and knowledge can possibly reduce the severity and frequency of the injuries.

Current research has indicated the following causes for sport related injuries:

- » Lack of proper conditioning; not being physically prepared
- » Lack of training for coaches, instructors, and/or advisors in the rules and procedures for the sport

- » Poor decision making by coaches, instructors, advisors, and participants
- » Inadequate supervision
- » Inadequate equipment and facilities (lack of mats, practice area free of obstructions, etc)
- » Poor nutrition and lack of hydration
- » Improper application of the rules of progression

As with all sports, cheerleading coaches must place a premium on conditioning and physical preparation. A significant portion of each practice should be dedicated towards exercises that increase flexibility and strengthen the abdominals, lower back, quadriceps, and upper body (arms and shoulders). The intensity of practices should increase gradually, as should the difficulty of stunts, tumbling and other sport specific skills.

It is recommended that all cheerleading coaches obtain proper training and education in the rules and techniques of the sport. It is also recommended that coaches become certified in first aid and CPR. All coaches should insure that proper safety measures are implemented at all times, to decrease the probability of injuries to the athletes. No other single factor affects a program more than the knowledge of coaches.

In order to help prevent injuries to cheerleaders, it is highly encouraged that school administrators and athletic directors implement the following safety guidelines for all coaches and student-athletes as outlined in the NFHS Spirit Rule Book. These rules will help to minimize risk for the participants. This rule book is published, reviewed and revised annually by the National Federation for High School Associations (NFHS), and it serves as the main source for determining what's legal and/or illegal in the sport of cheerleading. The Spirit Rules book is available for purchase at www.nfhs.org.

Since there have been no rules other than those written specifically for high school teams, many elementary, middle, and junior high schools and state associations have directed their cheerleading teams to follow high school rules. As a result, many in the cheer industry recently noticed that more teams at the elementary and middle school levels were performing advanced skills for

which they were not prepared. However, beginning in 2010, the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) introduced the first set of cheerleading rules developed specifically for elementary, middle, and junior high school squads with the goal in mind of minimizing the risk of cheerleading related injuries. While it is expected that schools follow the rules as outlined by the NFHS and AACCA, it is also expected that schools follow the recently added restrictions included in Section F of the 2010-2011 AACCA School Cheer Rules. These rules have been adopted by I.E.S.A (Illinois Elementary School Association). A copy of the 2010-2011 AACCA School Cheer Safety Rules can be found at www.aacca.org.

According to Section F of the AACCA School Cheer Safety Rules, the following restrictions for elementary, middle school and junior high teams are as follows:

- » Basket tosses, elevator tosses and similar multi-based tosses are prohibited.
- » The total number of twists in a dismount from stunts cannot be greater than one rotation. Exception to this rule: Side facing stunts (i.e. Arabesque, scorpion, etc.) may add a one-quarter twist in order to cradle the front.

While there are certainly teams at this age level that can safely perform these skills, the rules are not written for the elite athletes, just as they are not written for the beginning athletes. These revised rules for elementary, middle school, and junior high teams are written for school teams, not all star or youth recreational programs. There must be a difference in focus of school cheerleading, which results from a limit on talent pool from which teams are selected, and a certain level of risk acceptance on the part of school administrators.

In order to prevent cheerleading injuries, it is highly encouraged that school administrators and athletic directors implement the following safety guidelines for their coaches and student-athletes:

- » Coaches should attend a Rules Interpretation meeting (through IHSA) and obtain a copy of the NFHS Spirit Rules book each year.

- » Whenever possible, coaches and athletes should attend clinics and camps to improve knowledge of the sport.
- » All cheerleading squads should adopt a comprehensive conditioning program. Emphasis must be placed on potential problem areas (i.e. leg flexibility, upper arm strength, ankle and wrist strength)
- » Coaches are responsible for knowing the rules regarding sideline cheerleading at games, rules regarding bleeding / wounds, and rules for concussions (Spirit Rule 2-1).
- » Practices must be held in a location / area suitable the sport with an appropriate surface (mats or grass) that's free of obstructions and excessive noise (Spirit Rule 2-1-3)
- » An emergency response plan must be in place, in case of injury or emergency.

Practices:

Pre-Season

- » Limited to one session per day, not to exceed 8 hours per week.
- » EXCEPTIONS: Summer Camps and Choreography Camps, which may require longer days (more hours per week) but the hours can be managed by mandatory non-practice days after attendance at camps.

In Season

- » Limited to one session per day, not to exceed 6 hours per week.
- » Limited to 2 contests per week.
- » No practices or contests should be scheduled early on Sunday morning as families should be allowed the opportunity to attend Mass together.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL COACHES

COACHES: THE SELECTION PROCESS

The coach has the greatest responsibility as well as the greatest opportunity to guide and influence the student athlete. Coaches assume the role of teacher, mentor and minister to the athletes in their charge. A coach's attitude and spirituality are critical to modeling good Christian faith-based sportsmanship, both in word and deed. The careful selection of coaches is vital if the athletic program is to reflect the Mission and Philosophy of the school's interscholastic athletic program.

Criteria for the selection of coaches must include:

- » The ability to model Catholic values
- » The ability to articulate and model the school's Mission and Philosophy and goals of the program
- » The ability to responsibly supervise and instruct the youth in his/her care
- » An understanding of the basics of the sport to be coached
- » The ability to develop the potential, confidence and skills of each athlete
- » The ability to separate winning from the important goals and values of the program

After a careful screening and selection process, coaches are appointed by the athletic board/committee or by the athletic director with the approval of the pastor and/or the principal. Head coaches should be 21 years of age, and they all must submit all of the necessary documentation and training. Before coming into contact with any children, all paid and volunteer coaches must:

- » Complete an eApps online criminal background check application
- » Attend Virtus Training within 60 days of beginning service

- » Read and sign the Code of Conduct for Church Personnel
- » Complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System Form – CANTS
- » Complete Mandated Reporter Training (employees only)
- » Present themselves for digital fingerprinting within 5 days of hire (paid employees)

See page 9 for Safe Environment Compliance Procedures.

Each school must conduct their own coach training program prior to the start of the sport season as a means of making sure each coach understands his/her responsibility as an extension of the school, the staff, and the religious tradition of the Parish Community. In addition, the school should make arrangements for coaches to attend a formal clinic or in-service in their particular sport. The benefits of sending coaches to a professional organization that focuses on appropriate teachings and principles of effectively leading youth sports programs are extremely significant. It is recommended that the coaches are certified by a national governing body or a national coaching program in the sport they coach. In addition, it is recommended that coaches receive training in first-aid, CPR, and on blood-borne pathogens. Of equal importance, all coaches must be familiar with the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, and every coach must clearly understand their legal responsibilities.

Further Training opportunities for youth coaches can be found on page 55.

COACHES CODE OF ETHICS

The Coaches Council of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has established

the following Code of Conduct to which coaches at all levels are to be held accountable:

- » Have the knowledge and preparation to effectively lead your teams
- » Be responsible to ensure that the health, well-being and development of your athletes take precedence over the win/loss record
- » Accept that you serve as role models and there must be congruency between your actions and words
- » Provide a physically and emotionally safe environment for practices and competition
- » Exemplify honesty, integrity, fair play, and sportsmanship regardless of the impact that might have upon the outcome of the competition
- » Maintain a professional demeanor in your relationship with athletes, officials, colleagues, administrators and the public and treat them with respect and dignity
- » Be committed to the education of athletes and encourage academic achievement
- » Follow current safe training and conditioning techniques
- » Exhibit sound injury and risk management practices
- » Demonstrate an understanding of growth and development stages of your athletes
- » Place the athlete's needs and interests before your own
- » Remember that competition should be a healthy and enjoyable experience for all

COACH'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Coaching is not just about winning games. In fact, winning is a very small component to the job. Successful coaches help athletes master new skills, enjoy competition with others, and help young athletes feel good about themselves. Successful coaches are not only well versed in the techniques and skills

of their sport. They also understand how to effectively teach those skills through age appropriate exercises and drills. Most importantly however, successful coaches go far beyond teaching athletic techniques by teaching and modeling skills needed for successful living in our society.

Below is a list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all coaches MUST adhere to:

Act in Accordance with Catholic Character

Coaches are expected to model Christian sportsmanship knowing that the school is judged more by the coach's sportsmanship than by their record. The coach must instill and guide the team members with a sense of fair play and model winning and losing in a respectful, courteous and gracious Christian manner.

Model Superior Sportsmanship, Humility, and Graciousness, both in Victory and Defeat

Coaches should never instruct or encourage student athletes to violate either the spirit or the letter of the rules of the sport or of the league. It is unacceptable for coaches to "run up" the score on inferior opponents. Coaches are expected to substitute players when the opposing team is significantly behind. Coaches must show respect for game officials and opponents at all times; publicly shaking hands with the officials and the opposing coach before and after a game gives clear witness to this respect. All coaches must refrain from public protest that may lead to similar behavior from students, parents or other spectators.

Properly Supervise Student-Athletes

Rarely, if ever, should athletes be left unsupervised. In the event of a serious emergency, the coach should attempt to get another adult to supervise the team. If this is not possible, athletes may have to be left alone for a reasonable period of time, providing that the athletes have been instructed on what to do in the coach's absence. Clear expectations of behavior in emergency situations should be reviewed with the athletes. In addition, coaches must be physically and mentally present when supervising athletes. Being preoccupied, completing unrelated tasks, using cell phones, texting, or engaging in conversation with others does not allow adequate supervision.

Adhere to Professional Conduct

The coach is responsible for student conduct and behavior during practices and games. Under no circumstances should coaches tolerate words that demean other players (name-calling, taunting, etc). Likewise, any action that is physically dangerous, for example deliberately trying to injure an opponent during a game, is absolutely prohibited. Coaches must strive to be fair and unbiased in their relationships with student athletes and their parents. Coaches must also strive to faithfully and fairly adhere to the guidelines for “playing time” for each student athlete, giving each athlete an appropriate opportunity to participate. It is expected that coaches emphasize the development of self-confidence, self-discipline and sportsmanship, and that they make team participation a learning experience for all.

Possess Basic Knowledge in Skills, Tactics, and Strategies

It is to be expected that coaches are knowledgeable of the rules of the sport and techniques for teaching the fundamentals of the sport. They should use tactics and strategies that are appropriate for the age and skill levels of their athletes. Winning takes secondary importance to the athletic, social, and emotional development of all those involved. Coaches should teach the rules of the sport and develop each player’s skills within the framework of a team concept.

Possess Basic Knowledge in Training, Nutrition, and Injury Prevention

Proper physical conditioning of the student athletes must be emphasized. All practices should begin with dynamic stretching and warm-up exercises and end with cool down activities. Water must be made available to all participants, and coaches should allow athletes to take as many water breaks as needed. Coaches should never allow injured players to return to competition unless cleared by a physician or certified trainer.

Comply with Established Policies, Philosophies, and Procedures

All coaches must adhere to and support the local interscholastic athletic Mission and Philosophy Statements, as well as all local and league policies

and guidelines. Coaches should attend various information meetings to become familiar with these prior to assuming coaching responsibilities. In addition, all coaches are expected to publicly support the school’s administration, athletic director, and/or athletic committee.

Possess a Basic Understanding of Risk Management Procedures

Coaches are responsible for the safety and welfare of the team. Coaches must insure the proper use of the facilities where practices and games are held. Coaches practicing at parish/school facilities should understand the proper procedures for entering and securing the building. Coaches should be familiar with the School Emergency Plan and periodically rehearse the plan with the team. Coaches must carry with them pertinent information on every athlete in their care in case of an emergency. The emergency card should list obvious problems such as asthma, heart problems and diabetes. The card should also specify allergies, including bee stings and foods, as well as list of emergency phone numbers for each athlete. A FIRST AID Kit should be at all games and practices. However, coaches should never administer medication. Coaches must document all injuries by filling out an accident report and/or other necessary paperwork with the school office.

Possess Basic Athletic Administration Skills

Coaches should keep a written documentation of accidents and injuries and notify the parents and the school administration when these occur. While it may be impossible to document every injury and its source, an honest effort to document and notify parents and the school administration in a timely manner is important for the safety and well-being of the student athletes. Coaches should keep objective and factual written documentation of problems concerning student athletes’ attitude and/or behavior. These records are important when discipline matters might lead to the suspension and/or expulsion of a student from the program. It is important for coaches to communicate the schedule of practices and games (or any cancellations or alterations to the schedule) in a timely manner. Coaches cannot assume that players will get an oral message home; written

communication, including emails, is highly encouraged.

Understand Appropriate Disciplinary Procedures

Coaches must discipline inappropriate student behavior or disrespect. However, coaches should never resort to physical or verbal abuse or profanity. Every coach needs to understand the difference between punitive touching (physical discipline) and corrective touching (correcting an athlete's hold on a ball or bat); one is prohibited while the other is not. Coaches should also take caution in how and when they make physical contact with an athlete so that the action is never misinterpreted in a sexual manner.

Coaches are prohibited from the following:

- » To use inappropriate, abusive or vile language, or to engage student athletes in inappropriate conversations unrelated to the sport
- » To berate and harass officials, opposing coaches, or personnel from other schools
- » To undermine the authority of the School Administration, Athletic Director, and/or the Athletic Committee
- » To deny adequate playing time to students who are cooperative in effort and attendance
- » To give preferential treatment to the most gifted athletes
- » To submit rosters that are not signed by the pastor and/or principal (or athletic director)
- » To play students who are not on their regular school roster or to roster students on two school teams in the same sport
- » To forfeit games without following local procedures
- » To join another league or an additional tournament without the approval of the athletic board/committee, athletic director or pastor and/or principal

PLAYING TIME

Playing time is a frequent source of misunderstanding and conflict among coaches, students and parents.

The athletic director or the athletic board/committee, with the approval of the pastor and/or the principal, must develop detailed guidelines for playing time and clearly communicate these guidelines to all parties.

In grades 4, 5 and 6, all players are expected to be awarded equal playing time. The focus at this level is on development, and every player at the 4th, 5th, and 6th Grade level must get an equal opportunity to play. In grades 7 and 8, playing time should be a reflection of ability, effort, attendance at practices, and commitment to the team. Coaches at the 7th and 8th grade level should work collaboratively with parents in helping all student athletes understand that not everyone who is on the team will play equal amounts. However, playing time for all is expected at the 7th and 8th Grade Level. For example, simply putting a player in the game for two minutes and calling that playing time is not acceptable. "Winning at all costs" or the exclusion of participation of eligible players, is never tolerated. Athletic guidelines should clearly state consequences for coaches who repeatedly ignore this directive. Instances of non-compliance are to be carefully documented with a written notice given to the offending coach.

In order to better facilitate the athletic development for all participants, athletic directors and coaches should encourage league officials to allow extra time at the end of a contest for non starting players to play an additional amount of time. Naturally, the score would not be kept for this additional period or quarter. For example, playing a 5th quarter in basketball would allow those who need further court time an opportunity to improve their skills.

Missing practice without cause or excessive absences can result in reduced playing time. Playing time may also be reduced as a disciplinary action, most especially when a player loses self-control or engages in other conduct unbecoming a Christian student athlete. Generally, however, every eligible athlete plays in every game (including tournaments).

CONDUCTING TRY-OUTS

Grade school athletic programs throughout the Archdiocese are not encouraged to cut a player based

on athletic ability. Because the focus of Archdiocese athletics at the 4th-8th grade level is more on development, rather than winning, coaches should find a spot for everyone who shows the willingness and desire to be a part of a team. Being a part of an interscholastic athletic team is a major component to the school experience; preventing any aspiring student athlete from participating denies them of this right.

DIVIDING TEAMS ACCORDING TO SKILL LEVEL

Dividing teams according to skill level is highly discouraged. However, when schools have a large number of participating student-athletes in THE SAME GRADE LEVEL, it may be necessary to create two teams for the sole purpose of ensuring a significant amount of playing time for all. THIS IS THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE INSTANCE WHERE SCHOOLS CAN OFFER AN 'A' TEAM AND A 'B' TEAM. If teams are formed by skill level, (an "A" team consisting of more game ready players and a "B" team consisting of players who need additional skill development) it is still expected that students would see a fair amount of playing time on either of the teams for which they qualified. In addition, parent/guardian coaches (most especially those who are coaching their own children) should never be responsible for dividing up teams based on skill level. Deciding who plays on the "A" Team and "B" Team must be made by the Athletic Director, Athletic Board,

and/or school principal. Lastly, these teams should never be referred to as "A" Teams and "B" Teams, but rather given some other identifiable name, such as a color, to differentiate the two.

Talented athletes should never be asked to play up with older players unless he/she is needed to play with the older team due to a lack of participating athletes at that level.

MONITORING COACHING PERFORMANCE

The athletic board/committee or athletic director should develop guidelines and procedures to regularly monitor and evaluate their coaches. While the specific procedures for disciplining and discharging a coach may vary within different school communities, all schools must document all incidents of misconduct. If a coach is unable to perform his/her duties according to the spirit and guidelines of the local athletic program, a process for disciplining and/or removing a coach should be clearly outlined and followed by the athletic board/committee or the school principal. Coaches who have been negligent or deficient in carrying out their responsibilities should not be retained. Ordinarily, coaches who have been removed from their position should not be involved in any other aspects of the athletic program.

COACHING PRINCIPLES: HOW TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD YOUTH LEVEL PROGRAMS

THE PROFESSIONAL COACH

The Professional Coach is one who understands that the physical, emotional, social, and psychological development of their athletes takes precedence over winning. They are individuals of sound moral character who understand the true meaning of integrity. They are organized, disciplined, focused, and value driven decision makers. The Professional Coach has a solid understanding of sport science, sport management, risk management, nutrition, and sport specific techniques and tactics. The Professional Coach always seeks to better him/herself by attending coaching conferences, reading books and professional journals, or exchanging ideas with peers and mentors. In addition, the Professional Coach has superior communication skills and understands the psychology behind reinforcement, motivation, and how young people learn.

Knowledge of Sport & Teaching the Skills

There is no substitute for a superior understanding of the techniques, tactics, and rules of the sport you coach. Some believe that possessing this knowledge is less important for teaching beginning athletes than advanced ones. However, this assumption is false. In fact, teaching the fundamentals to a beginning athlete requires as much knowledge, if not more so, than coaching older, more experienced athletes.

Having knowledge of the sport is only one component to the process. Being able to teach and communicate this knowledge to young players is perhaps the most important aspect of the job itself. Ultimately, successful coaches are those who combine a solid understanding of their sport with an ability to teach these skills in a manner that is age appropriate and properly sequenced.

Does a person's playing career really factor into their ability to coach? The answer is no. Being a great player does not make you an accomplished coach. In fact,

some of the best coaches were not necessarily the best players, as many former star athletes have difficulty actually teaching the ins and outs of the game and empathizing with failure.

Now that we have described what a Professional Coach is, let's examine what a Professional Coach IS NOT:

- » **The Win-at-all-Costs Coach:** Coaches who adopt this style care more about their win-loss record and personal ego than the development of their athletes. They will use every tactic imaginable to give them a competitive edge, even if these tactics are unsportsmanlike and dishonest.
- » **The Me Coach:** Coaches who adopt this philosophy are more focused on 'me' than 'we.' For example, they may say, "I need you to play flawless today," or "I need you to work hard for me today." In order to build a team concept, this coach should be saying, "We (or the team) need you to play flawless today," or "We need you to work hard for the good of the group today."
- » **The Babysitter Coach:** Coaches who adopt this style make few decisions as possible. They do not hold their players accountable, nor do they set any standards for excellence. For these coaches, it is a 'throw out the ball and have a good time approach.' The Babysitter Coach provides minimal guidance and instruction and resolves disciplinary actions only when absolutely necessary. In addition, the Babysitter Coach cares more about being popular with his/her players than doing the job right.

COMMUNICATION

As previously discussed, communication may be the most essential component to the coaching profession.

Simply stated, every single act of coaching requires communication skills. Coaches who fail often do so because of their inability to communicate, rather than their lack of sport specific knowledge or their in game decisions.

Coaches must be prepared to effectively communicate in countless situations. The following are some example situations where it is critical for coaches to communicate effectively:

- » When a parent speaks to you about his/her child not playing enough
- » When explaining to athletes how to perform a complex skill
- » When speaking to your team after a tough loss or poor performance
- » When speaking to an umpire/official who just made a call you feel was incorrect

There are three dimensions of communication. They are as follows:

- » Sending & Receiving
- » Verbal & Nonverbal
- » Content & Emotion

Sending & Receiving

Communication includes not only sending messages, but also receiving them. Many coaches (and others who are in any type of leadership roles for that matter) only focus on the sending aspect of communication, rather than the receiving aspect. Coaches not only must be skillful at sending clear, understandable messages, but they also need to understand how to listen (not hear) what is being communicated in return. Here is an example of a coach with poor communication skills due to his inability to really listen to his athletes:

Coach: "Can you pitch today? You are definitely not throwing with your usual velocity."

Athlete: "Nothing hurts; but I think my arm is too fatigued to pitch today."

Coach: "Okay, I will put you at shortstop then."

In this example, the coach is only focused on the athlete's ability or inability to pitch. He does not listen to the athlete who is saying that his arm is fatigued. As a result, the coach makes the mistake of putting the athlete into a position like shortstop that places a significant amount of stress on the arm.

Verbal & Nonverbal

The majority of communication consists of nonverbal interactions, rather than verbal. In fact, it is estimated that 70% of communication is nonverbal. Hand gestures, posture, facial expressions, movements, and proximity when speaking are all examples of nonverbal communication. While people tend to have greater self control over their verbal communication than their nonverbal communication, it is often the nonverbal expressions and behaviors that dictate the receiver's interpretation and comprehension of the sender's intended message. Here is an example:

Parent: "Why did my son only play two quarters today?"

Coach: While packing up the equipment and not making eye contact "Nobody on the team played more than two quarters today. Your son played just as much as everyone else."

Coach's Intentions: To reassure the parent that his son is being treated fairly

Parents Interpretation: The coach is unapproachable and rude. I don't feel comfortable with my son playing for this coach anymore.

In this example, the coach had every intention of diffusing the situation and making it clear to the parent that everyone on the team is subjected to the same rules. This coach generally cares for the emotional well being of his players. However, because the coach displayed negative body language while speaking with this parent, the parent did not listen to the coach's message. As a result, the parent adopted a negative view of the coach and the situation.

Content and Emotion

Content is the substance of the message; emotion is how you feel about it. Content is usually expressed

verbally while emotion is usually expressed non-verbally. Pressure situations challenge coaches to be in control of both the content and the emotions they communicate. Coaches who deliver solid content with negative emotions are often misunderstood. Consider the following example:

Coach (shouting): “How many times do I have to tell you to follow through and keep your head centered? You can’t throw strikes with that approach!”

Coach’s Intentions: To give his athlete genuine feedback about an error in technique and to encourage him to remember the right technique in the future

Athlete’s Interpretation: The coach thinks I stink. I am trying to do it right, but there are so many things to remember right now. The harder I try, the more mistakes I make. The more mistakes I make, the more he yells. I wish he would get off my back.

In this example, the coach has good intentions – to give specific and immediate feedback. However, the coach allowed his emotions to take control over his tone of voice. As a result, the athlete ignored the message entirely and focused on the tone instead.

Losing Respect from Athletes

Often times, athletes do not receive the message because they are not paying attention. Certainly, having a short attention span is a major cause for this. However, many athletes consciously choose to tune out their coaches. While there are a variety of reasons as to why athletes intentionally ignore their coaches, it all boils down to an issue of respect, or lack thereof. According to the old adage, respect is something that is hard to gain but easy to lose. Nothing could be closer to the truth. Below are some examples of how coaches can quickly lose respect (and control) of their team:

- » Coaches who do not show respect for their athletes will get little respect in return. Respect is a two way street – it must be earned by both parties. Many coaches lack credibility with their athletes because they demand respect, rather than seek to earn it.

- » Coaches who are consistently negative and critical will cause many athletes to simply tune out or ignore them over time

- » Coaches who continually evaluate their athletes, rather than instruct them, quickly lose respect. Athletes want quality feedback from someone who knows what they are talking about. When athletes are constantly judged but not instructed on how to make corrections, credibility is lost. A great example of this is the coach who yells from the bench, “Throw strikes!” or “catch the ball!” This message is highly destructive because it provides no useful information to the athlete.

- » Coaches who show inconsistencies between their words and actions or who have different rules for some players as opposed to others will fail to gain the respect of their players. Examples include punishing the non starter but not punishing the star on the team for the same offense, or telling the players not to yell at officials but personally doing this on a regular basis. Athletes see right through this behavior, and will eventually tune out.

- » Coaches who refuse to show emotion, good or bad, can be very confusing to many athletes, especially young ones. While many successful coaches at the professional level rarely show much emotion, understand that they are working with seasoned athletes who are more emotionally secure than the average adolescent.

- » Coaches who are not able to explain skills and techniques in a clear, concise, and age appropriate manner will be quickly disregarded. In this case, it is not that the athlete feels any ill will towards the coach; he/she simply cannot follow the coach’s train of thought, and it becomes much easier to simply tune him/her out.

The Importance of Communicating Specific Instructions

Sports inherently evaluate participants through competition. With that being said, the primary role of the coach is not to evaluate, but rather to give specific

instructions and feedback that will improve future performance. Athletes know when they played poorly. In other words, when an athlete is struggling to catch a ball, they don't need to be made aware of the fact that they dropped the ball. Those words do not help them. Either do the old clichés like “keep your eye on the ball.” What athletes really need is specific and detailed feedback on how to alter their mental or physical approach.

The last season that the legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden roamed the hardcourt, two psychologists recorded all of his verbal communication with the team during practice. Nearly 75% of Wooden's messages gave specific instructions to athletes. His remaining messages were 12% requests to hustle, 7% praise, and 6% scolds. Another similar study found that Little League Baseball Coaches who provided specific instructions were evaluated more positively by their players than were coaches who gave general encouragement. This was especially true for players with low self esteem. Ultimately, young players are incredibly thirsty for quality instruction. Your primary responsibility as a coach is to give that to them.

While there is a time and place for making evaluations, they should not dominate your communication with athletes. Evaluations should be saved for instructional sessions when you can put it into a constructive framework.

Finally, always evaluate the behavior, rather than the athlete. For example, never say, “What's wrong with you Jimmy?” It is much more effective to say, “That was the wrong decision Jimmy.” The latter is a comment about Jimmy's behavior, which has no bearing on Jimmy as a person.

PSYCHOLOGY OF REINFORCEMENT

The purpose of reinforcement is to increase the likelihood that specific behaviors will be repeated. In contrast, a punishment decreases the likelihood that specific behaviors will be repeated. Effectively reinforcing behaviors while appropriately punishing other behaviors is a skill that is easy to understand yet hard to apply with athletes. After all, humans are far more

complex than laboratory rats, where the principles of reinforcement and punishment were first developed.

Before beginning to explore the principles of reinforcement more carefully, it is important to keep in mind the following:

- » Reinforcements are relative, not absolute. What may be reinforcing to some may not be for others
- » Reinforced behavior cannot always be consistently repeated if the athlete lacks the skills to do so
- » Behavior modification is not a quick fix. It takes patience, persistence, and foresight
- » It is critical to be consistent with how you reinforce. Inconsistency leads to confusion and erratic responses to reinforcement

Using Rewards

What should I reward?

- » Reward the performance, not the outcome. Though this seems self explanatory, coaches often times lose perspective and think about winning (the outcome) more than about how the athletes are playing (the performance).
- » Reward athletes more for their effort than for their actual success. If athletes know that you will only reward them if they succeed, they may begin to develop a fear of failure. While some thrive on the fear of failure, this can cause anxiety with many others.
- » Reward the learning and performance of emotional and social skills as well as sport skills. This is a critical component to rewards that many coaches overlook. Be sure to reward your players for demonstrating self control, good judgment, responsibility, sportsmanship, and teamwork, just as you would reward the player for hitting the game winning homerun.

How often should I reward?

- » Reward frequently when young players are first learning a new skill. Be careful here though –

rewarding too frequently causes them to lose their value

When should I reward?

- » Reward as soon as possible after correct behaviors are exhibited. Shouting “good job” immediately after a player executes a skill correctly reinforces the action, not a detailed debriefing an hour later. However, once certain skills have been mastered and athletes mature mentally, it is less critical to give immediate rewards, unless of course the athlete has poor self-confidence.
- » Reward athletes only when they have earned it. There is no need to praise athletes after a poor performance just so you can be Mr. Positive. Athletes see right through this. When players perform poorly, do not make excuses for them.

What type of rewards should I use?

Rewards that come from you the coach or other sources are called extrinsic rewards. Most athletes respond positively to extrinsic rewards like praise or recognition. Extrinsic rewards can be tangible items, such as T-shirts, decals, or ribbons, or they can be non-tangible, such as pats on the back or other expressions of approval. However, the most powerful rewards are intrinsic rewards, a type of reward that you as a coach cannot directly give. Intrinsic rewards include such things as feeling successful, having a sense of pride in accomplishment, and feeling competent. Although you as a coach cannot directly offer these rewards to your athletes, not recognizing their accomplishments may deny them the opportunity to experience these intrinsic rewards.

Successful coaches emphasize playing for intrinsic rewards over extrinsic ones. Intrinsic rewards are self-motivating that lends itself to greater personal responsibility, accountability, and personal pride. Ultimately, athletes who only play for extrinsic rewards will not maintain the long term motivation and desire needed to continuously succeed. The athlete who is driven from within to excel is always the one who wins the race, whether it be in sports or in life.

Punishment

Some educators say we should never punish the behaviors of young people, only reinforce their positive behaviors. However, when appropriately applied, punishments do eliminate undesirable behaviors without creating other undesirable consequences. Punishment can be used as part of a positive approach when the following guidelines are applied:

- » Use punishment as a corrective way to help athletes improve now and in the future. Do not use punishment as a means of retaliation or to make you feel better.
- » Impose punishments in an impersonal way. Young athletes make choices, and there are consequences for every choice they make. Shouting or scolding athletes indicates that your attitude is one of revenge.
- » Don't just threaten to use punishment – do it
- » Give athletes a warning before punishing
- » Be consistent in administering punishment
- » Do not decide on a punishment until you are absolutely comfortable with what you choose. If you cannot think of an appropriate consequence right away, tell the athlete you will talk with them after you think about it.
- » Once the punishment is completed, don't make the athlete feel like they are in the doghouse. Instead, make them feel like valued members of the team again.
- » Never punish athletes for making physical errors
- » Do not use punishment frequently. Doing so causes athletes to turn their interests elsewhere and resent you as well.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

People are motivated to fulfill their needs. Sports psychologists have learned that the two most important needs of young athletes are to have fun, which includes the need for stimulation and excitement, and to feel worthy, which includes the need to feel

competent and successful. Understanding these needs will greatly help you as a coach successfully motivate your athletes.

The following are critical components to successfully motivating young athletes:

- » Match the difficulty of the skills to be learned or performed to the ability of the athlete. In other words, the task must be difficult enough to challenge the athlete, but not so difficult that they see no chance of success. If the athletes' ability exceeds the challenge, the athlete will become bored. If the challenge far outweighs the athlete's ability level, the athlete will experience high levels of anxiety.
- » Keep practice stimulating by using a wide variety of drills that keeps everyone moving
- » Avoid constant instruction during practices and games. Give athletes the time to immerse themselves in the activity.

The Need to Feel Worthy

Every person shares the basic need to feel competent, to experience some success, and to feel that they are worthy. As human beings, we are socialized into learning that our worth depends largely on our ability to achieve. Even children as young as 4 or 5 years old understand this. With respect to sports, young athletes quickly translate winning to equal success while losing to equal failure. To win is to be successful, to be competent, to be a worthy person. To lose is to be a failure, to be incompetent, to be unworthy.

When athletes experience a reasonable amount of success, it reinforces their sense of competency, which in turn motivates them to pursue their chosen sport further as a means of achieving excellence. But if athletes fail to experience success, they may blame themselves for failure and attribute it to a lack of ability. With repeated failure, some young athletes may decide to protect their dignity and self worth by not trying their hardest. Some may even quit playing entirely. As a youth league coach, it is important to realize that sport participation can be potentially threatening for many young athletes.

Filling the Emotional Tank

Many athletes (especially really young athletes) who try but do not succeed will eventually lose motivation and quit the sport, or even worse, may refuse to try their hand at any other sport. As a coach, it is your job to prepare your players for success by giving them the proper skills and knowledge to effectively execute what is demanded of them. Because many young athletes associate feelings of self worth with winning and losing, it also the coach's responsibility to put their players in positions where they can be successful. In other words, as a coach, do not ask your players to do something they are not physically or mentally prepared to do.

A loss in self confidence and self esteem lead to an athlete's reluctance to take risks. Success in sports requires taking risks. Athletes who are accustomed to failure may have the tendency to not take as many risks as the athlete who expects to be successful. A confident athlete who expects to be successful will put themselves out there, risk everything, and try their hardest. An athlete with low self confidence will be more reluctant to take risks and not try at all (this is especially true for the younger athletes). Think about two gamblers sitting at a poker table. The gambler with the most poker chips is willing to take risks because he has a history of winning and being successful. The gambler with fewer poker chips may not take the same risks because he has a history of losing and being unsuccessful. Ultimately, an athlete's emotional tank functions in a similar fashion as these poker chips.

Consider the following example: For Billy, one of the least talented players on the team, trying to field a ground ball during a low key practice session can be a risk. "What happens if I miss it again?" "I really don't think I am cut out to be a baseball player." "If I miss this one, I might as well stop trying – it's easier to not try and fail than it is to try and fail!" "I am tired – I want to go home."

In the above example, Billy has low self confidence and is on the verge of losing all motivation. As a result, Billy is ready to stop taking the risk of trying. Who knows – maybe Billy is ready to give up athletics

entirely. Ultimately, effective coaches recognize this and intervene long before an athlete gets to this point.

The problem is that Billy's emotional tank is on empty. It is not that he lacks motivation or he is lazy. While many coaches may fall back on the old cliché, "practice makes perfect," Billy's inability to field a ground ball in this particular case has nothing to do with the fact that he is not working hard enough.

What Billy needs is for one of his coaches to pull him aside and work with him one-on-one. Go over the fundamentals again and slowly roll ground balls to him instead of hitting them. Put Billy in an athletic situation where he can be successful. Give Billy positive reinforcement and praise his work habits in front of his teammates.

Once Billy feels comfortable with fielding slow rollers, roll them a little harder, and eventually build him back up to taking ground balls on the field. This is what motivation is all about – recognizing when the emotional tanks are empty and giving athletes the right opportunities to build them back up again.

Who knows – the same Billy who could not field a ground ball at age 8 may grow up to be a varsity team starter at age 16. If it was not for that coach who took the time to work with him and fill his emotional tank, none of this would have been possible.

The Danger of Setting Unrealistic Goals

When young people begin playing sports, they quickly observe that coaches prefer superior performance and tend to give greater recognition to the athletes who excel. Desiring similar recognition, less skilled players attempt to be more like the skilled ones. In doing so, the less skilled athlete may be setting himself/herself up for failure by setting their expectations too high for their present skill level. If athletes themselves do not set unrealistic goals, often time parents and coaches do it for them. For example, coaches may set the same performance goals for the entire team, but it may be set so high that only a few of the top players will be able to meet those expectations. In addition, parents who are living vicariously through their children by wanting them to become athletic stars may be asking them to pursue goals that are beyond their reach.

Regardless of who is at fault, the result is the same – unrealistically high goals and expectations almost guarantee failure. Unfortunately, many young athletes do not realize that such goals are unrealistic. Once they fall short, they mistakenly accuse themselves of not having ability, and they begin to feel unworthy.

How We Should Define Success

Many young athletes learn from their parents, coaches, teammates and the media to gauge their self worth largely on whether they win or lose. As a coach, you must shift this paradigm, stray away from wins and losses as a means of defining success, and redefine what it means to be successful. The definition of success can be applied in two realms – success as a team and success as an individual: The two applications are as follows:

- » Team: Success is a team sport. Success is the inner satisfaction and peace of mind that comes from knowing you did the best you were capable of for the good of the group. (Definition adapted by Jim Tressel from John Wooden – notice that this definition has nothing to do with wins and losses)
- » Individual: Success must be seen in terms of athletes exceeding their own goals rather than surpassing the performance of others (Definition taken from the American Sport Education Program)

Using these two definitions of success, athletes can begin to set specific performance goals and behavioral objectives rather than goals that revolve around the outcome of winning or losing.

- » My goal is to strike out less this week than I did last week
- » I want to improve my foul shooting
- » I want to learn to relax more and enjoy playing
- » I want to work on becoming a better teammate

Once you as a coach teach your athletes to view success as something that is independent of wins and losses, you have unlocked the key to enhancing your athletes' motivation. As a coach, sit down with your players, get to know them, and help them set realistic

performance and behavioral related goals. This will go a long way in keeping them motivated.

When coaches help athletes set realistic goals, athletes inevitably experience more success and feel more competent. By becoming more competent, they gain confidence and can tackle skills of moderate difficulty without fearing failure. They discover that their efforts can result in favorable outcomes. Failures no longer result in feelings of unworthiness, but rather they begin to trigger feelings of discipline and desire to work harder. What a life changing paradigm shift this is, whose effects can be felt far beyond the athletic field!

HOW ATHLETES LEARN

Coaching is teaching, and teaching is helping your athletes learn. Learning is a relatively permanent improvement in performance capability arising from practice. Because learning is not directly observable, it must be inferred from changes in performance over time. Because other factors besides learning can cause changes in performance, it is not always easy to know whether an athlete has actually learned a skill. The key to knowing whether learning has occurred is that the improvement in performance is more permanent.

When an athlete is first learning a new skill, their first objective is to understand how to perform the skill correctly. Doing so requires a great deal of mental activity, as the athlete is trying to program his/her mind into fully comprehending the correct technique and strategy. During the early stage, it is best to explain the skill and demonstrate the skill. This allows the athlete to get information in two ways – auditory and visual. Ideally, the auditory explanation and the visual demonstration, when used together, should enhance the instruction and increase the likelihood that the athlete will fully understand what is being asked of him/her.

It may be useful in some situations to explain and demonstrate what not to do, just as you would explain and demonstrate what to do. Make sure to explain to the athlete why mastering this skill is necessary. In addition, coaches must be careful not to

teach too much at one time during this initial stage, for it is easy to overload young athletes. Remember: stick to the basic fundamentals, go slowly, and be patient. Be sure to break down more complex skills into smaller movements and build from there.

Once the skill is properly introduced, have the athlete practice the skill in a non threatening and non competitive environment. During this stage, the emphasis shifts to refining and applying the skill, as well as timing and coordination. As a coach, you must provide specific and quality feedback. A simple “good job” is not sufficient. What specifically is the athlete doing a good job with? Can the athlete improve? If so, in what specific area? With continued guidance, you may notice that the athlete will eventually be able to detect their own errors and make the necessary adjustments.

During the practice stage, the quality of practice is more important than the quantity. When it is all said and done, quality increases the learning curve, not quantity. As a coach, you need to decide how long each practice session should be, what drills to use, and when to move on to more advanced skills. The athlete’s capacity to learn, personal motivation, and levels of fatigue dictate these decisions.

As an athlete continues to practice, the skill eventually becomes more automated. During this stage, the skill is so automated that when the athlete begins analyzing the skill during its execution, the performance is disrupted. It is during this stage where the athlete learns to stop thinking and just let it happen. For a coach, the focus during this stage shifts from coaching-to-learn to coaching-to-perform.

10 COMMON COACHING PROBLEMS

The Player Who Only Wants to Play One Position

“I’m a shortstop.” “I can’t play guard.” “I’ve never played third base before.”

The sooner the athlete learns that an athlete is an athlete, period—that a true athlete can play any position on the field and that different coaches see players’ abilities and roles in different ways—the better off that player will be. Simply stated, the more

positions the athlete plays, the better he/she will understand the game.

It is important for coaches to communicate the importance of versatility, especially as it relates to the athlete's future in the sport. Before moving a player to a new position, it is best to ease the player into a new role during practice. Let him/her get the feel for a new spot during non-threatening, non-pressure situations. Spend time teaching new responsibilities and the skill associated with the new position during practice so they are better prepared to transition during a game.

The Player Who Thinks the Coach's Lineup/Strategy/etc. is Wrong

Certainly coaches can learn from their players. Someone out on the field has a different perspective than someone on the sidelines. Not always better, or worse, or right, just different. That player's insights or suggestions often can be valuable.

However, it is the coach's job to see that those suggestions are offered at the appropriate times. Time can be allocated during certain practice sessions for discussions about strategy. That's when a rational team-wide discussion can be held. However, no coach can allow statements about other players or negative comments about coaching policy disrupt team unity. Criticism by players must be restricted to private conversations with the coach. Breaches should result in loss of playing time.

There is a time for open discussion and a time for coach's authority. Any coach who does not recognize the difference is doing the team and his/her young athletes a grave disservice.

Parent Interference

It is critical to take a proactive approach by setting expectations for parents at the beginning of the season. Holding a mandatory parent meeting at the beginning of the season can reduce the likelihood of parental interference. During this meeting, establish expectations for parent behavior and discuss in detail the negative consequences that may occur when parents cross boundaries. Before the season begins, help parents understand the importance of remaining clear of the bench area during games and why it is important

for them to refrain from yelling instructions from the sidelines. Most parents will comply once you make it clear that your rules are designed with their child's best interest in mind.

However, some parents will still continue to cross that line despite your initial efforts. One clever way of dealing with parental pressure is to suggest that the parent come help you coach. The answer is usually no, for a variety of reasons. Use that line as a vehicle to open a discussion about the need to let the coach operate without interference, unless the parent wishes to donate a significant amount of time to the team.

When a knowledgeable parent becomes overly critical—and they're vocal enough to be undermining your authority, organize a meeting of all the adults. Calmly confront the issue head-on, ask for criticism, answer it as rationally and articulately as you can, and stress the need for a united front.

Coaching a "Superstar"

Yes, this is a problem, and coaches need to make sure that the star player is consistently challenged, works collaboratively with his/her teammates, and maintains a respectful and humble approach to the game.

Many problems will arise if the superstar believes he/she is too good for the other players on the team. Always handing the ball to the star or singling that player out for constant praise and using him/her for every good example reinforces that player's feeling of being special. Good young players should be used as examples for others, but they also need to be criticized constructively, prodded and shown the necessity for working selflessly with others. Too many great athletes have stagnated as youngsters because they haven't been pushed to improve even more, pushed to develop team concepts and skills they'll need once they advance to a higher level of play.

All players must be held accountable to similar standards. A coach can't be afraid to sit a superstar down. If too many practices are missed, the player should sit; if a rule is broken, he/she should sit; even if the superstar is having an off day—the coach should

resist the temptation to think that the star must be on the field at all times for the team to be competitive.

Disruptive Players

Often players disrupt practices or cause problems on the bench because they're bored or inactive. The cures for inactivity are simple. During practices, less talking by the coach, more movement by the players, or smaller groups so each athlete is involved more in the action will help cure this issue. During games, don't just keep your attention on the field or court, but be aware as to what is going on in the bench area as well. Ask the players on the bench questions, tell them how soon you'll be substituting them in, encourage them to run, stretch, and keep their bodies loose, and remind them to keep cheering for their teammates. Keeping them involved as much as possible will limit the likeliness of disruptive behavior.

Information Overload

Young athletes have short attention spans. They cannot handle as much information at one time as adults, yet there are many coaches who insist upon forcing every scrap of detail they know on their players, often at the most inappropriate times.

The pre-game talk is the wrong time to give a dissertation on athletic skills and strategy. This should have been introduced in bits and pieces during practices sessions so players could have had time to absorb the information and understand it thoroughly. New concepts should be introduced slowly and methodically, not quickly during pre-game speech. While reinforcing previously explained ideas before a game, concentrate on one or two key points. If you throw out eight or ten different thoughts in random order as they occur to you—you'll lose your audience entirely.

It's easy to attack every problem in sight every single day, hoping something will sink in. It's more difficult to pick out one or two ideas and reinforce them systematically. Ultimately, the latter requires foresight, planning, and patience.

Lengthy Post Game Speeches

The need for carefully thought-out and well-organized post game comments is crucial. Spend the few minutes while the players are packing up the

equipment to think about what you want to say. That way you won't ramble or hem and haw in the few minutes allotted to you.

Again, don't overburden your players. If things are going poorly, twelve different ideas won't change things. Concentrate on one or two. Make sure to end your post game comments on a positive note. Very little is to be gained from ending the game with negative criticism, unless the players are old enough to handle it and/or it is used so seldom it makes the players sit up and take notice.

Failure to Communicate

There are two times when communication is especially important: when a player comes out of a game and when the game has ended.

No child likes to leave the contest. Every child who comes out of the game should be greeted personally by the coach. A pat on the head or shoulder is good. Better is some verbal comment, such as "Good work out there, I just needed to get Chris in." Or, "Wow, you really worked hard, take a rest, and support your teammates."

Even if a player was removed because he/she was playing poorly or couldn't handle his/her position, use this situation as a teachable moment. "Pat, listen, next time you're in there and you're batting against someone that throws that fast, this is what you should do..." It goes without saying, of course, that you should never, ever, remove a player immediately after he/she commits a mistake, no matter how grievous the error. To do so can only demoralize an already desolate youngster.

After the game is a fair time to analyze the game. You don't have to deliver an oratorical masterpiece or go over every player's performance minute by minute, but you can wrap up the game briefly. This is what we did well, this is what we did poorly, this is what we'll work on next week and practice is at the usual time. Resist the temptation to let everyone leave immediately after the game.

Too Much Yelling from the Sideline

"Keep your eye on the ball!" "Be aggressive!" "Follow through!" All these are bits of advice a coach can call

out during a game. They're good advice, but they lose effectiveness when shouted over and over again. They also tend not to get heard when several different people—the coach, his assistant, the parents and all the youngsters on the sidelines—are yelling them at the same time. In addition, when you come to think of it, this advice is also really not that revolutionary. After all, athletes know that they should keep their eye on the ball, be aggressive, and follow through. Why not try spending one or two games quietly on the sidelines? Do your teaching during practice sessions and let the players play during the game. Limit your advice to one or two key moments each game. You may be surprised by how well your players perform.

Focusing on the Score Rather than the Progress Made

Too many coaches look only at the final score. They tell their team “Great game!” in the first instance without realizing the opposition played better despite losing the contest. They also tell their team “Well, you lost again” in the second instance without congratulating them for how close this game was or giving them encouragement that perhaps the next time the score will finally be different.

You can play well and lose, just as you can play poorly and win. Your team knows after a game whether it won or lost. It's your job, as coach, to tell them how they played the game and what they need to do to be successful the next time around.

TEAM MEETING

You have only one chance to make a first impression. This becomes the utmost importance when you are working with young children and their parents. As soon as possible after the selection of your team, a mandatory meeting should be planned for all team member and their parents. The key to a successful season is to open the lines of communication between the head coach, assistant coaches, players, and parents. The team meeting is the time to express and explain several key points and inform all as to what you as a coaching staff plan to do throughout the season. This meeting can be done either in person or, in this age of technology, over email.

It has been our experience that a well planned out meeting before the seasons starts will avoid many problems that often occur in youth sports. Take the time to formally introduce yourself, your coaching staff, explain your philosophies and goals for the team, ask for interested volunteers, and discuss the league and team rules.

Below is a guideline of topics that should be covered in this introductory meeting:

- » Team Roster (should include parents names, emails, and all phone numbers)
- » Practice schedule
- » Game schedule
- » Coaching philosophy
- » School's Athletic philosophy
- » Parental involvement
- » Attendance at practice and games
- » Open line of communication
- » Pre game meals (high in carbohydrates); no sweets, junk food, soda, or foods high in fat
- » No negative comments during games
- » Phone tree for information such as rainouts, practice changes
- » How to care for uniform and equipment
- » School rules regarding playing time
- » Drop off/pick up policy
- » Discipline policy (yours and the schools)
- » Infractions: Throwing equipment, bad language, fighting or displaying temper, arguing with coaches and officials, ridiculing the performance of teammates/opponents, unexcused absence or tardiness, not having proper uniform/equipment, and leaving bench area during games
- » Things to stress: hustle at all times, good sportsmanship, no jewelry, safety rules, and having fun. These are some of the areas that if you are

prepared, will help you make this season a positive experience for you and your team.

PRACTICE ORGANIZATION

It is critical to create a strict and detailed schedule, work within each given time frame, and meet each objective for every planned activity. As a coach, it is important to explain what your practice plan is and how it will look before putting your players to work. Be sure to have all equipment out and ready when players arrive. Start each practice with conditioning to loosen them up. All practices should begin with a jog around the entire field or court. This gets the blood flowing through the athlete's muscles. After the jog, players should do anywhere from 4-6 sprints to recruit the fast twitch muscles. Various other movements, such as high knee skips, butt-kicks, karaoke, shuffling, and leg kicks also recruit important lower body muscles necessary for athletic performance. Once these exercises are completed, the team should engage in a dynamic upper body and lower body stretching routine.

If your team has 12 players on its roster, you can break practice down to 1 coach and 4 players per group. If you are fortunate enough to have extra certified coaches on the team, you may be able to set up more groups or do multiple drills in areas that your team needs improvement with. The group practice plan will allow each coach to work on a certain area and drill. Each group should be no longer than 15-20 minutes. At the end of this time period, the groups should rotate but the coaches stay. With all drills, be creative and make them as challenging and fun as possible. In

addition, keep the players moving. The less standing around, the more effective the practice!

Practices should be no longer than 1.5 hours for groups under 13 years old. Leave time for water breaks if kids are tired or it is hot out. In addition, it is recommended to end practice with a contest, challenge, or their favorite drill to help make it fun

In terms of running an effective practice, here are some other key points to follow:

- » Stick to the time period allotted for each drill. Do not get bogged down in a drill and lose the whole practice plan. Get on with the practice, make a note on what fundamentals need more work, and spend more time on it next time.
- » Do not spend too long on a specific drill. Keep your segments short, and maintain high intensity throughout
- » Never tolerate a lack of hustling in anything you are doing. All players should be sprinting between drills and stations
- » Create as much competition as you can in everything you do. Kids love to compete, so give them every chance to do so.
- » Demand a lot of your players during practice. You will get what you demand, and players will rise to the level of your expectations.
- » Use practice time to simulate game situations. Create pressure situations and make them work to get out of jams and difficult spots.
- » Finish practices on a positive note

UNDERSTANDING A COACH'S ROLE IN ADMINISTERING SPORTS FIRST AID

Studies have shown that any delay in first aid care can cause further injury or prolong an athlete's recovery time. At minimum, all coaches must possess basic knowledge in sports first aid and CPR, in addition to being equipped with the proper supplies at every practice and game to treat all injuries, or, in the most serious situations, stabilize the athlete until help arrives.

Coaches are often the first to witness injuries. In more cases than not, medical personnel are not present at practices or games, so it is the coach's responsibility to appropriately administer first aid care. In addition, it is usually the coach who is responsible for determining when and if the athlete should return to competition.

PROACTIVE MEASURES FOR REDUCING INJURIES

The severity and frequency of sports related injuries can be significantly reduced if coaches understand and proactively perform the following duties:

Properly plan the activity:

- » Make sure that athletes are in proper condition
- » Teach athletes the sports skills in a progression so that they are adequately prepared to handle more difficult skills

Provide proper instruction

- » Keep up to date on better and safer ways of performing sport techniques
- » Teach athletes the rules and the correct skills and strategies of the sport

Provide a safe environment

- » Monitor current environmental conditions (i.e., wind chill, temperature, and humidity)
- » Inspect playing and training areas for hazards

Provide adequate and proper equipment

- » Make sure athletes are using top quality equipment
- » Inspect the equipment regularly
- » Teach athletes how to fit, use, and inspect their equipment

Match you athletes

- » Match the athletes according to size, physical maturity, skill level, and experience

Evaluate athletes for injury or incapacity

- » Immediately remove athletes from the activity if they are unable to compete without pain or loss of function (i.e., inability to walk, run, jump, throw, without restriction)

Supervise the activity closely

- » Forbid horseplay
- » Do not allow athletes to use sport facilities without supervision

Warn of inherent risks

- » Provide parents and athletes with both oral and written statements of inherent health risks of their particular sport

From a legal standpoint, coaches are expected to take action when needed and provide a certain standard of care. This includes performing basic first aid care for any injury or illness suffered by an athlete, in addition to CPR if necessary. It is strongly encouraged that every coach be certified in CPR!

KEEPING ATHLETE'S HEALTH RECORDS

It is critical for coaches to know if any of their players have certain health problems that could affect their sport participation or medical treatment. Completing a Health History Form can document these various health related issues. Diabetes, asthma, epilepsy,

heart murmurs, allergies, and skin conditions are just some health problems that coaches and first aid responders must be made aware of. Furthermore, an Emergency Contact Information Card must be on hand at all times. Coaches must be able to immediately contact the athlete's parents, guardian, or other family contacts in case of an emergency.

PRESEASON PHYSICAL EXAM

Athletes who are not in shape are more likely to get hurt. In order to proactively prevent injuries, it is recommended that schools require a preseason physical exam. This should be a thorough exam performed by a physician to check for problems in the following areas: circulatory, respiratory, neurological, orthopedic, vision, and hearing. The physician should note any preexisting conditions or other potential health problems when deciding whether or not an athlete is cleared to participate. All athletes should turn in these physical cards prior to participation.

PRESEASON SCREENING

While a physical exam will detect specific health problems, it does not provide insight about an athlete's overall fitness level. Preseason screening, which can be conducted by a trained fitness professional, can evaluate athletes in the following areas:

- » Strength in the muscle groups most often used in the particular sport – for example, a football player's neck strength or a basketball player's ankle strength
- » Flexibility or tightness in the majority muscle groups
- » Cardiovascular endurance
- » Body composition or percent body fat

Ultimately, these tests pinpoint fitness deficiencies that could lead to future injury. It is in this area where having a sound physical education program can be so important. Physical education teachers can implement various physical fitness testing programs, most notably FitnessGram, which can help athletes and

parents pinpoint and address potential problems in these critical fitness areas.

PROPER WARM-UP AND COOL-DOWN

A proper warm-up is an exercise routine that prepares the body for vigorous physical activity. All warm-ups should begin with a light jog or anything that increases the heart and breathing rates. This should then be followed by a series of light calisthenics and dynamic stretching exercises that help prepare the muscles and tendons for vigorous activity. Once the activity has ended, it is recommended that athletes cool down their bodies as a means of returning their heart and breathing rates to normal levels. This can be accomplished through the following activities: walking, light jogging, and stretching.

STOCKING THE FIRST AID KIT

Coaches must have a first aid kit on hand for all practices and games. A well stocked first aid kit should include the following items:

- » List of emergency phone numbers
- » Face shield (for rescue breathing and CPR)
- » Bandage scissors
- » Plastic bags for crushed ice
- » 3 inch and 4 inch elastic wraps
- » Triangular bandages
- » Sterile gauze pads – 3 inch and 4 inch squares
- » Saline solution for eyes
- » Tongue depressors
- » Cotton swabs
- » Bandage strips – assorted sizes
- » Alcohol or peroxide
- » Antibacterial hand sanitizer
- » First aid cream or antibacterial ointment
- » Athletic tape
- » Prewrap

- » Sterile gauze rolls
- » Insect sting kit (for outdoor sports)
- » Safety pins
- » Examination gloves
- » Thermometer

HANDLING SERIOUS INJURIES

Unfortunately, serious injuries are an inherent risk associated with sport participation. To minimize confusion and ensure that an injured athlete receives prompt medical attention, all coaches must develop an Emergency Response Plan. In particular, coaches should determine who is responsible for what duties, how a duty should be carried out, when certain actions should be taken, and what paperwork needs to be completed.

In order to remain in control of the situation, it is critical for all head coaches to have an athlete's Emergency Contact Information Card at every practice and game. This is especially critical if an athlete is unconscious and unable to tell the coach who to contact or the contact person's phone number. Coaches should also have with them a Health History Form which details an athlete's pre-existing condition, medical issues, and/or allergies.

When a serious injury does occur, it is the coach's responsibility to lead and direct the response effort. Each emergency plan should follow the sequence below:

1. Check the athlete's level of consciousness
2. Send a contact person to call 911 and the athlete's parents. This can be an assistant coach or parent.
3. Send someone to wait for the rescue team and direct them to the injured athlete
4. Assess the injury and administer first aid care or CPR if necessary
5. Assist emergency medical personnel in preparing the athlete for transportation to a medical facility

6. Appoint someone to go with the athlete if the parents are not available. This person should be calm, responsible, and familiar with the athlete. Assistant coaches or parents are best for the job
7. Immediately report the injury and incident to the school principal, who in turn reports to the Archdiocese.

HANDLING MINOR INJURIES

Most injuries do not require emergency medical attention. However, it is important for coaches to not take minor injuries lightly, as they can impair performance if not treated correctly. For minor injuries, coaches should take the following steps:

1. Evaluate the injury
2. Administer sport first aid
3. Remove the athlete from participation if the athlete is in a great deal of pain or suffers from a loss of function (cannot walk, throw, jump, etc)
4. Contact the athlete's parents and discuss the injury with them
5. When necessary, suggest the athletes see a physician to rule out a serious injury

Under no circumstances should an injured athlete return to competition. While injured athletes return to competition at the professional level, youth league coaches must not confuse managing a team of adolescents with leading a team of grown men and women.

CONCUSSIONS

A concussion is a complex injury that causes a disturbance in brain function. It usually starts with a blow to the head, face or neck, and is often associated with temporarily losing consciousness. However, it is important to understand that a blackout is only one possible symptom. When an athlete suffers a concussion, the brain suddenly shifts or shakes inside the skull and can knock against the skull's bony surface. If left untreated, a concussion can lead to a slow brain bleed.

Symptoms

Concussion symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe. Common mild concussion symptoms can include headache or migraine, temporary memory loss, and nausea. Moderate to severe concussion symptoms can include dizziness, dilation of pupils, migraine, convulsions, and temporary changes in vision, smell, and taste. A person may also lose consciousness.

Below are the most common symptoms associated with a concussion:

- » Passing out
- » Not being able to remember what happened after the injury
- » Acting confused, asking the same question over and over, slurring words, or not being able to concentrate
- » Feeling lightheaded, seeing “stars,” having blurry vision, or experiencing ringing in the ears
- » Not being able to stand or walk, or having coordination and balance problems
- » Feeling nauseous or vomiting.

With a loss of consciousness, it is clear to everyone that emergency medical services are needed. However, do not ignore the non-blackout symptoms mentioned above. Unfortunately, a pervasive mindset in some sports is that getting “dinged” is part of the game and you need to tough it out. This thinking is dangerous because it exposes the child to further injury when their brain needs a rest. It also prevents them from obtaining a proper medical assessment as soon as possible.

No players with even the MILDEST concussion symptoms should return to a game or practice. They should be assessed by a physician immediately. If symptoms do not appear until several hours after the game, the child should still seek medical assessment.

Return to Sport

Anyone who has suffered a concussion needs to rest their brain until all the symptoms are gone. This

means they should be able to read, do math and think at their usual pace with no headaches, fatigue or other symptoms. This can mean a few days resting at home, not doing school work and, definitely, no exercise.

There is no timetable chart to follow; each child needs a treatment program tailored to their symptoms and circumstances. Younger children seem to take longer to recover than adults and it is not unusual for children to be out of sports for a month after suffering a concussion. If a player suffers one concussion, they are more likely to sustain future concussions. Researchers believe the younger the child, the more vulnerable the brain may be to these repeat concussions.

Under no circumstances can an athlete return to action without clearance from a medical professional.

Second Impact Syndrome:

If someone with a concussion too hastily returns to contact sports or activities, a second concussion can result in Second Impact Syndrome — a potentially fatal condition. Second Impact Syndrome is when another blow to the head (even a minor one) results in the brain losing its ability to control its own blood flow, which increases pressure in the head and can lead to death, usually within 2 – 5 minutes. Second Impact Syndrome most often affects young athletes (in junior and senior high school), but any athlete who returns to a sport too soon is at risk.

Administering First-Aid for Head & Spine Injuries:

The first step in administering first aid to an athlete suffering from head trauma is to send for medical assistance, regardless of whether the athlete is conscious or not. Stabilize the head and neck of the athlete, monitor the ABC’s (airway, breathing, and circulation – particularly in an unconscious athlete), and provide rescue breathing and CPR if necessary.

In many cases, because of their structural and functional interconnections, an injury to the head will cause damage to some portion of the spine, and vice versa. Regardless of the type and site of the injury, the initial evaluation of a suspected spinal injury should be conducted in the same manner. In addition,

because it is difficult to differentiate between a sprain, fracture, contusion, and strain, initial treatment should be the same for all. Never move the athlete during the evaluation unless it is impossible to check the ABCs or unless the athlete is in danger of further injury. If an athlete walks off the playing area and complains of pain anywhere along the spine, coaches should perform the evaluation with the athlete in the position in which they initially see him or her. For example, a standing athlete should remain standing. Also, if an athlete is wearing a helmet, leave it on. Removing it can cause further harm. If an athlete suffers a serious head or spine injury, call for help, immediately stabilize the head and spine, check the ABC's, and treat the athlete for shock and other injuries as necessary.

CITY OF CHICAGO ORDINANCE CONCERNING HEALTHCARE OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

Athletes who show symptoms of a concussion cannot under any circumstances return to action without the permission of a medical professional. This is non-negotiable. Schools that do not comply with this measure run the risk for being billed by the City of Chicago for their otherwise free water and sewer services.

The following Ordinance was passed on 11/10/2010 by the City of Chicago to amend Title 7 of the Municipal Code by the addition of new chapter 7-22 concerning healthcare of student athletes. All principals, athletic directors, and athletic coaches should be aware of this ordinance.

WHEREAS, concussions are one of the most commonly reported injuries in children and adolescents participating in sports and recreational activities;

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as three million nine hundred thousand sports-related and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year; and

WHEREAS, the risk of catastrophic injuries or death are significant when a concussion or head injury is not properly evaluated and managed; and

WHEREAS, continuing to play with a concussion or symptoms of head injury leaves a young athlete especially vulnerable to greater injury and even death; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that young, developing brains take longer to heal, requiring that treatment must be tailored to specific ages; and

WHEREAS, cognitive exertion, such as going to school, can delay recovery just as physical exertion can; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF CHICAGO:

SECTION 1. Title 7 of the Municipal Code of Chicago is hereby amended by adding a new Chapter 7-22, as follows:

7-22-010. The provisions of this chapter shall be applicable to any elementary, middle, or secondary school in the City of Chicago, public or private, which sponsors athletic activities for its students, and, by order of City Council, is exempt from City water or sewer charges.

7-22-020. A student athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion, including loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, problems with immediate recall, disorientation as to time place or person, fatigue, blurred vision, or balance problems, shall be immediately removed from the contest. If no health care professionals are immediately available and an injured student athlete has any of the described signs, symptoms, or behaviors, he or she shall be promptly taken to a facility for appropriate medical care. For purpose of this Chapter, "health care professionals" shall be defined as "physicians licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois and certified athletic trainers."

7-22-030. A student athlete who has been removed from play may not return to play until the athlete is evaluated by a health care professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and receives written medical authorization to return to play from such health care professional.

7-22-040. Upon proof of a violation of Section 7-22-020 or 7-22-030 by any school exempted from City water or sewer charges, through its responsible agents, including coaches, athletic directors, or any other similar personnel, such exemption shall be revoked, and such school shall become liable for all such charges from and after the date of the injury, or the return of the student to play without written authorization by a health care professional.

Section 2: This ordinance shall be in full force and effect on and after its passage and due publication.

RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

STUDENT ATHLETES: EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The expectations and responsibilities of the student athlete must be clearly stated and published before inviting students to make a decision to participate in the interscholastic athletic program. These expectations are to be a part of the school handbook and the athletic handbook.

It is important for the principal, athletic director, and/or the athletic board/committee to establish criteria for eligibility. These criteria could include, but are certainly not limited to, the following provisions:

- » Submitting all documentation within an established timeline
- » Meeting basic academic requirements
- » Turning in all necessary permission forms
- » Signing acknowledgments of expectations of behavior, effort and attitude
- » Signing an agreement of support of the guidelines and policies of the athletic program
- » Undergoing a physical examination or present a letter attesting to the athlete's physical fitness
- » Meeting age and weight requirements of league/conference regulations
- » Paying all required fees

Below is a list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all student-athletes **MUST** adhere to

Return all uniforms and/or borrowed equipment by the specified dates for each sport.

The athlete is responsible for the uniform issued. If it is lost, stolen or damaged, an appropriate assessment can be made to replace the uniform. It is a good idea to publish the cost of uniform replacement. At the end of the season, uniforms should be returned in clean, reusable condition.

Maintain a solid academic and behavioral record in and out of season.

Participating in an interscholastic athletic program is a privilege, not a right. Athletes must be held to personal, academic and behavior standards. Students who choose to participate in the school's athletic program are representing that school and parish at all times. They must act in a manner that reflects favorably upon the school and on themselves. This expectation is not limited to the sports arena, but should also be evident at school, in the community, and at other schools before, during, and after the games.

Attend school the day of a game and/or practice.

An athlete who was absent from school due to illness is not allowed to attend practice or play in a game on that given day. Absence from school on a Friday should not affect Saturday and Sunday participation if the athlete has recovered sufficiently to play.

Attend and be on time for regularly scheduled practices.

Athletes are expected to be present and on time for all practices and games. Not attending practices affects the entire team and detracts from the sense of teamwork that the coaches are striving to achieve. "Excused" or "unexcused" absences should be defined. Expectations and procedures for notification in the event the student is unable to attend practices/games should be clearly outlined. The consequences of missing practices and games or of excessive absences should also be clear to parents and student-athletes.

Display Respect for Teammates, Opponents, Coaches, & Officials

Student-athletes must be respectful at all times towards their teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials. All student-athletes must also respect the spectators and fans. Athletes are expected to show good sportsmanship, play by the rules, and gracefully handle winning and losing. Losing self-control, using inappropriate gestures, verbalizing foul or abusive

language, arguing a referee's call or a coach's decision, or displaying other signs of disrespect are reasons for disciplinary action. These expectations are also detailed in the Student-Athlete Code of Ethics below.

Adhere to a Student-Athlete Code of Ethics:

All student-athletes are expected to exhibit the following behaviors:

- » Play the game for the game's sake
- » Be generous in winning and graceful in losing
- » Display good sportsmanship and respect towards all opponents
- » Work for the good of the team
- » Accept the decisions of the officials gracefully
- » Conduct yourself at all times with honor and dignity. This includes during and after school, games, practices, and trips to other schools and facilities
- » Recognize, applaud, and encourage the efforts of your teammates and opponents
- » Show respect for your coaches
- » Show respect towards fans and personnel from other schools

PROBATION, SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION FROM THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Consequences of disrespectful behavior can include a reduction in playing time or even suspension or expulsion from the team. School policy should govern all such incidents, and these consequences must be enforced by the administrations and the faculty. Student-athletes may be suspended from practicing with the team and/or participating in interscholastic competition for the following behaviors:

- » Inappropriate language, as deemed by the coach, officials, or school administration
- » Physical or emotional abuse of teammates, opposing players, coaches, spectators, or officials
- » Destruction of school facilities and equipment

- » Disrespect toward any coach or official in games or practices
- » Lack of academic performance, effort, and/or positive behavior in the classroom
- » Several "Code of Ethics" violations

School policies and athletic policies should define what constitutes PROBATION (active participation and reasonable improvement), SUSPENSION (no participation for a given amount of time) and the finality of TERMINATION. Athletes should be given written notification and the opportunity "to be heard" if there is the possibility of suspension from the program for an extended period of time or if the possibility of dismissal from the program exists. Athletic Directors or Athletic Boards/Committees may establish a grievance committee to offer advice on discipline issues or other issues of a serious nature. The pastor, principal, a head coach, the athletic director, an athletic board/committee representative or a school board member may be considered for membership on this committee. Final decision however rests with the pastor and/or principal.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

A student-athlete may participate in school related athletic programs if he/she:

- » Is a fully enrolled student
- » Is exhibiting academic progress as determined by the classroom teacher(s)
- » Is displaying positive social behavior as determined by the classroom teacher(s)
- » Has a current athletic physical on file with the Director of Athletics (Athletic Physicals are valid for one year)
- » Has a current Child/Minor Acknowledgement Form on file with the Director of Athletics
- » Attends school the day of a game and/or practice

PERSONAL PROPERTY SEARCHES

An athlete may be asked to submit to a search of gym bag, uniform or other athletic gear when the athletic director, the coach, or another school official suspects that the student possesses drugs, weapons, or anything that might be detrimental to the health and safety of the student or of the team.

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF CHICAGO, A CORPORATION SOLE
**CHILD/MINOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
FORM**

Athletic Program:

School Year:

The Catholic Bishop of Chicago (CBC) and _____ Parish are committed to conducting programs and activities in the safest manner possible and holds the safety of participants in the highest possible regard. Participants and parents registering their child in these programs must recognize there is an inherent risk of injury when choosing to participate in these activities including athletics. The CBC and Parish insist participants follow safety rules and instructions designed to protect the safety of the participants and attendees.

Please recognize the CBC and the Parish does not carry medical accident insurance for injuries sustained in its programs. The cost would make program fees prohibitive. Each person registering themselves or a family member for a recreation program/activity should review their own health insurance policy for coverage. The absence of health insurance coverage does not make the CBC or the Parish responsible for the payment of medical expenses.

I recognize and acknowledge there are risks of physical injury and I agree to assume the full risk of any injuries (including death), damages, or loss which I or my minor/child/ward may sustain as a result of participating in activities connected with this program. I am responsible for the transportation of my child/ward to and from the event(s). The use of my personal automobile to transport participants or attendees is not sanctioned by the CBC and the Parish and is my voluntary undertaking. While using my personal vehicle to and from parish/school activities, I acknowledge my automobile insurance is primary; I understand and will comply with the rules and regulations of the Illinois Motor Vehicle Code; I understand and will comply with other Federal, State and local laws; during the event(s) and to and from the event(s) I will not engage in any inappropriate behavior or activity and doing so will be my personal responsibility.

On behalf of myself or child/ward, I will indemnify the Catholic Bishop of Chicago, a Corporation Sole and the parish from claims resulting from injuries (including death), damages and losses sustained by me or my minor child/ward or arising out of, connected with, or in any way associated with the activities of the program.

In the event of an emergency, I authorize the CBC or parish officials to secure from any hospital, physician, and/or medical personnel any treatment deemed necessary for my minor child's immediate care and agree I will be responsible for payment of any and all medical services rendered. I have read and fully understand the above program details.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Parent/Guardian Name

Child/Minor/Ward Name

Address

Home Telephone

Work Telephone

STUDENT ATHLETE CODE OF CONDUCT

School Name:

School Year:

The purpose of the following Student Athlete Code of Conduct is to help define appropriate actions and behaviors that support the mission of the athletic program. All participating student athletes should read, understand, and sign this form prior to participation.

Any student athlete who does not follow the guidelines below may be suspended or expelled from the athletic program.

As a student-athlete, I therefore agree to the following:

I will play the game for the game's sake.

I will be generous in winning and graceful in losing.

I will display good sportsmanship and respect towards all opponents.

I will work for the good of the team.

I will accept the decisions of the officials gracefully.

I will conduct myself at all times with honor and dignity. This includes during and after school, games, practices, and trips to other schools and facilities.

I will recognize, applaud, and encourage the efforts of your teammates and opponents.

I will show respect for your coaches.

I will show respect towards fans and personnel from other schools.

Athlete's Name

Athlete's Signature

Date

RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

PARENTS/GUARDIANS: EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Parental support is valued and encouraged. Parents/guardians and spectators must conduct themselves in an appropriate manner and act as positive role models for all participants. The essential elements of character building and ethics in sports are embodied in the concept of sportsmanship and six core principles: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship. The highest potential of sports is achieved when parents reflect these ‘six pillars of character.’

Therefore, it is critical for parents/guardians to display the following behaviors:

- » Trust in their child’s ability to have fun as well as to perform and achieve excellence on their own
- » Help their child to learn the right lessons from winning and losing and from individual accomplishments and mistakes
- » Respect their child’s coaches, teammates and fellow parents as well as the players, parents, and coaches from opposing teams
- » Give only encouragement and applaud positive accomplishments, whether for their child, his/her teammates, their opponents or the officials
- » Show respect towards all officials and their decisions
- » Never coach their child or other players during games and practices, unless they are one of the official coaches of the team

These six pillars of character should be thoroughly explained to every parent/guardian in the program. In addition, the mission/philosophy statements of the athletic program should be communicated to the parents as well as all expectations of their child’s participation in the program. It is reasonable to expect parents/guardians to attend a mandatory pre-season

orientation session as a means of fostering continuity and consistency between parents, administrators, coaches, and student-athletes.

Below is a detailed list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all parents/guardians MUST adhere to:

Commit to the Demands of the Sport

It is important for parents/guardians to understand that participation in an interscholastic athletic program is a significant commitment. This commitment includes adhering to all school and league policies, attending every game at all locations at which their team is scheduled to play, driving student athletes to “away games” or tournaments that are a good distance from the school, and participating in tournaments during the holidays. If parents/guardians cannot make such a commitment, they should be encouraged to not enroll their child in the sports program.

Act in Accordance with Catholic Values

Parents/guardians are expected to support and encourage their child’s efforts. All comments from the stands should be supportive of the team’s efforts. No negative comments and criticisms should ever be directed towards student-athletes. In addition, public criticisms directed towards the coaches, the athletic director, and the school administration are absolutely unacceptable. In addition, it is expected that parents/guardians act as role models for their children by putting wins and losses in their proper perspective.

Let the Coaches Coach and the Referees Ref

Parents/guardians should make no attempt to instruct players or the team from the stands. In addition, questioning, criticizing, or berating the coach and/or the referees does not set a good example for the young athletes involved in the contest. It is up to the Athletic Director and/or the School Administration to help parents/guardians realize that they will be asked to leave a game if they are not able to maintain a standard of acceptable behavior.

Volunteer their Time

Parents/guardians may be expected to contribute their time and service in support of the team and the interscholastic athletic program. A viable volunteer program is dependent upon everyone's willingness to maintain a high level of quality and success. Parents/guardians may be asked to assist as scorekeepers, timekeepers, ticket or money takers, refreshment sellers, crowd control monitors, or to help with set-up or clean-up. When appropriate, parents/guardians may be asked to serve as team liaisons and assist with phone calls or provide a schedule to see that all tasks are filled and rotated in an equitable manner. In addition, parents/guardians may also be asked to help with and support fund-raising. Any expectation that is mandatory must be clearly stated before the season begins.

Provide Transportation to and from Games

In most cases, parents/guardians are expected to provide transportation for their children to and from games and practices. Coaches are not covered with liability insurance for chauffeur service. Therefore, they are not allowed to transport athletes at any time.

Engage in Respectful Communication

Parents/guardians should communicate directly with the coach, athletic director, and/or the athletic board/committee on matters of concern. They must do so at appropriate times, and not immediately before, during, or after a game. While it is a given that parents/guardians act as advocates for their own child, it is important for parents/guardians to understand that coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators make decisions that benefit the group, not the individual. Sometimes decisions that benefit the group conflict with individual needs and desires, but such is the reality of being a member of a team. Under no circumstances should parents/guardians be verbally abusive towards coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators. Parents/guardians must be respectful with their tones of voice, as well as thoughtful with the words they choose to use.

Pay all Necessary Fees and be in Good Financial Standing with the School

Parents/guardians may be asked to make the school fees and tuition account current as a condition of student participation in the athletic program.

It is important for parents/guardians to realize the amount of time and effort it takes to run effective and efficient interscholastic athletic programs. The level of commitment that coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators put forth demands the respect of all parents involved. Parents/guardians who cannot adhere to a reasonable level of respectful behavior and expectations should have their privileges of attending games revoked. In addition, under no circumstance should parents/guardians sit in and around the bench area or speak with their child during games. Parents/guardians do not have these rights and privileges unless they are asked to serve as an official volunteer coach.

TWELVE THINGS YOUTH LEAGUE PARENTS SHOULD NOT DO

1. Do not put yourself in your son's/daughter's place on the field or on the court. The kid on the court is not you. If he/she makes an error, it's his/her error. If his/her homerun wins the game, it's his/her homerun. Glory or grief, it is your kid's ballgame.
2. Do not talk about the big game all day. Chances are the big game is not as important to your son/daughter as it is to you, and that is healthy. The youngster will usually keep the game in proper perspective and keep pressure to a minimum.
3. Do not criticize any players on the field. That is not only classless and unseemly: it is dangerous as well. Chances are the player's mother is sitting in the next chair.
4. Do not yell instructions to your son/daughter during a game. That is the coach's job. Your voice only makes your son/daughter more nervous. Shout positive, general encouragement instead.
5. Do not start analyzing your child's performance immediately after the game. All the player wants is peace and quiet, and a juice box!

6. Do not criticize the coach with other parents in the stands, and never under any circumstances criticize the coach to your son/daughter. If you do, your son/daughter will no longer respect the coach, and he/she will have the inability to be coached. Once this happens, everyone loses. Your son/daughter loses and the team loses. I understand that you may never agree with your son's/daughter's coach. But please, do them a favor, and keep your feelings to yourself. Watch your son/daughter perform, and support the team instead. Lastly, before you complain, ask yourself: Am I willing to give up all my valuable free time to coach?
7. Do not complain when the good coach plays everybody and even goes with different starters every game, right down to the child who has the least amount of athletic ability on the team.
8. Do not abuse the officials. Baiting the official who is calling the game for a few extra bucks will not inspire the respect for authority that is demanded from your child at home or at school.
9. Do not decide your player has a future in professional sports. Likewise, do not write off that baby face in the large uniform either. Kids mature athletically at different paces. Some are better now than they ever will be. Some of the worst players develop into varsity athletes with time and proper seasoning.
10. Do not forget to praise your child for simply performing. Do not over praise a good play either. Above all, do not dwell on an error or failure to deliver, especially not with scorn or anger. More importantly, do not get in the habit of continually praising mediocrity and allowing your child to settle for less than their best effort.
11. Do not forget to praise all the players after the game, especially if they lost.
12. Do not take yourself or the outcome too seriously. Even the BIG game is not the answer to all of the world's problems. Put the game in its proper perspective!

SPORTS PARENT/GUARDIAN CODE OF CONDUCT

School Name:

School Year:

The purpose of the following Sports Parent/Guardian Code of Conduct is to help define appropriate parental/guardian actions that support the mission of the athletic program. Parents/guardians should read, understand, and sign this form prior to participation.

Any parent/guardian who does not follow the guidelines below will be asked to leave the sports facility and be suspended from the privilege of attending games.

The essential elements of character-building and ethics in sports are embodied in the concept of sportsmanship and six core principles: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship. The highest potential of sports is achieved when competition reflects these pillars of character.

As a parent/guardian, I therefore agree to the following:

I will not force my child to participate in sports.

I will remember that the game is for youth, not adults.

I will learn the rules of the game and the policies of the league.

I (and my guests) will be a positive role model for my child and encourage sportsmanship by showing respect and courtesy towards all players, coaches, officials, and spectators at all games and practices.

I (and my guests) will not engage in any kind of unsportsmanlike conduct (booing, taunting, etc) or any other form of harassment towards any official, coach, player or parent.

I (and my guests) will not use any profane language or gestures.

I will not encourage any behaviors or practices that would endanger the health and well being of the athletes.

I will teach my child to play by the rules and to resolve conflicts without resorting to hostility or violence.

I will demand that my child treat other players, coaches, officials, and spectators with respect.

I will teach my child the importance of hustle, playing fairly, and doing one's best.

I will never ridicule or yell at my child or other participants for making a mistake or losing a competition.

I will emphasize the importance of skill development over winning and losing.

I will promote the emotional and physical well-being of the athletes ahead of any personal desire I may have for my own child.

I will respect the officials and their authority during games, and will never publicly question their decisions.

I will respect the coaches for the time they donate, and I will never publicly confront, question, or criticize them.

I will demand a sports environment for my child that is free from drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, and I will refrain from their use at all sports events.

I will refrain from coaching my child or other players during games and practices, unless I am one of the official coaches for the team.

Athlete's Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

CROWD CONTROL AT HOME EVENTS

It is recommended that standard operating procedures for all athletic events be established. The goal of these procedures is to safeguard those present and their reputations, as well as the school's property, assets, and good name.

In order to ensure safety of all involved in a home athletic contest, school personnel should make sure of the following:

- » Anticipate the size and the temperament of the expected crowd
- » Determine if there have been previous incidents when these two teams have played
- » Identify the current league standings for the two teams. If the standing is number one and number two or both of the teams are in the top five or ten, there is the potential for either a highly emotional contest and/or a larger than usual crowd

- » Instruct the referees to cancel the game (a school with offensive fans would forfeit the game) if unruly fans in the stands cannot be brought into control
- » Develop a spectator Code of Conduct. Have this statement read aloud before the game begins
- » Exclude students on suspension from attending any school activity during the suspension period
- » Determine if any external forces might increase the need for security.

Athletic Directors and/or Athletic Committee members are ultimately responsible for assigning adult personnel to manage specific operational tasks that athletic events require. Naturally, it is important to assign responsibilities to only those who are capable of physically, mentally, and emotionally handling the required tasks.

FEDERAL LAW AND THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Federal Law prohibits sex discrimination in private schools' education programs or activities. The law allows only one exception – if the private school can prove that compliance with the statute and its regulations would conflict with its religious tenants. The Archdiocese of Chicago, following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, encourages equal treatment of the sexes. Consequently, all Archdiocesan schools, through their athletic programs, must provide equal athletic opportunity for both sexes.

The United States' courts who have considered the meaning of "equal athletic opportunity" judge school compliance with federal law by the following ten factors:

- » Whether the selection of sports and levels of competition effectively accommodates the interests and abilities of members of both sexes
- » The provision of equipment and supplies
- » The scheduling of games and practice times
- » The travel and per diem allowance
- » The opportunity to receive coaching and academic tutoring
- » The assignment and compensation of coaches and/or tutors
- » The provision of locker rooms, practice and competitive facilities
- » The provision of medical and training facilities and services
- » The provision of housing and dining facilities and services; and publicity

The courts apply one of three tests to determine whether schools are in compliance with factor one. These tests are:

1. Whether male and female levels of participation opportunities are proportionate to the male and female enrollment percentages
2. Where one sex is under represented, whether the school can show history and continuing improvement in program expansion that is responsive to the developing interest and abilities of the under represented sex
3. Where one sex is under represented and the school cannot show improvement in program expansion, whether the present program fully and effectively accommodates the interest and abilities of the under represented sex

Accordingly, Archdiocesan schools should provide co-educational athletic programs when possible or provide comparable programs according to the factors and tests outlined above.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COACHES

ASEP

American Sports Education Program
www.asep.com

EYC

Ethical Youth Coaching
www.ethicalyouthcoaching.com

NASPE

National Association for Sports and Physical Education
www.aahperd.org/naspe

NAYSI

North American Youth Sports Institute
www.naysi.com

NYSKA

National Youth Sports Coaches Association
www.nays.org

PACE

Youth Sports Institute
Michigan State University
www.educ.msu.edu/ysi

PCA

Positive Coaching Alliance
www.possitivecoach.org

RESPONSIBLE SPORTS – LIBERTY MUTUAL

www.responsiblesports.com

SPORTS LEADER

www.sportsleader.org

REFERENCES

The purpose of this manual is to identify and highlight best practices for athletic administration and youth league coaching. The intent was not to create something new and unique, but rather to compile information from various credible sources into one document that can be readily accessed by school administrators, athletic directors, coaches, student-athletes, and parents. The following books, articles, and websites were used to compile the content of this manual.

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