

YOUTH SPORTS ADMINISTRATION

101



LEAGUE RULES AND POLICIES

TAKE YOUR LEAGUE TO THE NEXT LEVEL!

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Every league should have a very thorough set of rules and policies. Regardless if your participants are reading these in full, it is a must have to help govern your program. It will set expectations and give solutions if issues arise. Here are 12 tips in creating, implementing, and enforcing your leagues rules and policies.

1. Use National General Accepted Game Play Rules: The extent depends on the sport, but there is generally a national governing body for each sport that will have game play rules by age group. Use these rules of play and/or your states high school rules as the basis for the sport you are trying to run. Note in the rules that anything not listed will be reference to these rules. This also provides your justification if parents or coaches question rules, you can let them know they are national or state standards, rather than trying to defend something you just made up because it sounded like a good rule.
2. Do Your Research: You may also want to check with your referee associations to see what rules they are accustomed to as well as what other organizations in your area use. From there, add your in house rules that work for your program to finalize the rules of play for whichever sport you are offering. There is no reason to make things up as you go or re-invent the wheel.
3. Have Policies to Set Expectations: Other than your sports rules of play, you should also have your programs policies such as mandatory playing time, code of conduct, spectator seating areas, weather, cancellations, make ups, discipline, player equipment, etc. Now participants know the rules going in and you have grounds to enforce them if it comes up.
4. Board Oversight: You should have a board or group of people who oversee creating and enforcing rules and policy so you do not put yourself on a pedestal to make all the decisions effecting the league. This is especially true for larger organizations. Whether it's a volunteer board, group of coaches, or your internal staff, group decisions are always going to be better and more well received when new policies are implemented or enforced.
5. Outline Your Program Goals: Outline the goals and focus of your program in your policies and make sure your parents and coaches see it and hear it from you. It needs to be engrained in them to form a positive culture in your program.
6. Mandatory Play Rules: Every young athlete paid the same registration fee and is there to play. It is a shame when coaches do not allow them in the game. Regardless of their skill level, every child must get playing time. Create policies that guarantee playing time for at least half the game. Once you have your policy, track it as best as possible so if it ever get questioned you have back up. Also, if a coach falls short in getting kids in the game you can step in and force them to play based on your policy.

7. Special Requests: The ideal scenario for a recreation level program is that you get to the point where you do not take any requests from participants to be placed with another player (other than siblings), play for a specific coach, or practice requests. Teams should be formed solely on the skill levels of the players to make fair and balanced teams. Most leagues have far too many players to adhere to everyone's request and still keep the teams fair and balanced so rather than picking and choosing who gets a special request, don't take any. We will talk about this further in the skills assessment and team formation section, but this one thing alone will make the games more competitive and give the players, parents, and coaches a better experience, thus increasing retention and word of mouth as you move forward. There is always a scenario that you can make an exception but families will find a way to make it work if they don't end up on the team with their best friend or don't get their ideal practice time.
8. Formatting: Format your rules to make sure they flow, look nice, have a table of contents, and are easy to read. You may need to make additions and retractions as you go. Make sure whatever you change flows with the current rules and policies and don't end up with contradictions. There are too many rule books out there that you can barely get through because they don't flow. It was clear that things were added or taken out without considering everything else in it.
9. Distribute Your Rules: What good is a book of rules and policies if no one ever sees them? Make sure coaches have them and they are reviewed with coaches. Make them available to parents on your website and tell them it's there. There is no reason to review the game rules with parents but you should hit on some of the important policies at your orientation. The more informed your parents are the smoother game play will go as they will know what is going on and why certain calls are being made the way they are.
10. Consistency is Key: When it comes to your referees enforcing your league rules of play, consistency is key. This is why it is very important to review these with them and open that line of communication throughout the season. You may not have the ability to have the same officials there very week so with new crews comes new challenges as they may not enforce something they way the previous crew did. Have a "cheat sheet" with quick references for the referees on site and the full rule book if they need to look something up. Meet with officials before games start for the day to inform them of anything that may have come up the previous week.
11. Enforcing Rules of the Game: It is always better to enforce your playing rules, even at the lower levels and youngest ages. Your players will learn a lot faster if your officials are calling fouls and penalties. It is tough sometimes when the child made a great play and it gets overturned by a penalty, but trust me they will learn a lot faster on the proper way to play!
12. Policy Enforcement: When enforcing policies make sure you are consistent and fair with everyone. This is across the board with players, parents, and coaches. Sometimes it is better to find a compromise than be 100% black and white with the rules and policies. However, if you give a break for one person you will have to for everyone so any policies that are for the betterment of the league should be enforced by the book.



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