

THE DARK SIDE OF SPORTS

Safety and Responsibility: It's Time to Step It Up

A brief history of the evolution of the legal process in sport and human performance

BY MARC RABINOFF

This January, Bigger Faster Stronger, Inc., will be releasing the first book in my three-part series about safety and liability in coaching physical education classes. Certainly there are many books available about the legal process, but few are written so that coaches and parents can understand them. I will be discussing the content of these books in future issues of *BFS* magazine, but for this short article I want to explain why I decided to take on this project in the first place.

When I started teaching sport liability classes nearly three decades ago, there was no road map to follow, no concept of a forensic expert in human performance and sport – none of that existed. In fact, sport injury litigation was one of the quietest aspects of injuries in civil suits. Forty years ago when I started teaching physical education and sport-related classes it was very rare that a coach would be sued at all, because the word “coach” was a very endearing term. Athletes, parents and the fans loved and respected coaches. Surely, coaches didn’t engage in sexual attacks, coaches didn’t cheat and lie; but if they did, their misbehavior was so far under the radar that no one cared or no one ever caught on to it – certainly the media never caught it. If someone got hurt, it was simply because that was the nature of the sport.



Dr. Marc Rabinoff was involved in helping to “Feng Shui” the equipment in this high school weightroom to make it safer and to allow more students to train at the same time.

What has made it different now compared to when I started years ago is that sport has grown massively in America. For one thing, 40 years ago women were seldom involved in sports, and most parents didn’t even want their daughters in sport. I started teaching weight training classes in 1970, and back then young women just didn’t enroll in my classes. I did see girls in swimming and gymnastic classes, but very few women had any interest in lifting weights. So sport was a male-dominated endeavor back then; and when someone got injured in sport, it was considered just a male problem – and you moved on.

But as women became more involved in sport, there was a demand for more coaches and more administrators who knew sport and physical fitness. And as a result, many of these fringe groups, especially personal trainer organizations, saw the profit potential in developing educational programs

to develop coaches and fitness trainers. Many of these programs, unfortunately, did not adequately prepare their graduates for their profession; and as a result, we started seeing lawsuits against these individuals.

I testified in my first sport-related case in 1978, and since then I have been involved in over 300 cases...and I have never advertised! I don’t even have a website – all my work as a forensic expert has come about from word of mouth and my professional publications and presentations. And this brings me to why I decided to write these three books:

Coaches, physical education instructors and administrators must become better at what they do. If not, injuries will occur, lives will be permanently affected, people will die and lawsuits will be filed. I’ve seen too many lives lost or tragically altered because of negligence to just stand by and do nothing. I have committed myself to being part of the change for the better, and that is why I do what I do. **BFS**

Dr. Marc Rabinoff is a regular contributor to *BFS* magazine and is the author of the upcoming book series, *The Dark Side of Sports: Understanding Safety and Liability*.





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