



DIOCESE OF TOLEDO

Department of Discipleship & Family Life — CYO Athletics

CYO Coaches: Best Practices Handout

Coaching as ministry — forming faith, character, and sportsmanship in every athlete

Bringing Faith Into Your Coaching

You are not just volunteering to teach fundamentals — you were entrusted with young people's formation. A CYO coach is a minister first and a coach second. Faith does not need a separate slot on the practice plan; it should shape how you already coach.

Model it before you teach it

- **Go to church and pray yourself.** You cannot lead someone to Christ from a place you have not gone yourself — before you can help your players see Christ, you must be seeking Him too.
- **Your example is the lesson.** Kids absorb how you handle a bad call, a losing streak, or a frustrated player far more than anything you say.
- **Name the virtue in the moment.** When a player hustles back on defense or helps an opponent up, call it out: “That’s discipline” or “That’s charity — well done.”
- **Treat every player as beloved by God.** Playing time and correction should never make a kid feel less valued as a person.

Simple ways to weave faith into practice

- Open or close practice with a one-line virtue focus for the week (perseverance, humility, teamwork, self-control) and point out when you see it happen.
- Tie a sport moment to a short faith truth: effort and character are offered to God, not just to the scoreboard (“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” — Colossians 3:23).
- Celebrate good sportsmanship toward opponents and officials as visibly as you celebrate a good play — it is a direct expression of loving your neighbor.
- Keep score of character, not just wins; ask the team after a tough loss what they are proud of, not just what went wrong.
- If a player is struggling outside of sport (family stress, a rough week at school), a brief word of encouragement or a prayer for them privately can matter more than any drill.

How to pray with your team

Keep it short, sincere, and age appropriate. You do not need to be a theologian — your comfort and consistency matter more than eloquence.

- **Before practice/games:** A Sign of the Cross and a short prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary, or a simple original prayer) asking for safety, effort, and good sportsmanship. The CYO Prayer is prayed before all games / matches with both teams.
- **After practice/games:** A brief prayer of thanks — for the ability to play, for teammates, and (win or lose) for the effort given. Ask for the patron Saint’s intercession: “St. Joseph..... pray for us”.
- **Rotate who leads.** Invite a player to lead the Sign of the Cross or a prayer intention once they are comfortable — it builds ownership, not just habit.
- **Take prayer intentions.** Ask quickly if anyone wants to pray for someone (a sick grandparent, a family member) and include it by name.
- **Pray for the opponent, not just your own team.** This is one of the most formative habits in CYO sports — it teaches that competition and charity are not in conflict.
- **Respect the room.** Some players may come from families less familiar with prayer — keep it welcoming and never a source of embarrassment or exclusion.

Quick reference: a simple pre-practice prayer

“Lord, thank You for the chance to play the game we love. Keep all the players safe. Help us play with our whole heart, treat each other with respect, and have fun. Let us walk away from this practice better teammates and better people. In Your name we pray, Amen.”

Handling a Disruptive Parent or Spectator

Most parents and fans are supportive — but every coach eventually faces a heated parent, a sideline shouting match, or a spectator riding the officials. How you handle it protects the kids, CYO’s witness, and your own peace.

Before the season: set the tone early

- Hold a preseason parent meeting. State plainly that CYO is faith-formation through sport, and that respectful behavior toward players, coaches, and officials is non-negotiable.
- Remind parents of the CYO Code of Conduct so expectations are not a surprise in the heat of a game.
- Let parents know who to go to with concerns (you or the athletic director) and when (never immediately after a game — give a 24-hour cool-down).

In the moment — practice or game

- **Stay calm and do not engage in the argument.** Your composure is contagious — so is your frustration. Lower your voice as theirs rises.
- **Never debate a call or a disruptive parent during live play.** Your attention belongs to the kids on the field/court. Address it at a stoppage or after.
- **Move the conversation away from the kids and other spectators.** A few steps to the side preserves everyone's dignity, including the parents.
- **Use a short, firm, respectful script.** “I hear you're frustrated. I can't talk about this during the game — let's connect after,” or “I need you to lower your voice, or I'll have to ask you to step away.”
- **Let officials manage themselves.** Don't referee the referee in front of players; if a call needs addressing, do it through proper channels, not sideline shouting.
- **Loop in help early.** Signal your athletic director or site supervisor if a spectator won't de-escalate — you shouldn't have to manage it alone mid-game.
- **Know the stopping point.** If someone becomes abusive, threatening, or won't stop after one clear warning, they can be asked to leave the facility per CYO policy — that's the AD's or site supervisor's call to enforce. If they are not present, a coach may ask a spectator to leave.

After the incident

- Briefly note what happened (who, what, when) while it's fresh, especially for anything serious — this protects you and the league. You may do this
- Report it to your moderator/AD the same day for anything beyond a passing comment.
- If a follow-up conversation with the parent is needed, wait for the 24-hour window, and consider having your moderator or AD present.
- Approach the follow-up with charity, not just correction — assume good intent from a parent who loves their kid, while still being clear about the expectation going forward.

If it escalates — quick steps

1. Stay calm; do not argue back or leave your team unattended.
2. One clear, respectful verbal warning.
3. Signal your athletic director / site supervisor immediately.
4. If needed, the AD or site supervisor asks the individual to leave.
5. Document the incident and report it that same day.

You are never expected to handle a serious situation alone — lean on your moderator and athletic director.