

Summer camps provide positive experience in safe atmosphere

As the intensity around high school sports and student-athlete performance heats up, sports camps are more than just rolling out the balls.

Whether you choose from the numerous high school camps within the archdiocese, which range in age from 6-16 and offer a myriad of sport opportunities, or your child is invited to the more “elite” summer camp sessions, often held on the campuses of colleges and universities, safety issues must be the driving force behind a positive camp experience.

There’s no doubt that sports camps can be a positive experience for kids of all ages. Whether it’s an opportunity for kids to experience the finest of athletic facilities or the chance to work individually with camp counselors, the Baltimore area shines with opportunities that keep campers’ progress and safety at the forefront.

Safety concerns vary, from a properly run facility, to adequate equipment to the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s STAND policy.

Towson Catholic High School runs two sessions each summer, baseball and basketball, and while the ratio of counselor to camper is usually lower than its goal of 1:7, each senior and junior counselor must complete the archdiocese’s STAND program, a comprehensive training and security review of all archdiocesan employees and volunteers. For further information on the program, log onto www.archbalt.org/STAND.

“Our program is strict about following the archdiocesan guidelines,” said Jeff Palumbo, Towson Catholic athletic director. “Even our junior counselors, as students, must attend the training.”

Sports camps can do a lot for kids by improving their skills, enhancing their confidence levels and, in essence, increasing self-esteem.

“Children learn life skills that become habits of the heart,” said Marla Coleman, past

president of the ACA (American Camp Association). “We are in a climate where it is harder to know what we need to survive, so drawing on experiences that give children healthy alternatives and opportunities to instill capabilities, the hallmarks of thriving, is the greatest gift you can give a young child.”

According to Mrs. Coleman, camp is the best demonstration of moral and spiritual order with democracy as the core purpose. Children learn life skills and behaviors that become habits of the heart.

Attending specific sports camps allows student-athletes to dream and set goals, based on their talent and love for the sport.

Many athletes are dropping out of sports because they are tired, bored and have become stale with their sport. Basically, they aren’t having fun anymore; and isn’t that what youth sports was always supposed to be about?

A camp setting, however, can renew energy and refocus the goals and priorities for athletes who are struggling to “stay or go.”

Lee Dove, athletic director for Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn, runs a dozen camps primarily run by each sport-specific coach. He reinforces safety through the school’s trainer, T.J. Morgan.

“As an example, T.J. will constantly remind our staff about building in extended water breaks for kids when temperatures rise and the need to come into the gymnasium to cool down. Safety is first and just like during the school year, every piece of equipment and area needs to be checked.”

Parents can keep involved by asking the following questions:

- What is the counselor-to-child ratio?
- What safety training does the staff receive?
- What is the crisis management plan? Is one in place?
- Are emergency contact information sheets updated and available?

- Have camp organizers been alerted about medical conditions and special needs?
- How are medications handled and dispensed?
- Are staffers competent with an AED, inhalers or auto-injectors?

While safety remains out in front when building a positive experience, the following “camp ethics” will also leave your sports camper clamoring for more.

- Learn respect for others
- Learn respect for self
- Teach tolerance
- Encourage kids to be themselves
- Have fun