Coaches' and leagues' accountability to prevent athletes’ injuries. Student Name

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**Abstract**

Leagues and coaches are essential to an athlete's development. Coaches bear a great degree of responsibility because of the close relationship that forms between them and their athletes as a result of their shared experiences. Because of this, the coach and the league must maintain their mutually beneficial relationship. The law increasingly increases the obligations placed on coaches to prevent or lessen athlete injuries. In other words, due to his position of power and responsibility, a coach will always be held accountable. If a few requirements are not met, the coach may suffer financial or even legal repercussions. The article discusses the legal requirements, commitments, and standards necessary to hold coaches and leagues accountable for the safety of their athletes.

**Introduction**

The coach-athlete connection is unique and crucial, but other factors such as athlete-athlete interactions, team management ties, medical links, and other personal relationships may also have an impact on an athlete's performance in a sport. In this type of cooperation, the coach has control over the athlete's skills, time, and attention, according to Slauterbeck et al. (2019). This relationship has a substantial impact on the athlete's motivation and level of stress. The bond between the coach and the player does not end here, though. Furthermore, they have agreements in place where the coach is legally obligated to the athletes substantially. The obligations that result from these linkages are not specified by the parties involved. However, they are specified by case law and statute law, which are rules that each country's government has put on paper. When a coach has a legal relationship with either the athlete or the people who may harm the athlete, there is an affirmative duty to safeguard the athlete. The quantity of remuneration received by a party has no bearing on the duties that are owed (Hattery, 2017). Therefore, both paid and volunteer coaches have duties to the players. For instance, they owe the athletes the same duties concerning providing secure facilities and equipment, carrying out competent monitoring, etc.

Simply said, whether one coach receives compensation and the other does not have any bearing on the commitments owed to the players. When coaches commit nonfeasance or fail to carry out these constructive tasks, they are held accountable by law. Learning the many legal aspects of the relationship between coach and athlete, as well as the duties and responsibilities that coaches have to their athletes, is essential. It should be highlighted that past research does not entirely reflect the obligations and liabilities of coaches, according to Slauterbeck et al. (2019). It could be useful to review and study the pertinent literature to provide a comprehensive picture of the issue because many papers and court cases have expressed contrasting perspectives on these subjects.

**Legal duties of the coach and league**

The legal duties of the coach and the league are frequently clearly defined by state sports organizations, departments of education, and other pertinent governmental bodies, and coaching certification programs commonly give weight to these regulations. The safety and welfare of athletes were taken into consideration when developing these rules. In addition, extra obligations for a league may be governed by court decisions or other legal actions. Numerous research has been conducted on the legal obligations imposed on coaches. In this study, the case law about similar tasks was looked at. For instance, after considering the court cases involving accidents that occurred in New York high schools, the following duties were assigned to coaches: gathering the necessary equipment, keeping an eye on the storage area, inspecting all accidents, and administering first aid. Coaches were also responsible for providing proper care for injured athletes until a doctor could arrive, using protective equipment, and maintaining equipment (Voicu, 2021). Slauterbeck et al. (2019) emphasized the duties of coaches and the league, including administering endurance programs, training players on the value of nutrition, maintaining equipment, providing first aid, and applying protective tape and equipment.

 legal obligations for coaches were identified by Kerai (2020) in his research, which was based on case law and legal literature. These duties cover a variety of things, such as giving athletes adequate and proper supervision, alerting them to the dangers associated with training and competition, providing secure surroundings and facilities, safe equipment, giving athletes access to adequate and proper health care, giving athletes access to proper and safe transportation, appropriately pairing and equating competitors for competition, giving the press with a fair shake, and instructing and enforcing rules and regulations. Hanlon et al. (2020) established obligations that educational institutions and all athletic staff members, including coaches, should meet or beyond. Establishing a plan, overseeing it, figuring out whether an athlete is academically and physically capable of practicing and competing, maintaining safe playing environments, providing appropriate equipment, giving the right instruction, matching athletes, providing and overseeing appropriate physical conditioning, alerting athletes to inherent risk, and making sure athletes have injury-free seasons are some of these duties.

Courts have developed these conditions to establish negligence in sports-related incidents as a result of tort-related lawsuits involving academic institutions, teachers, and athletic programs. There are different lists of responsibilities that pertain to coaches, according to Kerai (2020). The most significant of them were initially categorized by (Wenham,1994) and later finished by (Wiesenberger,2008), covering the majority of the legal obligations of coaches and being accepted by several researchers.

1. **Carefully plan the activity**

Make sure the workouts you plan are appropriate for the athletes' age and growth stage. Athletes shouldn't practice advanced skills before they are ready since doing so might be hazardous. In a similar vein, adapt your team's training regimen to their current state of readiness.

The coach's responsibility to fulfill these duties is to:

1. create a long-term strategy that includes skill-appropriate instructional progressions.
2. firmly adhere to your plans;
3. modify your teaching methodology to the unique qualities of your athletes;
4. retain records of your athlete assessments and practice schedule.
5. assess athletes' abilities and physical condition; • develop instructional plans for all practices
6. **Give appropriate guidance**

It was shown that there is a considerable danger of injury while adopting particular sports techniques, such as head-first sliding in baseball and spear tackling in football. According to legal regulations on coaches, such tactics should never be taught to young athletes or even allowed for them. Coaches must impart technical and tactical knowledge through the sport's accepted procedures to reduce the danger of harm. Coaches are required to impart proper skills during the activity to successfully promote the development of the participants. The ability to research safety films and the appropriate mechanical training, study books on sports safety, go to coaching hospitals, and learn safe and right procedures are all part of these tasks.

To accomplish these responsibilities, the coach must:

1. be aware of the most recent sport-specific educational materials standards and incorporate them into your instruction;
2. give instructions in a clear, thorough, and consistent manner, including adequate feedback on skill-learning progressions.
3. At all times, closely monitor all instructional, practice, and competitive activities, even when others are given leadership responsibilities;
4. teach methods, approaches, and rules following the sport's accepted practices and the athletes' developmental stage.
5. **Inform Parents and Athletes of Potential Risks**

Every activity has some risk, and the argument "I wasn't warned that this might occur" has been used in several court cases. Youth sports programs may deal with parents who have never participated in the sport and are genuinely unaware of some of the hazards. This subject should be discussed during the preseason parents' meeting. It is crucial to educate players on the hazards associated with their sport (Voicu, 2021). Instead of scaring parents and athletes, we should provide them with a solid platform on which to base their decision on whether or not to accept the risks associated with playing a sport. The coach must first inform players and parents of the hazards associated with sports participation so that they are aware of, comprehend, and appreciate those risks (Hattery, 2017). To do this, the coach should make sure that the dangers are recognized by using releases, videos, written alerts, and repeated cautions.

1. **Create a safe setting for sports.**

As a coach, one has a responsibility to regularly and thoroughly inspect the safety of the equipment, the field, and the warm-up, training, and changing areas. This includes making sure there are no hazards such as openings, shattered glass, exposed sprinkler heads, or jagged edges (Cavallerio, 2022). You must mitigate hazards that you can't eliminate which include:

1. alert the facility management,
2. inform your athletes, and
3. direct the activity away from the risk.

To carry out these responsibilities, the coach must:

1. rectify hazardous conditions and/or reduce the hazards to the best of your ability; warn athletes of hazards and notify the facility manager;
2. provide athletes with safety rules; regularly remind them about the rules, and constantly enforce the rules;
3. regularly inspect the sporting environment, noting and addressing hazardous conditions;
4. develop and use facilities and maintain completed checklists on file;
5. **Provide Adequate and Proper Equipment**

Baseball bats with loose grips, incorrectly positioned masks on helmets (for sports like football, hockey, and volleyball), and loose bolts on gymnastic equipment are a few instances of accidents waiting to happen. As the coach, it is your responsibility to give players the greatest equipment to ensure their utmost degree of safety (Koller, 2022). By law, coaches must use prudence while selecting, assigning, employing, and maintaining equipment. If the equipment is used improperly, coaches might be held liable for player injury. In kid's sports, the essential gear is typically supplied by the team. Hanlon et al. (2020) claim that the equipment in issue isn't in the best of shape and is routinely thrown away every year. The instructor must differentiate between faulty and old equipment. In the end, the coach must procure replacements for any defective equipment and supply it to the competition.

The coach must perform the following tasks to fulfill these obligations:

1. deliver the best age/skill-appropriate equipment that can be afforded;
2. guide your athletes on ways to effectively fit, utilize, and examine their equipment and motivate them to replace ill-fitting or faulty equipment;
3. examine all equipment frequently for wear and tear and guarantee that it keeps up with safety standards;
4. allow only authorized people to set up, fit, adjust, and repair equipment;
5. warn athletes of potential hazards.
6. **Make the Right Matches for Your Athletes**

Avoid comparing athletes to others who are physically stronger, larger, or more skilled to keep them safe. This is true for actions like tossing or smashing objects as well as combat sports like football and wrestling. The impact of a one-on-one tackling practice in football when the ball carrier weighs 110 lbs. and the player who tackles is 200 lbs. is the basis for the coach's carelessness (impellizzeri et al., 2020). To fulfill these duties, the coach must: match athletes appropriately based on their age, size, maturity, skill, and level of expertise to avoid situations where the risk of injury is increased; enforce the rules designed to promote fair and safe competition; prevent inconsistencies, but modify practices and drills to appropriately meet them when they do occur; and make the necessary safety modifications for mismatches relating to between-sex competition, going back a year.

1. **Evaluate Athletes for Injury or Incapacity**

Athletes may also be at a higher risk of injury if they have health difficulties or a history of accidents. Preseason physical exams are often required for junior high and higher-level programs, but not for smaller leagues. The decision to allow a player to return from injury is another instance in which the coaches' accountability is put to the test. It is important to note that the coach does not have complete power over this decision; rather, the coach only has limited influence. All of the parents, the athletic trainer, and the doctor are notified. Assuring that every player is fit to play at the beginning of the season, determining whether an illness or injury is severe enough to prevent participation in practice or competition, and ensuring that injured players have fully recovered before allowing them to return to the field are all duties of the coach (Hanlon et al., 2020).

1. **Oversee the Activity Carefully**

 The coach in charge supervises the players as well as the assistant coaches. In general supervision, it's important to be in visual and audible touch with the location and people you're watching so you can react fast. Examples include the restroom, bathroom, gear room, bleachers, passageways, etc. in addition to the sports field (Hanlon et al.,2020). Specific oversight has an educational focus on the coaching or teaching of a particular activity or skill. It takes place just where an activity is taking place and is more proactive than generic monitoring. The oversight should generally be more detailed the riskier the activity. Furthermore, athletes who are younger and less experienced need more detailed monitoring. A competent supervisor is someone who has the experience and qualifications necessary to carry out instructional activities in a suitable manner.

To carry out these responsibilities, the coach must:

1. provide general supervision for playing fields and athletic facilities;
2. provide specific supervision when teaching new skills and when the risk of injury increases;
3. be sufficiently knowledgeable about their sport to foresee potentially dangerous situations and be able to proactively remedy them;
4. use informational messages to enhance their supervision, and • prohibit reckless or excessively assertive behavior that endangers the safety of others.
5. **Provide Appropriate Emergency Assistance**

 For injured athletes, coaches and the league have to arrange for or procure proper medical care. It is the responsibility of coaches to offer emergency and interim treatment if qualified medical aid is not readily accessible. As a result, yearly first aid and CPR training sessions are required. When an accident occurs, the coach should only administer first aid that is within his or her scope of practice and delegate the dangers involved with emergencies to more competent individuals. Most leagues have a form for reporting injuries. Make sure you finish this up and get it to the league office as soon as you can. To fulfill these duties, the coach must:

Every participant must sign an authorization document before the season begins, Injured athletes must be kept safe from harm, first aid must be administered right away, CPR must be attempted to maintain or restore life when necessary, Injured athletes must be comforted and reassured, an emergency plan must be activated that includes handing off treatment to qualified medical personnel and medical report sheet must be filled out as soon as possible after the injury. Another classification of the coaches' legal obligations was made by Hanlon et al. (2020). They divided the responsibilities into seven main classifications, which encompass the obligations of coaches in numerous sports and at various levels of competitive and leisure athletic activity. They fall under the following categories:

1. Oversight: Monitoring the athlete's transportation and nutrition as well as monitoring the locker rooms and practicing spaces before, during, and after sessions of training.
2. Educating the skills, tactics, and regulations required for competition and practice, as well as strategies to lower the risk of harm;
3. Resources and Devices: taking into account weather and its impact on safe playing circumstances, inspecting indoor and outdoor amenities, providing secure environments at athletic training sessions and competitions, and accommodating clean, hygienic, and functional equipment that meets all of the safety requirements for the sport;
4. Risk Warning: Informing athletes of potential dangers that might arise during practice or competition. warning of some risks resulting from the exercise's nature, the usage of instruments, the playing field's characteristics, and the tactics used during play.
5. Medical Care: Making sure that suitable initial assistance and medical care are available, working to obtain practically quick and effective medical treatment for harm before the arrival of proper medical help, and refraining from making any existing injuries to the athlete worse
6. Understanding Players: Being knowledgeable of a player's physical condition before, during, and following sports activity as well as their background and accurately evaluating their enthusiasm and aptitude
7. Pairing Players: In training sessions and contests, pair athletes of comparable age, size, physical and mental maturity, experience, and ability level with other athletes in close competition in contact and non-contact. Coaches should make players aware of all of the aforementioned obligations if they want them to engage in athletic competition safely. Coaches who are not adequately informed about their responsibilities put players in danger and expose themselves to legal liability. The coach might face criminal charges as a result of this duty violation. Yet, the athlete may file a legal lawsuit against the coach after the incident that injured them (Bolling,2020).

**Coaches’ civil liability**

 Coaches usually have the strongest relationship with players and the most direct control over them in any sport. After the competition, coaches continue to often coach their athletes. Coaches have a stronger duty to shield players from recognized risks of harm due to the special nature of the coach-athlete relationship. In simple terms, when athletes participate in a particular sport class, the coach is required to do more than just teach them the skills they need for that activity; the coach is also required to keep an eye on the students at all times and protect them from known dangers. It might be argued that the commitment owed to athletes has risen owing to the financial and other benefits that coaches receive from players' participation in athletic events. Due to the close bond between the coach and athlete as well as the responsibilities placed on the athlete, coaches regularly find themselves named as defendants in lawsuits filed by such athletes. The coach's actions or inactions may be criticized or held personally responsible when an unanticipated circumstance arises on the field of play in sports (impellizzeri et al., 2020).

It should be stressed, though, that just because the coach had control over the injuries doesn't automatically render him or her accountable. Slauterbeck et al. (2019) claim that the cornerstone of civil responsibility is often the concept of carelessness. Negligence is frequently used as the basis for lawsuits brought by plaintiff players who hold the coach accountable for injuries they received during practice. The player must use a balance of probability to prove that the coach acted negligently. The definition of negligence, according to Slauterbeck et al. (2019), is the failure to exercise the amount of care that was necessary given the circumstances at the time of the accused conduct or error. In instances of carelessness, the following elements must be present for liability to be established:

1. A legally recognized duty of care on the part of the coach;
2. A breach of this duty by the coach;
3. Athlete injuries or damages; and
4. A causal relationship exists, in fact, between the coach's negligence and the resulting injury. A court must first consider, as a matter of law, whether a responsibility passes from the coach to the athlete to decide if a cause of action is established for a coach's culpability. A link of some kind among the parties is necessary for a duty of care to exist.

In the event of an injury or accident, the legal authorities will probe the parties' connection to see if it was such that the coach should have known that his behavior would cause the athlete harm. A fundamental principle of tort law is that if there are no particular circumstances between the plaintiff and defendant, no culpability is established. A coach is not required to support or defend his players under the fundamental tort law rules unless their relationship is regarded as exceptional. A judge will next determine whether the athletic trainer broke the duty of care (Kerai, 2020). A coach must treat his players with the same common sense that another confident, cautious coach would use in a similar circumstance. The precise approach or actions used to fulfill the standards may vary depending on the situation, including the setting, the game being played, the people's gender and age, skill level, and other factors. The overall notion of the norm of treatment, however, remains constant.

A coach has the potential to violate a duty both actively and passively. Therefore, it might happen as a result of acting inappropriately (misfeasance) or failing to act when required to do so (nonfeasance). The judiciary would have to initiate a case-by-case examination into the specifics of each athlete's situation if the requirement had been broken (Slauterbeck et al., 2019). The infraction must have caused losses or damages to the athlete's person, property, or interest. If the party complaining (athlete) suffers harm or hardship as a result of the offender's (coach's) negligence in the fulfillment of their obligations, a lawsuit is not sufficient. It must be established that the coach's negligence resulted in the specific harm for which the court is asking for compensation. It must be demonstrated that the coach's negligence was the main reason for the harm.

The concept may be reduced to one simple question: Did the defendant's carelessness cause or aggravate the injuries at issue? Regardless matter how much carelessness was present, if the answer to this question is "no," the injured athlete will not be allowed to sue the coach for negligence-related losses. The first and maybe most crucial factor in determining whether a coach is responsible for the injuries of his player is whether he or she has satisfied the requirement to use reasonable care to safeguard the athlete. If coaches fail to recognize the risks unique to their sport and/or instruct athletes on how to minimize these risks, they may be held legally responsible for an athlete's mishap (Slauterbeck et al., 2019).

**Conclusion**

Any sports system's foundation is its coach. If coaches truly understood the value of their relationship with players, embraced, and upheld their legal and moral obligations, the bulk of lawsuits brought against them would not occur. Instructors should never intentionally do anything to harm the athletes' psychological, physical, emotional, or psychological health and should never maintain close connections that involve any of the athletes, regardless of age, as there is always a chance that their relative power may influence the beginning of the relationship.

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