



PLC Focus of Week 12: Safe Environment Practices in Sport



In today's athletic culture it's becoming more and more evident that direct education must occur regarding safe environment practices. Organized sports present many opportunities for abuse to occur. In order to protect the children, coaches and schools, it's imperative to have specific rules and protocol with respect to conduct for coaches as it pertains to the student-athletes they mentor.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has adopted Play Like a Champion Today's® Safe Environment Program to develop awareness and shared responsibility. Coaches and athletic administrators need to establish clear physical and emotional boundaries that must be strictly maintained by everyone's vigilance. Coaches and administrators need to be prepared to respond to difficult situations. Some may involve witnessing clear abuse, but many involve circumstances that are "gray" areas.

During the Safe Environment portion of the clinic, we discuss several different scenarios to see how the coaches think they should handle them. Although the scenarios are generic, they are intended to spark discussion and thought process of how to handle such issues if they should arise. One scenario in particular is:

You notice a coach joking around with a group of athletes. As the group huddles up for a team cheer, he puts his arm around one particular player in an overtly affectionate manner.

Things to Consider:

Coaches Prayer
Guide me as I try to coach my team to build each player's character and boost their self-esteem. May I keep an even temper and remember it's a game; let me not have favorite players, but treat them all the same. Grant me patient wisdom as I praise them or correct... Remembering that I must work to earn each one's respect. Lord whether we may win or lose, may all who are watching see the kind of coach at every game that you would have me be. Amen

Inner-City Catholic League,
South Bend, IN

- Is this behavior you have witnessed more than once from this coach?
- How does the athlete respond? Does s/he look uncomfortable? Have you noticed that this athlete is displaying other unusual behaviors?

Questions:

- Would you address this situation?
- If so, how would you address it?
- What if the coach happened to be the head coach of the team?
- What if that coach were in some way responsible for your involvement in coaching?
- What would you say in addressing the issue?
- When would you address it?

Principles to Remember:

- Avoid any appearance of impropriety.
- **Never be alone with an athlete.**
- Avoid treating athletes as peers.
- Do not establish special relationships through texting or social networks, like Facebook.
- Be aware of others' suspicious behavior and take responsibility for bringing it to the attention of the proper authorities, who are in a position to assess their seriousness. To be vigilant is not to judge others but to protect children.
- Remember you are a minister.

Play Like a Champion Today® challenges you to take a closer look and pay attention to your surroundings.

As coaches and mentors it is our responsibility to protect the young people we teach and mentor. Remember coaching is a ministry... being a minister means we are servants. No one ever said it would be easy, but if we coach for character with integrity our reward will be much greater than any championship we could win... remember, Play Like a Champion Today®.