



## Team Bonding Alternatives to Hazing

By Dr. David Hoch

There are still too many myths and misconceptions about hazing, which probably is alive, undetected in many of our programs. Also, since athletics should be educational in nature, coaches have to find healthy, positive alternatives for team bonding activities. Everyone has to do a better job combating hazing.

Unfortunately, hazing is hidden and mired in things that we often consider traditions and integral to building team unity. At some point – and there is no better time than now – we have to see hazing for what it is and change what has been done for years. Hazing has absolutely no place in education-based athletics.

To assist coaches in finding alternatives for team bonding, it may be helpful to review a few key words associated with hazing. Activities which may be:

- Unwanted by the participants
- Degrading to members of a team – usually new ones
- Used to create a pecking order and control
- Dangerous or perhaps illegal

If your traditional team activities include any of these aspects, it is time to eliminate them and find better alternatives for team bonding. The following are some good examples of team bonding activities to replace hazing.

1. **Organize team dinners, pizza parties or cook-outs.** Whether these events are held at one of the team member's home or in the school cafeteria, it probably doesn't matter. These food-centered activities can take place almost at any time of the season and provide a great opportunity to share an enjoyable time for the entire team. Everyone likes to eat

and share some laughs – when it's done as a team, the camaraderie can also improve.

2. **Attend college games as a team.** Often colleges arrange special evenings in which high school teams can attend at minimal or no cost. Obviously, colleges benefit by getting high school athletes to their games, which exposes their program to potential recruits. Your athletes also get to see what it takes to play at the next level and to enjoy an evening with their teammates.
3. **Assign big brothers or sisters for new teammates.** Unlike college pledging, these upper class teammates are available to help the newcomers by answering their questions and helping them to adjust to a new school setting. The new, young players are never referred to as rookies and the upper-classmen only serve as resources and mentors.
4. **Organize a bowl-a-thon for your team.** This activity not only can serve as a valuable fund-raiser, it also is a great, fun bonding opportunity for your players. Any time you can combine two important goals into one effort, it has to be extremely worthwhile.
5. **Arrange to give instructional clinics for your feeder middle schools.** When players help teach skills to younger, inexperienced students, fellow teammates can also gain a greater appreciation of those around them and also have a good time doing it. In addition to helping with team bonding, the younger athletes have a chance to learn new skills, meet members of the varsity squad and develop an appreciation of the sport. Everyone wins by giving clinics.

Whatever activities you choose to use with your program, it is also helpful to have your seniors and captains involved in the planning and organization. With the involvement of these key individuals of your team, you are also providing leadership development opportunities that will pay huge dividends.

Of course, a huge component of team bonding could ideally consist of team community service projects. Careful consideration needs to be given to what project a team aligns itself with and at what point on the calendar you contribute your time and energy. For example, preseason activities will probably not include any new athletes who might be trying out for the team and this is precisely the group that you would want involved and would benefit greatly from bonding efforts.

Community service provides the ideal setting to subtly introduce an important aspect of team play – helping others. By giving to others and also learning how to help your own teammates, community service combines the best of both worlds and accomplishes two goals simultaneously.

An added benefit of community service is the public relations value for the team and school. During community service activities, the public has a chance to see athletes in a positive light as opposed to negative problems which are often reported by the media. These projects may even be able to change the public's prevailing perceptions.

If possible, it would be a good idea to provide the local newspaper with details of your community service project. Often the media is criticized for selling newspapers by exploiting the negative and controversial stories. At least give the local press the opportunity to use positive news items, which can be a win-win situation for everyone.

With any team bonding activity, it should be clear that the coach has to be totally involved in the planning and provide the ultimate leadership. Coaches should always think of and use these activities as teachable moments.

Through increased understanding, awareness and determination, team bonding can be achieved without using long-accepted hazing activities. Hazing has no place in education-based athletics. **CQ**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. David Hoch is the athletic director at Loch Raven High School in Towson, Maryland (Baltimore County). He assumed this position in 2003 after nine years as director of athletics at Eastern Technological High School in Baltimore County. He has 24 years experience coaching basketball, including 14 years on the collegiate level. Hoch, who has a doctorate in sports management from Temple University, is past president of the Maryland State Athletic Directors Association, and he formerly was president of the Maryland State Coaches Association. He has had more than 250 articles published in professional magazines and journals, as well as two textbook chapters. Hoch is a former member of the NFHS Coaches' Quarterly Publications Committee and current member of the NFHS High School Today Publications Committee.



## BETTER YOUR BEST.

And get a really cool athletic calendar free.



If you are not already receiving our sports specific catalogs, fax in this request using our toll free number, or give us a call.

### SPRING 2009 CATALOGS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baseball & Softball | <input type="checkbox"/> Track & Field      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer              | <input type="checkbox"/> 2008/2009 Calendar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis              |   |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



P: 800.950.3320 F: 800.950.9301  
www.GLSPORTS.com