

**ADHOC COMMITTEE ON ABUSES**  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
May 3-5, 1991

**Present:**

David Berkoff, Chairman  
David Bennell- Penn State University  
George Block - Alamo Area Aquatics  
John Leonard - ASCA  
Kathy Mc Keenan - Dynamo Swim Club  
John Morse - Wichita, Kansas  
Tim Schmeckpepper  
Bob Steele - USS

**Absent:**

Betsy Mitchell - Dartmouth College  
Audrey Birkliid - Bloomington, Minnesota

**Chairman's note:** *The committee in its first -ever meeting was extremely productive and efficient in covering a variety of major problems pervasive in our sport. The outcome of the meeting brings forth a series of legislative recommendations and program ideas which we hope will embraced by United States Swimming and all of its members.*

**Minutes/Notes:**

The first issues covered (the simple ones) were those which we thought would require new legislation and recommendations to the Legislation Committee.

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT/FELONIES**

1. (CRB); Recommendation that the Legislation Committee form a Conduct Review Board to deal with the issues and possible legislative rules listed below. This board should be made of five members representing a cross-section of USS, selected for a two-year term with rotating selections of 1-2-and 2 people. It was suggested that the Counselor's Committee make a list of eligible people for the committee, the president of USS pick the members of the committee, and that the Board of Directors pass the list of selections.

2. (Sexual Misconduct--convicted); Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that any USS member convicted of sexual misconduct will instantly lose their USS card and is subject to review by the Conduct Review Board (CRB). Any person with a prior conviction for sexual misconduct must be reviewed by the conduct review board for instatement as a USS member.

*There was some talk among members of the committee of how long the penalty should be before a person could approach the CRB for reinstatement. This should be looked at by the appropriate committee.*

3. (Sexual Misconduct--Non-adjudicated); Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that any USS member involved in an incident of non-adjudicated sexual misconduct be subject to review by the CRB.

4. (Illicit Drugs--felony conviction for distribution or use); Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that any USS member convicted for felony distribution or use of illicit drugs be instantly banned from USS and be subject to review by the CRB. Any person with a prior conviction for felony use or distribution of illicit drugs must be reviewed by the conduct board for reinstatement as a USS member.

5. (Convicted Felons); Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that any USS member convicted of a felony be subject to review by the CRB. Any person with a prior felony conviction must be reviewed by the conduct board for reinstatement as a USS member.

*Notes for 1-5: In order to avoid a series of witch hunts and false accusations, the Abuses Committee thinks it would be wise to make all purposely false accusations of misconduct charges in itself a misconduct charge. It should also be made clear that purposely false accusations are subject to local or state laws regarding slander and libel. We do feel it was important that anyone could bring a complaint to the CRB in an anonymous, private, and confidential way, and only positive findings would be made public. This is ultimately an issue for the Counselor's Committee.*

## STEROIDS/DRUGS

6. (Steroids/Performance Enhancing Drugs); Recommendation that all USS National Team athletes be subject to random/unannounced drug testing at any time during the year. ~~with~~

*Note: Although USS could never afford to test everyone, we feel that athletes would not take the risk of being one of the few random athletes to be tested even if their chances of being tested were one in ten. The message we are sending to other countries with this rule is that we are taking this issue seriously and it could give us the moral high ground to press FINA and the IOC into accepting random/unannounced testing internationally.*

7. Recommendation that all non-American USS athlete-members at the world-ranking level and currently training in the United States be subject to random/unannounced drug testing.

8. Recommendation to OIOC, FINA, and the USOC that there be random/unannounced drug testing at any time of the year in the international community of all National Team members or they be disallowed to compete in Olympic and International competitions.

*Note: The Abuses Committee felt that the only way to make international swimming fair is to make all countries play fair. We suggest the USOC, OIOC, and US representative to FINA press extremely hard for this.*

9. Recommendation that there be the possibility of random drug testing at all international competitions within the United States.

10. A) Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that any USS athlete testing positive for Steroids be banned and sent to the CRB for review.

B) Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to make legislation that if there is sufficient evidence of active involvement and encouragement by the coach (or any other related USS member) of an athlete who tests positive for steroids, they be subject to review by the CRB.

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**Note:** We felt that this rule would both protect the coach from false accusation or rumor, and also to hold all potentially guilty parties accountable.

## PARENT EDUCATION

The largest problem discussed in our meetings was that of parent education. We felt that with a comprehensive and thorough parent education program, retention of athletes would increase and performance pressure, verbal abuse, and intimidation would decrease. We all discussed parent abuses and stories of the local superstar who was virtually tortured by an overbearing parent and no longer was swimming as a fourteen-year old.

### Issues:

#### 1. Performance Pressure.

- a) inappropriate expectations from parent/family of a child.
  - i) Judged by older siblings success.
  - ii) Time is measured, not potential in future or stroke efficiency.
  - iii) Big meets at a young age. Too much riding on the kid's performance; financial/time commitment is compared to performance level.
  - iv) Comparison of other kids on the team.

#### 2. Verbal Abuse.

- a) demeaning or hurtful language.
  - i) in front of team or peers.
  - ii) non-productive language used to express dissatisfaction.

#### 3. Intimidation.

- a) Using position as a parent in order to physically or mentally manipulate a child into a situation or performance.
  - i) child needs to develop self. Vicarious living by the parent is a derailment to the development of the child.
  - ii) swimming scared is not fun, healthy, ethical, or loving.

*Many ideas were brought to light on how to combat parental abuse problems and how to develop a parent education program . Discussion focused on how to better use warm-up time at USS meets for parent education seminars or guest speakers, make parent meetings at clubs mandatory, create a family newsletter which disseminates information to parents in the form of articles and resources, an educational videotape that would circulate from team to team in an LSC, and the development of non-competitive programs for younger athletes in order to bridge the gap between swimming lessons and the swim team. After many hours of creative conversing, we formulated three program ideas and their potential budgets:*

A. Outside panel made up of experts on abuses, parents, and present or former swimmers, trained by USS at the OTC make a presentation to every team in every LSC. Accompanying this program would be a videotape, workbook, and handbook for each parents. Handbooks could present real short stories written by ex-swimmers or national level swimmers. Emphasis should be that the parent is investing in the kid and not the sport. The child will grow as a person and not just as an athlete. The program would have an estimated budget of \$300,000 over four years.

*The philosophy behind this idea is that the only way to help the retention of younger athletes is to create a healthy environment for them. By educating parents, preventing*

*abuses and ignorance within the sport, more athletes will continue with swimming rather than switch to another sport. We feel this is by far the most productive and effective way of reaching parents; let's give them something tangible and meaningful for their commitment and money.*

B. The LSC sends a local expert in the field of abuse in sport (psychologist or counselor) for training by USS at the OTC. The expert presents the information to teams within the LSC. A workbook and handbook would accompany the LSC representative. The proposed budget for this project would be \$25,000.

*Although this program has the potential of working, it also could be far less affective in reaching the people we need to reach. The people who are the ones who put pressure on their children assume they know everything about swimming anyway and may be turned off by the program.*

C. Videotape is created by filming a live audience of parents undergoing the ideal educational seminar in idea A. The videotape could be distributed to teams by the LSC along with workbooks and the parent handbook. Proposed budget: \$25,000.

Beyond these three programs, we feel that more information to parents needs to be disseminated either through Lane Lines, Swimming World, or a family newsletter.

## COACHES EDUCATION

Beside parent education, coaches education was of concern to this committee. Although coach education may not be directly related to abuses, we felt that information on many of the issues we have discussed is not readily available to coaches. Other issues, such as rubdowns, physical abuse by coaches, and coaching style needed more attention.

### Issues:

1. Steroid/performance enhancing drugs.
  - a) Info can be found with ASCA, Lane Lines, and an NCAA video.
  - b) Possible new legislation.
2. Sexual Misconduct.
  - a) Info with ASCA, NCAA, ICAR.
  - b) Possible new legislation.
3. Eating disorders.
  - a) ASCA pamphlet, NCAA video, ICAR
4. Verbal Abuse.
  - a) info NEEDED.
5. Sexual Harassment.
  - a) info NEEDED.
6. Coaching Style.
  - a) info NEEDED--solicit stories from coaches and athletes.
  - b) There are a whole variety of emotional responses to situations and coaches need to be educated on how to communicate to their athletes about their actions and style.
7. Drug/alcohol abuse.
  - a) NCAA video, coaches college info.
8. Physical abuse.

*Physical abuse is not within the realm of coaching or training. Physical abuse is the point at which the coach is no longer a positive role model, has lost control, and is causing perceived pain, injury, or harm to the child.*

- a) When does fun and games become abusive?
- b) Control of anger.
- c) Injury is an injury: believe the athlete.
- d) solicit stories and set guidelines.
- e) The best way to control physical abuse is to listen to the swimmer: stop means stop!
- f) Abuse outside of the pool: child abuse at home.

#### 9. Rubdown Issues.

a) There may be a possible problem with abuses or perceived abuses when coaches, parents, or non-professional persons perform rubdowns.

#### Recommendations:

1. (Bibliography); Recommendation to ASCA and USS that a bibliography or list of resources be published and made available to coaches on the educational issues listed above.

2. (Physical Abuse); Recommendation to the Legislation Committee to require LSC's to publish state and local laws regarding reporting mechanisms and action in cases of suspected child abuse.

*The philosophy behind this legislative item is to give coaches power and information in the case of child abuse from within a home. Coaches are likely to see the physical evidence.*

3. (Rubdown Issues); Recommendation that coaches and teams obtain certified professional rubdown specialists or trainers for rubdown purposes at meets.

*We felt that many coaches can be placed in potentially compromising situations with regard to rubdowns. Parents and non-trained persons should not give rubdowns.*

## SWIMMER EDUCATION

While it seemed that most of us thought that it was ASCA's responsibility to distribute information to coaches, athlete education was up to United States Swimming. We discussed a swimmer survey to gain a perspective of how pervasive some issues were in the sport, but felt the cost and mere presence of problems merited action. Getting information to swimmers was the main point of discussion. The committee talked of using publications more effectively and the creation of an athlete's newsletter which could be distributed to all USS athlete-members. By breaking the newsletter into four levels we could distribute proper information to the relative age group. For example we wouldn't want information on bulimia going to eight-year olds.

#### Swimmer Education Topics:

Steroids/performance enhancing drugs  
Eating disorders  
Swimmer's rights  
Sexual harassment

Sexual misconduct  
Coaching style v. abuse  
Intimidation/manipulation/insecurity  
Drug/alcohol abuse  
Physical abuse  
Response Skills Training

**Recommendations:**

1. (1-800-#); Recommendation to USS that a 1-800 number be created to serve as a referral and information service to all USS athletes with educational or private concerns. This number could be staffed by an elite/ older athlete who would not be acting as a professional counselor, but as a peer referral service.

*This number should be advertised to the athletes only and could be forwarded to another number after closing at the USS office. Suggested #: 1-800-277-4653.*

2. (Pamphlet); Recommendation to USS that a 5-page handout or booklet be created discussing swimmer education issues to be distributed to LSC representative and redistributed to all LSC teams.

3. (Age Group Newsletter); Recommendation to support the request from Age Group Planning to create a four-tiered Age Group Newsletter.

4. (Response Skills Training); Recommendation to Sports Science to create a program or booklet on response skills training.

*Response skills are teaching the athlete the ability to say no or know how to combat harassment, physical abuse, or any of the other topics listed above.*

## **Participation Programs**

The final topic of discussion was that of alternative competitions for ten and unders. Although we did not come to any major conclusions, we agreed that we teach one thing and measure another. While coaches stress skills development and fun, we time the hell out of kids, rank them and make them susceptible to performance pressure, burnout, and quitting.

**Issues/ Ideas:**

1. Stroke Awards- judge stroke technique and not time.
2. Fun Meets- promote fun, games, races incorporating the whole team.
3. Cross-country meet- total time is important and no individual times are listed. In this situation the best and slowest swimmer are equally important.
4. Bulimic Learning (Bennell)- Feed the child what we want them to tell us and have them spit it back out on us. We need to let children develop their skills and potential through active learning and not programming.
5. We talk about fun, self-reliance, confidence, health, discipline, satisfaction, goal-setting skills, coordination, and teamwork skills as important but we have no way of measuring these. Most parents do not value or see these intangible benefits. It all comes down to parent education and the idea that we are investing in children and not a sport.