

# Planning Sports and Recreation Camps for Mission Settings

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## Introduction

The world's obsession with and passion for sports provides a unique opportunity to meet people where they are through an area of common interest. Sports and recreation camps provide a contemporary approach to reaching people of many ages for Jesus. Providing sports and recreation camps gives Christians an opportunity to minister to secular people and introduce them to biblical teachings they can apply to their lives. A caring and sensitive mission group can present the message of Christ in a holistic manner, emphasizing health, fitness, recreation, and a relationship with Jesus.

## Background

Almost any mission team in almost any community can conduct sports and recreation camps. The emphasis of the camp must always be on participation and sportsmanship, rather than skill, accuracy or winning. If a mission team does not have access to or cannot obtain the services of a trained athlete at the high school or college level, the one-week clinic should be viewed from a recreational standpoint, not a technical one. Regardless of the technical level, a sports and recreation camp can be a successful and effective way to share Jesus.

A sports and recreation camp can offer almost any sports activity. Its location, facilities, and equipment help determine the types of sport activities to offer. Facilities and equipment can vary from a fully developed suburban park with grassed athletic fields and paved basketball courts, to an all asphalt park in the inner city with no equipment. Mission teams should realize that no matter how developed or undeveloped the site, there are people in the community who need the gospel message. The following is a list of possible sports activities that can be used in a camp:

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Broom hockey
- Dodge ball
- Duck, duck, goose
- Football
- Frisbee golf
- Golf
- Kickball
- Putt-putt
- Slam dunk
- Soccer
- Softball
- Stickball
- Street hockey
- Track and field
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Volleyball
- Other recreation games

### Responsibilities of the Mission Group

As the sponsor sets the stage for ministry, the mission group is responsible for performing the ministry. The leader should focus on the kinds of sports activities to be offered, training the mission group, and setting up the organization so the group can perform its activities.

The mission group should understand that they are not expected to be experts on the sports activities selected. If no college or professional athlete is available, emphasis should be solely on participation and sportsmanship rather than on skill, accuracy, or winning. This should always be the atmosphere of the weeklong event.

### Selecting the activities

When you visit the site, you will find that the equipment and field set-up indicate which activities to plan for. If there are tennis or basketball courts or markings for football or baseball fields, these sports can easily be conducted. If the site is an empty lot with little or no equipment, opportunity and creativity are needed in finding possible activities. This setting calls for portable equipment that can be donated by or purchased from a sporting goods store at home or in the mission community. Convenience of transporting the equipment may determine the best place to purchase it. Portable basketball or hockey goals can be brought to the site and set up. Sidewalk chalk can be used to mark boundaries. Several sheets of plywood can be used to construct a backboard for tennis practice. Portable fencing can be used to set up restrictive areas for small children.

The surface of the field will also affect the selection of activities. For instance, a grassy field may not lend itself to street hockey, but it would be fine for soccer. Football would be difficult on pavement, but broom hockey, stickball, or baseball would be fine. Many sports and recreation activities can be adapted to work on both asphalt and grass.

The sports selected should be suitable for the location and should be activities the groups feel comfortable with. If the missions group or the anticipated participants in the community have special interest in a particular sport, it should be included among their planned activities.

Offering several sports simultaneously is a great way to organize the mission group's effort. Age grouping is a good way to match activities and workers. Simple games should be available for small children: Frisbee golf, kickball, duck-duck-goose, broom hockey, and putt-putt. Older children, youth, and young adults can participate in more involved sports.

### Planning and organizing

Offering two or three different activities for the two or three-hour sessions keeps the age groups moving and interested. Sports can be set up so each is an activity station. Specific group members should be responsible for overseeing and administering each. Other group members should be responsible for escorting specific age groups, setting up refreshments, and taking registration. A good time for rotating the groups is after refreshments and Bible story time. Leaders should prepare more activities and games than they anticipate using, because there is no guarantee that each activity will work. If one proves to be ineffective, another can replace it.

### Necessary equipment

You must have the following items before you begin:

- Registration tables and materials.
- Public address system or bullhorn.
- All necessary sports equipment.

- Refreshments and paper products.
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### Scheduling

The following is a sample itinerary for a clinic. Multiple age groups should rotate Bible story and refreshment times to help serve larger groups in an orderly fashion.

- Arrival and set-up.
- Gathering of the children.
- Registration.
- Activity 30-45 minutes.
- Bible story 10-15 minutes.
- Activity 30-45 minutes.
- Refreshments.
- Activity 30-45 minutes.
- Fellowship and walking children home.

### Bible studies

The Bible studies provide opportunities for the Bible to be seen in a practical way. They enable participants to see it as relevant and applicable to everyday living. Lessons can be taught about fitness, health, and nutrition. These lessons can give the clinic continuity and a theme for the week. Biblical truths and principles may include the following:

- God's Word brings health (see Ex. 15:26; Prov. 4:22; Jer. 30:17)
- Nutrition in our food (see Lev. 3:17, 7:23; Matt. 3:4)
- The body is God's temple (see 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Eph. 2:22)
- Physical fitness (see Judg. 16:3,9)
- Spiritual food (see Isa. 55:2; 1 Cor. 10:3-4; John 6:51)
- Running the race (see Phil. 3:12-14)

### Training

To have a successful mission trip, the project leader must thoroughly train the mission group. Group members should be well informed about the background, purpose, and goals of the ministry. Preparation and training, or lack thereof, is evident on the mission field. Each member must understand the expectations of his or her role and how it fits into the success of the overall project.

The group can be organized into different teams with different responsibilities. Teams should be assigned either a station or an age group of participants. These stations will be needed:

- Registration
- One station for each activity, including setting up, overseeing, and taking down)
- Refreshments
- Bible lessons

Other team members work with and stay with specified groups of participants—befriending, encouraging, and building them up. Age groups include:

- Preschoolers
- Young children
- Older children
- Youth
- Adults

Combining responsibilities can provide alternatives to make the plan workable for each group. Registration and refreshments could be merged. Bible lessons may be received best from those who are working with different age groups because they have established relationships. The leader should make whatever adjustments are needed to make the week work for the group.

The leader should instruct group members to be flexible. No matter how great plans are or how thoroughly trained group members are, plans may not work and unanticipated things can occur. There may be unforeseen, last minute changes. It is important for group members to understand that the ministry must go on and must be effective, regardless of changes.

Mission groups should be trained in the sports activities and Bible lessons selected, the culture of the community where the work will take place, the guidelines between the sponsor and the owners of the ministry site, evangelism, and follow-up.

To help mission group members feel more comfortable in taking on the missions opportunity, it may be advisable to hold a one-day sports clinic before the mission trip begins. Choose a community similar to the one on the mission field. Have the group lead this clinic as practice for the trip. Follow your agenda and plans for the trip as closely as possible. This will also help iron out any kinks and discover any oversights. It can also plant seeds for future missions opportunities in your own community.

#### Registration

Tables set up with colorful banners marking age groups ease the registration process. Registration information should include name, age, address, phone, and church affiliation. Two or three people should work with registration.

#### Understanding the culture

If your clinic will be held among people of a different culture, learning about that culture and developing good relations with the people will contribute greatly to the success of your clinic. Group members should know the kinds of participants they will deal with. Unchurched, inner-city life is much different from affluent, suburban, church life. Among the differences are possessions, home life, hygiene, attitudes, and language. Remind mission group members that they must meet and accept the people as Jesus did, as they are. Through the love of Christ, all people can be loved and offered the hope of salvation in Christ.

#### Evangelism

Group members should be trained to share their faith and lead others to Christ. Evangelistic tracts and manuals are widely available. Group members should be required to share their own personal testimonies and practice an evangelistic presentation, since the purpose of the ministry is to bring Christ to the participants. When a participant accepts Christ, the team member should report the person's name to the registration group. These names should be shared with the sponsor at the end of the week so follow-up can be provided.

#### Publicity

The sponsor may enlist the mission group to publicize the clinic. This can be accomplished a day ahead of the opening by distributing flyers, posting posters, or having a parade throughout the community. However, when the publicity is done, make sure it gives who, what, where, and when information, and tells the ages the clinic is planned for.

### Guidelines

The sponsor must make agreements with the owners of the property for use of the site. The sponsor must review the guidelines with mission group leaders so the leaders can explain the rules to their group members. If the guidelines are not followed, the ministry may be lost, because the owner may not allow the sponsor to use the location again. Group members should thoroughly understand the guidelines.

### Sponsor representative

The sponsor may have a person on the clinic site to assist the mission group. This person reviews guidelines, advises on dos and don'ts, and makes suggestions about what may work best. This person should be familiar with the community and the mission setting and he or she can identify problem participants and residents, and understand the best way to deal with them. This person is not to supervise the work, but is to help the group complete its task.

### Walking children home

After each day's activities, team members should walk children home. Winning the children's and parents' trust is essential for the longevity of the ministry.