

Sports News

January 2009— Newsletter of the Utah Salt Lake City Area Sports

OUR BEST YEAR YET—THOUGHTS FROM AREA SPORTS DIRECTOR

“We have had a very good year in 2008, having seen improvement in all areas of sports in the Utah Salt Lake City Area’s more than 180 stakes. Our goal is to support Stakes in our area in bringing souls unto Christ! We have found that sports are a great way to introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to our friends of other faiths and to help re-activate and strengthen active members of the Church.”

So writes Brother Harold Turley, Area Sports Director in a letter to Elder Michael Holmes, Area Seventy responsible for Church Sports in the Utah SLC Area. Harold goes on to say that in the past year Area stakes and wards have sponsored 40 different sports involving more than 300,000 members. The Area and Region Staff of 130 individuals support local stakes and wards through officials and coaches training, regional and area tournaments, and area training meetings. “And 2009 will be even better!” Harold confidently asserts.

Just who is Harold Turley? First, he is the one who has been called by Priesthood leaders to encourage wards and stakes to develop an active Church Sports program. *“It’s been very humbling to feel the support we receive from members of the Presidency of the Seventy: Elder Rasband; Elder Snow; and Elder Costa. Each have expressed their sincere desire that Church Sports be an integral part of the effort to bring souls to Christ. Plus we have the unqualified support of Elder Holmes, who actually attributes his reactivation to the Church to an earlier call to coach in the youth program.”*

As an outstanding athlete in his own right, Brother Turley is well suited to the call, having played on a number of championship basketball teams in his native El Paso, Texas as a young man. But his real passion is tennis, where he has won more than 50 tournaments in the past 40 years, including four years rated number one in doubles

while attending BYU on a full-ride scholarship. He and his partner also placed first for eight years in a row at the Huntsman Senior Games. *“I love the competition—of challenging myself to be the very best I can. Of course in doubles I can’t do it by myself, so I have to rely on a partner. I think that’s true in life as well as it is in sports—we succeed with the help of others. It’s certainly true in this calling.”*

Consider just two of the many things Harold wants to accomplish in 2009?

- *“The brethren are very concerned about how many of our young adults drift into inactivity. We believe Church Sports can be an antidote to that. Consider that we had more than 200 young men and women play in our recent Area co-ed Volleyball tournament. We must do more for our Young Adults.*
- *We’d like all stakes within our area to utilize a “STAKE MEMBERS SURVEY” to find out which sports their particular stake members would like to pursue. For example, a stake president in the Holladay area thought he knew what sports his members would choose. After receiving the results of his stake survey he was totally surprised that the main sport cited by both youth and adults was golf—totally different than what he thought would be the response.*

An eternal optimist, Harold asserts that *“With the present difficulty in our economy, sports can be an inexpensive way to remove stress from the lives of Church Sports participants as well as helping them to become more physically fit.”* In other words, even the worst of times can become the best of times, in Harold’s way of thinking.

Just what is success in Church Sports? *“The most satisfying element of my job is seeing the light turn on in stakes that start to use sports to create opportunity to reactivate and attract those who are not members to the church. We’ve enjoyed great success at the Area level meeting individually with leaders in 40 stakes—including all sports leaders, the*

stake presidency, high council representative, and others to brainstorm on how to use sports most effectively in their stakes.”

The most frustrating part of Harold’s calling? *“Getting people called to the positions—we have over 100 positions and we go through local priesthood leaders—it takes a great deal of energy and patience to get people cleared and called and functioning. We appreciate the leader’s support.”*

What is the recipe for success at the local level? *“The Ward Sports program needs a bishop with vision to use sports to strengthen those already involved, seeing that it can play an important role for both youth and adults, and then putting some of his strongest members in the positions needed to staff the sports program. This is true of the stake, as well.”*

It’s a daunting challenge trying to bring the vision of Church Sports to more than 180 stakes. But if anyone’s up to the job, it’s Harold Turley, Area Sports Director. If your stake hasn’t invited him in for a planning session, **call Harold at 801-942-5630**

LONELINESS

In a fascinating article in the Dec 1, 2008 *New York* magazine columnist Jennifer Senior talks about loneliness and its negative effects on emotional and physical health. She also draws attention to recent research that shows some interesting ways to combat loneliness that may have application to those who engage in Church Sports.

“In the last couple of decades,” she writes, “researchers have started measuring the effects of social isolation, and they aren’t pretty. There’s been an avalanche of studies, for instance, showing married people are happier and healthier, while the odds of dying increase significantly among the recently widowed, something known as the ‘widowhood effect.’ There’s evidence suggesting that strong social networks help slow the progression of Alzheimer’s. There’s even better evidence suggesting that weak social networks pose as great a risk to heart-attack patients as obesity and hypertension. There’s also evidence to suggest that the religious people who live the longest are the ones who attend services most frequently.”

Studies also demonstrate that loneliness contributes to obesity, anger, and less exercise.

But there’s good news in the article showing that that regardless of one’s personal family situation, he or she can overcome the effects of loneliness and social isolation through a combination of relationships; 1) a

few very close relationships, including family and friends and; 2) others in a much broader group of acquaintances at work, church, and social networks. In fact, we all feel better when we have both close relationships as well as a broad circle of acquaintances with whom we interact occasionally. Even married people can be lonely during difficult times in their marriage, as can singles who have no spouse to share their life with.

So what does this mean for Church Sports? #1—every person’s life is improved by having outside associations to draw pleasure and support from, which includes Church Sports. #2—since lonely people are less likely to exercise and pay attention to their diet, Church Sports brings activity into their lives in a fun and engaging way improves physical health. #3—the studies found that it is through the “weak” interactions with social acquaintances at events like Church Sports where people often find someone who becomes significant in their life, a “strong” connection that provides greater support.

The conclusion we draw from this brief discussion of a complex subject is that Church Sports can be much more than just a pick-up basketball game on Thursday evening. *It may become a significant lifeline to emotional health & happiness for members who are struggling with loneliness and despair!*

ACTION: If you’re responsible for activities in your ward or stake, try to think of the needs of those who may be lonely and come up with activities that will appeal to them: Healthy seniors and widows may be interested in team bowling or swimming; Young adults are drawn to co-ed volleyball and softball; Single mothers may enjoy a Church sponsored Pilates or Yoga class hosted by the Relief Society Activity Chair; young married mothers may yearn for a female friend to go walking with. The list is endless, if you’ll but ask in a survey. Remember, there are some 40 officially sanctioned Church Sports in this Area. One should appeal to nearly everyone.

Isn’t it great that even a secular magazine like *New York* recognizes that church and family are at the top of the list of positive associations that help people avoid loneliness and enjoy a healthy and happy life? With well planned Activities thru Church Sports we can offer even more to the members and neighbors we are sharing our life with.

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