

HAZING -PLAYFUL OR PERILOUS

I read a disturbing article in Sports Illustrated (September 13, 1999), entitled “Who’s Coaching Your Kid”. The article brought to light a horrific problem – that of coaches who prey on young and vulnerable athletes.

You may have read it, as well as articles about hazing. Hazing is a term used to describe various group or team rituals. The purpose of these rituals is presumably to enhance bonding between teammates. In its least offensive form, hazing is bullying; in its worst form it can be traumatic. Some hazing even “may include sexual contact” (Anchorage Daily News, October 7, 1999). In some instances it has been known to cause death.

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR HAZING IN SPORTS - there is no place for it in LIFE.

Youngsters become involved in sports for many reasons - for the sheer love of it, for the joy of competition, for the thrill of pursuing and achieving excellence. In the process of competing they presumably are also being taught some invaluable life lessons - cooperation, fairness, honesty, sportsmanship, respect (for teammates, coaches, officials, foes, etc), judgment, humility, understanding. But are they?

Sports have many ugly aspects. There are rumors of rituals, which (if true) make one’s hair stand on end. Older kids doing questionable things to younger kids. Veteran players doing questionable things to rookie players. Peers doing questionable things to peers. All just “normal”, playful, behavior?

What *is* going on behind those locker room doors? What is happening on the team bus, in hotel rooms, on and off the playing field (ice)? Have you heard “things”? Have you witnessed “things”? Have you had to consider removing your child from hockey (or another sport) because of concerns for his or her safety?

I know of reputable sports publications that are interested in bringing these issues to light. If you have experiences that you want to discuss, please email me at laurastamm@earthlink.net. If you should decide to “go further” with your information I could refer you to a highly ethical and caring freelance writer.

The sports world needs watchdogs. We can make a difference by speaking out against behaviors and rituals that have been overlooked or accepted for too long. If we speak out loud enough, hard enough and persistently enough perhaps we can become catalysts for major changes.

Skate Great Hockey, in Safety,

Laura Stamm

October, 1999