



MISSION & PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT

CYO Athletics is sports done a different way – as one community. Individuals and teams strive for greatness in accordance with Gospel values. To develop the whole person, we teach success is not measured solely by the scoreboard, but by the effort, team play, and fun of the experience.

COMMUNITIES

The CYO Athletics community is organized around the parish as its center of activities, as this is a natural environment that provides a resource of volunteers and financial support necessary for the implementation of activities for youth. It is this environment that also encourages family participation in activities, as well as serving as a base of operations for coordinated programs and service projects to the greater community upon which youth can have a positive influence.

Athletic competition will not begin before 12:00 noon on Sundays to allow families to attend mass.

DIGNITY OF LIFE

CYO Athletics is committed to the dignity and worth of each child it serves, regardless of physical talents, mental strength, or emotional health, and hopes that the same respect for life will become a part of their value system. A desired outcome is that each child knows that they are wanted and loved.

PROGRAM GOALS

- 1) To provide opportunities for youth to grow in faith;
- 2) To increase self-confidence and self-reliance;
- 3) To increase interpersonal competence;
- 4) To increase a sense of caring toward others.

This will help athletes understand the aspect of service to others, and will help them better understand their sense of belonging. Youth are brought together from different parishes, schools, and social backgrounds in an atmosphere that fosters the recognition of one's strengths and limitations, the lessons of winning and losing, and respect for all involved; fellow players, opponents, coaches, and officials.

In other words, CYO Athletics is in the business of teaching life values that aid boys and girls in their social, spiritual, physical and emotional development towards adulthood not toward becoming a professional athlete. This philosophy is worthwhile only to the extent that it is incorporated into the programs of CYO Athletics. It is this philosophy that justifies the involvement of the Catholic Church in athletics. Its implementation is not optional.

Administration of CYO Athletics at the parish, school and archdiocesan level requires policies to effectively and efficiently run the program. To be true to our philosophy, it is imperative that there is a balance of justice and mercy in our program implementation. In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, mercy "*does not destroy justice, but is a certain kind of fulfillment of justice...Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution; (and) justice without mercy is cruelty.*"

Therefore, being merciful without a sense of what is fair and just for all involved undermines accountability because there is no means to hold individuals or programs to a standard of expectation. Simply applying the existing policy

and associated consequence without consideration for the individual circumstances at hand displays a lack of understanding and compassion that should be present in our program as a ministry of the Catholic Church.

“You know that while all race, only one is crowned champion. In that case run to win. Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things, they do this to win a crown that withers but we a crown that is imperishable”
1 Corinthians 9: 26-27

SPORTS AS MINISTRY

The Latin *ministerium* means “service”. All Christians, not just ordained, are called to ministry through baptism. CYO Athletics is a ministry of the Catholic Church. As such, sports becomes a vehicle for reaching young people, for providing opportunities to grow in their faith, to apply the lessons of faith to their daily lives. We need to ensure the experience of athletics serves our young people, that they do not become servants to athletics.

In order for this to happen, much as Paul exhorts the community of Corinth, we need to focus on the imperishable crown. We must create an environment and experience that focuses on the growth and development of all involved, not just merely those who wind up ahead on the scoreboard. We must create an experience that is lasting, even after the trophies have lost their luster. We must redefine what it means to “win”.

COACH AS YOUTH MINISTER

“All of us, in life, are in need of educators, mature, wise and balanced persons that help us grow in the family, in study, in work, in the faith. Educators that encourage us to take the first steps in a new activity without having fear of the obstacles and the challenges to be faced; that spur us to surmount difficult moments; that exhort us to have confidence in ourselves and in our companions; that are at our side be it in moments of disappointment and loss be it in those of joy and success. The sports coach, especially in Catholic environments of amateurish sport, can become for many young people one of these good educators, so important for the development of a mature, harmonic and complete personality.”

-Pope Francis

In viewing sports as ministry, it is important that the coach see themselves as minister, in response to the baptismal call. Not because coaches are required to speak profoundly on theological concepts or Catholic Church doctrine but because they must help create the environment in which these are valued and lived out. One of the coach's greatest responsibilities is to lead the team in creating a positive culture for Christian values and passionate competition. Adherence to these is critical to the development of the individual and the team. In order to create this culture, coaches must be willing to incorporate the “Play Like a Champion Today” approach into their coaching practice.

It was St. Francis of Assisi who said, “Preach Always. Use words if necessary”. It is an age old truth that what we do says so much more than the words we speak. This is particularly important in regards to our young people who look for congruency in what we tell them to do and how we act ourselves. Our young people see and remember how we react to a poor call by an official, they witness our integrity and compassion when it is time for our least skilled player to get in the game and they experience our response and perspective when we come up on the short end on the scoreboard.

Being a Champion is not based on the results on the scoreboard. Coaches need to be prepared to redefine success for themselves, the players and their parents. Ask the questions: Are you a good coach if your team wins a trophy? Are you a bad coach if your team doesn't? Are players good if they win and bad if they lose? Being a Champion Coach is empowering individuals and teams to maximize their potential.

Being a Champion Athlete is reflected in how personal and team growth occurs in performance and how they carry themselves within the experience, not whether they have more points or a faster time than someone else at the end of the day.

COMPASSIONATE COMPETITION

CYO Athletics should reflect an integration of the Gospel values we are called to live out through our baptismal call. It is not a choice between compassion and competition. It is not an either or proposition. One of the great elements of athletics is the aspect of competition. If we were to remove competition, we would remove one of the essential aspects of athletics that provides teachable moments and lasting memories. It is often competition that brings out the best in who we are and helps us become something more than we believed capable.

The word competition comes from the Latin *com* meaning “with” and *petere* meaning “to strive”. It is important to note that we do not compete against someone else, we compete with them. We strive with them to bring out the best in ourselves and those we compete with. Likewise, if we are to remove compassion from athletics, we remove the framework of our faith that should inform every action we take. If we remove this, then the Catholic Church has no business running an athletic program.

The word compassion comes from the Latin *com* meaning “with” and *pati* meaning “to bear, to suffer”. Compassion is the sorrow for the sufferings of another or others, accompanied by an urge to help. Christ’s passion is that which He suffered and endured on our behalf on the cross. His passion is in union with us and with God. Through this act, He reconciles us with God. We are called as disciples to take up that cross and to act in our lives with that same sense of suffering or endurance on behalf of others, to have and to show compassion for those we encounter.

One of the ways this is lived out specifically in CYO Athletics is in our lopsided score policy. Our emphasis on trying to eliminate lopsided scores comes from a number of values of the CYO Athletics program and the Catholic Church.

Often the argument used in defense of lopsided scores is that by having the policy we have, we are restricting the growth and development of our most talented athletes. It is argued that we are holding them back. It is questionable whether beating a decidedly inferior opponent really reflects growth and development in our own skill level, whether we have achieved anything solely by doing so. There can be a false sense of success and a lack of appropriate self-assessment when we beat someone that is clearly less talented and skilled.

It is healthy for a coach to ask a player to focus on a less developed skill or weaker part of their skill set in order to grow as a player. That is not about reducing effort or achievement. It is simply redirecting effort from a skill that they clearly have grasped (or one they can achieve relative to their opponent) to one that they need to develop further.

In the end, while that player may not score a basket or a goal, they are better served as a competitive athlete for using lesser developed skills in a game environment and they likely made the game more competitive, which for most athletes and spectators is more fun. Because they have developed their skills, they will be better equipped to compete against a more skilled team.

By not taking the opportunity to challenge our athletes to further develop their underdeveloped skills we are holding them back in a different sense. In athletics, if the only skills we put into use or practice are the ones we are proficient at, we will be limiting our own growth and limiting our usefulness as we progress in life. From the CYO Athletics perspective, this is a win-win. The more talented athlete develops a greater proficiency in less skilled areas of their game and the less talented athlete is not overwhelmed by the talent disparity and discouragement. With intentionality of those involved, both have the opportunity to develop toward their maximum potential.

Becoming a "Champion Athlete" is gained by maximizing potential as an individual player and as a teammate. This is not necessarily defined by completing a skill in game competition or by examining the score on the scoreboard. There are plenty of teams that played well below their potential and have "won" on the scoreboard and others that played well above their perceived potential in a loss. We should celebrate the latter. Add the faith element and how Christian values are lived out is an important part of being a champion as well.

The question is how do we define who our teammates are? How do we become a difference maker beyond our team, or beyond our immediate community? For many fans, it is difficult to see beyond their own child or team, to cheer for kids that are not from their own community. And yet, our baptismal call to discipleship thrusts this role upon us as the need to be bearers of hope and light for others in our life; both friend and stranger. So while we are striving to become the best we can be, let us also be mindful of how we encourage and support others to do the same.

**“Let me win,
but if I cannot win,
let me be brave in the attempt.”
- Special Olympics Motto**

Prayer for the Courage to be Great

"Heavenly Father,
Give me the courage to strive for the highest goals,
to flee every temptation to be mediocre.
Enable me to aspire to greatness, as Pier Giorgio did,

and to open my heart with joy to Your call to holiness.
Free me from the fear of failure.
I want to be, Lord, firmly and forever united to You.
Grant me the graces I ask You through Pier Giorgio's intercession,
by the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen."

WHY HAVE PLAYOFFS?

This question is sometimes asked within and about CYO Athletics. With its emphasis on the development of all participants and the concept of compassionate competition, why do we have a season ending experience where some teams qualify and some do not? Why do we have championship tournaments or events where we hand out trophies? Is this really what CYO Athletics is all about? If we reflect on the prayer for the courage to be great that is based on the life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, known as "the Man of the Eight Beatitudes", there is congruence. Much like Pier Giorgio (www.FrassatiUSA.org) and the example of his life, we are called to seek greatness but not at the expense of others.

Striving for the highest goals is in line with the message of CYO Athletics that all participants should maximize their potential in order to become a champion. This is not limited to our involvement with sports. Like Pier Giorgio, the striving to be a champion as an athlete should be matched by the desire to do so in other areas of life – as a student, as a friend and family member, as a member of the community. To be a champion disciple encompasses all of these things.

Playoffs and championship competition provide an opportunity for individuals and teams of proven talent and ability to compete with other individuals and teams of like capability and accomplishment and bring out the best in themselves and others in the field of athletics. In most individual sports, the challenge is the athlete against the time or distance while in team sports the challenge is how a group of individuals can not only maximize their individual contributions but also their output as a team, all the while in dynamic competition with an opponent who is striving to do the same. Playoffs and championship competition are both an acknowledgement of achievement and an opportunity to refine excellence.

The difference in CYO Athletics is that the achievement and excellence should be rooted in the Gospel values that inform our entire lives as disciples, like Blessed Pier Giorgio. If there is an issue of reform this is where we need to be vigilant, to ensure that every level of competition reflects the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING CYO ATHLETICS' PHILOSOPHY

"Our athletics should go hand in hand with our youth ministry. Sports well understood and practiced contributes to the development of the whole person because it demands generous effort, careful self-control, mastery of self and respect for others, complete commitment and team spirit."

- Saint John Paul II

For the sake of practical application, the important question may be, how do we exhibit compassionate competition in the midst of athletics? The expectation is that even in the midst of working to become the best we can be, we are mindful of those we are competing with, aware of the golden rule and what it would be like to be in their shoes in the competitive experience.

When there is a talent disparity, it is imperative to act to minimize the difference in order to increase the enjoyment and growth potential of the less talented without taking away the same for the greater talent. At the same time, if done well, taking measures to mitigate talent differential can also pose a challenge toward growth and development of the more talented team. The first step in accomplishing this is to remove the scoreboard as the ultimate determination of whether the experience was fun or not. The team should be asked after each practice and game – how did you as individuals or we as a team get better today? If your team is greater in talent, why not have them shift roles so that they can play positions they are not accustomed to? Why not have them use only their non-dominant hand or foot?

Why not run more complicated schemes in a game situation? Why not have them focus specifically on an area of their individual game that is less developed? Why not play your lesser talented players more? These measures will look different in different sports but all will provide an opportunity for an individual and team to grow in their coordination, sport specific skills as well as their perspective and compassion for others.

At practices, each youth will receive equal attention regardless of playing ability. The goal of coaches in CYO Athletics should be to assist every player on his or her team to utilize their God-given talents to the best of their ability in the hope that each child will leave the season with a feeling of individual accomplishment and an increased sense of self-worth. Quality of experience should be taken into account when determining roster size.

Each child who faithfully attends practice must be given meaningful opportunity to play in games. The degree of participation, while depending on many variables, will basically reflect the concern the coach has for each child. Each parish may determine specifics, but CYO Athletics expects each player, at a minimum, to play one quarter of each game or match. Please refer to the sport-specific sections for detailed playing time policies.

Coaches must be constantly aware of the tremendous influence they have on their players, and should use this opportunity to always set a positive Christian example.

Coaches and parents must always accentuate the positive, win or lose. Comment on specific performance should always be in the context of a growth mindset vs. a fixed mindset. Focus should be on the process of development, fun and maximizing potential as an individual and as a team and not solely on the results of the scoreboard.