

# **INSTRUCTION & SUPERVISION IN SPORT**

*Prof. Paul Singh, 2006.*

*“Some were born to coach, others should never settle for less!”*

## **WHAT IS INSTRUCTION ABOUT?**

Many accidents in sport, recreation and sport education can be prevented through proper training. Educators, coaches and instructors have the opportunity and responsibility to assist athletes to become aware of their personal safety. All coaches are responsible to provide proper instruction to their athletes. Proper instruction includes aspects such as teaching specific sport skills, correcting faults and poor techniques, and teaching participants about safety in their sport. Coaches use various means of communicating, such as written, verbal, and visual demonstrations. A coach may show what can happen if a technique is not performed correctly, and also what consequences may result. Coaches or instructors should be qualified to teach the sport. They should be able to direct younger or less experienced coaches and participants to use appropriate sport skills and techniques to promote the safety of all athletes.

To reach this goal, coaches should inspect their sport to find out the inherent risks to which participants may be exposed. They must illustrate the importance of observing the rules of the game. Instructors also have a duty to warn participants about dangers that are part of their sport. The duty to warn participants also involves making them aware of the dangers associated with breaking the rules of the game or activity. This is usually achieved through the signing of an informed consent form. Closely related to instruction is the task of supervision.

## **WHAT IS SUPERVISION?**

This is a dual duty:

- to supervise sport and recreation facilities, thus having control over the physical environment;
- to supervise the activities that take place in them. It requires giving attention to many management details and constant emphasis on safety and order. The high-speed of many games and competitions today usually causes some

participants to have reduced judgement and unacceptable behaviours. This is where sport administrators, physical educators, and coaches should regulate the behaviour of participants. Risk management programmes and consistent supervision can prevent most accidents and injuries.

## **TYPES OF SUPERVISION**

There are generally two types of supervision:

**1. Specific Supervision:** This involves:

- ❑ Direct involvement with the individual/ small group
- ❑ Activity which is generally instructional in nature
- ❑ Eg. Supporting a gymnast; adjusting the stance of a dancer

**2. General Supervision:** This involves:

- ❑ Overseeing activities in whole areas
- ❑ Usually non-instructional in nature
- ❑ Eg. Overseeing individuals or small groups who are practising

## **STANDARD OF CARE**

This has to do with the duty you owe to users of your facilities and to participants in activities. What level of care do you have to give them? This is based on what is known about the prevention and care of injuries and other aspects of coaching. The coach or instructor will be judged not by what he knows, but what he should have known. Ignorance will thus not be tolerated. Coaches must therefore act in accordance with the knowledge required of them. They owe it to their athletes to be competent in all aspects of coaching. They also have a duty to regularly update their coaching knowledge and to keep themselves informed of new developments. Lawsuits have been brought against coaches for not teaching skills properly, failing to adequately supervise activities and for failure to carry out first aid procedures.

In the case of *Williams v MEC GAUTENG Department of Education and others* (2004) the Williams's son was injured at school whilst he was on the rugby field. A

fellow learner, Charl Victor struck a golf ball into the rugby field hitting Williams in the eye. As a result of the incident, Williams lost the use of his one eye and lost a year of schooling which he had to repeat. The plaintiff sued the Governing Body and the Education Department for damages amounting to R403 873,19. Although this case was dismissed by the court, there are valuable points to be learned from it.

Williams's claim was based on the allegation that the educators were negligent in their duties in one or all of the following ways: they failed to maintain proper supervision over the learners; they failed to maintain proper supervision over of the activities of the learners; they failed to maintain proper control over the learners; they failed to ensure that any dangerous activity should not be performed where it may have become a danger to other learners; they were negligent in that they failed to see learners hitting the golf ball with a golf stick in the presence of other learners; they failed to ensure that learners participate in sport and recreational activities safely; they failed to warn the learners about dangerous activities; they failed to prevent a dangerous situation arising. From the educators' evidence, it was clear that for at least half an hour before the incident there was no teacher on duty on the rugby field or on the grounds in general.

To put it simply, the standard of care that sport administrators owe to their clients is **to protect the users of their facilities and participants in their activities from the foreseeable risk of unreasonable harm**. In other words, they are expected to foresee and prevent risks. In the Australian case of *Watson v Haines* (1987), a fifteen year old schoolboy was playing hooker for his school football team when he fractured his cervical spine resulting in quadriplegia. The court held that the State had failed to ensure that reasonable care was taken for the safety of boys with long, thin necks who were susceptible to this type of injury. A warning had been issued in an information kit that had been made available to the New South Wales Education Department over one year before the accident but had been disregarded.

These risks are the ones that can cause serious harm, injury or even death. The standard of care thus requires the administrator's approach and attitude towards

participants to be a professional standard, and not the ordinary reasonable person standard.

The responsibility placed on the administrator to meet this duty will vary according to circumstances, some of which could be the following:

- ❑ age or maturity of the participants
- ❑ skill of the participants
- ❑ health and fitness level of the participants
- ❑ size of user the group/ team
- ❑ level of difficulty of the activity
- ❑ hazardous nature of the activity
- ❑ age, skill and size of the competitors
- ❑ hazards present due to the facility or the equipment
- ❑ nature of the environment (visibility, temperature, traffic, crime, etc.)
- ❑ availability of medical assistance

One factor that standard of care **does not** depend on is the **experience** or ability of the administrator. Once someone is in the role of an administrator, that person must live up to the standard of care of a reasonable, prudent and up-to-date administrator. So, the more experience and ability a manager has, the better for all concerned. The standard is not lowered because the person performing the job is less skilled. This principle is clearly illustrated in the case *McKay v Board of Govan School Unit No. 29 of Saskatchewan* (1968), where a Canadian school was found negligent for failing to provide a properly qualified gymnastics instructor .

A 16 year old boy was injured while he attempted a difficult move on the parallel bars. The instructor had described the move, but he had not demonstrated it. The instructor was not specifically trained to teach gymnastics. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court of Canada where it was decided that the School Board was both directly liable for its own negligence in failing to provide a properly qualified gymnastics instructor, and vicariously liable for the negligence of the instructor himself. The instructor had failed to provide any of the following: adequate instruction in the exercise, adequate demonstration of the exercise, progressive training, adequate spotting and adequate safety precautions.

## **SUPERVISION OF MINORS AND SPORTSPEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Particular care should be given to children, and to participants with disabilities. The duty of care owed to a child is greater than that owed to an adult, because children do not have the same level of judgement and maturity. Their behaviour is often unpredictable and they may not be aware of possible dangers. Therefore, children require closer supervision than adults. Similarly, special care should be taken when participants with disabilities are involved. They may have different kinds of problems which may reduce their judgement or physical abilities. Extreme care should be exercised when working with people with mental disabilities, as they not only have poor control of their bodily movements, but because of their nature and level of mental challenge, they may not understand and appreciate instructions of coaches. They certainly cannot be relied upon to foresee dangerous situations that may cause harm or injury to themselves. The other precautions that apply to able bodied persons should also be taken when working with sportspersons who have a disability.

Supervision includes the duty to make sure that players are properly matched. This implies that attention should be given to the age, height, weight, skill level and maturity of participants. Boxing is a good example where this is done. Coaches should also guard against causing injuries by their own participation in the activity, which would lower their standard of supervision. Educators or coaches should be warned to consider their own size and skill before joining participants or young sport team members in their sessions.

There is also a duty to protect players from unsafe activity, be it horseplay in the locker room or overly aggressive, rough, unsafe play on the field. When it comes to dangerous sports, in addition to giving prior information about it, training techniques in the sport are essential. Encouraging aggression, which injures the athlete or an opposing athlete might also expose an official or coach to liability. Coaches or officials who supply athletes with substances that could injure them, or encourage the use of such substances, might be liable for subsequent harm. This is particularly relevant today as many young sport stars may be tempted to experiment with doping to enhance their performances or recovery from the stresses and strains of rigorous training. For more specific

information, rules and regulations in respect of doping, you should refer to the website of the South African Institute of Drug Free Sport, found at the end of this article.

In *Knouwds v Administrator, Cape* (1981), Knouwds brought an action for the payment of damages for serious injuries which her eight-year old daughter (Ester) sustained when she fell on a lawnmower when she and another schoolgirl (Nelie) were playing on the grounds at school. Ester and Nelie were racing over a lawn where the caretaker was operating a lawn mower. Other children were also playing there and making a noise and shouting as they played. Nelie pushed Ester to prevent her from passing her, and Ester was injured when she stumbled and put her hand on the lawn mower to maintain her balance. She lost her right thumb in the process. The court found that the principal, the caretaker, and his supervisor were negligent. They should have foreseen and guarded against the possibility that young children might collide with the mower as used at that particular time and place. The principal had not correctly assessed the nature of the risks and the specific circumstances when he exercised his discretionary powers. The court based its finding on the following facts: the dangerous nature of the lawnmower; the time the lawn was mowed; and the typical behaviour of school children at play. The court found that no effective steps had been taken by the school staff to guarantee the safety of the children.

Referring to the latter case, it must be remembered that only reasonable supervision and care is expected during sports activities and play at schools. It is not reasonable to require continuous supervision, and an injury may occur when children are running, pushing and shoving. A coach cannot be held liable if it can be shown that an injury would still have occurred had he been present and had he acted reasonably. The conduct of children cannot always be anticipated.

The case of *Peter Wynkwart v Minister of Education, Highlands Primary School* (2002) is a case which is not sport related, but one that clearly indicates the standard of care expected from educators. Wynkwart, acted on behalf of his son, Randall Wynkwart. Randall was an eight year-old learner, who suffered serious injury on the school grounds on his way home from school. He and the rest of the grade three learners at Highlands Primary School were discharged from school slightly earlier than the older learners. Normally they leave the

school grounds under the supervision of their class teachers, other educators and senior learners, who would escort them across a busy street. On the day of the incident Randall left via another gate that was unused and locked. When he tried to climb over the gate, he slipped and fell on his head. He sustained severe spinal injuries which left him permanently disabled and quadriplegic.

The court ruled in favour of Wynkwart and held that the school was to be held liable for the damage. The court pointed out that this kind of care is appropriate where young children, whose behaviour is characterised by impulsiveness, are dealt with. This was even more so at the specific school which is situated next to a dangerous road. It is to be expected of educators trained in psychology and child development to understand the behaviour of children, especially since they are known to act impulsively, unpredictably and irresponsibly. The mere fact that the students were told at assembly that they were *not* to climb gates and fences was not enough.

## **IDENTIFYING SUPERVISORS**

Since you may delegate the direct supervision and management of activities, facility areas, and equipment, you should spend time and effort to identify **competent** supervisors for these duties. Some of the abilities that you should look for in facility, equipment or sport and recreational activity supervisors include the following:

- knowledge of the sport/ activity and facility
- ability to teach/ instruct skills effectively
- ability and readiness to teach or demonstrate use of equipment
- capacity to identify and stop hazardous play/ behaviour in all activities
- ability to provide first aid or to activate the emergency procedure
- ability to draw up and implement a risk management plan
- assertiveness to enforce rules and regulations
- knowledge of how to assess safety of the facility and activity programmes
- readiness to provide more intense supervision for children and people with disabilities

## **TRAINING OF SUPERVISORS**

Activity supervisors may have some playing or competition background, and the motivation to serve as supervisors, but they still need a thorough orientation and training programme. Such a programme should be tailored to meet their sport or facility needs and should focus on the following:

- ❑ General policies eg. supervision & security requirements
- ❑ Safety procedures eg. facility & equipment inspections
- ❑ Facility maintenance eg. observing cleaning and repair staff
- ❑ Medical procedures eg. first aid
- ❑ Emergency procedures eg. emergency certification, hazard reduction
- ❑ Accident reporting eg. checklists & equipment/supplies storage
- ❑ Location of store-rooms and procedures for issue/return of equipment

### **SCHEDULING OF SUPERVISORS**

Supervisors should be given responsibilities according to their competence and the readiness of the participants. This may mean using the buddy system, where less experienced supervisors are paired with more seasoned staff to ensure that they apply safety procedures correctly. In other cases, special expertise and certification may be required to supervise activities such as swimming, gymnastics, martial arts, weight training, adventure activities and aerobics.

A supervision schedule or time-table should be posted on a wall visible to participants and staff. Ensure that volunteer supervisors are informed and sign acceptance of their duty. Supervisors should be required to report at least 15 minutes before their session, to prepare themselves and to set out the facility and equipment. The last supervisor of the day should ensure that the facility is vacated, lights turned off and doors securely locked. You should also monitor the quality of the supervision duties performed by coaches, instructors, and others regularly. Excellent supervisors should be acknowledged and rewarded for promoting safety and security policies and best practices of sport bodies.

## **SOME GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISION**

Some guidelines are recommended for providing adequate and effective supervision. These are as follows:

1. The supervisor has to be in the immediate vicinity of the activity to see and hear what is going on.
2. The supervisor should not leave athletes unattended. If it becomes necessary for the coach or instructor to depart from his supervisory duties, it is essential that a suitable replacement be found, or the activity be stopped until the return of the coach/instructor.
3. Supervision procedures have to be pre-planned and they form an essential part of daily session plans.
4. Supervision procedures must include what to look out for, what to listen for, how the supervisor should move around the area to maximize control and what to do in the case of emergencies.
5. High-risk sport activities require extremely close supervision. Participants should be progressively instructed to develop the skills and techniques required to do the activity safely.
6. Age, maturity and skill or ability levels of participants must always be taken into account. They should be matched with the level of difficulty and the possible risks involved in the activity.

For information regarding doping and drug control, see the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport website at [www.drugfreesport.org.za](http://www.drugfreesport.org.za) They also have a Drug-free info Hotline on weekdays, Mon-Fri: 09h00-13h00, at 021 448 3888. Their address is PO Box 2553, Clareinch, 7740.

For more information regarding sport for people with disabilities, refer to the DISSA website at [www.dissa.org.za](http://www.dissa.org.za)