

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SPORTS NEWS

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ACTIVE & ACTIVATE

Church Sports gives meaning to two words that are common in LDS Culture, but with an interesting double meaning; “Active” and “Activate.” Not only can Church Sports help get physically inactive members to lead healthier lifestyles, it can also provide a “no threat” opportunity to invite our neighbors and friends who *are not* members of the church, or those who *are* members but do not actively participate, to enjoy the fellowship of the saints in ongoing activities.

Quite simply, Church sports can touch every single member of the church in a positive way and even enliven existing programs. As Elder Merrill J. Bateman wrote in an official communication to stake presidents, “President Thomas S Monson and President James E. Faust counseled that activities are very important in the lives of many of our members and nonmembers, and that the Church should continue to have activities on a stake multi-stake basis.”

It is the purpose of this newsletter to encourage stake presidents and bishops to support an “active” program of healthy sports programs for their members.

300,000 MISSIONARIES IN SLC

Okay, we misstated. It’s more than that. But we can’t document all of them since not all Church sponsored sports events get reported. But we do know that at least 300,000 people in the Salt Lake City Area participated in one of **36** Church sponsored sports (not events – actual different sports) in 2006. And each of them had the chance to ask a friend, a neighbor, or a fellow member to come participate.

Consider: Do you find your throat getting tight when it’s time to ask the “golden question?” Do you fear the reaction of an inactive home teaching family to a well-meaning invitation to come to church on Sunday? If so, try asking a different question and see if it isn’t a lot easier. Like this one – “John, we’re starting a SOFTBALL team and would love to have you play with us on Tuesdays.” Or, “Hank, I know it sounds a little odd, but we’re having a HORSESHOE tournament and I need a partner.” Or, one of the easiest of all, “Marty, would you like to play in a GOLF foursome with me?”

What members find is that this invitation takes hardly any courage at all. And when a non-member finds himself spending four hours on the golf-course with members of the church he or she is bound to learn a little bit about us. They feel the spirit that accompanies those who believe in the gospel and who try to live their lives accordingly. While not every non-member who enjoys Church Sports will show an immediate interest in learning more about the gospel, they will feel a closer kinship to the members of their team – and isn’t that a major part of the gospel story? Isn’t that the best type of missionary work there is – to know us for who we are?

THE STAKE PRESIDENT WHO DOESN’T LIKE BASKETBALL

Actually, this one could be titled, “the Area Sports Communications Director who doesn’t like basketball.” In my case, ‘doesn’t like’ is too strong – I do enjoy seeing other people play basketball, but it’s just not for me. Unfortunately, many of us tend to impose our own likes and dislikes on

others. If basketball, or another Church sponsored sport, isn't personally satisfying to a leader, then it's difficult for that leader to appreciate the role it can play in the lives of others. Yet, more than 90,000 men and young men, women and young women, did find satisfaction in church basketball last year, as just one example. Just imagine that – 90,000 people spending time on a church basketball court with friends and neighbors, rather than propped up at home in front of the television, including youth who would otherwise be surfing the internet or out on the street without supervision.

It seems like a good return on the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on Church cultural halls in this valley to keep them occupied and busy with, to name a few: Basketball; Volleyball; Dodge ball; Futsal; Table Tennis; and Aerobics. That's just 6 of 36 Church Sponsored sports. Most of the others are played outside the chapel, like: Golf; Softball; Tennis; Flag Football; 5K Run/Walk; Hiking; Horseshoes; Swimming; Soccer; Biking; Track; Skeet Shooting; Skiing; Snowboarding. Now we're up to 19. Watch future newsletters for the other seventeen Church sponsored sports.

The point is, Church Sports is much more than the traditional "Big 3" of Softball, Basketball, and Volleyball – as popular as those three sports are. There really is something for everyone.

By the way, this isn't a random list. It is a list of actual sports sponsored by real stakes in the Salt Lake City Area. The turnout is phenomenal, when given modest encouragement by Priesthood Leaders. Have you asked your Stake and Ward Activities Committees to survey your units to find out what activities your members would like to participate in?

TWO ELEMENTS OF CONVERSION

Elder Michael Holmes, Area Seventy, teaches that conversion involves two distinct elements: spiritual conversion, which is the province of the Holy Ghost, and; social transition, which requires new members to be integrated into the ward and stake family.

While the Holy Ghost is extremely effective in bringing about spiritual conversion, experience teaches that it's sometimes very difficult for new members to abandon unproductive ties to old friends and to form new friendships that support their conversion experience.

That's where Church Sports comes in for many new members. Elder Holmes has personal experience in this regard since, as a young man growing up in a home where his parents were not active in the church, it was the Sports program that kept him fellowshiping with other young men who lived Church standards.

Even so, in later life he too had drifted from the church. Fortunately, a wise bishop asked Elder Holmes to coach a young men's softball team. Because he had been coached by less active men as a youth, he felt comfortable in accepting this modest contact with the church, even though he wasn't ready to go to church on Sundays. In time, however, he valued his association with the boys enough that he began to conform his life to church practices and principles, eventually accepting the invitation to come back to full fellowship. In other words, all the blessings of the gospel that have come to Elder Holmes and his family are, in part, a result of Church Sports. His case is far from unique. Church Sports truly does offer a unique, non-threatening way for the Church to be inclusive and welcoming to friends and members alike.

GET ACTIVE

We hope you've enjoyed this initial look at Salt Lake City Area Sports. In our next newsletter we'll interview a sports officiator to get tips on how to maintain good sportsmanship at Church sponsored events as well as stories from stakes who have implemented non-traditional sports that have lifted members and increased missionary work and reactivation efforts.

We'd love to hear about your successes as well. Please contact Jerry Borrowman, Salt Lake City Area Communications Director at jerryborrowman@hotmail.com or by phone at 571-9258.