



Keep Student-Athletes Safe During Team-Building Activities

When do team-building activities, believed to bring a team closer together, cross the line into risking student-athletes' safety? Coaches, athletic directors, and administrators play important roles in creating a culture that either supports aggression and hazing or focuses on student development, ethics, and safe, healthy competition.

Once a culture is created that states winning is more important than any other outcome, the stage is set to progress to more violent acts, such as those often observed in hazing incidents. When students are viewed as weak or not team-oriented if they do not participate in overly aggressive or sometimes dangerous activities, the outcome may be catastrophic for individual students and possibly the entire school community.

Tips for Safe Team-Building

The risks of hazing and overzealous training drills may give athletes a false perception of team bonding. The danger of harm outweighs the perceived benefits that the coaches are entrusted to provide. The following can help guide your schools' coaches, athletic directors, and administrators when considering team-building activities.

- School administration and coaches must send clear messages conveying that the schools' core values are against violence and overly aggressive behavior toward others.
- School officials must talk about behaviors that cause damage to teams and team members. An attitude that "we've always done this activity" or "no one is going to die from this" without thorough consideration is dangerous.
- Stopping even the least violent behaviors gives sports programs the best chance of preventing serious physical and psychological injuries to student-athletes.
- Coaches must always be mindful of the ethical implications of their decisions and directions as well as demonstrate their ability to protect the health and well-being of student-athletes.
- Developing a team requires a thorough review of what is acceptable and what is not within a sports program culture, plus a willingness to make necessary changes.
- Coaches and athletic trainers must show that they can properly and safely condition student-athletes to minimize and prevent injuries.
- Supervision of all pre-season, in-season, and out-of-season training programs must involve the most ethical and safety-minded advice from individuals educated in working with student-athletes.

The information provided in this article is intended for general informational purposes and should not be considered as all encompassing, suitable for all situations, in compliance with all laws and regulations or legal advice. Consult an attorney or other specialist to obtain advice with respect to any particular issue or problem.