

Fourteen Legal Duties of a Coach

Several obligations or duties have been identified as absolute requirements for coaches and athletic administrators. These standards have evolved as a result of various case law proceedings and legal judgments against individuals and school districts. It is important that all coaches, including assistants and volunteers, know and understand the following duties. This summary is not all-inclusive but is generally accepted as the “Legal Duties of Coaches” by the NFHS (National Federation of High Schools) and NIAAA (National Interscholastic Athletic Administrator Association).

- 1. Duty to Plan** – A coach must demonstrate awareness of the maturity, physical development and readiness of athletes with appropriate plans for instruction, conditioning and supervision.
- 2. Duty to Supervise** – A coach must be physically present, provide competent instruction, structure practices that are appropriate for the age and maturity of players, prevent foreseeable injuries and respond to injury or trauma in an approved manner. This duty requires supervisors to make sure facilities are locked and that students are denied access when a competent staff member cannot be physically present to supervise. This duty may also require coaches to control reckless player behaviors. Supervision responsibility also pertains to athletic administrators who are expected to be able to supervise coaches competently.
- 3. Duty to Assess Athletes Readiness for Practice and Competition** – Athletics administrators and coaches are required to assess the health and physical or maturational readiness skills and physical condition of athletes. A progression of skill development and conditioning improvement should be apparent from practice plans. Athletes must also be medically screened in accordance with state association regulations before participating in practice or competition.
- 4. Duty to Maintain Safe Playing Conditions** – Coaches are considered trained professionals who possess a higher level of knowledge and skill that permits them to identify foreseeable causes of injury inherent in defective indoor and outdoor facilities or hazardous environments.
- 5. Duty to Provide Safe Equipment** – Courts have held athletic supervisors responsible to improve unsafe environments, repair or remove defective equipment or disallow athlete access.
- 6. Duty to Instruct Properly** – Athletic practices must be characterized by instruction that accounts for a logical sequence of fundamentals that lead to an enhanced progression of player knowledge, skill, and capability.
- 7. Duty to Match Athletes** – Athletes should be matched with consideration for maturity skill, age, size and speed. To the degree possible, mismatches should be avoided in all categories.
- 8. Duty to Condition Properly** – Practices must account for a progression of cardiovascular and musculoskeletal conditioning regimens that prepare athletes sequentially for more challenging practices and competitive activities.

9. **Duty to Warn** – Coaches are required to warn parents and athletes of unsafe practices specific to a sport and the potential for injury or death. This warning should be issued in writing and both athletes and parents should be required to provide written certification of their comprehension.
10. **Duty to Ensure Athletes are Covered by Injury Insurance** – Athletics administrators and coaches must screen athletes to ensure that family and/or school insurance provides basic level of medical coverage. Athletes should not be allowed to participate without injury insurance.
11. **Duty to Provide Emergency Care** – Coaches are expected to be able to administer standard emergency care (first aid, CPR) in response to a range of traumatic injuries.
12. **Duty to Design a Proper Emergency Response Plan** – Coaches must design plans to ensure an expedited response by EMS and an effective transition to the care and supervision of emergency medical personnel.
13. **Duty to Provide Proper Transportation** – In general, bonded, commercial carriers should be used for out of town transportation. Self or family transportation for local competition may be allowed if parents have adequate insurance coverage for team members other than their family members. (follow School District guidelines)
14. **Duty to Select, Train, and Supervise Coaches** – Administrators have responsibility to ensure that appropriate skill and knowledge levels exist among members of the coaching staff to ensure appropriate levels of safety and well being among athletes.