

Starting a New Sport Season

Athletics Directors and coaches face many demands on their time prior to the start of a new season. Good planning is essential to preparation that makes sure nothing is overlooked. By being proactive, the athletics directors and coaches can make certain that nothing is left to chance.

It is important to document in writing that proper steps have been taken to ensure a safe program for the student-athletes. The following guidelines should be part of every institution's risk management plan:

1. Document in writing that a preseason staff meeting was held. Keep a copy of the agenda and list the staff members in attendance. Keep minutes of the meeting.
2. Update all department policies and procedures.
3. Review eligibility rules, pre-participation physical examinations, insurance coverage including preexisting physical conditions, athlete insurance, and catastrophic insurance and liability coverage for all personnel. Discuss exclusions with athletes and notify parents of resulting exclusions.
4. Discuss warnings (including waivers and agreements to participate). Designate who will meet with individual teams to discuss and implement the agreements.
5. Computerize all eligibility, insurance coverage, and pre-participation physicals requirements prior to using any equipment
6. Require that coaches obtain certification in emergency first aid and CPR.
7. Discuss with coaches the procedure for a medical emergency plan. Discuss the coaches' responsibilities and have them sign a statement that they understand the emergency action plan.
8. Meet prior to the start of the season with local paramedics to discuss protocol for treating injured athletes at practice or during athletic contests. Make sure the principal, athletic director, coaches and athletic trainers understand the protocol.
9. Check all first aid kits, walkie-talkie's and on-site telephones to determine that they are operative. In addition, plan to check these items prior to every practice to ensure that all are in working order.
10. Have trainers provide contact cards for each sport in the event of an emergency.
11. Inspect all facilities and equipment and document the inspection. Do not allow athletes to modify equipment.
12. Have a plan for administering accident/injury reports and claims.
13. Discuss your transportation policy with staff.
14. Check School Division safety and emergency protocol and policies.
15. Schedule regular inspection dates of facilities and equipment. Designate who will conduct and document the inspections.
16. Develop a due process policy for student athletes and staff.
17. Develop a plan for disruptive action prior to the start of athletic contests.
18. Review catastrophic plans for bomb threats, fire, and other such events.
19. Review proper signage in areas that need signage.

20. Discuss blood-borne pathogens and related policies that will be in effect.
21. Discuss crowd management procedures.
22. Discuss alcohol policy.
23. Discuss a policy for security and ejection from facilities.
24. Review catastrophic injury protocol.

These guidelines, while not inclusive of every issue that confronts athletics directors and coaches, nevertheless covers many potential problems and strategies that need to be addressed. Adherence to the policies and procedures will help assure a judge and jury that your department did everything it could to protect the participants in your sports program.

From the Gym to the Jury attempts to remind our readers of these significant guidelines periodically. We strongly believe in the importance of the preseason checklist as a risk management strategy.

Source: From The Gym to the Jury – August 2005