

**PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

Champion Coach Note

Educating and Forming Champion Coaches

Hazing

To many a team is just a group of males or females who come together to compete, their value measured by wins and losses. Play Like a Champion partners know that this view misses the point: the true value in a team lies in its ability to promote the development and well-being of its members, as well as fostering a moral community for all participants. In fact, our research shows a team may be among the very best environments in which we can teach young people to be self-giving rather than self-gratifying, to think of the well-being of their peers before their own. The moral character practiced in a team transfers into the everyday lives of its members. Therefore, a truly successful team is not one that wins every game, rather, it is one that instills these values. An athlete should be able to think of his/her teammates as friends and sometimes even family.



Unfortunately, not every team becomes such a nourishing and healthy community. The potential for community is sometimes squandered by ill will and hurtful “traditions.” Adolescent athletes in particular struggle with issues related to *hazing* on teams that should be havens of positive peer interaction and growth, as issues have become all too common at high schools and universities. Hazing is defined as “any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of you to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate.” By its very definition it is meant to degrade and humiliate. So while upperclassmen may see it as a rite of passage or a bonding opportunity that will make them a stronger team, in truth the hazers are abusing those who would much prefer to trust and admire them.



Research has shown that while only 14% of high school students reported they were hazed, 48% of all high school students reported being subjected to hazing activities (Alfred University). Some young people find it hard to distinguish between what is appropriate and what isn't. Without being prompted by a list of hazing activities, many youth did not even consider themselves to be hazed. This is problematic and revealing. Coaches themselves often dismiss certain behaviors as harmless even when those behaviors cultivate a negative team culture and are actually considered hazing activities. These oversights or misunderstandings detract from the relationships and values a team and its members should build with each other. When victims, bystanders, coaches, and parents fail to recognize the negative ramifications of hazing and do not intervene it becomes a pervasive and accepted activity when it shouldn't be.

In order to build the kind of moral community that generates self-giving and virtuous individuals:

- Establish a positive tradition to welcome new members to your team that inspires a brotherhood and sisterhood among teammates rather than fear.
- Coaches work together with your team to establish firm principles that athletes will uphold. Expectations for behavior in the locker room, at practice, at school, after practice and on the weekends should be decided upon as a team, clearly stated ensuring all team members buy into the principles.
- Teams should decide upon a team consequence if principles are not adhered to.
- Teams should also be given a particular virtue or trait to focus on either weekly or for that season as well as outside of practices and games (examples: teamwork, respect, compassion, patience).

It is important that these lessons not be limited to just the team, but should flow into athlete's day-to-day actions as well. Champion teams are moral communities.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. ~ Hebrews 10:24-25

Join us for our Spring Webinar!

Join us for our spring webinar on ***Recognizing, Addressing and Preventing Bullying in Sports*** on **Thursday, April 11 at 12:30 to 1:30 pm EDT**. According to the Department of Health & Human Services, over 77% of students have been bullied either verbally, mentally, or physically. All students, including athletes, can fall victim to bullying and hazing, leading to lower self-worth, isolation, anxiety and depression. Athletes can also be the bully on a sport team. This webinar will define bullying and discuss what it may look like on a sport team. We will identify ways of recognizing this toxic behavior and how to address it as a coach or administrator. Click the link to register now for FREE!



Register Now for the Spring Webinar!

A Coach's Prayer



Lord, help me to be for these children a model of faith and love. Through my words and actions, may I show them what it means to be a Christian and how to live that faith through participation in sports. May they know love through my caring for them personally and taking the time to help them grow in skill and virtue. Help me to be truly humble, that I might not be tempted by the pressure to win or to coach for my own sake, but always strive to do what is best for those you have entrusted to my care. Grant me the graces I need to help each of these children reach their absolute best in sport and in life, and give me the strength to remain steadfast in this commitment through the days and weeks to come. Amen.

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