



## Guidelines for Athletics in Seventh-day Adventist Institutions

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*For it is in Him that we live and move and exist. Acts 17:28 Moffatt*

## Introduction

Perhaps no phenomenon, except politics, war, or religion, is as ubiquitous as sport. All forms of the news media give copious space to this topic. Although Ellen G. White cautioned against games and recreation, we must not ignore sport. It is too entrenched in our society. Rather, we should educate our membership on how to relate to sport with a Seventh-day Adventist Christian focus. Too many have learned what sport is by listening, observing, or reading what happens in the popular venues of sport throughout the world. However, it is not inevitable that sport be like these representations. There is a Christian model of sport, and we have not totally fulfilled the mission of Seventh-day Adventist education unless we teach this model to administrators, players, parents, and spectators.

Sport can result in a growing, maturing, and self-actualizing experience. However, Christian ethics must control sport. We have a responsibility to help build noble characters in students, to educate their minds, and to motivate their spirits to make our society better by applying core values to real-life situations. It is far more important to develop the whole person than to win such a comparatively insignificant thing as a game. The greatest value of sport can be its ability to enhance the character and elevate the ethics of participants and spectators.

A person must experience the joy of movement before it becomes a reality. There is nothing quite like the kinesthetic exaltation of hitting a ball on the sweet spot of a bat or knowing the moment the ball leaves your hand that it will go through the hoop. In such experiences we transcend ourselves into a realm reserved only for the participant. Sport provides an opportunity for a person to expand his or her dimension, integrating mind and body while moving through space with perfect harmony. Sport potentially offers the sense of accomplishment, the reward for hours of intense effort, the integration of self with self for the common good, and the feeling of “team.” These all enrich a person’s soul and experience.

The mandate of Seventh-day Adventist schools is to educate the whole person academically, spiritually, physically, and socially. In addition, students should encounter ethics, social issues, various cultures, and athletics. A liberal education helps one become more fully human and better able to integrate religious principles into life. Students must learn to make value judgments, to analyze activities and events, and to determine if they should be a part of their experience. God has given us rational, moral, and artistic powers that we should invest in His cause. There is no dichotomy between what is secular and what is sacred. Playing a musical instrument, repairing an automobile, playing a game, or preaching a sermon are all religious activities. God does not ask us only to honor Him on the Sabbath but to reflect His image everyday in whatever we do.

Although these guidelines focus on athletic programs, the institution must maintain an appropriate balance among academics, the instructional aspects of physical education, recreational opportunities, intramurals, and athletics.

Our first duty to God and to others is to develop ourselves for greater service to humanity. In order to accomplish the greatest good, we should cultivate as perfectly as possible each of the abilities that the Creator has given us. Religion and sport are not two separate entities; they are one. We should weave biblical principles into all we say and do. We must cooperate with God in our acts of play as well as in our acts of Christian work.

A Christian athlete should be a better-behaved athlete for being Christian. While Christians do not necessarily perform better or win more games, they are motivated by different principles and approach activities differently from non-Christians. A Christian should be truer to the spirit of sport and to the fulfilling of its essence.

The Christian spectator should also be better. Christians should be different from typical fans. They should relate to opponents and officials in the same way they would wish to be treated. Christian institutions include sport to help their graduates participate better in the culture of their society while honoring God.

The key to a successful athletic program is Christ-centered, competent leadership. We must have leaders who emphasize the thrill of participation and the challenge of doing one's best. We should be known for our outstanding sportsmanship and should display Christian principles in our play. Our schools, players, and spectators must learn that sport is not an activity in which we suspend Christian values but one that is transformed by such values.

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the athletic program is to provide a setting in which students can experience the joy of movement through the medium of sport in a Seventh-day Adventist, Christ-centered environment as they engage in activities that promote the development of the whole person physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

## **I. Administration**

Strategic, proactive leadership is the key to achieving the mission, goals, and objectives of any athletic program. This is especially true for athletic programs in Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions. Such effective leadership must be displayed by all entities involved in the athletic program.

### **A. Administrative structure**

Each athletic program should have a clearly established chain of command. This will help to facilitate the professional operation of the program and will identify an obvious leadership structure for persons who wish to voice concerns according to the principles outlined in the Bible.

- The athletic director administers the program and must be a Seventh-day Adventist who actively and enthusiastically promotes the philosophy of this document.

- In colleges or universities, the athletic director reports to the chair of the department of physical education or to the president of the institution.
- In academies, the athletic director reports to the principal.
- There should be separate budgets for academics and athletics.
- An athletic council, with representation from various segments of the institution, provides guidance for the program.

#### **B. Job descriptions and hiring process**

- The institution should have clearly written job descriptions for each position within the athletic program.
- The athletic director should carefully screen and hire teacher-coaches and other support staff using previously established criteria that reflect the principles outlined in this document.

#### **C. Recruiting**

- Recruiting exclusively for athletic ability is not appropriate.
- The institution should consider the student's character, lifestyle, church affiliation, and academic performance.
- If non-Seventh-day Adventist students desire to attend an Adventist academy or college, the institution should try to ensure they will uphold its values.

#### **D. Financial support**

- The budget of the institution should provide for the operational costs of the athletic program (e.g., costs for officials, uniforms, coaching stipends, and travel).
- Fund raising, athletic booster clubs, or user fees may supply additional funding for special events or projects.

#### **E. Eligibility**

- Student-athletes must meet eligibility standards of state or national governing bodies of athletic programs. However, individual institutions may establish more stringent criteria.

#### **F. Gender equality**

- The institution must provide equal opportunities for female and male student-athletes.

#### **G. Competitive level of play**

- Those who develop schedules should consider competitive equality.

#### **H. Sabbath travel and game policy**

- The institution should schedule games so as not to infringe upon the hours of the Sabbath.

## **I. Medical coverage**

- The institution must provide appropriate medical coverage at athletic events to ensure that it is prepared for medical emergencies.
- Institutions must have adequate medical coverage for student-athletes.

## **J. Websites**

- Schools should develop a website for the athletic program and may include in it such items as the philosophy of the program, personnel, schedule, spectator code of conduct, and scores of games.

## **II. Teacher-Coaches**

The success of the entire athletic program hinges on the proper selection of qualified, dedicated, and committed teacher-coaches. Above all else, the teacher-coach must be a person who values and supports the philosophy of the organization that will mold young athletes into players who emulate Christ on and off the court or field. Coaches must teach players by both word and example and must convince them that the philosophy of winning at all cost or by sacrificing principle is not honorable or desirable.

### **A. Qualifications**

The teacher-coach should:

- Meet the state or provincial requirements for coaching.
- Be certified in first aid and CPR.
- Be given additional growth and development opportunities paid for by the institution.
- Obtain certification through the Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association.

### **B. Salary**

In order to assure quality and the continuation of a consistent program, the teacher-coach must receive financial compensation that represents the time and commitment invested in the athletic program.

### **C. Qualities of a Christian teacher-coach**

A teacher-coach should:

- Model Christian ethics at all times.
- Not allow unsportsmanship, cheating, or any other form of dishonorable conduct.
- Not engage in or permit trash talking, taunting, boastful celebrations, or other actions that demean individuals.
- Not engage in or permit profanity or obscene gestures during practices, games, or any team activity.
- Not permit student-athletes to engage in unhealthy techniques to gain, lose, or maintain weight.
- Forbid the use of unhealthy substances or dietary supplements and illegal performance-enhancing drugs.
- Discourage selfishness and encourage student-athletes to think and play as a team.

- Avoid the use of verbal abuse, physical and psychological intimidation, or conduct demeaning to student-athletes.
- Treat all people with respect and require the same of student-athletes.
- Promote loyalty to team and school.
- Place the academic, emotional, physical, and moral well being of student-athletes above the desire to win.
- Make the game fun and enjoyable.
- Be a good communicator and let student-athletes know their role on the team.
- Encourage student-athletes to work on improving their individual and team skills.
- Educate student-athletes to assist fallen opponents, compliment extraordinary performance, and show respect in pre and post-game activities.
- Treat game officials with respect, not complaining about or arguing with their decisions.
- Use positive coaching methods to increase self-esteem of student-athletes and make their experience enjoyable.
- Promote personal physical fitness and health.
- Insist that student-athletes observe the letter and spirit of the rules.
- Incorporate positive messages about sportsmanship, character, and ethics into practices and games.
- Be gracious in victory and dignified in defeat.
- Distribute, explain, and enforce codes of conduct.
- Discuss the Christian values that can be used to govern behavior in practices and games.
- Provide opportunities for spiritual growth.

### **III. Student-athletes**

Athletic participation should not only be enjoyable but should also be a significant part of the total educational program, exemplifying high standards of moral behavior and sportsmanship while developing Christian character and other important life skills. Student-athletes will strive to give their best as they pursue victory with honor.

Athletics can help build school spirit and can be a positive experience for the entire student body (e.g., spirit week, pep rallies, etc.). Athletics can provide a constructive channel for physical expression and opportunities for students, parents, faculty, staff, and community members to share experiences.

#### **A. Expectations for behavior on the court or field**

Student-athletes should:

- Model good sportsmanship by assisting fallen opponents and showing respect in pre and post-game events.
- Not participate in unwholesome gamesmanship or any other dishonorable conduct.
- Not use profanity, obscene gestures, sexual remarks, trash talking, taunting, boastful celebrations, or any other actions that demean individuals.
- Live and compete honorably.
- Treat the teacher-coach with respect.

- Treat officials with respect by not complaining about or arguing with their calls or decisions during or after a game.
- Exercise self-control by, for example, not fighting or showing excessive displays of anger or frustration.
- Meet time commitments for practices and games.
- Have concern for others and never intentionally injure another player or engage in reckless behavior that may harm themselves or others.
- Help promote the well being of teammates.
- Honor, observe, and enforce the spirit and the letter of rules by avoiding temptations to gain competitive advantage through improper gamesmanship techniques that violate the traditions of sportsmanship or by engaging in any conduct designed to evade the rules that govern fair competition.
- Display humility in victory and graciousness in defeat.
- Demonstrate Christian behavior in all aspects of the game.

### **B. Expectations for behavior off the court or field**

Student-athletes should:

- Make academics a priority.
- Represent the school, teacher-coach, and teammates with honor.
- Be loyal to the school and team by subjugating personal advancement for the good of the team.
- Avoid using any illegal or harmful substances including alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and performance-enhancing agents or employing any unhealthful techniques to gain, lose, or maintain body weight.
- Demonstrate Christian values in all they do.

### **C. Spiritual growth opportunities**

An athletic program can provide numerous opportunities for the spiritual development of both individuals and small groups. Such activities, planned by the teacher-coach and/or the athletic director, may include:

- Team worships at practices or other times.
- Prayer partnerships where athletes pray for the specific needs of each other and share the things for which they are thankful.
- Team sessions for sharing prayer requests and praying together.
- Team-led spiritual programs such as vespers, Sabbath School, or worship service at the home campus or church or at some other location.
- Outreach activities such as clinics and halftime presentations.
- Pre-season projects that provide opportunities to serve others, to appreciate one's own blessings, and to bond as a team
- One-day or weekend team-building activities including challenge initiatives such as Project Adventure activities, camping trips, etc.

## **IV. Spectators**

Athletic competition is an important part of school life. Spectators participate in the movement experience vicariously, promote school spirit, and help to demonstrate the philosophy and dignity of their school. Spectators may positively contribute by helping to build the character of student-athletes and promote the reputation of the school. Spectators must reflect Christ-centered behavior in their conduct at all times.

### **A. Education**

Because the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of sport differs from that of the general public, the education of spectators must occur continually. Activities may include:

- Presenting the philosophy of the athletic program and proper spectator behavior at an appropriate time (e.g., chapel) by the drama department, the student council, the athletic department, or the chief administrator of the institution.
- Reading a brief, positive statement of appropriate spectator behavior prior to each home event.
- Distributing the code of conduct for spectators to the parents of all students prior to the season.
- Having an administrator or faculty members present at all events to supervise spectators.
- Posting the code of conduct in the athletic facility, around spectator seating areas, in the printed program for the athletic event, and on the athletic web site of the institution.

### **B. Hospitality for spectators**

So that spectators may have a safe and enjoyable experience, arrangements should include:

- Making available appropriate visitor seating.
- Providing a safe environment in and around the facility including parking areas with appropriate, visible security.
- Designating a clearly identifiable person to whom visitors may take their needs or concerns.

### **C. Code of conduct**

The spectator code of conduct should include some or all of the following:

- Support the team in a positive way.
- Do not encourage dishonest or unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Do not engage in negative or demeaning cheers.
- Do not engage in any kind of disrespectful conduct including the use of profanity, obscene gestures, offensive sexual remarks, trash talking, taunting, boastful celebrations, or any other demeaning actions.
- Do not show excessive displays of anger or frustration.
- Do not use noisemakers during a contest.
- Treat officials with respect at all times by not complaining or arguing about their calls or decisions during or after an athletic event.
- Cheer appropriately, but do not attempt to distract opposing players when, for example, they are shooting free throws in basketball or serving in volleyball.

- Compliment extraordinary performance.
- Treat all participants and spectators with respect.
- Do what is right, even if it is unpopular.
- Represent the school with dignity.
- Be gracious in victory and dignified in defeat.
- Act in ways that are compatible with being a representative of a school that has high spiritual standards.
- Exhibit Christian behavior at all times.

## **V. Hospitality for the Visiting Team**

The institution should treat visiting teams as guests. It has invited them to participate in a contest of physical activity and should show them courtesy and respect. In the pursuit of being a good host, there is no substitute for displaying Christian sportsmanship on the court or playing field. Student-athletes must demonstrate Christian behavior at all times as exemplified in the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23).

### **A. Ways hospitality can be demonstrated prior to the event**

- Send an information sheet that describes bus parking, ticket prices, halftime activities, pre-game protocol, etc.
- Post signs that welcome the visiting team.
- Ensure that the facilities are clean.
- Ensure that support personnel are on time and know their responsibilities.
- Post signs that identify seating areas, restrooms, concessions, video filming areas, etc.
- Provide printed programs that include team rosters.

### **B. Hospitality for the visiting team upon arrival**

- Identify a host to greet the visiting team, remind them of the order of events, and direct them to the appropriate locker room.
- Offer to supply equipment such as warm-up balls.
- Provide water coolers and cups.

### **C. Pre-game hospitality**

- Welcome the visiting team and their fans.
- Ensure that the public address announcer knows how to properly pronounce the name of each player.
- Read an appropriate sportsmanship announcement.
- Have a suitable prayer that is not offensive to the faith tradition of the visiting team.

### **D. Possible post-game activities**

- Thank teams and their fans for their attendance.
- Provide refreshments for the visiting team.
- Provide a short, informal post-game reception for the players and coaches of both teams to mingle and get better acquainted and include refreshments and possibly a small gift for the visitors.

## **VI. Booster Clubs**

The role of a booster club is to support the efforts of the athletic program toward maintaining a high quality experience for athletes and to represent the school. Booster clubs should never exert any operational control over the administration of the school or over the athletic department. The club should provide financial and other support for the entire program without regard to season, sport, gender, etc. It should limit its activities to those that comply with amateur status requirements and the ethical guidelines of the church, school, league, state, and association, with particular regard to matters of recruiting, gifts, and scholarships.

### **A. Administration**

- Booster organizations should operate under the guidance of a constitution endorsed by the school.
- The constitution should contain provisions and procedures for such things as the chain of command, voting, selection of leaders, and protocols for requesting and distributing funds.
- The constitution should address financial issues such as tax-exempt status, the matter of handling finances inside vs. outside the school, bookkeeping and financial records, financial reports to the membership, membership dues, and contributions.
- The booster organization should publish a handbook for its members explaining its philosophy and rules of conduct.
- The club maintains control of funds until an item is subsidized.
- The club should focus on special projects rather than funding essential items of the athletic program such as uniforms, fees for officials, and salaries.

### **B. Activities of the booster club**

Regular booster meetings and activities are essential. Socializing will encourage members to remain involved. Boosters can provide support in various ways. For example, they may:

- Provide financial support through individual gifts and fundraising activities.
- Serve as game support staff to take tickets, distribute game programs, work with concessions and the welcome wagon, help at the scorer's table, etc.
- Assist with award dinners and other special events.
- Assist with public relations such as newspaper submissions and the distribution of season schedules.

## **VII. Assessment of the Athletic Program**

The institution should have an assessment process for the athletic program that is based on the philosophy and mission statement of the program. The assessment process should include both formal and informal evaluations. The institution should develop written instruments to use in the formal evaluations. One of the important outcomes of the assessment process will be data on the degree to which the institution is maintaining the balance among academics, athletics, intramurals, recreational opportunities, and the wellness of the student body.

## A. Levels of assessment

- The primary administrator responsible for the athletic program should conduct an annual formal evaluation of the program. The evaluation should include a thorough report by the athletic director summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of the program such as the coaching staff, hospitality teams, booster club, and budget.
- The administrator to whom the athletic director reports should conduct an annual formal evaluation and periodic informal evaluations of the director.
- The athletic director and players, using written instruments identified prior to the season, should evaluate head coaches.
- The head coach and players, using written instruments identified prior to the season, should evaluate assistant coaches.
- Coaches should periodically evaluate players throughout the season and provide them with an individual, post-season interview that may include their contributions to the team, their strengths, and their weaknesses.
- The athletic department should have some of the following regularly evaluate spectators: the athletic director, faculty and students of the institution, randomly selected spectators, visiting team coaches, and officials.
- The athletic council should evaluate the whole institution to ensure that it is maintaining a healthy balance among academics, intramurals, recreation, and athletics.

## VIII. Resources

Institutions should be aware of the numerous resources that are available for athletic programs. Governing bodies, such as the National Federation of State High Schools, state high school associations, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, and the National Christian College Athletic Association, provide an array of resources for their member institutions. The Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association (SDA-HPERA) hosts a web site ([www.sdahpera.org](http://www.sdahpera.org)) that also has resources available. Athletic directors are encouraged to submit resources information from their athletic programs to the SDA-HPERA to enlarge the database.

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