

October 2009 Sports News

Newsletter of the Utah Salt Lake City Area Sports

This month we're going to let President Monson have the last word. But first, an interview with Jeff Cutrer, Men's Director in the Wasatch Division. We also hope you'll check out the October *Sports Calendar* for news on upcoming Basketball Officials Clinics and a YSA Co-Ed Volleyball Tournament.

An Interview with Jeff Cutrer—Division Director

Why do you think the Church Sports program matters?

A number of months ago I was helping at a Regional Basketball tournament when I was approached by a coach from one of the teams to pledge his support for the program and to promise that he would do his best to encourage good sportsmanship. As we chatted he told me that he had been estranged from the church for more than 20 years, but that the invitation to coach the men's basketball team had brought him back into contact with members in such a positive way that he was in the process of returning to full activity in the church. Church Sports was the bridge that helped him find his way back. To me that's what the program is all about and why it's worth all the time and effort I put into my calling.

What is the relationship of the Division Directors to the Region Directors and stake and ward Sports leaders?

We do not preside. It's the local priesthood leaders—the stake president and bishop—who preside over all programs within their units. Rather, we are there to train, support, and encourage the Regional Directors, who then provide training and support to their stakes and wards. They are a resource to the priesthood. The Wasatch Division has 96 stakes within 11 Regions.

What's been your biggest surprise in this position?

I've been the Division Director for 3 ½ years. The thing that has surprised me most is how much time I spend trying to motivate people to fulfill their callings. Working at the region and local level is difficult because it's unlike most other church callings where you see the people you work with every Sunday.

Sports activities are intermittent, which means our leaders have to reach out to people and initiate contact, do follow-up calls, and motivate people to organize the events, set up the schedules, find the referees, etc. It's very challenging and I admire those who accept these calls and make it happen. Because Church Sports isn't always a priority for priesthood leaders, it's easy to let things slip. The way I look at it, though, is that we are all answerable to the Savior for our callings, including sports. That helps me to stay motivated.

Why are Regional Activities important?

When the church was smaller there used to be the All Church Tournaments where members traveled from all over the Church to Salt Lake City. They were a lot of fun. But the First Presidency changed the emphasis from determining champions to involving as many people as possible. Regional Tournaments provide additional opportunities for teams to play and to enjoy healthy competition, without the burden and expense of travel.

What is Gratifying About Church Sports?

Most gratifying is that sports transcends the usual barriers that exist between people. It touches people of every age, male and female, active in the church, less active, and neighbors and members of other faiths. I truly believe it is universal in its appeal. For example, this last Saturday I helped the Holladay Region with their 5K/1M walk-run on the Jordan River Parkway. Basically it's just a fun-run. But it was interesting to see who came out to participate and why – serious runners who competed with one another; families with babies in strollers wearing their numbers on the baby's bibs; a stake president in a suit; people who had invited neighbors and non-members friends. There were pregnant women and college students, primary kids, youth and young adults. They participated together and enjoyed each other's company for a couple of hours. I don't know of any other program in the church that can do that.

You served as a bishop prior to this calling. Has your perception of Church Sports changed?

I've always enjoyed sports, so that hasn't changed. But I didn't take advantage of all the resources that could have helped me make the program more successful. Looking back, if somebody had approached me and said, "Bishop, we have a program in which we are willing to train people, teach them, support them with all the resources we have, and it will help the members of your ward in a positive way, would you be willing to let us do that?" I would have welcomed the help. I believe current bishops would too. But it was never presented to me in that way. So now I would counsel bishops to open up and let people come in. We have these tremendous Regional Directors and we're all working towards the common good to touch people and bring Christ into their lives.

Final Thoughts?

This is an inspired program. I know it works. I've seen it. When I was a young man my ward had a phenomenal program – uniforms, warm-ups, matching shoes, everything—and we had great success. But no matter how many games we won on the court, I came to understand our true success some 20 years later. There were two young men, neighbors of mine who were not members, who I invited to play ball with us. Eventually I grew up, left home, and got married, losing touch with those players from my youth. Years later I met one of these men at a baptism where I learned that he had joined the church and was now in the bishopric, having served a mission and later married in the temple. He told me that it was because of Church Sports that he had found the gospel. It was the easiest missionary work I ever did –and eternally significant to my friend and his family. So I say to everyone out there—give the program a chance. It works! It's more than just sports—it's the gospel.

President Thomas S. Monson

"Years ago, many of us participated as players or observers in the all-Church basketball tournaments and later in the softball tournaments. The most coveted prize was not to be adjudged first-place winner, but rather to receive the sportsmanship award. The applause of the audience was louder and longer, the smiles broader and more universal. A goal beyond victory had been won.

Lately we have received at the Office of the First Presidency letters which tell of serious arguments on the sports floor or playing field, name calling by

parents, abuse of referees, and all that characterizes poor sportsmanship. We have room for improvement, brethren, and improve we must.

In the videotape entitled *The Church Sports Official*, there is featured this truth from the First Presidency: '*Church sports activities have a unique central purpose much higher than the development of physical prowess, or even victory itself. It is to strengthen faith, build integrity, and develop in each participant the attributes of his maker.*'

Brethren, it is difficult to achieve this objective if winning overshadows participation. The recreation halls in our many buildings are constructed through the tithes of the members of the Church. It is only fair that all worthy young men and young women have an opportunity to play, to learn, to develop, and to achieve... ***When you put a player in a suit, put him in the game.***

Basketball begins soon. Let our teams of young men and young women be counseled appropriately. And a word or two for the spectators and coaches would not be amiss.

If I might add a personal touch, I share with you an experience that embarrassed, a game that was lost, and a lesson in not taking ourselves too seriously. First, in a basketball game when the outcome was in doubt, the coach sent me onto the playing floor right after the second half began. I took an in-bounds pass, dribbled the ball toward the key, and let the shot fly. Just as the ball left my fingertips, I realized why the opposing guards did not attempt to stop my drive: I was shooting for the wrong basket! I offered a silent prayer: "Please, Father, don't let that ball go in." The ball rimmed the hoop and fell out.

From the bleachers came the call: "We want Monson, we want Monson, we want Monson—*out!*" The coach obliged.

I never was a basketball star. What timing—to be a freshman at the University of Utah when All-Americans Arnie Ferrin and Vern Gardner dominated the boards.

Brethren, let's take the necessary steps to rekindle sportsmanship, to emphasize participation, and to strive for the development of a Christlike character in each individual." *Excerpted from "Goal Beyond Victory," President Thomas S. Monson, Ensign, November, 1988.*

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