

National Federation of State  
High School Associations



# Fundamentals of Coaching

Blended Learning

Manuscript





National Federation of State  
High School Associations



# Fundamentals of Coaching

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# Educational

## Athletics and the Role of the Teacher/Coach

This course is designed to assist you in becoming a successful interscholastic teacher/coach. How you define success as a teacher/coach, however, is critical in determining whether or not your students will experience a developmentally appropriate enriching experience through their participation in interscholastic athletics. Our goal is to provide you with the skills and strategies to help your students maximize their physical, social, personal and psychological development and competitive success.

Unit 1 of the NFHS course emphasizes the history, mission and purpose of educational athletics in our nation's schools. The role of the teacher/coach in interscholastic athletics is to establish an environment that will facilitate success for all participants. This theme is articulated throughout the course, along with the positive outcomes that should occur as a function of the teacher/coach's actions as they impact the students' experience.

**At the conclusion of this unit you will be able to:**

- Describe the mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics.
- Recognize developmentally appropriate experiences.
- Trace the history of athletics in our schools.
- Explain how interscholastic athletics becomes a part of the educational process.
- Describe how the teacher/coach can act as a positive role model.
- Develop a student-centered coaching philosophy.
- State the top five educational outcomes of interscholastic athletics.

## THE MISSION AND PURPOSE OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

At the interscholastic level, learning is far more important than winning. The skills and strategies you will acquire in this course, however, will enhance not only your students' knowledge, but will also help your teams and athletes to be competitively successful. You will be introduced to concepts and insight into how best to structure a coaching environment that promotes the educational mission of interscholastic athletics.

To this end, it cannot be stressed enough that successful coaching at this level is much more than winning games and championships. Successful coaches create the conditions necessary for students to master new skills, enjoy competition with others, and experience enhanced self-esteem. Although successful coaches are well trained in the tactics and techniques of their sport, they recognize that this is only part of their craft; the other part is use of athletics as the vehicle to educate our nation's youth in becoming good citizens.

American author, autobiographer and historian Henry Adams (1838–1918) stated, "A teacher affects eternity; he [she] can never tell where his [her] influence stops." The same applies for coaches. It is widely accepted that coaches hold the key to the positive or negative outcomes of the interscholastic athletic experience. Coaches are truly the delivery system for all that is positive, and at times negative, about the interscholastic athletic experience.

Your presence today places you in the company of hundreds of thousands of individuals who have chosen to coach interscholastic athletics over the course of our country's history. You are now part of that group and share in their legacy. Before we start discussing your role as teacher/coach, let's take a look at the history of athletics in America's schools and discuss the mission and purpose of the activity.

## THE HISTORY AND GOALS OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

It would be easy to assume that sport has always been an important component of our schools. Prior to the mid-1800s, however, organized athletics played virtually no role in education, and did not begin to be available for female students until the mid-1970s.<sup>1</sup> It was only during the 19th century that America's attitude toward the value of sports as an educational and character-building vehicle began to change.

The widespread institutionalization of sport in our schools took place in order to address four societal concerns: education, socialization, military preparedness and health.

### Education

The lessons learned in athletic practice and competition were considered the primary reasons for the institutionalization of athletics in our schools.<sup>2</sup> The opportunity to teach character, discipline, teamwork and perseverance through the vehicle of athletics was promoted by both education and community leaders.

## **Socialization**

The capacity for athletics to foster the socialization of a diverse population in the “American Way” was also promoted by community leaders. It was believed that as a nation of immigrants, interscholastic athletics provided participants and their families opportunities to shape and be shaped by some of the dominant beliefs about what it was and is to be an American.

## **Military Preparedness**

The physical fitness level and, therefore, the ability of our nation’s young men to defend our country has long been a source of national concern. Although John F. Kennedy is most closely associated with the promotion of physical fitness in our schools to address this issue, this approach has long been emphasized as a reason for the inclusion of athletics in our schools. It was believed that participation in athletics would instill in these young men toughness, discipline and, most importantly, an unquestioning respect for authority.

## **Health**

The physical health benefits of participation in athletics were also reasons for the introduction and acceptance of athletics in our schools. The notion that a sound body went hand-in-hand with a sound mind contributed to the growing institutionalization of athletics in our schools.

The most widely held justification for organized athletics in our schools emphasized the educational and character-building benefits of participation. While lessons learned in math, science and English were considered important, the teachable moments and lessons learned on the playing field in terms of discipline, delayed gratification, perseverance and teamwork were also vital to the overall development of each individual. This view quickly became embedded within the American psyche, thus leading to the widespread and unquestioned belief that these outcomes are inevitable consequences of athletic participation in our schools.

Fast forward to the 21st century: The games may have changed but the lessons learned remain the same. Is this true? Is interscholastic athletics in the 21st century really an educational vehicle that teaches character, discipline, teamwork, perseverance and delayed gratification?

Research shows that participating in interscholastic athletics does not automatically result in positive or negative outcomes. Sports are not in and of themselves educational; however, if they are organized and played in certain ways, they do support educational goals. The educational value of athletics is largely dependent on how the activity is structured, and that means what you as the teacher/coach choose to teach and model. When structured appropriately, athletics offers a vehicle to teach students skills that contribute to the overall development of each participant.

Interscholastic athletics is a school-based activity that becomes part of the educational process when certain criteria are met. These include:

- Learning objectives are clearly stated and integrated into the experience. Specifically, coaches must purposefully plan for learning to take place. Simply put, coaches need to a) be purposeful in explaining to students what they are going to teach, b) teach what they said they were going to teach, and c) reinforce what the students learned.

- The program is designed to enhance academic achievement and never interferes with opportunities for academic success.
- The unique teachable moments that occur in athletics are used in the development of each individual.
- Personal responsibility and accountability are stressed for each participant.

Like most activity programs such as art, band and theater, athletics can also increase the commitment of students less interested in the traditional academic subjects offered at the school.<sup>iii</sup> For example, research into the significance of sports to young black males has demonstrated that sports in middle schools could be used to spark a commitment to education among many young people ready to give up on classroom learning by the time they are seventh- or eighth-graders.<sup>iv</sup>

Who is the most influential individual in determining the outcomes of interscholastic athletics – the coach (you), parent, teacher, athletic administrator or school principal? If you picked the first one, you're right. It's YOU!

## THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER/COACH

It is vitally important that teacher/coaches remember that a developmentally appropriate experience is one that is consistent with the ability and maturity of the student. Students, even at high school, are not miniature adults. This simple but important recognition will significantly reduce or remove a great deal of frustration you may experience, particularly when coaching middle-school aged children.

Remember, if your students do not look like professional athletes such as Peyton Manning or Serena Williams do not expect them to understand the game or play like Peyton and Serena! This may seem obvious, but often teacher/coaches' expectations are inconsistent with their students' stage of cognitive, motor-skill and/or physical development.

While the physical and motor-skill development characteristics of students are relatively easy to assess, see and measure, cognitive and psychological development characteristics are less obvious. Teacher/coaches need some understanding of key development issues and be able to maximize their students' learning and development. Consider these questions:

- Will the student understand what I say?
- How many coaching points will he/she be able to take in?

Clearly knowing the answer to these questions will assist coaches in planning practice sessions, and thus optimize learning and enjoyment. In addition, it is important that interscholastic teacher/coaches have knowledge of psychological development.

**This knowledge will provide the basis for understanding:**

- How and why students are likely to react in different situations.
- The psychological demands sport places on participants, and its powerful psychological effects on them.

**You must also be aware of the effects of your behavior on students. Such issues are important to consider at all times.**

For many young people, the interscholastic coach is an incredibly influential figure. Your influence goes far beyond your ability to teach sport skills, however, and one could argue that this is the least important aspect. In addition to playing a key role in the immediate development of a young person, the lessons you choose to teach your students will impact their lives long after their involvement in athletics has concluded. To paraphrase Henry Adams, you will never know when your influence will end. Therefore, it's important to understand what your students are looking for in a coach.

The results may surprise you as they have little to do with X's and O's and more to do with how you treat and value each student as an individual. What high school athletes look for in a coach is competence, approachability, confidence, fairness and consistency, motivation, personal concern, and support.<sup>v</sup>

Consider these attributes as we move on and begin to discuss your coaching philosophy. The vast majority of students who participate in interscholastic athletics are not looking for a master coach in terms of tactics and winning. Rather, they are looking for a competent individual who respects and values them first and foremost as young adults who are exploring how to interact effectively with their environment and work out who they are, what they believe, and what they want to achieve in life.

Because of this, your role as a leader is critical in creating the most optimal learning environment, and you play a central role in defining the experience not only for the students, but also for their families. The role of parents is also of great importance. In fact, the relationship between student, parent(s) and coach is often referred to as the athletic triangle and is a natural aspect of interscholastic athletics. A student's interscholastic athletic experience is likely to be most enriched when parents, coach and the student are all in agreement as to the mission and purpose of the activity. The athletic triangle and the importance of the role of parents in the interscholastic athletic experience will be addressed in more detail in Unit 2 – The Coach as Manager.

Never forget that your behavior, namely what you actually do, will have the most significant impact on the lives of the students in your charge. This point is even more critical in the current culture that glorifies negative role models. It is also important to remember that the most effective method of instruction is to model the behaviors and values you expect your students to exhibit.

Coaches must behave professionally in the way they teach and interact with their students, parents, colleagues and administrators. What you do really matters! Behaving professionally means, among other things, being punctual, dressing appropriately and being well-groomed, working hard and using appropriate language. A true professional also maintains appropriate relationships with students, parents and coaching colleagues; modeling exemplary sportsmanship at all times; displaying positive body language; and modeling a healthy lifestyle.

## STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING PHILOSOPHY

So far we have dealt with the mission, purpose and history of interscholastic athletics. We have also emphasized that interscholastic athletics is a school-based activity that should be part of the educational mission of the school, and that

because the coach is arguably the most influential person in the lives of many students you should be professional in all aspects of your coaching. Furthermore, it has been clearly stated that the coach's responsibility is to maximize the physical, social, personal and psychological development and competitive success of his or her students.

Considering all this, it is important to focus on understanding why you have chosen to coach. To do this, ask yourself two questions: Why do you want to coach interscholastic athletics, and what values define you as a person?

Although these questions may seem simple and straightforward, they are key in determining whether coaching interscholastic athletics is a good fit for you. If you believe that your motives and values are consistent with the mission and purpose of the activity as described in the opening sections of this unit, it is time to move forward and begin to integrate your motives and values into your coaching philosophy.

You possibly are wondering just what a coaching philosophy is and why you need one. Upon completion of this section, your only question should be, "How do I effectively communicate my coaching philosophy to my students and their families?"

Your coaching philosophy is the road map of your coaching life, representing your beliefs, principles, opinions and values about coaching and relating completely with your views on the mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics. Your success as a coach will depend on these things that guide your behavior more than on any other factor. The choices you make as a coach will determine how much success you and your students will experience.

To this end, the NFHS Coaches Code of Ethics is a document you should know and model as you consider what is critical to you about coaching. It is also important to understand and support your school's vision and philosophy. Examine your school's mission statement and reflect particularly how it applies to interscholastic athletics.

## **THE NFHS COACHES CODE OF ETHICS**

The function of a coach is to educate students through participation in interscholastic competition. An interscholastic program should be designed to enhance academic achievement and should never interfere with opportunities for academic success. Each student should be treated with the utmost respect and his or her welfare should be considered in decisions by the coach at all times. Accordingly, the following guidelines for coaches have been adopted by the NFHS Board of Directors.

**The coach** shall be aware that he or she has a tremendous influence, for either good or ill, on the education of the student and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest ideals of character.

**The coach** shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession. In all personal contact with students, officials, athletic directors, school administrators, the state high school athletic association, the media, and the public, the coach shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct. This shall include appropriate use of all electronic/social media.

- The coach** shall take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse.
- The coach** shall avoid the use of alcohol and tobacco products when in contact with players.
- The coach** shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct the program in harmony with the total school program.
- The coach** shall master the contest rules and shall teach them to his or her team members. The coach shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules.
- The coach** shall exert his or her influence to enhance sportsmanship by spectators, both directly and by working closely with cheerleaders, pep club sponsors, booster clubs, and administrators.
- The coach** shall respect and support contest officials. The coach shall not indulge in conduct which would incite players or spectators against the officials. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical.
- The coach** should meet and exchange cordial greetings with the opposing coach to set the correct tone for the event before and after the contest.
- The coach** shall not exert pressure on faculty members to give students special consideration.
- The coach** shall not scout opponents by any means other than those adopted by the league and/or state high school athletic association.

## **CREATING A STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING PHILOSOPHY**

Your No. 1 responsibility as a teacher/coach at the interscholastic level is to create and promote a healthy, nonthreatening and respectful environment that provides each student opportunities to develop skills and learn personal responsibility. The welfare of the student is at the core of the interscholastic athletic experience, which emphasizes the need for the coach to be proactive in creating an environment that promotes the value of each individual and provides participation opportunities for as many students as possible. In many ways, a student-centered coaching philosophy has as its goal the positive development of each student.

Research from a number of different disciplines has shown that positive development is likely to occur when students are active participants in their schools; have a range of opportunities to develop and display competence in settings where they are noticed and rewarded; and have chances to prove they are becoming valued adults in their communities. If interscholastic athletics are organized to achieve these three things, they will contribute to education and development, as students will be noticed in positive ways and will be more likely to identify with the school and its educational mission.<sup>vi</sup>

Write out your coaching philosophy and your responses to the questions asking you why you are coaching and your values, then place them in a prominent place that you will see daily, such as on your bathroom mirror. Use these statements as constant reminders of your motives and values – reminders that will help you remain true to your mission and purpose for being involved in the lives of our nation’s youth. If you ever feel that you may be losing perspective as to the mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics and your role as teacher/coach, take a big step back and ask yourself the following three questions:

- What is the purpose of interscholastic athletics?
- Why did I choose to coach? What are my values?
- Does my behavior consistently reflect my values?

## **THE PLACE OF WINNING IN INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS**

When Pulitzer Prize-winning author H. G. Bissinger wrote about a high school football program in Odessa, Texas, in his book *Friday Night Lights*, he described a town that defined itself by the performances of its football team. In one vivid instance, Bissinger described how the head coach returned to his home after a loss to find “For Sale” signs planted in his front lawn. Although many towns across the United States consider the success of a high school’s athletic program to be central to community identity and pride, when it is taken to the extreme described by Bissinger, interscholastic athletics is no longer in line with the mission and purpose of the activity from an educational perspective.

But what role should winning play in interscholastic athletics? Phil Jackson, head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, knows a little about winning as a coach.<sup>vii</sup> “Winning is important to me,” Jackson said, describing his concept of striving and investment in the process that are key elements of being a good coach. “But what brings me real joy is the experience of being fully engaged in whatever I’m doing.”

Jackson’s philosophy toward winning is one to which all interscholastic coaches can aspire. Like Jackson, no doubt all of you like to win, but his words speak more to the striving and total investment in the process that is key to being a successful coach at any level of sport. At the interscholastic level this should represent a total investment in the physical, social, personal and psychological development of each student participant.

Even though what Jackson said may resonate with coaches at all levels of competition, what should be emphasized is that interscholastic athletics has a dramatically different mission and purpose than coaching at the professional level. Indeed, Robert Kanaby, NFHS Executive Director, placed winning in perspective and clearly articulated its importance in various levels of sports in the United States: “Winning at the professional level is required. Winning at the collegiate level has become expected. Winning at the high school level should be a pleasant by-product to what you’re really supposed to be doing, which is developing young people into productive citizens.”

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The word “competition” is derived from the Latin word *competere*, “to seek together, to coincide, to agree.” Opponents are viewed as co-creators of an experience, and competition as a process of striving with, not against, others.

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Kanaby's stated position contains clear consequences. Professional sports are an explicitly commercial enterprise where the goals are to entertain and, ultimately, to make money. Financial success is of primary importance and depends on winning. The goals of interscholastic athletics are different, however, and as such the experience will be different for all concerned, including the teacher/coach.

One of the most important lessons a coach can teach a young person is the value of competing and trying to win every contest he or she enters. However, when winning a game or a contest becomes the only way that an individual or team can feel successful, it sets the stage for some moral and ethical challenges. As noted developmental psychologist John Nicholls stated, "If winning becomes everything, then an individual is likely to do anything to win."<sup>viii</sup> Indeed, research, such as that by Ommundsen and his colleagues, has shown that the more an individual views success in sports being dependent solely on winning, the more likely he or she is to engage in cheating and adopt unsportsmanlike attitudes.<sup>ix</sup>

Because interscholastic athletics is part of the educational process, losing provides just as critical a teachable moment for a student as winning. The very different ways that both are handled will reveal the characters of both the teacher/coach and his or her students. Learning to win with class and lose with dignity are key life lessons and are educational outcomes all teacher/coaches should be teaching. In life, individuals will be faced with many forms of adversity and challenges, and will face losses far more severe than any they may experience in athletics. What better way to teach young people how to handle such losses than through athletics. This by no means that in your role as a teacher/coach you should like to lose; rather, it means that you should recognize the teachable moment that a loss offers you.

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*"If you can react the same way to winning and losing, that is a big accomplishment. That quality is important because it stays with you the rest of your life."<sup>x</sup>*

— Chris Evert

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## **SELF-AWARENESS**

One of the realities of coaching is that your performance is "out there" for the entire school community to see. Parents, administrators and students will all have opinions about you and of your strengths and weaknesses as both a teacher/coach and, potentially, a person. Opinions will be formed by everyone with whom you interact. The bottom line is that you have little if no control over what others think; how and what you think about yourself, though, is vitally important in terms of your development and performance as a teacher/coach.

So what is your perception of yourself as a teacher/coach? Can you identify your current strengths and areas of your coaching where you're limited and where improvement is needed? One of the main skills you can develop is being aware of yourself and your motivation for coaching. Let's say, for example, that the school district's superintendent asked you to describe your three major strengths and limitations. Could you answer the question? Do you have a process for identifying your strengths, limitations and motives?

Generally, four main skill sets can determine a teacher/coach's success. The usage of the term "skill set" is deliberate in that it represents the belief that coaching is indeed a skill that can be developed and enhanced. Those four skill sets are:

- **Technical:** Knowledge base of sport.
- **Tactical:** Analytical/decision-making component of coaching; skills that help win contests.
- **Managerial:** Maintenance and organization of a systematic approach to coaching in terms of preparation, time management, administration, programming, and so on.
- **Interpersonal:** The most critical category that underpins everything a coach does, such as communication, social skills and motivation.

Given the above, honestly rate yourself on each skill set on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 equals very poor and 10 equals outstanding. The responses should help you understand your current strengths and limitations and assist in the development and improvement of your self-awareness.

## **COMMUNICATING YOUR STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING PHILOSOPHY**

Every practice and competitive contest provides an opportunity to communicate your coaching philosophy to your students. Again, this does not happen by chance and will be successful only if you approach each occasion purposefully and with a plan. To achieve this goal, you should look to communicate your student-centered coaching philosophy in both verbal and written forms to students, parents/guardians and program staff at every opportunity.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS**

What positive outcomes should a teacher/coach be striving for with his or her students and program? This is a critical question and a teacher/coach needs to have the end in mind in the way the program is built, along with plans for the season and the structure of the coaching environment. Once more, if winning is either everything or the only way success is defined, serious limits are placed on the educational value of the experience. When a teacher/coach adopts a student-centered coaching philosophy that stresses the educational mission of the activity, the experiential outcomes are almost entirely positive and contribute significantly to the holistic development of each and every student.

## **THE TOP FIVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS**

**Promotion of learning:** Students should acquire new knowledge or skills that will lead to long-term behavior changes. This learning is not limited to the development of physical skills and should also facilitate the social, personal and psychological development of each student.

**Citizenship:** Students should acquire knowledge, attitudes, experience and skills that will prepare them to be a productive and responsible member of society.

**Sportsmanship:** Students should learn respect and concern for rules and officials, opponents, and the spirit and customs of sport.

**Healthy lifestyle:** Students should become committed to an addiction-free, physically active and long-term healthy lifestyle.

**Life skills:** Students should learn how to balance their life, emotional well-being, leadership, personal growth and decision-making skills.

These outcomes do not happen automatically or by chance. They happen because you as teacher/coach adopt a planned and purposeful approach to the interscholastic athletic experience. The remainder of this course will provide you with skills and strategies to help your students maximize their physical, social, personal and psychological development, as well as their competitive success.

## **ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In order to maximize the positive outcomes described above, the teacher/coach should have the knowledge necessary for coaching at the interscholastic level. This will ensure that the training and competition activities are developmentally appropriate and based on sound and accepted teaching practices. It is expected that a teacher/coach must be current in all aspects of the profession by taking advantage of professional development opportunities. Attendance at coaching workshops and conferences from accredited organizations is a critical aspect of coach development. It is strongly advised that coaches maintain memberships in professional organizations and coaching associations, and similar groups whose programs are focused on the development of the competence of each coach. From a practical viewpoint, coaches cannot recommend students for all-district or all-state recognition unless the coaches are members of their respective coaches' associations.

# The Teacher/Coach as Manager

Abraham Lincoln once said, “If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend six hours sharpening my ax.” Why? Would it not be better to just start chopping?

You know the answer to that question, but the point needs to be emphasized. Specifically, what Lincoln said emphasizes the role of preparation in being successful as a teacher/coach and speaks directly to one of the four coaching skill sets introduced in the previous unit, namely, managerial skills. In this unit we discuss organization of a systematic approach to coaching in terms of preparation, time management, administration and programming. You will be introduced to issues related to your legal responsibilities as a coach and your position in the administrative structure of your school district. The experiences of thousands of coaches who have gone before you have shaped this particular unit, and it could very easily have been titled “All the things I wish I had known before I started coaching.”

Some of you may find what is in this unit common sense; however, our experience tells us that common sense is, in fact, far from common.

## **At the conclusion of this unit you will be able to:**

- Identify the managerial skills necessary for being a successful teacher/coach.
- Classify management responsibilities into three main time frames (i.e., off-season, preseason and in-season) in order to develop a timeline to accomplish your management responsibilities.
- Describe the administrative chain of command operating in most schools.
- Recognize your coordinating responsibilities in facility management, scheduling, transportation and budgeting.
- Explain the general rationale for many of the state associations’ eligibility rules.
- Establish procedures for emergency care of your students.
- Explain components of sport safety in order to minimize risk of injury.
- Indicate strategies for working effectively with all stakeholders in the sport program.
- Describe legal liability concerns related to interscholastic coaching.

## ORGANIZATION

As courts in the United States continue to define the legal responsibilities of a teacher/coach, you must understand that you are not immune from legal action. More importantly, it is critical that you learn a number of well-established procedures that will not only reduce your risk of being sued but enhance the health, well-being, development and athletic performance of your students.

No matter how knowledgeable you may be about the technical or tactical aspects of your sport, your ability to run a smooth and efficient program is an important aspect of being a successful interscholastic coach. Indeed, the more efficiently you manage and organize all aspects of your program, the more time and energy you will have to devote to actually working with your students. The reverse also applies; the less efficient your program, the less time you will have to work with your students as you will constantly be dealing with one organizational crisis after another.

To assist you in this task, we recommend that you break the needs of your program into three specific time periods: off-season, pre-season and in-season. By using this as a starting point, you can begin to determine what needs to be done and when to do it over the course of a year. Not only is this important in terms of maximizing the development and performance of your students, it is necessary to maintain appropriate records of all practice plans, trainings and other aspects of your program in the event of any legal challenge.

### OFF-SEASON

Off-season is the time of year when a coach should be focused on reviewing and evaluating the events of the previous year and preparing for the next season. It is a time when she should engage in ongoing professional development activities and complete as many of the administrative responsibilities and tasks of the position as possible, such as budget and scheduling of contests and facilities. Most of your students will be engaged in other activities during this period, providing you with time to determine your goals for the upcoming season and how you will go about optimizing the development, performance and well-being of each student. This is the time to develop practice plans, conditioning programs, team policies and procedures, and generally create the system and processes that will dictate the way your program is run. If you are a head coach, this is also a time to evaluate your current staff and/or recruit new staff. You will want to work with them to enhance all aspects of the program, including defining each individual's role and responsibilities. The off-season is also a key time to evaluate your current facilities, uniforms and equipment, and make any needed changes.

## **PRE-SEASON**

This period represents the time for the initial implementation of whatever systems and processes were developed during the off-season. It is the phase when you introduce your students and parents to the program and set the culture, goals and objectives for the year. You are likely to minimize the number of issues you may experience in-season if you are effective in establishing during this time the program's culture with your students and, perhaps more importantly, with their parents/guardians. Meetings with your students and their parents/guardians in which you define team rules and procedures are key tasks to accomplish during the pre-season. It is in these meetings that you will present your student-centered coaching philosophy and assert the educational mission of interscholastic athletics. The pre-season is the time when you will want to encourage students from your school to participate in the program. After passing a pre-participation physical, students will begin to participate in the conditioning plans you developed in the off-season. Tryouts are usually conducted toward the end of the pre-season, and you may have to reduce the number of students on the program roster. This can be an emotional and challenging time for any teacher/coach, students and parents. Establishing a clear and easily understood process for the evaluation and selection of your students is important. Those who do not make the roster are likely to be disappointed and upset, but a clear and readily understandable evaluation and selection process will minimize these feelings, and is often more significant in regard to their parents.

The selection of captains is another key task that typically takes place during the pre-season. Although some coaches choose not to have team captains, most programs have one or more students who serve that role. As part of this selection process, you need to decide whether you, the team, or a combination of both will make the selection. You also need to clearly state your expectations for the captain, including the specific roles and responsibilities. The selection of captains provides a wonderful learning experience for your team, specifically, as an opportunity for you to teach them about leadership, respect and good citizenship.

## **IN-SEASON**

Your primary focus in-season should be conducting practices and participating in contests. The amount of time you actually spend on these two tasks, however, is likely to be determined by how good a job you have done in the off-season and pre-season in terms of implementing an efficient management system for your program. Coaches who do a poor job in this regard often find themselves having to deal with one crisis after another. For example, you're likely to spend less time dealing with team policy infractions if you have been successful in educating your students and their parents as to the specifics of the policies during the pre-season. Likewise, you're less likely to have to spend time disciplining students for poor sportsmanship if you have established a culture that promotes sportsmanship and good citizenship.

A critical aspect of your in-season responsibilities is communicating with your staff, your athletic director and any other key individual with responsibilities related to your program. If you've established an efficient communication system during pre-season, you'll be able to be more proactive in dealing with any issues that may arise. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each individual involved in your program will enhance its efficiency and afford you the opportunity to spend more time working with your students.

### **Contest Management**

The management of the pre-, during and post-contest periods is an important task for the coach. In this unit we are not discussing tactical issues related to contest management or the physical/mental preparation of your students. Rather, we are highlighting the specific managerial responsibilities you need to be aware of as a coach. Pre-contest responsibilities may include:

- Confirming the scheduling of the facility for a home contest. Facility responsibilities will also include a safety inspection, ensuring lining of the field, equipment, and checking the visiting team locker room.
- Presence of emergency medical personnel when appropriate.
- Having crowd control/security personnel and procedure in place.
- Arranging greeters for the visiting school and officials.
- Arranging game-day personnel, for example, custodial staff, ticket office staff, announcers and officials.
- Availability of fluids for all students.
- Confirmation of school transportation for away contests.
- Direct supervision of students during travel to any away contest.

During contest managerial responsibilities are limited to and likely to be the responsibility of the athletic director or game day personnel. However, you are responsible for the execution of the emergency care plan if a student is injured and may have to intercede on occasion if your parents are behaving in an unsporting fashion or any of your game day personnel are not performing their role in a manner consistent with your program's expectations or culture.

### **Post-contest managerial responsibilities may include:**

- Arranging escorts for the opposing school's team and personnel, and for the officials from the field to the locker room and from the locker room to their respective vehicles.
- Supervising the locker rooms.
- Locking the facility.
- Reporting any problems related to the contest, facility or equipment to your athletic director.
- Returning equipment from students to the equipment room/personnel.
- Report of any issues (broken, lost or stolen items) related to the equipment.
- Reporting of scores to the appropriate governing body, such as athletic director, school district and/or state association.
- Direct supervision of students on bus ride home from away contests.
- Completion of injury or any other reports when necessary, such as disqualification of teacher/coach or student.

## ADMINISTRATION

Many of you are familiar with this quote from John Donne: “No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main . . .”<sup>xi</sup> The essence of these words is applicable to the interscholastic teacher/coach. As only one part of a much larger system, you should know the administrative chain of authority for athletics in your school district, specifically, who is your boss, who is your boss’s boss, and who is ultimately responsible for what in the school district. Although there may be geographical differences, the following description of the chain of administrative authority is relatively standard throughout the country.

### CHAIN OF COMMAND

#### Board of Education

All individuals involved in interscholastic athletics are ultimately responsible to the school district’s board of education, whose members are charged with the task of interpreting the needs of the community and developing policies in accordance with state statutes and mandates. The board of education is the final decision-making authority in your school district, in charge of and evaluating the merits of all interscholastic programs. Ultimately, the board is responsible for the hiring and firing of all school personnel, including coaches.

#### Superintendent/District Athletic Director

The superintendent is responsible for administering the schools according to the policies of the board of education and the rules and regulations of the state department of education. The superintendent establishes policy for athletics and ensures that all participants have an understanding and adhere to the policy. It is expected that the superintendent represent the school district in its dealings with other school districts, community groups and legislative bodies. In many school districts, a district athletic director based in the superintendent’s office may serve as the administrator for athletics for the school district.

#### State Association

The high school state association governs sports in each state and has jurisdiction over the number of scrimmages and contests a player or team can play in a year, and the beginning, end and length of the sports season. In addition, the state association hosts regional and state championships and in some cases governs sectional and district tournaments. It rules on all eligibility issues described in this course and determines whether all schools participate in a state tournament or if the schools have to qualify. The association also decides tournament sites and has final authority in all decisions regarding the games. School principals usually serve as the state associations’ voting members.

#### School Principal

The principal is the leader of the school and is responsible for the academic achievement of the student body. The principal is ultimately accountable for all aspects of school life, including athletics, and is responsible for any official action taken by the school in all areas.

### **Athletic Director**

The athletic director or designated person responsible for athletics at a school (the assistant principal, for example) usually reports directly to the school principal. The athletic director's primary responsibility is to administer and supervise all aspects of interscholastic athletics at the school, including evaluating and assessing coach effectiveness. In addition to providing day-to-day leadership, the athletic director is also responsible for the promotion of the educational mission of interscholastic athletics and the placement of these programs in the school's curriculum. The athletic director is likely to also have the role of making recommendations to the school principal in regard to the hiring and firing of coaches and other athletic personnel.

### **Head Coach**

The head coach reports to the athletic director or designated person responsible for athletics at a school and is responsible for all aspects of his or her athletic program. The head coach sets the level of expectations and the culture of the program and has the responsibility of ensuring the integration of the educational mission of the school into the athletic program and to promote a healthy environment for each student.

### **Assistant Coach**

An assistant coach reports to the head coach and is responsible for carrying out the duties described in the job description and other duties as delegated by the head coach. Part of the assistant coach's responsibility is reinforcing the integration of the educational mission of the school into the athletic program and to promote a healthy environment for each student.

## **FACILITIES**

Facility usage will probably be scheduled through the athletic director and recorded on a master calendar/schedule book to avoid double-booking and to ensure the maximum use of available facilities. During scheduling meetings with the athletic director, you should inform him of any special requests or needs you may have for your program. When facility use has been assigned or designated, it is your responsibility to adhere to the schedule and not overlap into the time of other teams. You also must ensure that you are well-prepared for every practice and that your students are on task and productive during this time.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The school or district's transportation policies should be adhered to at all times. A common policy is that all members of the team travel to events on a bus or in school-operated vehicle(s), and you are expected to travel on the bus with them. Reports of a number of recent hazing incidents have highlighted the need for the coach to not only travel on the bus with the students but also to take a direct supervisory role in trying to ensure the safety of each individual. For example, sitting at the front of the bus talking with your fellow coaches and not directly supervising the students' activities behind you is unacceptable and may leave you legally liable if any harm occurs to your students.

A student who travels to a contest on school transportation is generally expected to return by the same means, although a policy may be in place to permit some flexibility such as allowing a student to travel back with his or her parents(s) if approved in advance. In most instances, a written request to allow this is required before the contest.

As a teacher/coach, it is very important to strictly adhere to school and/or school district transportation policies. If you have any questions, you should discuss them with your athletic director.

## **SCHEDULING**

At the varsity level, head coaches usually have input into their schedules, although scheduling is ultimately the responsibility of the athletic director. Usually, schedules for junior varsity or freshman coaches are provided by the league or their athletic director. All coaches should communicate with the athletic director about scheduling concerns. When changes are needed because of weather or conflicts, the coach must notify all affected parties, such as the athletic director, transportation services and parents.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

It is your responsibility to ensure that all students who participate in your program meet eligibility requirements for participation in interscholastic athletics. A thorough understanding and knowledge of school, district and state association eligibility rules is critical if you are to be a successful interscholastic teacher/coach. In most instances, failure to meet all eligibility requirements by all students while competing in an interscholastic event will result in forfeiting the contest or in disqualification of the offending school. Additional punishment also is likely to be imposed by the school district or state association on the school, teacher/coach and student. Eligibility requirements are likely to vary from state to state; there may be exceptions and the opportunity for students and/or their parents/guardians to appeal.

**The following requirements represent the general rationale for areas addressed by state association eligibility rules:**

- **Age Eligibility:** Giving a specific age cut-off for students promotes maximum participation, fairness and safety among schools and their athletes.
- **Enrollment/Attendance:** This places an emphasis on the student's enrollment and attendance as part of his/her academic fulfillment. It helps maintain a perspective of athletics as part of a total school environment.
- **Maximum Participation:** To ensure that students focus on their progression toward graduation and to promote fair competition, all students are afforded the same number of semesters of academic eligibility. This discourages older students from "dragging out" their athletic participation and gives all interested students a fair chance at athletic participation.
- **Transfer/Residency:** A transfer/residency requirement inhibits students from seeking out or being recruited by other schools solely for athletic purposes. It assists in maintaining an interscholastic environment of athletic competition that, with a few exceptions, requires that students must attend the school in the district where their parents/guardians reside.

- **Academic:** As interscholastic athletics are part of a school's total environment, they should uphold certain expectations of academic achievement as a priority of the student's reason for being there. Rather than being viewed as a self-contained activity, athletics should be seen as an extension of the classroom and as preparation for a productive, balanced life.
- **Non-school Participation:** Students on interscholastic teams who participate in non-school athletic programs may be subject to pressures from people who are interested solely in the athletic ability of the student and are not subject to any administrative oversight from the school. Restricting nonschool participation can help alleviate the trend toward year-round competitive sport seasons and assist in time management, academic responsibility (reducing probability of missing classes for events), and team/coach loyalty issues for the student.
- **Pre-participation Evaluation:** Not only should physical evaluations of students be conducted before any interscholastic athletic practice or competition, but the evaluation process itself should be reviewed every three years at a minimum. This review should take into account any applicable statutory or regulatory actions and may include appropriate sport-specific evaluation requirements. It is also important for the authorizing body to determine who is qualified to perform the student physical evaluations.
- **Restitution:** This helps to prevent exploitation of students, discourages abuse of the court system, and strives for application of common practices to all participating teams. It serves to preserve a sense of fair play, is not meant to be punitive, and is limited to denying a school a competitive result to which it was deemed to be either not eligible or not entitled.
- **Amateur/Awards:** This encourages participation for the sake of sport, competition, learning and physical activity as opposed to any extrinsic or monetary reward.
- **Recruiting/Undue Influence:** This prohibition aids in keeping the focus of interscholastic athletics within its interscholastic context and discourages adults from jeopardizing a student's eligibility and gives more students an equal chance at participation.

## **BUDGET**

The teacher/coach is expected to manage the program's budget and be accountable for all expenditures and revenues. In all activities, the teacher/coach will use the program's funds in a fiscally responsible and ethical manner. Budgetary responsibility is likely to be shared with the athletic director and should fit into the athletic department's policies and guidelines. Uniforms, equipment, travel and medical kit are examples of items likely to be included in your budget.

Further, the teacher/coach may be involved in fund-raising activities and work with a booster club to raise revenue for the program. In all activities, the teacher/coach must maintain accurate and complete financial records and operate within established school district guidelines in terms of fund-raising. This particularly applies to the role of booster club members, who must be provided clear direction from the teacher/coach in terms of what they can and cannot do.

## INSURANCE

As a teacher/coach, you may be protected by school district liability insurance. However, often you may choose to purchase your own policy or supplemental insurance. Membership in the NFHS Coaches Association includes \$1 million of excess liability coverage, accidental death, medical and dismemberment insurance. To join the NFHS Coaches Association, please visit [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS

As mentioned in Unit 1, your No. 1 responsibility as a coach at the interscholastic level is to create a healthy, nonthreatening and respectful environment that provides each student opportunities to develop skills and learn personal responsibility. To this end, and before practice or competition begins, you need to prepare yourself by learning about any special health and/or physical conditions that may affect your students. All schools will or should require that each student successfully complete a preparticipation physical conducted by a qualified medical professional. Records of the physicals should be kept on file with the school principal or his designee and should be prominently marked to indicate if a student has a physical restriction, limitation, or health problem that will require special attention. If you believe that a student may not be able to participate, you should report this to your athletic director or principal who may request that the student be re-examined before a decision is made as to his/her participation status. Consent-to-treat forms should be on kept on file for each student in the case a parent or guardian is unavailable if the student's health condition warrants.

Because of the inherent risks involved in all athletic participation, a clear communication channel with the parents/guardians of your students needs to be established in order to facilitate the prevention, reporting and care of injuries. This channel of communication is necessary to ensure that the student is allowed to return to play only when physically and psychologically ready. Check with your athletic director on the clearance-to-play policy and procedure in your school.

At this point we need to discuss the Good Samaritan Law and its impact on you as an interscholastic coach. Most states have Good Samaritan laws that protect individuals who happen upon injured people and choose to render aid. Such laws are narrowly construed by the courts because they undercut the common-law right that people have to recover financially for harm caused by the negligence of others. Although the wording and application of this legislation varies from state to state, coaches and athletic directors are generally NOT excused as Good Samaritans in the event they utilize emergency care methods improperly.

As a teacher/coach, you have the duty to provide or secure appropriate medical assistance for any injured student you coach. It is vital that your school have a plan involving local emergency medical personnel and facilities so that a paramedic unit can respond quickly to the scene of a serious injury. If medical assistance is not immediately available, you have a duty to administer appropriate first aid in the event of a life-threatening situation. In most cases you are likely to be the individual best situated to administer first aid to an injured athlete – hence the use of the term “first responder.” To assist you in this task, each team should have a designated medical kit available at all practices and contests.

Establishing procedures for emergency care, including notification of parents/guardians, is critical in providing a high standard of care for students. To plan for emergency care, at least one coach for each team should have successfully completed sport safety or first-aid training, which will give you the skills to provide immediate and temporary care at the scene of an injury and/or emergency before medical personnel arrive. The goal of a first responder is to save a student's life, prevent aggravation of an injury, and alleviate severe suffering. Although as a general rule an injured student should not be moved, that may be allowed if further injury is likely otherwise. If a back or neck injury is indicated, the head should be immobilized in a neck collar and the student should be moved only with the use of a back board. Consult with your athletic director or principal about sport safety or first-aid training.

**Your emergency care plan should consist of the following steps:**

- In the case of life threatening injuries, administer first aid to the injured student.
- Personally call or have someone call emergency medical personnel.
- Notify parents/guardians promptly when emergency care is needed. Emergency telephone numbers for the parents/guardians of each of your students should be immediately accessible. The NFHS recommends that emergency telephone numbers for parents/guardians (ICE: In case of emergency) be kept in each team's dedicated medical kit.
- If the injury does not require that a student be transported by emergency medical care personnel, she should be released only to her parent, guardian or designated representative. Develop or be aware of school policies for transportation of injured students.
- Promptly complete a student accident report form. At minimum, copies should be given to your athletic director and school principal.

## **MINIMIZING RISKS**

It has been reported that high school athletes account for an estimated two million injuries, a half-million doctor visits and 30,000 hospitalizations annually.<sup>xii</sup> Sport participation causes approximately 55 percent of all nonfatal injuries at school.<sup>xiii</sup> Although accidental injuries are an inevitable aspect of interscholastic athletics, the coach is responsible for minimizing the number and severity of incidents by implementing an appropriate *sport safety program*. To minimize risks, you must recognize how accidents occur:

- Not all accidents are preventable. For example, the physical contact in some sports makes it simply impossible to prevent all injuries and still play the sport.
- Most accidents have multiple causes. These should be viewed in terms of operating errors, supervisory errors, management errors and *sport safety program errors*.
- Since multiple factors can contribute to the cause of an accident, a good *sport safety program* should focus on several areas to minimize the risk of accidental injuries. The coach should devote considerable time, attention and effort in developing management and supervision plans, as these will have great impact and long-lasting effects in preventing situations that cause accidents.

## **IMPLEMENTING AN APPROPRIATE SPORT SAFETY PROGRAM**

The major goal of any sport safety program is to prevent situations that cause accidents. Your sport safety program should be inclusive of *all* the components described in this section.

- Many sport accidents occur as a result of activities taking place in unsafe or inappropriate facilities. Learning to recognize potentially dangerous situations is therefore an important skill for any teacher/coach. Prior to the start of the season you should ensure that the facility meets minimum safety standards. You should identify foreseeable causes of injury inherent in defective indoor and outdoor facilities or hazardous environments and improve unsafe environments. All facilities should be inspected regularly and maintained in safe condition.
- You should undertake an accurate equipment inventory at the start of the season to establish the status of equipment and ensure that the correct amount of protective equipment is available and that the equipment fits your students. Send equipment in need of repair to reputable, agents and discard or replace equipment that is unsafe.
- It is your responsibility to not only provide adequate and proper equipment but also to explain to your students its correct use and any unique features of that equipment. You should emphasize that the equipment should be used only for its intended purpose.
- Students and parents should be warned about the potential dangers and risks involved in the sport. Students should also be taught safety rules at the start of each season. These rules should be posted and brought to the attention of the students regularly. The use of posters and bulletin boards can serve as cues to remind students in a powerful manner.
- Many accidents occur because students commit rule violations, such as an illegal block in football. To reduce this occurrence, the coach should teach and enforce the rules of the sport.
- Accidents will be reduced if students learn to execute correct sport technique. By teaching the correct technique of how to slide in baseball, for example, the risk of injury will be reduced for both the student and his opponent.
- Your coaching practices should be evaluated for possible hazards. If you are a new or relatively inexperienced coach, you should ask your athletic director or an experienced colleague to observe and critique your sessions from a safety perspective.
- Many accidents are caused because of the students' poor conditioning. A teacher/coach must understand the importance of proper conditioning and ensure that students are capable of the physical challenges of the sport. Pre-season conditioning should be undertaken in a systematic fashion, preparing students progressively for more challenging practices and competitive activities.
- When an injury or accident occurs, it should be recorded and a report placed in the student's file. An injury report should also be filed by type (i.e., head injury, lacerations, etc.) so that the prevalence and rate of injury occurrence can be tracked. This tracking procedure may assist you in determining areas of concern that need to be attended to in your program, such as a piece of equipment, certain practice activity or playing surface.
- Coaches need to keep their first-aid and CPR certification up to date.

## **MATCHING ATHLETES**

A common error that gives rise to lawsuits is the mismatching of students on the basis of size and ability. Just because the students are the same age or gender and choose to participate in the same sport does not absolve the coach of legal liability if an injury occurs. The question that courts examine is whether an effort was made to match students according to their physical maturity, including such factors as height, weight and ability. This is important especially in contact and collision sports such as football, basketball and soccer. It is also a key consideration in sports where balls are thrown or hit (e.g., baseball and softball). Although a court may understand the issues related to interscholastic athletics, you should be aware of situations when the chance of injury is increased because of differences in the physical maturity and ability levels of students.

## **MANAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS**

A stakeholder is an individual or group with an interest in the success of your program. Critical stakeholders in interscholastic athletics include your students, parents/guardians, administrators, fellow coaches, and the faculty at the school. Each stakeholder will influence your program and require your attention. In many cases the success of your program will be determined by these relationships, so it is vitally important that you understand the needs of each stakeholder and develop a plan to work with each individual.

## **STUDENTS**

The primary reason for the presence of athletics in America's schools is the contribution it can make in a student's education. Your responsibility as a teacher/coach is to actively engage in the educational process and facilitate the learning of important life lessons using competitive athletics as the vehicle. It is also your responsibility to lead this effort and to set an appropriate example as a positive role model. You are first and foremost a teacher, and your students should expect their interscholastic athletic experience to be an extension of the education they receive in the classroom.

In Unit 1 of this course you were introduced to the characteristics students are looking for in an interscholastic coach. High school students look for competent coaches who treat them as valued individuals, providing support and demonstrating personal concern. Students clearly do not need nor want their coach to be "one of the boys/girls." The establishment and maintenance of a professional relationship between you and your students is therefore integral to the interscholastic athletic experience. As the leader of the program you need to be fair, honest and considerate of individual differences, needs, interests, temperaments and aptitudes. Remember, it is more important to be respected as an interscholastic teacher/coach than to be liked.

A mandatory preseason meeting with your students should always take place. Notice of this meeting must be given in advance to any eligible student interested in participating in the program. The primary goal is to educate the students as to the mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics, present your student-centered coaching philosophy, and describe your expectations of them. Key items to be covered during the preseason meeting include the evaluation and selection process, time commitment, eligibility rules, team rules, and disciplinary procedures. At the conclusion the students should sign a code of conduct form.

Perhaps the most important ongoing task you will face with your students throughout the year is communication. An effective system containing both verbal and written communication in a respectful and professional fashion will minimize issues and optimize the efficiency of your program.

## **PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

Although your primary responsibility is to the student, you should look also to actively engage with your students' parents/guardians. As was described in Unit 1 of the course, the teacher/coach and parent form the base of the athletic triangle. Frequently, the quality of this particular relationship goes a long way in determining a student's interscholastic athletic experience. Specifically, the more effective you are in interacting with the students' parents/guardians, the better the experience is likely to be for all concerned, including you. Developing both a verbal and written communication system that provides parents/guardians with relevant information concerning their child's interscholastic athletic experience is a vital step in this process. Parents/guardians need to be kept completely informed as to your expectations of their child and themselves.

Similar to the process used with your students, a mandatory preseason meeting for at least one parent or legal guardian should always take place. Notice of this meeting must be given in advance to any eligible student interesting in participating in the program. Once again, the primary goal is to educate the parents/guardians as to the mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics, explain your student-centered coaching philosophy, and describe your expectations of both them and their child. Topics covered should include the evaluation and selection process, time commitment, inherent risk of injury, eligibility rules, emergency care plan, transportation arrangements, team rules, and disciplinary procedures. Enough time should always be left to address any parent questions or concerns.

Although you should provide your contact information to the parents/guardians, you should also clearly outline the limits of this access. The meeting should conclude with the parents signing a code of conduct form.

## **FELLOW COACHES**

Coaching staffs operate in a quasi-autocratic fashion with the head teacher/coach in command. Despite this position of authority, a good head teacher/coach is likely to actively engage with his or her assistant coaches and delegate responsibilities. Respect between and among professionals is a common feature of successful interscholastic athletic coaching staffs and administrations. The role of the head

teacher/coach is to establish a staff culture that encourages the open exchange of ideas and insights. As misunderstandings and a degree of tension are often inevitable aspects of working together, successful programs have a plan in place to assist in the handling of such situations. Ultimately, it is up to the head teacher/coach to ensure that these issues are dealt with in a professional manner and in an appropriate forum.

Always remember that your sport is only part of the total athletic department and educational programs offered by the school. At the interscholastic level it is very important to actively promote, support and cooperate with other teacher/coaches and sponsors of athletic programming. A teacher/coach should support his/her peers in the promotion of the educational mission of interscholastic athletics. Competing for and unfairly pressuring students to concentrate on your sport to the exclusion of other programs is unprofessional and inconsistent with the educational mission and purpose of interscholastic athletics. You should be courteous, thoughtful and supportive in all interactions with your peers. The same expectations in terms of behavior apply in your interactions with your athletic director, school principal and others in the chain of administrative command.

## **SCHOOL FACULTY AND STAFF**

You are expected to cooperate with every faculty and staff member at the school. You must recognize and embrace the notion that all parties are playing for the same team with the goal of facilitating the development of each and every student. Antagonistic relations often emerge between classroom teachers and coaches when this common ground is not clearly defined or understood, but when they work together it is far more likely that students will maximize the development of their academic and athletic potential. This is even more crucial for those academically "at-risk" students for whom athletics may be a strong motivator to remain in school and engaged in academics.

## **LEGAL/LIABILITY CONCERNS**

While many legal issues at the interscholastic level are the concern of athletic directors, it is **VERY IMPORTANT** to be aware of and knowledgeable about all the possible ramifications of careless coaching. This material is not an exhaustive document nor is it comprehensive of every school or athletic situation. Most importantly, the NFHS does not authorize this information to be used as a substitute for legal advice.

During the past century, American interscholastic athletic programs have been improved and standardized through the implementation of numerous procedures and policies enacted to enhance the health and well-being of students. Many of these improvements have resulted from proactive thought and planning; however, a significant number have evolved because of litigation, contract arbitration, court decisions and educational laws. In this regard, in-depth risk assessments, focused staff orientations, and detailed hazard reduction plans have become the norm for interscholastic athletic programs.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL AND FEDERAL LAW FOUNDATIONS**

Gender discrimination in tax-funded educational programs was prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972. This law has had major implications for interscholastic athletics. Today, Title IX requires interscholastic athletic programs to demonstrate equity or substantive and continuous progress toward equity in all aspects of male and female athletic activities. Moreover, legal decisions have required schools to provide separate and comparable athletic teams for female athletes, or to provide an opportunity for girls to participate as members of boys teams when no similar opportunity is available for females.

## **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)**

The ADA requires public facilities and programs to make accommodations for an individual with a recognized disability unless the accommodation will create a fundamental alteration of a program, create an undue administrative burden, or is excessively costly. For interscholastic athletics, the five areas in which challenges are typically made are age cutoff (e.g., 19 years old), number of semesters of eligibility (6 or 8 semesters), medical conditions, transfer to receive the benefits of specialized instruction, and academic achievement.

Of these, the two most common areas of challenge are the age cutoff rule and number of semesters of eligibility. Some courts have held that special-needs students are eligible beyond the state's maximum in state high school association rule codes.

Courts have increasingly asked schools to grant eligibility to disabled students or show that a very thorough individual analysis has been conducted of the special education student's abilities if eligibility is denied. If the accommodation is to be denied, the school needs to demonstrate that the student's participation would have been potentially dangerous by virtue of maturity and mismatches or that the accommodation requests would have created a fundamental alteration of the game or would have caused undue hardship or expense.

## **DUE PROCESS**

For persons accused of wrongdoing, due process is a guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. Due process requires that students facing a serious consequence (e.g., potential loss of eligibility or long-term discipline), receives notice of the charges against them and have the opportunity for a hearing. Minor discipline cases may not require strict adherence to this principle. Legal challenges have been initiated and court precedents have been established for failure of athletic programs to:

- Publish and disseminate regulations.
- Inform alleged violators of specific charges.
- Provide evidence or witnesses to an alleged violation.
- Allow the accused a reasonable opportunity to be heard and/or to present extenuating evidence or witnesses.

- Apprise the accused of findings or judgments concerning an alleged violation within a reasonable time frame.
- Define an appeal process or allow the accused to appeal an adverse finding.

## **FREE EXPRESSION**

For the most part, the courts have chosen not to rule on athletic cases involving student speech or personal appearance. Participation is voluntary, and the courts have recognized that participation on a team entails limitation on speech, conduct or attire. However, two procedural matters are often examined specifically:

- Whether athletic policies have been disseminated to parents and students.
- Whether statements certifying comprehension of these policies have been executed by students and parents.

## **FREEDOM FROM UNREASONABLE SEARCH AND SEIZURE**

While this provision of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America has been rigorously protected during legal proceedings, schools have been held to a lower standard of scrutiny whenever school officials have had “reason to believe,” for example, that dangerous or illegal materials were stored in a school locker. The school administration’s obligation to protect other students from danger or to control illegal activities has provided a rationale for school locker searches under certain prescribed conditions. In addition, the courts have recognized that some more intensive searches (e.g., drug tests) are permissible in connection with activity programs.

## **ANTI-HARASSMENT ISSUES**

Issues of illegal harassment have moved from the workplace to all areas of everyday life. As a coach you will have extensive contact with students, faculty members, administrators and parents/guardians. Federal law prohibits harassment based on factors such as gender and race. It is important that you avoid even the appearance of impropriety with regard to your interaction with students, faculty members, administrators, parents/guardians and any other constituency groups with which you may have contact. Be careful what you say and avoid any physical contact that may be considered as inappropriate touching.

In addition, as a coach you will have the unique opportunity to serve as both a teacher and a mentor to the students. In this role, you should be attentive to any issues suspected or reported to you by students regarding areas such as abuse or physical or emotional health needs. If you have questions about how to address these issues, consult with your athletic director or principal.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Various federal and state laws protect confidential information relating to students. For example, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") contains strict guidelines regarding the confidentiality of certain "educational records," which include many records maintained by coaches and athletic directors. Similarly, a number of laws protect the confidentiality of certain medical information. As a coach you must take reasonable steps to safeguard and protect all confidential information in your possession, including educational records, health information, and basic contact information of the students, including, for example, home address, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers.

## **EQUAL TREATMENT/EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

All students must have equal access to athletic programs and opportunities or must be judged impartially and with similar criteria during their candidacy for an interscholastic athletic team. Cases alleging violation of this principle have been heard in federal and state courts when students have been excluded from athletic participation for violation of athletic or school policies. Generally, these complaints have not been sustained when rules have been clearly stipulated and widely promulgated and when the local school or school district appeals procedure has been clearly defined and exercised. It is important that you follow these various rules and guidelines where available, since failure to do so could suggest that decisions were being made for arbitrary or inappropriate reasons.

## **STATE LAW FOUNDATIONS**

While state educational laws typically mandate a "free and compulsory" education for elementary and secondary students, there is no similar mandate for compulsory sponsorship or participation in activity programs at any level. In addition, no state law guarantees the right of participation other than an opportunity for fair, impartial assessment during the period in which student activities are selected.

Local schools or school districts implement state and federal laws through the development of policies and regulations. While local policies cannot abridge the constitutional rights of participants, a number of state courts have issued judgments favorable to school administrators that might otherwise be considered unconstitutional in compulsory attendance settings. In support of athletic regulations, courts have upheld the following: participation is a privilege and not a right; there is a need for good order in the management of athletic programs; and there is a need to maintain health, safety and decorum in connection with athletic programs.

When unfavorable judgments have been issued against athletic administrators, and/or teacher/coaches, it has usually been because of due-process violations or unequal application of existing regulations. In this regard, due process is best served by distributing the regulations in the form of an athletic department student handbook. It is important that parents/guardians and students have access to the regulations and verify their comprehension of these same policies. It is suggested that as a minimum, policy handbooks for students and parents/guardians cover the following topics:

- Athletic department/program philosophy and objectives
- Eligibility regulations (state association and local school)
- Locker room and equipment regulations
- Transportation policy
- Rules concerning changing sports
- Vacation policy
- Conduct and grooming
- Discipline policy
- Appeals procedures
- Due process
- Awards
- Warning statement (a general statement for all students that is further elaborated with additional information issued by the teacher/coach)
- Student and parent/guardian comprehension statement

## **FOURTEEN OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO NEGLIGENCE LITIGATION**

Aggrieved students have sued coaches and school districts on the theory that coaches owe, and have breached the following duties:

- **Duty to Plan:** A coach must demonstrate awareness of the maturity, physical development and readiness of students with appropriate plans for instruction, conditioning and supervision.
- **Duty to Supervise:** A coach must be physically present, provide competent instruction, structure practices that are appropriate for the age and maturity of players, endeavor to prevent foreseeable injuries, and respond to injury or trauma in an approved manner. This requires supervisors to see that facilities are locked and that students are denied access when a competent staff member cannot be physically present to supervise. It may also require teacher/coaches to control reckless student behaviors.
- **Duty to Provide a Safe Environment:** Coaches are considered trained professionals who possess a higher level of knowledge and skill that permits them to identify foreseeable causes of injury inherent in defective indoor and outdoor facilities or hazardous environments.
- **Duty to Evaluate Injury/Incapacity:** Once participation in either practice or competition has begun, coaches have a duty to evaluate factors that impact the ability of a student to continue to perform without unreasonable risks of injury.
- **Duty to Provide Safe Equipment:** Courts have held athletic supervisors responsible for improving unsafe environments, repairing or removing defective equipment, or disallowing students' access.
- **Duty to Teach Properly:** Athletic practices must be characterized by instruction that accounts for a logical sequence of fundamentals that lead to an enhanced progression of student knowledge, skill, and capability.
- **Duty to Condition Properly:** Practices must account for a progression of cardiovascular and muscular-skeletal conditioning regimens that prepare students sequentially for more challenging practices and competitive activities.

- **Duty to Warn:** Coaches are required to warn parents/guardians and students of unsafe practices specific to a sport and the potential for injury or death. This warning should be issued in writing and both students and parents/guardians should be required to provide written certification of their comprehension.
- **Duty to Provide Emergency Care:** A coach is expected to be able to administer standard emergency care (first aid, CPR) in response to a range of foreseeable injuries.
- **Duty to Design an Emergency Response Plan:** A coach must have a plan available for prompt response by emergency medical services.
- **Duty to Select, Train, and Supervise Coaches:** Administrators and, possibly, head coaches, have the responsibility to ensure that appropriate skill and knowledge levels exist among members of the coaching staff to provide appropriate levels of training and care among students.
- **Duty to Match/Equate Athletes:** Coaches have the responsibility to minimize risks by matching students for participation based on criteria such as size, strength, ability, age, and experience.
- **Duty to Provide Safe Transportation:** Coaches need to adopt a plan that will provide appropriate transport for students. As stated above, coaches must always follow the school district transportation policy.
- **Duty to Provide Insurance Disclosure:** Athletic personnel must provide clear and accurate information with regard to the extent of insurance coverage provided to the students or lack thereof.

## **FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF NEGLIGENCE LITIGATION**

In order to prove negligence, a plaintiff must demonstrate tangible injury and/or loss and prove that the supervisor(s) of an activity or program:

- Had a duty that was owed to the plaintiff
- Breached (failed to perform) the duty through commission of a dangerous act or omission of a required supervisory responsibility
- Was the proximate cause of an injury
- Caused actual loss or damage

## **DEFENSES AGAINST NEGLIGENCE LITIGATION**

- A defendant had no supervisory responsibility for the circumstances related to the loss.
- Public policy may exempt a school supervisor from litigation or damages through enactment of immunity legislation.
- The proximate cause of injury or loss cannot be directly attributed to the duties or performance of a supervisor.
- The injury resulted from an unforeseeable event or factor (no negligence).
- The injured student accepts (assumes) a certain degree of risk by participating in sports programs.
- The student contributed totally or partially to his/her injury by ignoring prohibited actions.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **Athletic Triangle:**

Student at the apex supported by parents and coach at the base of the triangle.

### **Coaching Philosophy:**

The road map of your coaching life that represents your beliefs, principles, opinions and values about coaching.

### **Developmentally Appropriate:**

An activity that is commensurate with the ability and maturity of the student.

### **Educational Athletics:**

An approach to athletics that stresses learning and considers sport as a vehicle to supplement and reinforce lessons learned in the classroom.

### **Education-based Activity Programs:**

Outside the regular academic curriculum. May include band, athletics, theater, speech and debate.

### **Interscholastic Athletics:**

For the purpose of the present course interscholastic athletics refers to sport competition between schools in grades 6-12.

### **Learning Objective:**

A brief, clear statement of what the student-athlete should be able to do as a result of the experience.

### **Student-centered Coaching Philosophy:**

A philosophical approach to coaching that has as its primary goal the holistic development of each student. The approach recognizes that the student is an active participant in the process.

### **Teachable Moment:**

A moment of educational opportunity when a person is likely to be particularly disposed to learn something or particularly responsive to being taught or made aware of something.

## ENDNOTES

### UNIT 1

- <sup>i</sup> Title IX, Educational Amendments of 1972.
- <sup>ii</sup> Gerdy, 2000.
- <sup>iii</sup> Mahiri, 1998.
- <sup>iv</sup> Braddock et al, 1991.
- <sup>v</sup> Coakley, 2004.
- <sup>vi</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>vii</sup> Jackson is also the NBA's career leader in playoff victories and playoff winning percentage, along with winning nine NBA titles (tying Red Auerbach for the most all-time).
- <sup>viii</sup> *The Competitive Ethos and Democratic Education.*
- <sup>ix</sup> Ommundsen et al., 2003.
- <sup>x</sup> Evert holds 18 Grand Slam singles titles, including a record 7 at the French Open; 3 Grand Slam doubles titles; her career win-loss record in singles matches of 1,309-146 (.900) is the best of any professional player in tennis history.

### UNIT 2

- <sup>xi</sup> John Donne (1572–1631) was an English clergyman and poet.
- <sup>xii</sup> Powell and Barber-Foss, 1999.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Cheng, Fields, Brenner, et al., 2000.