

CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION **A COACH'S PRIMER ON SUPERVISION**

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"Coaches differ from most other professionals in the way they must handle their role as supervisors."

That's according to Dr. Richard P. Borkowski, a sports-safety expert and director of athletics at the Episcopal Academy, Merion, P.A. "Our legal system sometimes takes a different view of what is or is not proper supervision in the coaching world," he adds. "Many coaches may think supervision is a piece of cake, but that's not the case."

He points to the following "deviations" from proper supervision and advises on ways to deal with them:

- * Not being there. "You are in a no-win situation if you are not present when a player is injured," Dr. Borkowski says.
- * Failing to control the situation. "Being there is only the start. You are there, but shooting the breeze with the opposing coach as "horseplay" occurs around the shot-put area often results in an injury. I've seen a coach get into trouble for failing to wear a whistle, based on the theory that the sound of the whistle would of prevented an injury to a player who used a football blocking sled without wearing his helmet."
- * Lacking a knowledge in the activity you are supervising. "You're a great basketball coach. Are you qualified to cover a practice for the sick swim coach?"
- * Not being taught how to supervise. "Think about it. Has anyone actually taught you the best place to stand or how to rotate when coaching? Where do you spot for the "Banzai" flip off the balance beam? Take time at your next meeting to review the art of supervision."
- * Being distracted. "A well-intentioned coach was supervising a physical-education softball game when a girl from his tennis team asked for advice. As the coach helped his player, a batter, not wearing a helmet at the time, was hit in the head. The coach was not aware of what happened, because he was helping another student."
- * Lacking concentration on matters at hand. "When you are in charge, be in charge. Nothing is more important, at the moment, than those people you have accepted responsibility for...period!"
- * Failing to understand progression. "You must not only know the activity; you must know how to teach the activity. Going all out with a full-field scrimmage on the first day of lacrosse practice is not reasonable."
- * Failing to have an emergency plan in case of a problem. "We all know the procedure, right?"

- * Failing to have correct ratio of supervisors to those being supervised. "There is, of course, no correct ratio. That figure will always depend on the activity, the experience of the participants, and the coach. Society and some of our textbook-writing colleagues have attempted to select magic numbers. We must educate society and some of our colleagues."
- * Supervising activities that you should not be supervising. "Ax throwing was a listed activity in a 1925 sports for children textbook. Bungee jumping might find its way into someone's future curriculum guide. But, on balance, we can offer less hazardous activities that are as beneficial."
- * Not practicing post-accident supervision. "Accidents will happen. We must know what to do when someone is injured. We must establish, we must have, and we must know the emergency plan."
- * Not keeping records. "Write it down. Keep track of everything. This helps you improve your program and demonstrates your credibility. You demonstrate your vigilance."

Concludes Dr. Borkowski, "If you remain aware of the above points, you get an "A" in Sports Supervision 101. Better than that, you lower your risk of lawsuit.