

RISK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF HIGH SCHOOL SPORT COACHES AND ADMINISTRATORS

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ABSTRACT

Sport and recreation constitute a significant part of the learning experiences at schools in South Africa. They provide the subject matter of learning and instruction in sport and physical education. Research on safety in sport has been conducted in the USA, Britain, Canada, Australia and other developed countries since the 1950s. There is a paucity of empirical, evidence-based information on safety and security of learners participating in sport activities in South Africa. The purpose of this study was to identify the key safety dimensions of school sport, and to assess the risk management practices implemented by coaches and administrators at high schools. The aim was also to highlight the chief problems associated with safety in sport and to develop strategies to protect learners. The findings could raise awareness of coaches, administrators and relevant role players concerning their legal duties. A previously validated and pilot tested instrument was used to gather data. Purposive sampling was done in three provinces. Several dimensions and individual safety factors were not adequately addressed by relevant personnel, and certain basic minimum requirements were not met at a fair number of schools. These findings support previous reports by researchers that coaches and administrators are not adequately aware of, or do not fully appreciate the implications of their legal liability relative to sports activities at schools. Recommendations and guidelines have been offered to enable coaches and educators manage potential risks so that athletes and other learners experience a non-threatening environment where they gain optimally from sports activities.

Key words: Safety; Learners; Coaches; Administrators; Liability; Risk management.

INTRODUCTION

Most educational institutions in Africa have been influenced by the British system of education. One of the lasting legacies of British colonialism is the philosophy that significant benefits could be derived from participation in sport activities, and the diversity of such activities continues to grow. The central idea is that personal and social development of learners can be considerably improved through such activities (Grayson, 2001).

South African schools provide learners opportunities to participate in both intramural and extramural sports. Where the resources permit, schools also offer Physical Education (PE) as a component within the Life Orientation syllabus. It is not the authors' intention here to debate the merits of participation in school based sports activities. These have long been

established globally (UNESCO, 1978; UN, 1989; Trost *et al.*, 2002; Kemp, 2008; Naidoo *et al.*, 2009). What is crucial though is to investigate the manner in which the expected outcomes are met, and in particular what preventive strategies coaches and administrators implement to ensure that learners are not exposed to unnecessary risks through their participation in sport activities.

Schools are one of the accepted settings for promotion of health and well-being. However, in most South African schools formal PE is non-existent. Wherever PE was offered, it has been significantly rationalised. This situation can be ascribed to a lack of qualified PE specialists and limited funding available for such low priority, non-examination subjects at schools (Singh, 2004; Naidoo *et al.*, 2009). These circumstances provide the backdrop for the key research questions of this study:

1. Do secondary schools provide appropriate facilities and equipment for sport participation?
2. Do the learners participating in sports have the appropriate level of skills and knowledge to engage safely without risk of harm to themselves and opponents?
3. Are the learners sufficiently prepared (in terms of health and fitness) to participate in competitive sports activities?
4. Do the coaches and administrators (who are not qualified specialists) have the requisite knowledge and skills to offer instruction in sport without exposing learners to unnecessary accidents, injury or harm?
5. Do the coaches and administrators appreciate and understand why it is vital for a non-threatening, nurturing environment to be provided during school sport participation?
6. Do these adult personnel comprehend their legal responsibilities of providing the appropriate standard of care to learners in sport?
7. Do schools have comprehensive risk management plans to ensure that all learners are protected from foreseeable risks of harm, injury and even death?

As the Government's national agenda appears to be focused on promoting elite sport at the expense of PE (Van Deventer, 2004), it exerts even further pressure on learners to excel in school sport so that they feed into the club system of high performance sport. While this sport development continuum is based on a sound philosophy, the concern is about the state of play within school sport. This concern is heightened as several studies indicate that the actual numbers of learners participating in sport and recreational activities has increased overall. This is due to the increased access of learners to sport participation and to the pervasive influence of the media and sport on youth and children (Grayson, 2001; Singh, 2004).

AIMS

This project aimed to identify and assess the current practices related to the management of school sport. The following were specific aims:

1. To determine how risks in school sport are managed, and what policies, procedures and practices are established.
2. To assess the management of risks in sport by coaches and administrators at secondary schools.

In particular, the paper aims to establish how high school coaches and administrators address their responsibilities in terms of providing safe learning environments and opportunities for learners in sport activities. A secondary aim of this study was to raise the awareness of educators about legal issues involving learners participating in sport and physical recreation activities; and to educate youth sport leaders to what is current, practical and safe. In a learner-centred environment it is expected that the learners would be the primary beneficiaries of any improvements made to the manner in which coaches and administrators plan and implement safety precautions and procedures.

THE LEGAL BACKGROUND TO SAFETY AT SCHOOLS

The three main parliamentary laws promulgated to regulate the management of education and schools are the National Education Policy Act, 27 of 1996, the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996 and the Educators' Employment Act, 138 of 1994. One of the general laws which was not specifically promulgated for education but which may impact on education is The Child Care Act, 74 of 1983, which focuses on the protection of children. The other general legislation is The Occupational Health and Safety Act, 85 of 1993, which regulates safety in the work environment. Another source of law that impacts on education is common law. Many of the statutory provisions relating to education directly or indirectly embody doctrines and principles of common law such as the Rules of Natural Justice, *Audi alteram partem* and *In loco parentis* (Oosthuizen, 1998).

The principle of *in loco parentis* applies to all people in a relationship with children (ie. learners in their care) be they school principals, administrators, coaches, educators, referees, and even volunteers who undertake certain responsibilities. The term literally means "in the place of parents". In other words, educators should take care of learners in their charge as their parents would take care of them. For effective and safe coaching to exist it is required that coaches are aware of and understand their legal responsibilities in addition to possessing technical competence in the specific sport. The *in loco parentis* doctrine creates legal liability based on the duty of care to be exercised where there is foreseeable risk of harm or injury for which a breach will lead to liability. Understandably, the standard of care will be influenced by several factors such as the age and maturity of learners, their size, and skill levels (Grayson, 2001).

Because of international concerns, Singh (2001) identified the following key dimensions in a content analysis of risk management principles and practices that sport organisations should apply in order to promote safety in sport: Supervision and Instruction; Facilities and Equipment; Medical Care; Travel and Transportation; Insurance; Civil Rights; and the use of Written Documentation. Within each dimension the various factors that comprise them are discussed.

Instruction and Supervision

The content analysis revealed that instruction to staff, from staff to students, and from staff to the community dominated the literature. Firstly, staff must be trained to adopt existing legal standards (Carpenter, 1995). Secondly, qualified personnel must be hired to utilize safe teaching methods and techniques and to provide safe environments. Court rulings in South

Africa, England, and USA have made it clear that skilled education professionals and their employers are placed in the same legal frame as doctors, dentists, nurses and other skilled practitioners in terms of the competent exercise of their specialist skills (Grayson, 2001). The active supervision of activities was emphasised by all authors. The responsibility to adequately warn participants and spectators of the risk of injuries was discussed by all. The matching of participants in sport was mentioned by most of the writers. The importance of educating the public in reducing litigation cannot be underestimated (Parmanand, 1987; Gardiner *et al.*, 1998).

Facilities and Equipment

The duty to provide safe facilities for athletes and spectators and proper equipment for athletes was another area that was outlined by all authors. Most of the authors recognized the importance of well-defined emergency procedures for an accident or injury to athletes. About half the researchers saw the necessity for accurately compiled injury reports based on facts. Authors also discussed the issue of medical permission to return to activity following an injury incurred by an athlete (Singh, 2001).

Travel and Transportation

Researchers also mentioned safe travel and transportation as important concerns. They pointed out the need for insurance, emphasizing liability insurance rather than accident or catastrophic insurance (Singh, 2001).

Written Records

The one approach recommended in all sources to identify and reduce risk was the use of printed forms to record what had been done and to provide evidence as a solid defense against liability (Opie, 1993; Carpenter, 1995). The courts demand that any practice used to reduce risk be verified in writing to provide any protection. The writing could take a variety of forms eg. checklists, log-sheets, handbooks, manuals and records of events. Documentation should cover accident reporting, medical history, staff meetings, coach or instructor certification, hiring procedures, requests for equipment repair, and so forth. Even the documentation of the risk management plan is important.

METHODOLOGY

The study design comprised a survey. Primary data was gathered by the use of a questionnaire that was developed by Gray (1995) and adapted by the authors to suite the conditions prevalent in the South African education system. A panel of three South African researchers, and three specialists (1 international) in sport law reviewed the questionnaire and made further suggestions that would improve its reliability. A statistician (STATKON) validated the questionnaire. The survey was divided into two parts: the first part dealt with the risk management behaviours of principals of these schools, and this data has already been published; the second part dealt with the risk management practices of coaches and administrators, and is the subject focused on in this paper.

The questionnaire sought information on six broad areas: 1. General legal liability (insurance; sport association rules & regulations; standard of care, transport; supervision & instruction); 2. Facilities; 3. Equipment; 4. Legal concepts/aspects; 5. Medical aspects (pre-season; in-season; and post-season); 6. Records and Information on Athletes (health records; documents from parents). The questionnaire made use of a differential sliding scale checklist to assess the various aspects of risks anchored on a 5 point scale, with 1= strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Frequencies, means, standard deviations and cross tabulations were computed and used to report on.

Secondary data was obtained by the use of a literature study on risk management related to educational institutions. Policies and procedures of the Department of Education related to school sport were reviewed to provide additional information. The most relevant legislation was reviewed and taken into consideration. Purposive sampling was done from secondary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed, and approximately 30% (91) of them were returned. This could possibly have occurred because coaches and administrators did not want to report on matters that they considered could have legal implications for their schools, despite the promise of confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

Public schools comprised 91% of the sample, private schools 6.7% and independent schools 2.2%. Regarding their location, 57.1% of schools were urban, 20.2% were suburban and 22.6% were rural. The mean (rounded off to nearest whole number in this section) number of boys at these schools was 388 and the mean number of girls was 414. The mean number of male staff at these schools was 15 and the mean number of female staff was 21. The mean number of coaching staff comprised 11 full time educators, eight paid coaches and three volunteers. Males comprised 81.9% and females 18.1% of the sample of coaches and administrators.

Of the respondents, 96.6% were coaches and 83.7% were also administrators. It must be emphasized that with limited human resources, most educators at schools serve a dual function in relation to sport responsibilities. Schools are hardly in a position to afford dedicated coaches who are not also administrators. The exception is where paid external coaches are hired. With regard to coaching or administration status, 57.1% worked full-time, 60.3% were part-time coaches, administrators or PE teachers. The proportion who coached more than one sport was 78.2%. This has added implications for safety as these coaches consequently need to be prudent, up to date and vigilant to ensure that they utilize current knowledge and techniques to reduce or prevent accidents and injuries.

The mean number of years of coaching or administration experience respondents had was 12 years, whereas their mean age was 38.37 years. Their highest academic qualifications were a teacher's diploma (39.7%), bachelor's degree (25%), or an honours degree (22.1%). The first qualification was sport related for 38.8% of the sample. It is therefore expected that with such a profile educators at secondary schools should have a fair knowledge and awareness of

liability issues in sport related activities. It is significant to bear in mind that Singh (2005) and Basson and Loubser (2003) emphasized the standard of care educators owe to learners is not just that of an ordinary, prudent person (*diligens paterfamilias*). Educators have to possess an inherent body of knowledge about and skill and experience in the profession or industry. As a result of this 'professionalism', educators are raised to a higher standard of care.

Whereas 53.6% of educators did possess a certificate of competence from one of the National Sport Federations, 46.4% had no such certification. Valid first aid certification was held by only 39.1% in comparison with 60.9% who had no certification. In the case of coaches it is a legal requirement that they be competent in the sport they coach, and that they possess a valid first aid certificate. According to Basson and Loubser (2003), the coach is responsible for helping to provide a safe environment for players; for evaluating injury or capacity; for properly matching participants; and for administering first aid and activating the emergency medical system. Hence it is clear that high proportions of relevant personnel do not have the requisite qualifications or expertise to address these responsibilities.

The problem of competence of educators engaging in sport duties is a serious concern especially in terms of the quality of instruction and supervision learners receive (Grayson, 2001; NASPE, 2004). It raises an important question. Who has the responsibility to train these coaches, officials or sport administrators? It is clear that National Sport Federations assist with this responsibility partially, but it cannot be their legal responsibility to do so as they do not have a relationship with the educator and therefore no duty. As the Department of Education or School Governing body is the employer of educators, a relationship exists and the responsibility is squarely theirs. Educators are expected to perform certain functions in sport within the course and scope of their jobs. The Education Authority therefore could be held vicariously liable for acts of educators that breach their duty of care which may create liability. Hence, at almost half of the schools (46.4%) there appears to be a problem to meet this basic legal requirement. It implies that at almost one in two schools learners participating in sport activities are exposed to risks of injury and harm resulting directly from the incompetence of educators.

GENERAL LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

For ease of reporting, the strongly disagree and disagree columns of all components have been totaled together and regarded as disagreement with the statements, and similarly the strongly agree and agree columns have been added together and regarded as agreement.

Insurance

While 32.5% of schools have a comprehensive insurance plan, more schools (36%) do not. More schools (35.2%) do not have a legal advisor for insurance than those that do (33%). More school coaches or administrators know the difference between accident and liability insurance (37.9%) than those that do not (26.4%). More schools reported that they do not cover volunteers for accident and liability insurance (44.9%) than those that do provide cover (12.3%). More schools (31.5%) do not have adequate monetary amounts of sport insurance than those that do (28.1%). At more schools (29.3%) monetary amounts of sport insurance are not kept up to date in comparison to 27% of schools where they are.

The purpose of insurance is to help schools protect their property and meet their legal obligations without having recourse to the scarce funds required to provide education. It is therefore critical that schools ensure that they arrange insurance and that educators in management positions understand the different categories of insurance, especially the need for liability insurance. There is little advantage in having insurance, if the monetary amounts are not adequate nor kept current. Where the school does not have expertise in insurance matters, it is recommended that they engage a legal advisor (Grayson, 2001; Basson & Loubser, 2003). It is a concern that most schools do not provide insurance cover for volunteers, especially since there is a high level of reliance on the services of volunteers in school sport throughout South Africa. This is probably due to the prevalent misconception that volunteers cannot be held liable for certain misdemeanours since they are not part of school staff. On the contrary, volunteer coaches or administrators of school sport are held to the same duty of care as paid professional educators are.

Sport association rules and regulations

In the vast majority of schools (85.6% on average) coaches and administrators are aware of and adhere to the rules and regulations of the relevant school sport governing association. In only an average of 6% of schools this is not the case. It is crucial that coaches, officials and sport coordinators at schools enforce their association's rules and regulations so that injuries and accidents are reduced or prevented. Particular care should be demonstrated by referees in the application of safety rules, as opposed to ordinary playing rules, of a sport that involves risks of serious injury in the game. This is particularly relevant in the case where laws of a game such as rugby have been amended specifically with the aim of reducing the risk of injury in the scrum, or modified rules have been introduced for younger players to protect them from harm (Grayson, 2001; Basson & Loubser, 2003).

Standard of care

On average 66.4% of respondents agreed that an appropriate standard of care was provided to learners, whereas an average of 16.9% disagreed. A total of 30.1% indicated that special supervision is not provided for inexperienced and/or less qualified coaches. A total of 20.5% indicated that competent coaches or administrators are not assigned to conduct and supervise practice in the absence of the coach. A total of 16.5% of coaches and administrators do not realize that if they assign unqualified personnel to conduct an activity, they may be held liable should a learner suffer any harm as a result.

In terms of the *in loco parentis* doctrine, it creates legal liability based on the duty of care to be exercised where there is foreseeable risk of harm or injury for which a breach will lead to liability (Grayson, 2001; Singh & Gray, 2002). In this regard, Basson and Loubser (2003) stress that educators and supervisors have a duty to exercise reasonable care towards children, implying that conditions on the schools premises or sports fields should be safe. In *Knouws v Administrateur, Kaap*, (1981), an eight year old school girl was injured on the school premises when she fell over a lawn mower that was operated by a caretaker while she and her friend were racing across the lawn. Her friend pushed her to prevent her from passing and winning the 'race' and she was injured when she lost her balance and put her hand on the mower. The court found the caretaker and staff negligent as they should have foreseen and

guarded against the probability that young children might collide with the lawn mower as it was used at that particular time and space (Basson & Loubser, 2003).

Transport

In general, 64.8% of respondents were in agreement that travel and transport were adequately arranged in terms of safety, whereas 15.5% disagreed. Of concern is that 28.9% were not aware of the liabilities involved in allowing learners to drive their own vehicles to games away from their school. Additionally, 17.6% of respondents did not ensure that vehicles used for transporting athletes were checked for roadworthiness. At 15.6% of schools it is not the practice to ensure that school-owned vehicles or licensed public carriers are used for transporting athletes at all times.

The responsibility of providing appropriate transport could raise additional areas for consideration such as parental consent, indemnities, adequacy and competence of other parent or helper drivers, and the roadworthiness and safety of the school's minibus or hired transport (Grayson, 2001). While the implications here may appear fairly obvious, it is nevertheless a concern that coaches and administrators at schools expose themselves to potential liabilities for ignoring basic responsibilities relating to providing safe transportation to athletes.

Supervision and Instruction

An average of 67.8% of respondents generally agreed that the level of supervision and instruction was acceptable, whereas an average of 13.7% were in disagreement. Amongst those that disagreed, 23.1% cited the absence of good written policies that prohibit unsupervised sport practice sessions. Further, 21.6% denied that adequate supervision was provided in specialized areas such as change rooms and weight rooms or gymnasiums. Experienced sport educators and coaches would certainly be able to attest to the significance of supervision in these specialized spaces as potentially risky behaviours naturally manifest after boisterous physical activity. At 20% of schools the number of supervisors during practice and competition sessions is insufficient for the number of participants and the kind of activity.

At such schools where inappropriate supervision and instruction at practice sessions or competitions are permitted the learners are clearly exposed to potential risks of accidents and injuries that could be serious and invoke liability. It has been highlighted that supervision and instruction are delegated responsibilities that are crucial and school heads or heads of sport and PE departments are required to ensure that coaches and administrators address athlete safety in their sessions (Singh & Gray, 2002). Grayson (2001) identified adequate supervision as one of the most crucial elements in a risk assessment of any sport. Its control and management are probably the most important issues since they also work in concert with an appreciation of the suitability of premises and equipment. It is recommended that the experience of the chief sport coach or administrator should include the ability to deal with any medical emergency and first aid in addition to the ability to teach or coach the sport itself.

FACILITIES

An average of 52% of respondents reported that facilities at their schools were appropriate for safe participation in sport, whereas an average of 14.6% were in disagreement. Of those that expressed above average dissatisfaction with most statements relating to safe facilities, 23% indicated that there was no clear written policy that identifies who is responsible for the inspection and maintenance of safe sport facilities. Further, 18.9% reported that periodic inspections related to maintenance of sport facilities are not conducted and recorded, whereas 17.8% pointed out that there was no control exercised over the practice of vehicles parking on the edge of playing fields.

At least 12.2% of respondents reported that very basic precautions were not taken as in the case of hazards around playing fields being considered and protective padding or warning with chevron tape being provided. Further, 12.2% reported that potential hazards such as hard walls, slippery floors and glass windows, etcetera were not attended to in order to prevent the possibility of injury. The implications of the results are that for at least half of the schools, it cannot be asserted definitively that their facilities provided environments that were safe for sport participation. These findings are indicative of a serious risk to learners who may be exposed to non-inherent risks purely because of inadequate inspection or poor maintenance of sports facilities. As emphasized by Singh (2004), educators have a legal responsibility to ensure that sport facilities meet the minimum safety standards that are prescribed.

EQUIPMENT

The majority of respondents on average (71.4%) reported that sport and recreation equipment used was safe. However, an average of 9.6% was in disagreement. Of those in disagreement, 15.5% indicated that coaches and administrators were not aware that an athlete is not responsible for knowing necessary kinds of protective equipment needed, or whether equipment is properly fitted or in a safe condition. It was disconcerting that 12.2% of respondents reported that coaches and administrators do not keep up to date equipment and inventory records, whereas a further 12.2% indicated that coaches and administrators do not regularly examine equipment used in contests to ensure that they are free of defects that could cause injury. Further, 12.1% reported that coaches and administrators are not aware that they are liable if rules that specify the use of protective equipment such as helmets, pads or mouthpieces are not enforced.

In terms of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (1993), as well common law principles, educators should not permit damaged or defective apparatus to be used under any circumstances in their sessions. This is vital in the context of the discharge of their duty of care that measures are taken to prevent foreseeable accidents and injuries (Grayson, 2001).

LEGAL ASPECTS

An average of 66.3% of respondents agreed with their coaches' and administrators' handling of the legal aspects in a safe manner. However, an average of 13.2% disagreed with them. In particular, a total of 20.3% reported that coaches and administrators do not require consent forms from parents before a learner participates in sport activities; a further 18.7% of them do

not know what constitutes liability; 13.2% indicated that coaches and administrators do not understand the concept of negligence; 12.5% disagreed that coaches and administrators know how to avoid damage suits through preventive measures; and 12.2% do not know and understand the SA Schools Act.

Hence, in more than 13% of schools the legal aspects surrounding sport provision and management are not adequately addressed, creating loopholes in their risk management systems. However, it should be noted that statistics do not reveal the entire risk. It may be misleading that the percentage (13%) of schools where this may apply appears low, to be wary that when the total population of learners of these schools are taken in to account, it represents a significant number of learners who are thus exposed to risks. Another phenomenon that is particularly significant to consider is that any one factor or variable in itself may pose a minor risk of harm, but when non-compliance to numerous factors and variables are considered jointly, then the exposure of learners to risks in sport activities increases exponentially.

MEDICAL ASPECTS

Pre-season

On average 54.3% were in agreement that appropriate medical attention was given to athletes in the pre-season whereas an average of 21.7% disagreed. Over one third (33.8%) of respondents indicated that coaches and administrators do not keep accurate records of injuries occurring during practices and competitions. This finding is consistent with previous results on coaches and administrators at tertiary institutions in South Africa (Singh, 1999), and may be indicative of a national trend. Almost another one third (32.5%) reported that all coaches or administrators do not have proper and up to date first aid training. These findings are exacerbated by the 23% who reported that coaches or administrators do not liaise with medical personnel regarding the prevention of injuries in sport, and a further 19% who reported that schools do not have suitable first aid equipment which is readily available in emergencies. It is alarming that at least 16.3% reported that all coaches or administrators do not have the competence to recognize symptoms that are indicative of injury in sport.

Schools are advised to consult with appropriately trained medical practitioners and to engage their services as independent practitioners or agents where required, as educators cannot be expected to possess the necessary expertise in handling the wide range of medical conditions and emergencies that may arise in sport participation.

In-season

An average of 60% of respondents agreed that medical aspects in-season were adequately addressed, whereas 17.8% were in disagreement. The chief concerns of those who disagreed were the following specific reasons: 28.4% reported that coaches or administrators do not insist on written medical clearance for an injured athlete to return to competition; 25% reported that they are not competent at training and conditioning athletes throughout a season; 21.3% indicated that they are not knowledgeable about proper post injury care and rehabilitation; and 19.3% that there is no ready access to a telephone at all times. These

findings are significant since the literature (Grayson, 2001; Basson & Loubser, 2003) clearly stipulates that seriously injured athletes must not be permitted to return to practice or competition without written medical clearance.

Post-season

An average of 38.2% agreed that post season medical care of athletes was adequate, whereas an average of 28.5% disagreed. Over one quarter (29.2%) reported that participants in sport are not trained in respect of what to do and what not to do when injuries occur. Further, 28% reported that they do not ensure that athletes maintain their fitness levels in the post season.

It is thus apparent that at fairly high proportions of schools inadequate post-season care is taken of athletes' fitness and well-being. It is recommended that coaches and administrators pay attention to providing adequate care of these aspects since it is in their own best interests and that of their athletes that they maintain reasonable levels of fitness in the post season and that they should know what to do when they sustain injuries.

RECORDS AND INFORMATION

Health records

Over one third of respondents (34%) were in agreement that adequate and appropriate health records of athletes were maintained whereas almost an equal proportion (33.35%) disagreed. Over two fifths (40.2%) reported that pre-season physical screening data on athletes were not kept; 33.4% respectively indicated that accurate records of injuries occurring during practices and contests were not kept, and written records on all medical treatment given to athletes were not kept on file; and 26.4% reported that written permission by a doctor allowing injured athletes to re-enter competition were not kept on file.

Documents from parents

Over two thirds of respondents (67.1%) reported that appropriate documentation from parents was maintained on file whereas 12.97% disagreed. At least 16.6% indicated that they did not keep a written letter of consent from parents on file that allows learners to participate in sport, while 12.5% reported that letters from parents requesting that athletes return from sport trips by means other than official transport are neither required nor kept on file. Further, 9.8% indicated that a copy of the athlete's birth certificate is not kept on file to verify birth dates.

The importance of maintaining adequate and appropriate documentation and records of athletes cannot be over-emphasised. The literature (Singh, 1999; Singh, 2005; Spengler *et al.*, 2006) clarifies that over and above all other reasons for maintaining such accurate records, they provide evidence of measures taken to reduce or prevent accidents and injuries and thus enable sports personnel to defend themselves and their sport programmes in the event of a lawsuit.

CONCLUSION

Although the majority of school coaches and administrators reported that they comply with most legal requirements, it is nevertheless a serious concern that there are a fair proportion of them who do not to comply with the minimum requirements. These non-compliant coaches and administrators would be in violation of the Schools Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Department of Education policies and directives, as well as common law principles. It is morally, educationally, medically, physiologically and legally unacceptable that learners at educational institutions such as schools be exposed to unreasonable risks of harm at the hands of professional educators. It would be in violation of all the established benefits and values that learners expect from participation in school sport activities.

It is recommended that professional preparation programmes for all educators be revised to include relevant aspects of safety and risk management in sport and physical recreational activities. School Governing Bodies and the school operational management team should engage the services of professionals to assist them in planning and implementing comprehensive risk management plans that address the key components of safety and security in the school environment. By doing this, schools would be demonstrating that they are proactively placing the welfare of their learners above all else.

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