

SPORTS NEWS

April 2008 – Newsletter of the **Utah Salt Lake City Area Sports**

SPORTSMANSHIP AND OFFICIATING

Human beings are competitive – it makes life interesting and exciting. And since an upcoming sporting event is one of the few activities left in life where the outcome isn't known in advance, (like in movies and television) it creates curiosity and intrigue. Done right, a well managed sporting event can create a fun afternoon or evening that builds great character traits including athletic prowess, physical fitness, and teamwork. Most of all, it can be an enjoyable way to fellowship with ward members and friends.

But competition can also lead to misunderstandings and the loss of good temper. Aggravated fans can become hostile and abusive. Players can lose control and say things they later regret, or even become physically threatening and intimidating. The good spirit that should be present at all Church sponsored events can quickly be marred by such behavior.

Some Priesthood Leaders indicate that their most serious concern with Church Sports is the potential for wounded feelings and non-Christlike behavior that comes from poor sportsmanship, along with the resulting hurt feelings and animosity that builds barriers between people, rather than bringing them closer together.

That's why this issue of the *Sports News* is dedicated to expressing ways to maintain control in Church Sports so that everyone feels that they are treated fairly and that their team had every opportunity to compete on an even basis with their competitors. As you might suspect, it starts with well trained officials and coaches who exercise personal restraint and who earn the

respect of their players. To learn how to do that we interviewed two individuals who are professional referees and who are also responsible for training Area officials to be successful in their callings: Kae Strong, Area Officials Coordinator and Thayne Gooch, Wasatch Division Officials Coordinator. We also talked with Kelly Kinghorn, a professional basketball referee who also volunteers as a Church Sports referee.

Each are passionate about the potential of Church Sports to lead to Christlike behavior and to help fulfill the mission of the Church. Consider the top 10 ways to maintain good sportsmanship derived from their interviews:

TOP 10 WAYS TO IMPROVE SPORTSMANSHIP

1. **Officials** for each sport should be called by the stake and set apart by appropriate priesthood authority. Officials are not a ward calling, nor should they be an ad hoc, "you played in the previous game, will you ref this one?"
2. **Coaches** are ward callings. It's fine for people who are willing to serve to express an interest to Priesthood Leaders, but the Bishopric should extend calls after prayerful consideration.
3. **Training.** Officials and coaches should be trained – referees to make proper calls, coaches to train their team in the rules. It is vital that they attend Area clinics, (even if they're already are trained for non-Church sponsored sports) since there are some unique characteristics of Church Sports that must be complied with to avoid misunderstanding.
4. **Specific rules apply.** This is a persistent source of misunderstanding by coaches, players, and fans who don't understand that

the rules for Church Sports are not the same as those for intercollegiate competition, the NBA, or other professional franchises. In Church Sports: basketball-high school rules apply; softball-ASA rules; Volleyball-USA, etc.

5. **Respect.** Participants and fans should show respect for officials and be tolerant as they become experienced. Just as no one would belittle or berate a new, inexperienced Relief Society teacher, members of the Church should never attack or insult a referee since he or she is a volunteer who has accepted a Priesthood call to serve.
6. **Interview Participants.** It's essential that Priesthood leaders complete team rosters to provide liability protection. But it's also important so that the Bishop or his counselor may interview and counsel participants in advance to create an expectation of good sportsmanship, particularly those who are not members or active members. The most important word in Church Sports is "Church." Less active and non-members can't help but judge the Church by the behavior of our members.
7. **Control.** Coaches should view their primary responsibility as maintaining control and helping members of the team to have a good experience. Everyone wants to win – but every competition will have a loser. Even an unskilled team can have a great time if the coach manages the game well. When a player gets angry, pull her or him out of the game for a time to cool down. If their behavior is unacceptable, schedule an interview with the bishop to explain appropriate behavior.
8. **Rules.** Games need rules – whether monopoly, chess, or basketball. Officials are there to make sure the rules are applied evenly and fairly so that each team has an equal chance to succeed.
9. **Parents and spectators should not intervene,** even when they feel things are unfair. The officials and coaches are in charge. If a spectator feels something is unequal, they should share it with their coach during a break, or with their bishop or priesthood leader, who is hopefully at the game.
10. **Sponsorship.** Stakes and wards should actively sponsor Church Sports. The potential

to assist missionary work and reactivation efforts is simply too great to overlook. Plus, Church Sports leads to good fellowship among active members.

KEY THOUGHTS

- “As President Monson has said, the purpose of Church Sports isn't so much about winning as it is about creating Christlike characteristics. The goal is to create better people. I believe that our every thought, decision, action, and reaction should be a reflection of Jesus Christ, even in the competitive arena of sports.”
Sister Kae Strong
- “We have to have reasons for people to come to church. If the first door they open is to the gym, the next may be to the chapel.” *Brother Thayne Gooch*
- “Good officiating conveys the Spirit of Fair Play, the sense that, ‘*Our team has an equal chance to win based on the rules, so that it comes down to talent, effort, and motivation.*’ No one likes to play against the refs. People get angry at officials because the officials have no vested interest in who wins – they are neutral – but fans always do. So when something happens, the people from Team B are going to feel their guy was in the right, the people in Team A think their guy is right. The same circumstance is viewed from a different perspective.” *Brother Kelly Kinghorn*

TAKE CONTROL – HAVE FUN!

We hope these ideas help you in your efforts to build a great stake and ward sports program. Please review the attached “Next up” to learn about Area Officials Training Opportunities. If you have questions for our Officials Coordinators, please call: **Kae Strong**, SLC Area at 801-568-7853 kaestrong@hotmail.com; **Thayne Gooch**, Wasatch Division at 801-943-1333 thaynerf@yahoo.com; or **Brent Kemp**, Oquirrh Division at 801-254-0827 brentroseann@msn.com. Contact Jerry Borrowman, SLC Area Communications Director at jerryborrowman@hotmail.com or by phone at 571-9258 for comments on the *Sports News*.