

Coaches Effect on Hazing and Their Power to Prevent Hazing

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Introduction

Hazing is an issue that can affect many different clubs and groups. There is a large focus on hazing in fraternity and sorority life, but we also need to prevent and address hazing in other areas such as athletics. Hazing has been prevalent in athletics since before the First World War. Athletic hazing can be seen at both the interscholastic and the intercollegiate levels. Hazing also does not discriminate against race, ethnicity, gender, or social economic standing.

Athletic Hazing

Any student who joins a group is at risk for hazing (Hoover et al., 2000). The mentality that hazing is a requirement of group membership is ubiquitous (Torta & Johnson, 2004). Hazing exists in both academics and social groups and is intended to rid the “old life” out of the new members (Torta & Johnson, 2004). Athletic hazing allows the veterans to show dominance over the new members. Athletics is special in that the coach chooses the team, unlike Greek life where student members are making the decisions, so athlete veterans look for other ways to have “traditions” or make new comers “earn their place” on the team.

Hazing does not discriminate. Although hazing is more likely with males, females also haze (Hoover et al., 2000). Women’s sports participants are more likely to use alcohol when hazing their new recruits (Hoover et

al., 2000). Men’s sports participants are more likely to use severe and dangerous activities to haze (Allan & DeAngelis, 2004). Hazing has taken place in all sports and has even led to deaths of student-athletes in some extreme cases. Rees (2010) suggested that hazing is simply bullying; the only difference being that the recipients are choosing to join the group thereby tacitly approving both the giving and receiving of the behavior.

Coaches Behavior Toward Hazing

Numerous coaches have experienced being hazed themselves as student-athletes (Caperchione & Holman, 2004). When a group of coaches were asked if turning a blind eye to hazing was acceptable, they responded that turning a blind eye is a “cowardly act” and they need to enforce their rules and morals against hazing (Caperchione & Holman, 2004, p.102). A majority of coaches also stated that hazing is not a part of being an athlete and should not be done to freshmen or new recruits. Although these coaches do not agree with hazing they all agreed that first year students do have something to prove (Caperchione & Holman, 2004). They also believed that most students gained the respect of their teammates when they completed hazing rituals.

Coaches Influence on Hazing

The attitudes and behaviors of coaches create a strong impression on their student-athletes (Kowalski & Waldron, 2010). “Quality coaching is a critical element of a successful athletic team; however, coaches too are susceptible to uncritically accepting the power and dominance sport ethic.” (Kowalski & Waldron 2010, p. 90) Johnson and Donnelly (2004) suggested that coaches are ignoring hazing and these actions give students the perception that hazing is an acceptable activity, Kowalski and Waldron (2010) also concluded that students’ perceptions of hazing is skewed based on the actions of the coach. Johnson and Donnelly (2004) noted that when coaches allow hazing it gives the students the idea that it is an integral part of

teambuilding.

There have been instances of coaches even participating in hazing. Fields et al. p.66 (2010) reported a case that involved a coach sodomizing a student with his fingers while the team was traveling on a bus. The coach told another coach and students who were in attendance that they were not allowed to say anything and that what had happened was fine (Fields et al., 2010). The coach committed a crime punishable by the law, and he also showed his athletes that it was acceptable to use sexual assault as in a misguided attempt at team bonding.

Some students have acknowledged that their coaches encouraged hazing, going so far as to tell athletes whom to haze (Kowalski & Waldron, 2010). Holman (2010) indicated a hockey student-athlete participated in hazing activities at the house of the coach and the club's president's house. Kowalski and Waldron (2010) concluded that coaches can mistake hazing for joking or teasing with teammates. Lipkins (2006) found that 83% of people, not just athletes, felt that coaches could stop hazing incidents. In a study done by Crow and Macintosh, (2009) it was identified that coaches and administrators believe there is a "gray area" for hazing and the definition is not clear and includes activities that they believe to be innocent or not harmful.

Coaches as Leaders to Prevent and Stop Hazing

Coaches are seen as the leaders of a team and are role models for their athletes. That leadership role allows them to set the standard for behavior towards hazing. Coaches need to take advantage of their leadership to prevent and stop it. Coaches that turn a blind eye to hazing activities are condoning the practice, whether they believe it or not. If student-athletes think their coaches accept hazing they will continue to haze. Coaches can prevent hazing by addressing the issue before it happens. They must lead in-depth conversations about hazing with their student-athletes at the beginning of each year. They can also set-up appropriate team bonding activities that won't lead to hazing, and start positive team

traditions. Further, they need to tackle hazing when it occurs and even when they suspect it may be occurring. Coaches set the tone for the acceptability of hazing and they have the power to stop it. If a student-athlete knows the coach does not accept it, and that there will be repercussions for perpetrating it, they will be hesitant to continue the practice.

Conclusion

The role of the coach as a leader of a team presents a special circumstance that allows them to prevent and stop hazing. Coaches need to realize that these actions are happening within their teams and have the discussion about why hazing isn't an acceptable tradition and how hazing can have lasting adverse effects. Administrators need to look to their coaches to set the example for the student-athletes. Student-athletes need guidance to stop these behaviors and coaches can give them that guidance.

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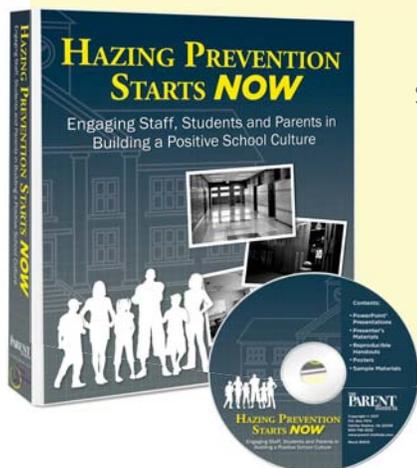
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NOTE: HazingPrevention.Org is currently developing a detailed coaches' guide to hazing prevention. It will be released in 2018.

Kayla Smith is the current student board member for HazingPrevention.Org. She has been researching hazing for seven years, with a focus on athletic hazing for most of that time. Kayla also interns with the athletics department at UNC in compliance. She hopes to take her knowledge of hazing and its solutions into the athletic industry after graduation.

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