

Athletic Hazing: Issues and Prevention Strategies for Sport Managers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the occurrence of hazing in the international sport culture and create policies based on preventative anti-hazing strategies that will positively impact all stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, parents, teachers, administrators, and governing bodies.

Recent studies have confirmed that the number of reported hazing incidents on athletic teams at all levels (e.g., high school, amateur, university, and professional) has continued to increase (Allen & Madden, 2008). Internationally, researchers have discovered many instances of hazing in the military (Stolyarova, 2008), in Japanese sumo wrestling, where one death occurred in 2007 (Lah, 2008), and at colleges and universities (Weimer, 2007).

Research has also shown that hazing has roots in several European traditions (Lipkins, 2006).

Overview and Definition

Hazing is defined as "any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate" (Hoover, 1999, pg. 4). In athletics, these incidents have traditionally been relatively minor, ranging from making rookies or first-year team members carry equipment, to having them sing their school's alma mater in public.

These activities are often encouraged as a form of team building, but in recent years these incidents have escalated into more dangerous activities, and athletes have begun in some ways to self-report by posting their hazing pictures on the Internet (Millersville suspends, 2007).



Background

Hazing exploits one's basic need and desire to be part of a group (Lipkins, 2006). In particular, high school and college athletes seem willing to do just about anything that veteran players demand of them in order to be part of the team's "inner circle".

This exploitation seems to be validated when one observes the media coverage of ostensibly "harmless" hazing activities, including challenges occurring on television (Reality TV, 2008) and in US professional sports (Zeigler, 2006).

For example, Kapustin (2007) light-heartedly remarked that a rookie quarterback for a National Football League team (NFL) was, "bound with tape and covered with baby powder, ... [then] sprayed with a hose, and placed in a massive tub of ice water, [with] a traffic cone on his head" (pg. F2).

This type of media coverage sends a mixed message to high school and college athletes who would undoubtedly be suspended or removed from a team for the exact same offenses.

Legal Issues

More and more students face criminal and civil charges for hazing (Rosner & Crow, 2002), including one high school football player found guilty of rape for sodomizing a teammate (Chancellor, 2008).

Forty-four states in the United States currently have some form of anti-hazing statute, yet these vary greatly in terms of defining hazing, penalties imposed, and enforcement (State anti-hazing, 2008).

Coaches and athletic administrators must be aware of the potential criminal charges they could face if involved in hazing or initiation activities.

Methodology and Data Analysis

There will be three focus groups consisting of eight participants in each group (N = 24).

The first two groups will be comprised of college student-athletes (N= 16), and the second will be composed of college coaches and athletic administrators (N = 8).

A list of potential focus group participants was created by the researchers. It was deemed appropriate to include a variety of constituents.

Therefore, the participants were purposely selected based on their position and expertise.

These individuals were e-mailed a letter of invitation to participate in the focus group. The letter of invitation included the questions that would be discussed at the focus group session in order to provide them with an opportunity to prepare their responses. Participants were told in the letter of invitation and at the focus group session that confidentiality would be guaranteed and that no names would be ascribed to the feedback.

The focus group sessions will be tape-recorded and detailed notes will be taken by the research team.

Focus group information will be analyzed according to frequency, comparison, and emanating themes.

Discussion and Hazing Prevention

Results from the focus group analysis will be combined with existing research to develop strategies useful for all constituents in the fight against athletic hazing.

The final section of the presentation will include including development of an anti-hazing statement, providing alternative orientation and initiation practices, and building lines of reporting for victims of hazing abuse.

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