

SECTION NINE – Athletics

Purpose And Philosophy

The Office for Catholic Youth Ministry's Athletic Program is an important component of the comprehensive approach to youth ministry in the Diocese of Wilmington. The purpose of these programs is to promote Christian attitudes while encouraging healthy physical activity. These activities should foster:

1. Cooperation
2. Respect
3. Sportsmanship
4. Responsibility
5. Leadership
6. Maturity
7. Competitiveness
8. Fairness
9. Courtesy
10. Self Control

9.1 Participation in any CYM Athletic program is not based solely on Religious affiliation. Parishes/Schools are to establish guidelines for participation and can include factors such as number of teams/participants, budgetary considerations, facility availability and similar considerations. These guidelines must be clearly stated and properly followed.

9.1.1 Catholic Youth Ministry reserves the right to overrule the Athletic Association of a parish/school on a decision if in the opinion of the Executive Director of the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry the decision is not in the best interest of the overall program.

Athletic Advisory Committee

The Athletic Advisory Committee is a committee appointed by the CYM Advisory Board and supports the efforts of the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry of the Diocese of Wilmington in maintaining quality athletic programs while fostering Christian attitudes. The primary goals of the Athletic Advisory Committee are to review and formulate athletic policy for recommendation to the Advisory Board and to promote wholesome, competitive sports programs.

The members of the Athletic Advisory Committee represent many segments of the community and various parish athletic programs. The members function to ensure compliance with rules within the context of the basic philosophy of CYM and to respond to member parishes and their needs.

9.2 All rulings by the Athletic Advisory Committee are subject to review by the Diocesan Board for Catholic Youth Ministry at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Athletic Associations – Parishes and Schools

The Office for Catholic Youth Ministry recognizes that most parishes/schools have athletic associations that govern their individual athletic programs. An Athletic Association can be made up of a number of adults/coaches, include executive committees, have formal by-laws and hold regularly scheduled meetings. In the case of smaller parishes, the Athletic Association can be as few as one individual appointed by the pastor of the parish/principal of the school to coordinate athletics in the parish/school.

Athletic Associations for parishes are accountable to the parish council and to the pastor of the parish. Effective comprehensive youth ministry demands that the Athletic Associations be active representatives of young people and their interests on the parish Youth Ministry Leadership Committee.

The athletic director for private Catholic schools is accountable to the principal of the school.

- 9.3 The Office for Catholic Youth Ministry requires each parish/school to name an individual as Athletic Association President (AAP).**
- 9.3.1 The AAP is to serve as the primary contact between CYM and each individual parish/school.**
- 9.3.2 The AAP is responsible for approving rosters and assigning head coaches.**
- 9.3.3 The office for Catholic Youth Ministry reserves the right to overrule the Athletic Association of a parish/school on a decision if, in the opinion of the CYM Director, the decision is not in the best interest of the overall program.**
- 9.3.4 The Office for Catholic Youth Ministry may, for any grave reason, require the parish/school to replace their Athletic Association President.**

Athletics as Ministry

Great strides have been made in recent years to help coaches and Athletic Association leaders more fully understand their role as youth ministers in the parish community. One look at the Purpose and Philosophy of CYM athletics will tell you that participants and their parents can expect more from this program than those that are not grounded in a religious tradition.

In many cases, participation in CYM sports is the only contact that some young people and their parents have with a parish community – or with any church community for that matter. Every attempt should be made to recognize the presence of God in our athletes and in our athletic competitions. Positive sportsmanship is key. So is prayer.

Prayer before practices and games can go a long way in setting the scene for a positive experience. Prayer led by participants calls each to be accountable for behavior and conduct as young Christian men and women. Prayer led by adults reminds all of us of the example we must set as ministers to, with and for young people. Prayer in the presence of spectators reminds those in the stands that they share in the responsibility of creating a safe, positive, and Christian environment.

A team that takes the time to celebrate Mass together before or during the season reveals a coaching staff that understands their role as leaders in a parish faith community.

A parish that takes the time to bless their athletes calls the whole community into celebrating the gifts shared on the court, the field, the mat, or around the track. A script for the Blessing of Athletes can be found in Appendix Two of this manual.

Athletic Programs By Season

FALL SEASON

Football – Junior Varsity and Varsity
Soccer - Junior Varsity and Varsity (Co-ed)
Volleyball - Junior Varsity, Varsity & Senior (Girls)
Cheerleading - Junior Varsity, Varsity and Combined
Cross-Country - Junior Varsity and Varsity (Boys and Girls)

WINTER SEASON

Boy's Basketball - Junior Varsity, Varsity, Intermediate and Senior (High School)
Girl's Basketball - Junior Varsity, Varsity, and Senior (High School)
Wrestling - Varsity
Cheerleading - Junior Varsity, Varsity and Combined

SPRING SEASON

Baseball - Varsity (Co-ed)
Softball - (Slow-pitch) - Junior Varsity (Girls)
Softball - (Fast-pitch) - Varsity only (Girls)
Track and Field (Boys and Girls)

Code of Conduct for Coaches

- 9.4** In addition to those items mentioned in *For the Sake of God's Children* and in Section Five of this manual, CYM mandates that all head and assistant coaches adhere to the statements outlined in this section.
- 9.4.1** If the actions or attitude of a coach are found to be detrimental to the athletes or the CYM program, that coach will be subject to review and discipline. Disciplinary action can range from counseling, probation, suspension or dismissal, depending upon the circumstances.
- 9.4.2** Any coach who verbally or physically mistreats an official or another coach or behaves in an unsportsmanlike manner at any time during the season may be suspended from coaching all CYM sports.

All suspensions are for a period of up to twelve (12) months from the time of the infraction.

A coach may appeal a suspension.

- 9.5 Appeals, including a request for a hearing, must be submitted in writing along with any supporting documentation.**
- 9.5.1 The appropriate CYM staff member, the Chairperson of the Athletic Advisory Committee and the Director of the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry will review all documentation. Decisions by this group are final.**
- 9.5.2 Upon completion of the period of suspension, a coach must request reinstatement in writing to the CYM Athletic Advisory Committee. The letter must indicate that the suspended coach has reviewed and will support the Statement of Purpose and Philosophy of CYM Athletics. The letter must be co-signed by the pastor/principal of the parish/school where he/she will be coaching.**

Under normal* circumstances, a coach may not be permanently dismissed from coaching CYM sports without a fair hearing conducted by the Athletic Advisory Committee. The coach will be afforded the opportunity to present testimony on his/her behalf. The decision of the AAC calling for the dismissal of a coach will require a review and concurrence of a majority of the Advisory Board.

**There may be circumstances where the facts are clear that warrant an immediate dismissal of a coach from the CYM Athletic Program (e.g., acts of violence, excessive use of profanity, continued unsportsmanlike conduct, intentional abuse of another person, etc.). The decision to immediately dismiss a coach for such behavior is made by the CYM Executive Director in consultation with the appropriate CYM staff member. Such a decision is final.*

Any disciplinary action of a coach will result in notification to the coach, the parish/school Athletic Association President/Athletic Director and the pastor of the parish or principal of the school.

Coaches Liability

Although liability issues and concerns dealing with volunteer coaches are not as demanding as those for paid coaches, it is always important to act in a reasonable and prudent manner when performing the duties associated with coaching. Volunteer coaches' liability issues are addressed in Title 16 of the Delaware Code. The Code states, in part:

Limitation on Liability of Non-Profit Sports Programs

Uncompensated qualified staff - Any person who renders services without compensation as a member of the qualified staff of a non-profit sports program shall not be liable under the laws of the State for civil damages resulting from any negligent act or omission of such qualified member occurring in the performance of any duty of such qualified member.

Coaches should be reminded that, even though limitations on liability are addressed in the Delaware Code, total avoidance from any conduct that could be considered reckless and adherence to the Volunteer Covenant, should minimize the potential for litigation in this area.

Spectator Conduct

The purpose of CYM athletic programs is to promote Christian attitudes while encouraging healthy physical activity by the youth of the diocese.

- 9.6 Spectators must realize that they represent the parish/school just as much as team members or coaches. Unsportsmanlike conduct, including but not limited to, objecting to decisions of game officials, disrespectfully addressing a game official, using inappropriate language/gestures, interrupting a contest by going on the floor or field or approaching a game official or coach will not be tolerated. Incidents of poor sportsmanship/unruly conduct will result in disciplinary action taken by the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry.
- 9.7 If a spectator is ejected from ANY parish or CYM athletic contest, whether sponsored by CYM or not, the spectator is banned from the next athletic contest played by that team.
- 9.8 Any spectator who verbally or physically mistreats an official or behaves in an unsportsmanlike manner at any time may be banned from attending CYM athletic contests for a period of time to be determined by the CYM Office.
 - 9.8.1 Monitoring of the team by the parish/school athletic association will be required and the Chairperson of the Athletic Advisory Committee will be notified.
 - 9.8.2 Violations of a ban will result in game(s) being stopped and a forfeit awarded to the opposing team. Two (2) forfeits during a season will result in a team's dismissal from the league.
- 9.9 Improper conduct of spectators at any CYM athletic contest may result in sanctions to the team or the athletic association of that team. Serious or repeated spectator problems with the same parish/school program will result in a hearing before the Athletic Advisory Committee.
- 9.10 Spectators are not permitted to file complaints concerning the performance of game officials. Only the head coach may file a complaint. Coaches and/or Athletic Association Officers are to review this spectator conduct section with parents/guardians of all players.

Player Conduct

- 9.11 Incidents of improper conduct by players before, during and/or after a CYM athletic contest may result in disciplinary action taken by the CYM Office.
 - 9.11.1 Disciplinary action can range from counseling, probation, suspension or dismissal depending upon the circumstances.
 - 9.11.2 Coaches are required under the Volunteer Covenant to communicate to players the rights and responsibilities of individuals on the team.

Filing a Complaint

- 9.12 Anyone wishing to file a complaint about a CYM coach, player or official must do so within the stated policies.
 - 9.12.1 Only a head coach may file a complaint about the performance of an official.
 - 9.12.2 Only a head coach may file a complaint against another coach.
 - 9.12.3 Assistant Coaches may not file complaints with CYM about players, officials, or other coaches.
 - 9.12.4 Parents may file a written complaint or concern about a coach or other spectators or about the behavior of players during a CYM competition.
 - 9.12.5 All concerns and complaints must be submitted in writing and must be signed. Emails may be sent to catholicyouth@cdow.org. Complaints made via telephone or anonymously will not be reviewed.
 - 9.12.6 All written and signed complaints about a coach will be referred to the appropriate CYM staff person who will, when appropriate, notify the coach that a written complaint has been received. After consultation with CYM director, the coach and complainant will be notified of the action taken.
 - 9.12.7 CYM will do everything within its power to see that all conflicts are resolved amicably. Please note that its primary goal will always be to have conflicts resolved on the parish level.
 - 9.12.8 Complaints concerning conduct of coaches or players or eligibility of players may be filed up to the day after the final day of the particular season. A complaint should be filed immediately upon gaining knowledge of an infraction rather than waiting until the end of a season.