

How to Start a Homeschool Sports Team (by Ernie Hodges)

I am often asked, “How do you go about starting a homeschool sports team? The answer I give them is that you do the things you would do when starting any type of homeschool project. In other words, when you are trying to get something going in homeschooling, you don’t go out to businesses or government agencies and ask for them to fund and do the work, you as a homeschooler do it yourself much like you did when you started your homeschool. In other words, when we started homeschooling, we did not expect the government to do it for us. No, we said, “Just leave us alone and we will take care of it ourselves.” The same is true with homeschool sports. When we needed support in teaching our kids at home, we sought out other like-minded individuals and we started local support groups to reach a common need for joint support and we were able to entuse others to do the same. So, using this same logic, we established homeschool sports teams across our great state.

So, how do you start you might be asking? The first thing you should do is to perform an analysis of the resources you already have. You should make a list of all of the homeschooled kids that your children play sports with in your backyard or that they play with on local recreational or travel ball teams. This is your recruiting ground for starting a team. Start talking up the possibility of a team with these athletes and your fellow homeschool parents. Remember, spread your net wide. While you may say that you know of 8 – 10 players in the same sport who express interest, experience shows that only about a fourth of that amount will actually show up when you start having practices. You should get each of these players to give you names of other homeschoolers to contact. The obvious reason for doing this is that it increases your numbers, but more importantly, if you get them actively talking up the team, they are less likely to fall away if they have some “skin in the game” by giving their word and name as someone who wants to play on a homeschool team.

Next, comes the more formal organizational efforts. This will probably take the form of one or more organizational meetings to identify the sport, whether a boys team, a girls team or both, should it be recreational or competitive, and how much travel they are willing to do. You will also want to form someone type of work group or committee. While someone will eventually need to take the lead, it is important to try and have at least 4 people from different families to be involved in the process. The advantage of having multiple families is because you have multiple points of view which will allow you to form policies and efforts that will appeal to a larger group of families and helps to insulate the process from relying on one person or family with the attendant weaknesses of that type of leadership. Also, if you have a coach, especially with prior coaching experience in your area, be sure to mention their name as this may help to attract more athletes and families.

Once you have this type of steering committee and the basic direction is established, then you can begin to advertise via e-mails, brochures placed in libraries, grocery stores, rec centers or any other places at which homeschoolers gather. The most important of these is EMAIL, EMAIL, EMAIL. You need to get your announcements on all of the homeschool e-mail loops of groups you know of in the county you live in and all the counties which border on your home county. Remember, homeschool loops are just a starting point. And, don’t think doing this once is enough, your announcement and follow up announcements should be done at least once per month. Also, get your committee members and

families of the athletes to make e-mail posts in non-homeschool loops for associations or hobbies that they participate in so that homeschoolers who are not on the homeschool loops may hear about it. Remember, your post may be read by a non-homeschooler who may tell homeschoolers they know but you do not know about your efforts. Also, the lack of homeschool athletic opportunities may be what is hindering these people from homeschooling and by hearing about your efforts, they may decide to start homeschooling.

Once it appears there are enough players to form a team, then there will need to be some formal documents drawn up. These would include registration forms to gather contact information, information about how much it will cost to play on the team, to pay for uniforms, to pay officials for the games, facility rentals for practices and games, and insurance. These expenses will be higher in year one since the uniforms will have to be bought, but in subsequent years this cost will already have been met. It is highly discouraged to allow people to buy their own uniforms and keep them, since uniforms go out of style and cannot be replaced if 2 or 3 people do not return them to the team the following season or drop off of the team during the season. An additional expense would be the cost of joining leagues such as NCHEAC, unless the team chooses to play as an independent team their first year. If league membership is desired, then go to www.nche.com/sports and read the NCHEAC Rules and Guidelines on-line and file a NCHEAC Registration Form online. For additional support in starting a homeschool sports team, you may contact NCHEAC at sports@nche.com.