

## *Chapter 7*

### **Some Practical Considerations in the Management of Youth Sport Programs**

#### **Introduction**

In some instances, it may be impossible for the people who conduct youth programs to separate their coaching duties from their management obligations. Some do a little. Some do it all. It depends, in part, on the number of helpers and how the program has been designed. There are some administrative areas where coaches and parents have little or no direct interest or contact. Some of the topics to be presented in this chapter may fall in this latter category. These areas are basic to the sport setting and include: cheerleading; officiating; legal concerns that relate to the safety of the players; and the relationship between youth programs in the community and school physical education. The purpose of this chapter, from a management perspective, is to introduce or reaffirm how these influences contribute to and shape the total picture of sport for youth.

#### **Defusing And Redefining Cheerleading**

Cheerleading is one of the more predictable problem areas in sport. In addition to internal conflicts about personalities, selection procedures and rating biases, many people outside of the activity consider it to be a sexist indulgence that exploits femininity. At the same time, it is a traditional facet of sport both for males and females. Some people argue that cheerleading should be abolished. At one end of the spectrum, it is regarded as nothing more than beauty and popularity contests for those high in local social circles. At the opposite extreme, cheerleading is considered a rigorous activity with demands for skill, strength and endurance comparable to any sport activity, and exceeding many by far.

Our traditional social conscience reminds us that cheerleading is for girls and sport is for boys. Neither view can be sustained today. In fact, when we look at the early periods of basketball and cheerleading, we find that basketball was predominantly an activity for girls and cheerleading was for boys and young men. So much for fleeting traditions. Cheerleading is based on skills that can be developed both by females and males. However, the skills can take different forms. Basketball for girls has characteristics that distinguish it from basketball for boys. The same can be noted about floor exercise in gymnastics, ice skating, and bowling. Capitalize on those differences. When cheerleading is based on skills that can be developed by girls and by boys, it would seem that there would be little room to criticize or regard it as a sexist activity.

The primary purpose of cheerleading appears to have been lost here and there due to personal conflicts, organizational squabbles, and the heat of competition. Cheerleaders were formed to cheer, teach cheers to others, lead cheering for their side, develop fan support, encourage the players, and lead all participants in good displays

of sportsmanship. (sic, sportpersonship?) Cheerleaders were not developed to titillate the viewers with displays of beauty and personality as is common in Revenue Sports. Cheerleaders exist to generate unity of purpose and positive energy for the team, club and school.

Here are two examples that illustrate how cheering has become secondary to other matters. The first case involved a military base. Youngsters can misbehave, complain and be obstinate at practice. One young girl was this way. She was scolded and reprimanded, but went home and told her mother. Mother told father. Daddy was an officer. In this case, Daddy “pulled rank,” not on the coach but on the husband of the coach. The husband was punished for what his coach/wife said to the young cheerleader. Therefore, coaches had to be very careful how they “coached” the kids for fear of reprisals. Similar situations can develop within other organizations where well-defined job hierarchies and social positions exist.

In a second case, a group of mothers wanted to withdraw from a county-wide basketball program. They wanted to develop an “in-house” or intramural league that would create more participation for the players. A second group of mothers was opposed to this plan. The second group, as it turned out, were the mothers of the cheerleaders. They believed that if they withdrew into an in-house league that did not travel, their daughters would receive insufficient practice and exposure around the county. This would hurt the girls’ chances of being selected for the junior and senior high cheerleading squads later. Cheerleading was more important to these mothers than was the sport participation of the boys and girls in the league. In each case, a primary purpose of sport was challenged in order to achieve more individual goals. In the latter case, more players would be synonymous with more teams, a greater need for cheerleaders, and more opportunity to learn to cheer. Learning to cheer is like learning to shoot. There must be ample opportunity to practice in order to develop skill.

The following suggestions are offered for those people who are involved in primary or secondary roles with cheerleading. Perhaps they will reduce or eliminate some of the more difficult problems that detract from developing well skilled cheerleaders.

1. Remove cheerleading from the realm of beauty pageant and popularity contest. Do not confuse these two activities. Consider, if you must, establishing a group of “pretty people” who are selected for their looks and personality. Then, form other units composed of people who are selected for their desire and ability to learn to cheer, as well as other such relevant criteria.
2. Recruit males for cheer groups with displays and demonstrations by male cheerleaders and gymnast-type persons.
3. Open the doors for 100% participation and eliminate tryout and selection procedures. Let all participate who wish to try.

4. Form as many teams as required with no "bench people" or "reserves."
5. Conduct regular sessions so youngsters have many opportunities to practice and learn the basic skills of cheering.
6. Form elite or select travel squads if you must, but do not do it at the expense of denying participation to the other youngsters.
7. Have regular cheerleading contests. Do away with the one big gala contest. This will reduce the importance of being selected and doing well in the one big opportunity to show their stuff. The greater the number of contests, the lesser will be the value of a single contest, not to mention conflict.
8. Develop cheerleading activities that can exist without sport action. Give cheerleading a reason to exist by itself. These other primary activities of cheerleading might include: weekly cheer contests, exchange contests, mass demonstrations within a league or a confined geographic area, exhibitions without judging, appearances at special events and everyday activities, and camps and clinics where the older players teach the basic skills to the younger players.
9. Coordinate the cheer and sport groups through youth representatives from each group. These youngsters see one another frequently in school activities and elsewhere. They can work together with their coaches to plan activities for mutual benefits.
10. Establish coordinating bodies among cheer, sport and parent groups.

Cheerleading should be a positive activity for youth when it is conducted for girls and boys. Conflict can be reduced by de-emphasizing the value of being one among a chosen few. Increase the size of the total group and the opportunities to learn about cheering, just as has been suggested with the sport programs. Create more teams. Bring more people into cheering. Teach the youngsters how to cheer and how to get others to cheer. Then create a variety of activities that permit cheerleading to stand on its own, separate from the sport activities. Do not overlook the obvious. Cheerleaders can form their own sport teams along with the other players. If they cannot get inspired or "psyched up" for that, then perhaps they do not want to be cheerleaders. For more information about cheerleading, contact:

International Cheerleading Foundation  
4425 Indian Creek Parkway  
Overland Park, KS 66207  
Telephone 913 649-3666

National Cheerleaders Association  
PO Box 30674

Dallas, TX 75230  
Telephone 214 231-2198

Young Cheerleaders of America  
886 Anita Avenue  
Antioch, IL 60002  
Telephone 312 395-7400

## **About Referees, Umpires, Officials, And Judges**

There is perhaps nothing more difficult in sport than making instant decisions about the fast-paced, intricate, and sometimes obscure movements of highly mobile players under the “watchful eyes” of their deeply interested mentors and fans. When referees make judgments, action stops for all to see. Few people command such instant attention. Regardless of the skill level of the players and coaches, referees are expected to be perfect. The following saying best explains their dilemma:

Referees and umpires are the only people who are expected  
to be perfect the first time and then improve after that.

Referees are given no room for error. They cannot hide when they err. Even when they are correct, their performance is passed off as “they are just doing their job.” More often than not, however, when their calls are perfect, one-half of the participants and fans may disagree with or dispute the decision. When referees are outstanding, they are ignored. This, in fact, can be the best compliment an official can receive. The better referees prefer to go unnoticed - - to be as inconspicuous as possible during the contests.

Here are some ways that the sport life of officials can be made merrier, or at least more placid. The first suggestion of merit is to eliminate the striped shirt. It has become a signal for criticism. Provide game officials with neutral colored shirts - - gray or brown.

Officials themselves should take steps to establish identities for themselves with the participants, both in the game and away from the court. They must be viewed more than just the judge, jury, and executioner. Similar problems may develop with other people who are seen in only one role - - coach or director or catcher. This expanded view can be developed through various league councils, programs, formal and informal meetings, and other non-sport activities.

A humorous undercurrent in league meetings may cast referees in an unfavorable light. This, in itself, is not bad, but it may lead to undesirable actions when people become serious. League supervisors can help keep the reputation of officials within respectable limits with their supporting comments. Good teachers do this when students pick on their less able classmates.

In some instances, we create bad images of referees unintentionally. Think of a young player who returns to the bench angry or in tears about an official's call. Do we pat the child on the back and blame the referee or do we explain the situation? When we blame the officials to pacify the players, we have a good example of how kids can learn the wrong things. This is an illustration of what players catch in the "informal sport curriculum" that is unplanned, undesirable, and unhealthy.

Officials need also to be on guard against their biases. As with coaches and players, officials have certain biases or tendencies. Among beginners and other unskilled players, they may loosen their interpretation of the rules so that the game can go on. This is fine. However, they tend also to see the better players in a more favorable light, a halo effect. Consequently, in sports like gymnastics and diving, players with "good reputations" may receive higher marks than those with "less favorable credentials," even when the latter group does better. This is subjective judgment by officials based on what they expect to happen, not what does happen. Officials, like the rest of us, must guard against seeing what is not there and ignoring what is. Rose colored glasses can be blinders just as the eye of the camera can limit what can be seen. (Curry and Clarke. 1977)

This type of perspective bias was seen in a tour of a juvenile detention center. It was apparent that many of the teenage boys there were not handsome, cute or preppy. Many, if not most of the boys there were unkempt, blotchy, unsmiling, and generally unattractive. It made one wonder how many of these boys found themselves in trouble because they were unattractive and were treated like undesirable people. Our perceptions and expectations can dictate how we are going to respond to people. We can all look more carefully, filter our thoughts, and see what is, not what appears to be.

There are a number of things that league directors can do to take the pressure off of the game officials. They can reduce the intensity of fan involvement by developing sportsmanship plans mentioned previously. They can do away with scoreboards and time clocks, put coaches in the stands so the kids can play, and reduce the rewards so they are not more important than the game itself. These are radical ideas in the traditional sport system, but done commonly in youth sport activities.

Another series of options, most in use somewhere, include using coaches, older players and college students as referees, allowing the players to referee, and teams providing their own referees. Of course, the elimination of referees is possible as was done in volleyball some time back. In some programs, the supervisors, coaches, and referees rotate from position to position daily or weekly. The adults may not be able to handle this, but the kids will adjust rapidly to it, and with little difficulty.

The officiating picture may seem still incomplete. Local youth programs might consider forming an associations of officials and coaches. It might best be formed as a joint association. This would establish avenues of communications and understanding plus mutual help without creating new barriers to cooperative action.

Within this association, a training program could be established to present rules, basic skills or mechanics, practice sessions and study sessions. The association could be opened to anyone, regardless of age, and might even lead to formal certification. Here are the primary skills that will help officials be more prepared to perform their role in sport competently and effectively. See Table 7-1.

*Table 7-1*  
**THE BASIC SKILLS OF OFFICIATING**

1. Study and know the rules. There is no substitute for this.
2. Put yourself in good position to see the play. Among the elements that this requires are: be in good physical condition so you can run with the players; attempt to be always at a 90 degree angle to the play; anticipate where the play is going to need careful attention; be stationary when making decisions; and move, move, move.
3. Practice the signals and offer to work scrimmage and practice matches with the players in pre-season activities.
4. Know where the ball is and where action will occur.
5. Be definite and firm with whistle and hand signals.
6. Call what you actually see. Remember, it is nothing until you call it.
7. Be inconspicuous. Let the game develop its own flow or character. Do not incite the participants and fans with flagrant, disapproving body language and gestures.
8. Communicate with the participants. Control the game through what you will allow the players and coaches to do. Do not allow the game and its participants to control you. Set the standards for play. Tell the participants what is unacceptable and acceptable.
9. When in doubt, stop, talk, review, decide, then make the call. Then tell everyone.
10. Keep scorers informed about all calls and decisions.
11. Do not try to even up or balance out an erroneous call. Change them if you can. Forget them if you cannot change them.
12. Introduce yourself to supervisors, coaches and players.
13. Inspect the players for hazardous jewelry and long finger nails. Inspect the facilities and equipment for safe maintenance.

14. Encourage the players to hustle in order to keep the action moving.
15. Help. For young players, be a teacher on the court and field to help them learn how to play properly.
16. Be neat and clean in appearance.
17. Be in control of yourself. Remain calm and cool.
18. Be consistent. Games develop according to what you allow and disallow.
19. Ignore 90% of what you hear, particularly if it comes from the fans.
20. Enjoy officiating. Help others enjoy the game, match or contest.

*NOTE: For more information about officiating, contact: National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) 1 700 North Main Street, Racine, WI 54302, Telephone 414 632-5448; Referee magazine, P.O. Box 161, Franklinville, WI 53126. Telephone 414 632-8855; and your state affiliate with the National Federation of State High School Associations, 11724 Plaza Circle, P.O. Box 20626, Kansas City, MO 64195, Telephone 816 464-5400; National Association for Girls and Women in Sport, 1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091. 703 476-3450.*

Clinics for officials help raise their skill level. The learning progression for officials would involve study, followed by practice matches. Then, new recruits would work contests with more skilled officials. Finally, they would begin working with new classes of beginners. As always, constant review and study must occur. Table 7-2, provides some suggested content material for officials clinics.

*Table 7-2*  
**GENERAL CONTENT FOR OFFICIALS' CLINICS**

Invite all officials, coaches, players and parents

Conduct study sessions

- Philosophy of youth sport
- Rules study
- Film and video analysis of situations
- Written tests
- Game and match protocol, control

Active practice sessions

- Practice common signals
- Demonstration of common situations
  - Gaining an advantage
  - Putting another at a disadvantage

## Unsafe play

### Scrimmage games and matches

- Observe and critique in person and at televised events
- Officiate with partner

Officiate regular matches with experienced partners

### Review

- Rules - - weekly
- Study sessions periodically during season
- Prior to each new season Officials begin peer training

Officials begin peer training

Game officials, like players and coaches, want to enjoy the youth sport experience. Perhaps we have overlooked this idea. The cooperative action of all participants, including officials, allows everyone to make their own contributions to youth. Help the officials help others enjoy the game. match or contest.

## Legal concerns

The legal concerns of youth sport are a bit less complex than those of other sport enterprises. In Revenue Sport, all personnel are usually highly trained and carefully selected for their positions through rigorous and competitive search procedures. Sport businesses (e.g., pools, rinks, tennis and bowling center, skateboard and water slide parks, and similar proprietary concerns) and youth service agencies rely frequently on professionally prepared staff members. These professionals are held to rigid standards of performance. Voluntary youth personnel, in contrast, are held to different and less strict standards because they are volunteers and untrained.

Nevertheless, youth sport people should be aware of matters concerning legal liability. Liability is a responsibility to another. People who do not fulfill their responsibility or obligation, frequently find themselves drawn into the legal area of liability and negligence. Negligence is the failure to perform or carry out a legal duty, liability or act, with common sense. Negligence is summarized most frequently as: "the failure to act as a reasonably prudent and careful person would under the circumstances."

After reviewing how objectives were formed earlier in this book, we can see that this "standard" is full of holes. It means that there is a lot of "inferring and interpreting" when the legal system gets down to applying the definition to the situation in question in the court room.

Rather than go into a long legal discussion that, in the end will be inadequate and confusing, let us refer readers to any legal text on sport by Herb Appenzeller (1980,

1983) or Borkowski (1991). This section will be concluded with these simple guidelines for coaches. When followed, they can prevent legal problems from arising. More importantly, however, they will guard the safety and welfare of the participants, coaches and other leaders on the fields of play. These guidelines should be reviewed regularly in all preseason meetings and coaches clinics.

**Instruct.** Instruct or teach the players the proper and legal skills of the games. Teaching skills that are known to be improper or illegal is difficult to defend.

**Warn.** Warn the players of the hazards in the activity, present safety suggestions, and stop the activity when the safety of the players is in jeopardy.

**Be Present.** Do not leave the players unsupervised while you return to the car for something forgotten or to run to the corner store to buy some ice or make a telephone call. Be physically present when the players are scheduled to be under your supervision.

**Insure.** Most professionals are covered by some type of liability insurance through their membership societies and associations. Volunteers may have some insurance under the “recreational pursuits” section of their home owners or renters insurance. Review your policy. Note however, that the medical profession has fluctuated on the purchase of separate liability insurance. The reason! Insurance prompts people to file law suits. The doctors have found that if there is no insurance, there are fewer suits. This same logic may exist in the youth sport for volunteers.

Untrained volunteer coaches and directors may be judged by the legal system when brought to trial, by standards different from those imposed on professionally trained educators and sports people. This does not mean that volunteers can disregard liability. It does appear, however, that the public is less likely to bring suits against volunteers for actions that would find trained sport personnel in litigation.

Other actions can enhance the quality of the program, protect the players and the adult leaders, and divert any attempts to bring suits against youth sport organizations and its personnel. They include:

1. conduct training programs for league administrators, coaches, officials and players.
2. supervise all activities.
3. equalize the level of play within leagues to prevent mismatches in size and skill level.
4. inspect equipment and facilities regularly and make needed repairs.

5. keep written records of complaints, actions and disposition of all organizational matters.
6. arrange for medical personnel to be present or on call for all activities.
7. treat everyone with dignity and respect.
8. do not exclude youngsters because of the actions of parents.
9. avoid physical punishment as a disciplinary strategy.
10. have written procedures that are commonly known by all participants.
11. avoid modeling after the Revenue Sports programs.

Youngsters and their parents want safe sport experiences conducted with dignity and fairness. The lessons to be gained from sport, if any, need to be established through the positive influences of one human being on another. This would appear to be reasonably prudent action.

### **The Youth Sport-Physical Education Relationship**

Some people feel that there is no need for school physical education programs where highly visible community sport programs exist. This is not the case, except where the physical education programs are of the type referred to as “throw out the ball” programs. In comparing community and school programs, it should be recognized that community programs are pointed toward those who elect to participate. This excludes many, by choice. In many other cases, youngsters are denied participation because their skill level is poor. This occurs even at the teenage level. Many teenage players are so well skilled that the older beginners cannot match up with them in the same leagues.

Professionally trained physical education teachers conduct sound instructional programs based on teaching movement and sport skills in an orderly and systematic progression, year to year. Good programs of physical education are designed and presented for all students in the schools. They offer a variety of sport experiences to boys and girls, gifted and not gifted, fast and slow. The activities are presented in developmental sequences and build upon what has been learned in previous lessons. Goals include learning new skills, lifetime participation, biological fitness, and progress in a variety of activities regardless of skill level of the students.

Youth sport and physical education, as similar as they may appear to some people, are pointed toward different goals. Community programs tend to focus on a narrow range of activities for those most skilled. Physical education, like other school programs, provides students with basic instruction in a variety of sport, physical activity, and movement skills. Both programs can exist independently or they can help one another. Elementary school teachers can give their students good movement skills.

Community programs can provide those who wish, the opportunities to play against others of equal ability. For those who do not participate in community programs though, the physical education programs are where they will acquire their lifetime sport skills. Professional educators and concerned citizens should urge that strong instructional programs of physical education be available for all students, without exception. Good instructional activities are what all school programs should emphasize.

## **Summary**

Cheerleading and officiating are sometimes regarded as peripheral activities, except on game day. Then people who may never speak with one another come together as though they have been the closest of allies. Frequently, this is not the case. Better relationships and programming can occur when youth leaders conduct their activities jointly for the youngsters. At the same time, players can be spared from injury and leaders saved from claims of negligence by adhering to the basic principles of good supervision.

Community sport and school physical education are different forms of sport. They have different goals and different clients. One is voluntary. the other is compulsory. One is selective, the other is for everyone. One is specific, the other is general. Mothers and fathers as well as community leaders should assure themselves that a good community sport program is not considered the same as a good school physical education program. Each has its place in the scheme of things. Both are necessary. Both are good for the kids.