

# Sports News

## August 2009— Newsletter of the Utah Salt Lake City Area Sports

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### Story from a Prophet

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*"I like basketball. I would rather play this game than eat, and I am a growing boy with a growing appetite. But basketball gives me some of my most trying situations. We have to do all our practicing after school, and milking time comes all too soon every day. I play 'til the last possible minute, then take just a few more throws; when I get home after running most of the way, I find the milk customers sitting on the bench at the back door waiting for their milk. . . . Because I can score time and time again it always seems that I can play just another minute without overrunning time, and my 'milking' memory is short when I am enjoying myself so much on the basketball court."* Excerpted from "President Spencer W. Kimball: Sharpshooter on a Dirt Court," Church News, November 30, 1991

### Purpose of the Program

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"The goal of the Utah Area Sports program is to 'bring souls to Christ' through the unparalleled fellowship activities that sports provides to both members and friends of other faiths. Area directors and their committees have been called to assist in the development of well-organized programs in stakes and wards, well-trained coaches and officials; and a commitment to good sportsmanship on the part of participants and spectators.

The First Presidency has stated that, "Sports activities in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have a unique central purpose...a purpose much higher than the development of physical prowess, or even victory itself." In fact, its primary purpose is to assist families, quorums and auxiliaries in meeting the mission of the church, which is to "invite all to come unto Christ" (D&C 20:59) and "be perfected in Him." (Moroni 10:32). *Mission Statement found on [www.utahareasports.org](http://www.utahareasports.org) Home Page.*

### Comments from readers

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The *Deseret News Mormon Times* is kind enough to post our newsletter at [www.mormontimes.com](http://www.mormontimes.com) each month and because of that we've heard from people in the Utah SLC Area and around the world about how much they enjoy the newsletter and appreciate the opportunities Church Sports

create for fellowshiping, physical activity, and teamwork. We love hearing from you.

But the online edition also allows people to post their thoughts directly—and not all are flattering. While it's true that there are hundreds of games played without major incident, sportsmanship remains a problem in some instances. It's been said that you often learn the most from your critics, so we thought we'd share some of the online comments, both positive and negative, and then respond with some thoughts of our own. Since no one uses their actual name in these posts, we'll cite all comments without attribution. Some have been edited for space and clarity.

- *"I actively participated in basketball officiating in our Stake. It wasn't the kids or the coaches, it was the parents. They would incite and bait and talk trash. I had one parent charge the court and challenge me to a fight, even though his daughter's team was winning. The referee is there to enforce the rules of the game.....live with it. The Lord has NEVER allowed His children to live without rules, or make up their own, as some would like to do on the B-ball court. That's the reason behind organized sports, to teach obedience to the rules and fair play. It takes real commitment to those ideals to make it work."*
- *"I've officiated hundreds of church basketballs games. Poor sportsmanship is not only prevalent; it's pervasive. Somehow Mormon doctrine gets it into our heads that when we succeed, it's because we're being "blessed". When we fail, lose, etc., we're being "tried". When you put that on a basketball floor the will to win is a fervor that is rivaled in few places in our adult world. The problem is that we have enough trials at home and at work and losing on the court is more than many men can handle. Officiating is the key to control of the tempers. Better, still, how about this—take the backboards out of the cultural halls along with the scoreboard. Problem solved. It is that simple."*
- *"We instituted a rule in our stake that greatly improved sportsmanship. Each team designated a captain who was the only person who could communicate with the ref. Any time a non-captain made a comment to the ref, he got a technical foul. 2 technicals and you were out of the game. It cut down the harassment and the referees loved to ref again."*

- *“My last Stake President was so difficult to play against I stopped playing so I could keep a positive attitude about him and his position because I liked the guy...”*
- *“I will admit that I am one who has acted shamefully in the past at church sporting events, especially when I was a coach of a young men's team. I'm glad that the refs of those games were largely friends of mine, and have since forgiven me. I later had the opportunity to ref games, and have seen the other side of it, both in terms of anger directed at refs for not making calls, and in terms of teams taunting the other team. I think it's great that there is an emphasis on the positive aspects of sports now.”*
- *“I've had a lot of good experience with church basketball. I've made a lot of friends, gotten a lot of exercise, and gotten to know people better. Incidents happen, but they can happen anywhere; I once witnessed someone who wanted to fight a quorum member because of a debate in Elder's quorum. Don't take something good away because of some competitive moments. They generally are forgotten soon after the game. If you have that bad of an attitude or temper, be responsible and don't play or learn to control your emotions better.”*
- *“My last church league had some games with no refs at all, we self-reported fouls. No injuries, no fights, no problems. Nope, it's not the refs that are the problem.”*
- *“It is funny how the best refs and best players are always in the safety of their seats and not on court.”*

Each of these posts is an honest expression of the writer's personal feelings on the subject. Basketball seems to be the place where poor sportsmanship is the greatest challenge, although the comments can be helpful for all Church sponsored activities. Here are some thoughts for those who work in Church Sports and for those who play:

1. Church Sports is endorsed by the First Presidency and is implemented under the direction of the Area Presidency. The program is not on trial nor up for a vote. Rather, we, as individual participants, should measure up to the ideals of the program. Hundreds of thousands of participants do it every year, and love the program. It remains a powerful missionary and fellowshiping tool.
2. The fundamental purpose of the Church Sports program is spiritual—inviting people to Christ through association with church members in dedicated buildings and playing fields. Events should be started with prayer and members should reflect on the solemn obligation they bear to not offend the Spirit or other participants—good sportsmanship is an imperative, not an option.
3. Stake Presidents and Bishops are the priesthood leaders responsible for Church Sports. A member of the Stake High Council is often assigned specific responsibility. Firesides should be held for officials, coaches, and players to outline exactly what is expected in the areas of sportsmanship and good play. Leaders should back coaches and officials with individual interviews for those

- who display bad sportsmanship. The goal is to help members exercise self-control while having fun.
4. Officials should be called, set apart and shown the same respect as everyone else who accepts a church calling. A self-confident official who knows the rules and applies them fairly sets the tenor for a well-played game. Training is essential. Our recently completed annual Basketball Officials Training Camp at the University of Utah is a good example, with a high level of support from area high school and college officials who did the training. Volleyball Training is scheduled for August. Training can be scheduled through the stake and region, as well.
  5. It really is just for fun and fellowshiping. Competition makes a game exciting, but at the end of the day everyone should leave as friends. It's fine to be excited for your team, but we should treat both teammates and opponents as brothers and sisters in the gospel.
  6. Self-control is essential. It's up to you to be a good sport. If you have problems managing your temper, then talk with your coach so he or she knows when to pull you from the game. Meet with your bishop to set goals, with follow-up interviews. Learning to manage one's temper helps far beyond the court or playing field—it improves all aspects of one's life; personal, family, professional, and church.
  7. Parents must set the right example—whether as a participant in a game or a fan on the sidelines, parents should be respectful and encouraging, never demeaning, to the players or officials. *“I'd rather see a sermon, than hear one any day, I'd rather you would walk with me than merely tell the way. The eye's a better teacher and more convincing than the ear. Your words may be confusing but example is always clear. Edgar Guest.* Your children will learn how to behave in public from you—so set a worthy example that is in harmony with the gospel.
  8. Church Sports is more than basketball. If you find you don't enjoy basketball, then participate in one of the dozens of other Church sponsored sports. If an approved activity isn't available in your ward, talk with your priesthood leader to see if you can get something started.

Church Sports is a great way to fellowship and the benefits of the program far outweigh the challenges. Thanks for helping to make it work in your area.

### **Learn More ... Online Resources**

Check out [www.utahareasports.org](http://www.utahareasports.org) for some great resources on how to lead an effective Church Sports program or check out previous *Sports News* issues at [www.mormontimes.com](http://www.mormontimes.com) for ideas on how to encourage good play and a great time.

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