

Utah Area Sports

Sports News—March 2010

Anywhere in the World

While paddling gently in an ocean kayak in the quiet waters inside the coral reef of one of the Islands of Tahiti a few years ago, my brother-in-law Winn Allen casually pointed to a white building on the shore and remarked, "There's an LDS Chapel."

"An LDS chapel? How can you tell that from this distance—it's hard to tell that it's even a church, let alone a Mormon church..."

"Easy," he said, "There's a basketball standard in the parking lot. They're near every warm-weather LDS Chapel all around the world!"

Sure enough, the distinctive profile of the basketball pole and backboard came into focus. "All around the world?" said I. He smiled. "All around the world." Winn would know, since he'd spent his entire adult life traveling to distant lands and places. He passed away a few years after that.

I was reminded of this encounter a few weeks ago while visiting the island of Roatan, Honduras with some friends. Coming around a corner on the steep mountain road a basketball standard loomed into sight in the parking lot of an LDS Church and I laughed as I recalled the memory of talking about it. I asked my friend, Bruce Bowen of American Fork, if the chapels in Argentina where he served his mission some 30 years ago had basketball standards. He nodded in the affirmative. "Were they mainly there for the American missionaries to enjoy on Preparation Day, or did the locals play?" He grew really serious (which is quite out of the ordinary for Bruce) and said, "Oh, no—they played. In fact they were really competitive. That was an American import they loved!"

Nice to know that Church Sports is universal, bringing people together all over the world. Perhaps it's part of an international language of fellowship.

Utah Area South – an interview with Gary Hooper, Men's Sports Director

Now that Sports News goes to participating members all over the state, please tell us about Utah Area South.

We cover a geographical area almost the size of Great Britain. More than half our stakes, 115 or so, are in the Utah Valley area where we are able to organize Coordinating Council tournaments for the major sports.

An almost equal number of stakes are scattered as far south as St. George (where we have 23 stakes), Kanab, and Monticello, and as far east as Vernal and Moab. I think a lot of our friends from Salt Lake and Utah North drive into our territory for their summer youth activities. In areas where the drive to the nearest stake is more than an hour away we try to strengthen the stake program so it can stand on its own.

Your Area really does cover some beautiful territory, so you can't really blame us for coming your way. What are the most popular programs in Utah South?

Basketball, Volleyball and, more recently, Futsal (indoor soccer). A lot of units play Dodge ball, but usually as an ad hoc recreational game, rather than in organized leagues. Golf does very well. I would also say that we have a lot of participation in 5K and 10K runs. We've been blessed to have the volunteer service of Doug Padilla, a former Olympian in Track and Field, who works professionally for BYU, to help us organize some great runs. Last year we had more than 250 people participate in an event in Payson, and 150 in Orem. So these events have added a great dimension to our program.

In Futsal, Lana and Steve Parker of Salem have provided some great leadership, going so far as to record games and training videos that we can use in other areas.

I think it's safe to say that the members in our Area love Church Sports and take an active role in it.

You mentioned a very rigorous training program for officials and coaches?

We absolutely believe that training is the key to a successful sports program. You have very few issues with poor sportsmanship when the officials know what they're doing and when they know how to properly control a game. So that's where we put a lot of emphasis. We're very fortunate to have two outstanding Officials Coordinators in the Utah Valley area, who we rely on to help us throughout the Area. Scott Hansen and Scotty Hammann are both highly respected high school and college officials, and they lead the way. In September, for example, we held a basketball training program for 140 people in two gyms (one for experienced, one for novice). On another occasion we had 80 officials working with Utah Valley University Women's program—we provide officials for their training camp for high school teams that use UVU. Plus, Scott and Scotty go out to the stakes to put on special training when requested by the appropriate Priesthood Leaders.

I think one thing that sets our training apart is that we certify our officials for those who want to get serious about it. Certification includes classroom instruction,

officiating at supervised games where the apprentice official referees the game with an experienced official, and other games where the apprentice sits out the game to observe and critique other officials. You learn a lot when you're seated on the sidelines watching the successes and challenges of others who are running the game. Once an apprentice is ready for graduation, they get a special lanyard that tells the world that they are certified. We also allow certified high school officials to wear the lanyard after taking a brief course that acquaints them with the specifics of Church sports. I sincerely believe this in-depth training is the key to success in the highly competitive games.

Another type of training that has proved very useful is that we had a clinic for all our committee people at the Coordinating Council level in which we brought in Medical Sports training officials to talk about how to deal with medical emergencies and injuries. We try to do that on a regular basis.

We also have a fun way to help in training in that Fred Roberts, who played professionally for years, agreed to put on a coaches clinic for our people. Fred is very enthusiastic and entertaining and everyone loved it. Fortunately, he let us record the program on DVD, and now we distribute those DVDs to stakes who have new officials.

Finally, we encourage our people to attend BYU Skills Day and other programs put on in the community.

Do you believe that there is a spiritual aspect to Church Sports?

Absolutely! In fact, it's one of those things that if we don't make progress in improving member's spirituality through our Church Sports program, then we aren't really doing what we've been called to do. Church Sports should bring young men and women, as well as adults, into contact with spiritually mature coaches and officials in an environment where they can enjoy each others' company. We do use the big charts on sportsmanship at our games and we include time for a spiritual thought at all our Area and Council meetings to remind us of the ultimate objective of the program.

I think what we're really about is getting this close contact, particularly for our young people, with good coaches and directors working in the sports program who themselves are examples for the youth and adults, in spiritual matters as well as sports matter. That's the kind of people we try to call and we encourage the stakes to do the same. If you put quality people on the front lines, it will bear fruit. We also try to communicate the meaning of Church sports in firesides, which always includes a speaker who can talk about a conversion

experience or reactivation into full fellowship that was influenced by Church Sports. I personally find those stories very inspirational.

How do you feel about the new direction we've received from the Brethren regarding the Coordinating Councils?

I welcome it! Since accepting this calling more than five years ago I've felt that something was missing—that there should be a stronger link between the local Priesthood Leaders and the Church Sports program. This new direction solves that problem and I welcome the chance to work with the stake president's on each of the Coordinating Councils to make these programs fully effective in the lives of their members.

We're glad to have you as part of Sports News—thanks for taking time to talk with us.

Sports News Authorship and Council Tournaments

We recently received an interesting e-mail from a stake Physical Activities Director asking, *"Is the Utah Sports News an official church document, or is it a document simply created by interested persons? Are the clinics mentioned in your publication organized via the church, or are they ad hoc clinics offered simply as outside support?"*

The newsletter is published under the direction of Harold Turley, Utah Area Sports Director, with the permission of the Presidency of the Seventy. We do not have access to official Church e-mail lists, so we maintain a separate list of those who want to receive the document. Instructions on how to subscribe are shown below. Your Stake President is the Priesthood Leader responsible for Church Sports in your stake. He often delegates much of the day-to-day activity to a member of the High Council. We are happy to have individuals subscribe directly to our group e-mail list, but we also encourage stakes to forward this publication to interested parties in your own stakes and wards. Again, the decision to do that rests with your stake president.

All training clinics are done under the direction of the Utah Area Sports program with the permission and encouragement of the Brethren. Participation is voluntary on the part of stakes, but those who do participate will testify to the effectiveness of these training clinics, Coordinating Council tournaments, and other Area events in helping members and friends of other faiths to enjoy the unique fellowshiping opportunities that Church Sports provide.

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