

# Starting Your Program

As with a journey of a thousand miles, taking the first step is always the most important. The same holds true for starting your own program and why we've made involvement in the AAU easy, rewarding, and fun. Let's begin with your first steps . . . developing a philosophy for your club, finding athletes, acquiring the services of a coach, and acquiring a facility for practice.

## Developing A Philosophy.

The first step is determining the type of program you want to develop. Will it be primarily participatory where everyone enjoys equal amounts of competition opportunities? Or will it be a competition based performance program where the starters receive a majority of the playing time? You will need to answer those questions before you attempt to secure a coach or attract athletes. Both categories of individuals must understand and believe in the programs philosophy or you will experience difficulties.

## Finding Athletes.

Your philosophy will determine how you should go about finding athletes. Will your group come from your community, county or maybe your son or daughter's school? Will you use a system of tryouts to select the very best athletes in your area or AAU Association or -will your program be determined through an invitational process? If you're basing everything on a performance philosophy, you might want to open your tryouts to the largest geographical area possible. You are typically restricted by the AAU to stay within your Association boundaries and don't really need individuals from areas that are so far away they seldom attend practice. If participation is your chief goal, then select your athletes from local sources. That makes the logistics and administration of organizing a program much easier. Your last consideration will be deciding how many athletes your program can comfortably handle, as well as your anticipated coach-to-athlete ratio. Having more youngsters than the program can handle could lead to safety issues. Having out of proportion coach to athlete ratios has to put into question instructional retention. Of course, the cost of operating your program would also impact these decisions.

## Finding A Coach.


Personal contact is the most effective way to recruit coaches. Below is a partial list of ways you may be able to find the right coach:

- Mention your upcoming coaching needs to others with whom you have contact throughout the year.
- Announce your coaching vacancies in the newspaper, use Public Service Announcements (PSA's) on your local radio and television stations, or place written announcements on bulletin boards at the YMCA, Boys' and Girls' Clubs or other similar locations.
- Contact the Chairperson(s) of the physical education department(s) at the school(s) in your area. They might be interested or direct you to the right person.
- Look to professional leaders in your community who might enjoy the opportunity to give back or invite coaches from other sports to apply.
- Contact referees in your area. Perhaps an off-season official in one sport would be interested in accepting a new challenge in another.
- Invite parents of athletes to apply for coaching positions. They would obviously have the greatest interest and motivation for becoming involved.
- Local high school, college or university coaches might also be a viable option.



*continued on page 5*





Since coaches have a great deal of influence on a child, don't assume all coaches are good ones. Examine each candidate closely. The following characteristics might help when you begin looking:

- The coach stresses that having fun and participation is the primary goals of the program.
- The coach treats players as individuals, recognizing the range of physical and emotional development that can exist among children of the same age group.
- The coach is knowledgeable about the skills that are needed and the rules for the particular sport. Practices are organized, children are interacting with each other and not standing around waiting for their turn.
- The coach graciously accepts defeat or victory. He or she does not subscribe to the "winning at all costs" philosophy. Sportsmanship and fair play are emphasized equally.
- The coach sets a good example for the club by refraining from alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use at all organizational events. The coach is open to parental participation and willing to listen to parent's observations and concerns.
- The coach uses positive reinforcement by pointing out a child's progress and efforts instead of drawing attention to a child's shortcomings.

### Locating A Facility

Programs are hard to run without a place to practice. The same locations you look for athletes may also be possible training sites. Both Public and Private schools typically have facilities that are potential locations. Governmental Park and Recreation departments might be a possibility and then there's the YMCA, YWCA's and Boys' and Girls' Clubs to name a few more places. Local churches typically have athletic facilities that may not be in as much demand after hours as other locations.

When it is time to secure a facility, you might find that networking is the most prudent way to proceed. Of course, those who control the use of any facility would prefer to rent rather than accept other arrangements. But before you start talking dollars and contracts, you should utilize the contacts you and your athletes parents have developed over the years. Build your own team of community professionals that will assist you in achieving your goals. Civic leaders such as the Presidents of the PTA, Lion's and Rotary clubs, key business leaders and School Board members are just a few good examples. You might even try talking to one or more of the high school coaches. They have their own stable of contacts and will certainly embrace any program that will become a feeder system for their sport. Networking and teamwork is the way you learn to win. Then once you have a facility, your interests must turn to the proper maintenance of that location and learning administrative etiquette for the facility. Your first goal must be the nurturing and development of a great working relationship between you and the facilities secretary and its maintenance employee(s). Making those individuals part of your inner circle of support will pay huge dividends.

## Did You Know *ESPN the Magazine*

*created the Coaches' Fundraising Program to assist our members generate funding for local, regional, and national competition. Our members keep 75% of the money collected just by selling 2-year subscriptions to ESPN The Magazine. For more information log onto [www.coaches.espn.com](http://www.coaches.espn.com) or call 1-888-530-ESPN.*