

## BOOK REVIEW

### *YOUTH SPORT AND THE LAW: A GUIDE TO LEGAL ISSUES*

Tom Appenzeller

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xx + 206 pages [\$19.95 U.S. (paper)]

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"It has been said that the value of law lies not in the happiness it creates, but rather in the misery and suffering it prevents" (p.5). Within that framework of thought, the author has written an insightful compilation of information regarding issues of law relating to youth sport.

The rapid growth of the sport industry in the United States and worldwide has been well documented. Nowhere is the growth more pronounced however, than in the realm of youth sport. There are currently over 25 million athletes in the 5 to 18 age groups in the United States alone. From the magnitude of participation in youth soccer leagues, to the "EXplosion" of the "Gravity Games" and "X Games", athletic events for young boys and girls have provided an outlet for fun, fitness and competition. From Williamsport to Winnipeg, Tallahassee to Taipei, and Salt Lake City to Seoul, youth, parents, coaches, officials and league administrators have become involved with sport for the young and young at heart. Unfortunately, wherever the soccer balls are kicked, basketballs are shot, baseballs and softballs are pitched, and gymnastic apparatus is vaulted, the risk of injury is present. In our litigious society, all too often where risk and injury appear, lawyers and lawsuits follow. Therefore, knowledge of the legal process, proactive safety planning, and effective risk management is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for today's sport administrators and coaches. Tom Appenzeller, in *Youth Sport and the Law: A Guide to Legal Issues*, has provided a valuable tool to prepare those working in youth sport for the practical realities of dealing with liability within the athletic realm of athletics for the young.

Appenzeller divided the Guide into 13 chapters that trace the origins of youth sport and litigation in youth sport, through relevant and current issues facing participants, parents and administrators. In each chapter, the author covers a brief history, trends, specific areas of concern for risk of injury, and representative court cases that illustrate the liability dangers. The beginning chapters lay the foundation for the understanding of current practice.

Chapter one provides a brief history of sport for youth, stretching from the ancient Olympic Games, through the development of organized American sport in the Public School Athletic League, the formation of the Little League, and finally to the diversity of programs and settings offered in communities today. The author completes the foundation by describing the structure of the court system, principles of tort law, and utilizes the unique analogy of a "prize fight" to illustrate the progression of a court case in chapter two.

In the following chapters, the author covers nearly "all the bases" concerning risks to participants, injuries caused by participants, spectator liability, coaching, facility safety, administration and management, gender issues, sexual abuse, and sport medicine care and prevention. Of particular interest were chapters that covered facility safety, gender issues and sexual abuse. The facility chapter presents guidelines, checklists and principles to follow concerning environmental safety, and concludes with personal testimony of an injury caused by facility negligence that resulted in a product change that may have prevented future injuries. Gender issues in youth sport were chronicled through some key cases involving girls participating in Little League and soccer programs. Contact sport issues, reverse discrimination, and non-discrimination guidelines for administrators completed the chapter. The chapter that discussed sexual abuse and molestation was both timely and informative. Administrative concerns in screening coaching applicants, background checks, and civil liability were presented.

One of the most interesting components of the book was the "After the Facts" section concluding each chapter. The author utilized a real life story to illuminate the principles of the chapter and humanize the legal issues. In addition, the author's personal experiences were occasionally interjected in the text to bear witness to the problems inherent in youth sport.

The book begins with the captivating story of Joey Fort, a 10 year-old New Jersey Little League All-Star who suffered an eye injury during a game in 1982. He became one of the most infamous Little League players in America, not because of his on-field prowess, but because of the \$750,000.00 lawsuit his parents filed against his volunteer coaches to cover medical expenses for the five subsequent operations needed to repair the damage to his eye. The legislative, political, and administrative ramifications of that lawsuit were felt across the country. The story points to the need of properly trained and qualified coaches for our youth sport programs. The author alludes to the story of a grandfather who went to register his grandson for a youth soccer league and was asked if he wanted to coach in the league. When questioned about the qualifications needed to coach, the administrator responded that the most important criteria involved ownership of a van to transport the team to

games. With that in mind, a brief explanation of the need for national certification of coaches, the training offered by various youth sport organizations, and the accreditation of coaching education programs (currently offered by the National Council for the Accreditation of Coaching Education - NCACE) at all levels of competition would have been a useful addition to the chapter on Coaching liability.

The book concludes with a brief chapter presenting 10 risk management recommendations for a safer, more effective youth sport experience. A very practical appendix section follows with examples of accident forms, employee/volunteer applications, parent consent forms, training kit equipment lists, and facility/field/equipment safety checklists.

Tom Appenzeller is uniquely qualified to write a book on this subject because of his ability to draw upon his nearly 30 years of experience as a teacher, coach, official, athletic director, and youth sport administrator. The book is written in a very easily understood style devoid of a great deal of complex legalese. The text is targeted for the volunteer or professional who needs practical information concerning the legal responsibilities of leadership positions in youth sport. The author covered a great deal of content territory, but the book was not intended to be an investigation into the depths of legal theory or case law. Although the author could have used more current court cases in some of the chapters, the ones used represents precedent setting decisions that form the parameters of legal interpretation today.

Overall, *Youth Sport and the Law: A Guide to Legal Issues* fills the void with a text that specifically relates legal issues to the arena and fields of youth sport. The book could be utilized as a required text in a youth sport class, supplemental text in a sport law or risk management class, or required reading in a coaching education course offered to volunteers or professionals. I would highly recommend it for any adult leader entrusted with the tremendous responsibility of providing a quality, positive, and safe athletic experience for our most precious treasure. . . our children.

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