

# The Final Whistle



## Here are the key points to remember:

1. You have more influence than you think and you need to exert that influence to positively impact your students on the subject of alcohol and other drugs.
2. Over half the alcoholics and addicts in America became addicted before the age of 25. Your students are at a critical stage regarding their choices about alcohol and drugs.
3. Your players' use of alcohol and drugs negatively affects you, as a coach. Alcohol and drug use results in impaired performance, leading to poor results in competition, which reflects negatively on you as a coach.
4. You have resources at hand to help you with this issue. Take advantage of them!



## Coaches' Playbook on SUBSTANCE ABUSE



This booklet is provided by Roots of Promise at the United Way of Yellowstone County through a grant by the Montana Board of Crime Control, to assist coaches in talking with their students about alcohol and other drugs. The contents were compiled by Jim Priest, founder of FATE— Fighting Addiction Through Education in Oklahoma for their Life of an Athlete program. Jim has graciously given United Way of Yellowstone County permission to use the contents and edit some information to apply to Yellowstone County.



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**Training, commitment and practice are all part of being a competitor in sports, speech and debate or other activity where the team depends on its players. In this booklet we use the term “athlete” for anyone who trains hard for a competition; whether the game is physical or mental. We want to offer this valuable information to ANY coach. Your influence over your students' behaviors is truly monumental.**

Throughout this booklet we talk about “alcohol, tobacco and other drugs” (ATOD). Coaches, trainers and other adults involved in activities must be prepared to talk with their competitors about the impact ATOD have on individual performance and team outcomes.

# THE INFLUENCE of a coach

Coaches have a special relationship with their players, but coaches sometimes underestimate the amount of influence they have. As a coach, you hold an important leadership role at a very significant and impressionable time in your students' lives. When you talk to your team or other youth about the dangers of drugs, the message is more effective because the *coach* is speaking.

It's not an overstatement to say the lives and future of the young people you coach are at stake. Recent research shows that nearly half of all alcoholics and drug addicts in the United States became addicted before the age of 25. The age when young people begin using alcohol is now 12. The ten most dangerous years of life are ages 14-24 and what happens during this decade can set the course for the rest of their life.

What you say or don't say to your students about the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs is very important. Equally important, your own personal life will become an unspoken example for your athletes' behavior. If you want students to stay away from alcohol and drugs, you must send that message clearly and forcefully, in your words and in actions. If team members do not

hear your opinion on this important subject, they will assume that you don't care or that it's okay to use alcohol and drugs and that they can still be on the team. As a coach, you need to send a strong message that alcohol and drugs don't mix with performance on or off the field.

Roots of Promise at the United Way of Yellowstone County wants to help you deal with alcohol and drugs and your students. You are not alone. We're here to help. This brochure is a first step but we also offer personal consultations and live presentations for your students at 406-252-3839.

**“Your job is monumental. Coaches have the potential to develop our youth’s life skills and abilities they need to be successful adults in the real world. Take pride in what you do and how you do it. Set high standards that are never compromised. A coach can have a huge influence over the lifestyle choices of a young athlete, especially the use of alcohol and other drugs.”**

**-John Underwood,**  
Olympic Trainer and Director of the  
American Athletic Institute

people down—parents, teachers, friends and teammates. Remind your older players that they are role models. Encourage them to speak out, and reach out, to younger players and to continue to do so both in season and out.

- 4. Let competitors know that they can talk with you about ATOD issues.** Many students may find it easier to talk to a coach than to their parents about topics such as alcohol and drugs. By responding openly when such a topic is raised, you will encourage your players to trust you and keep important lines of communication open. If you feel you don't know enough yet to answer questions about alcohol and drugs, take advantage of other available resources. Tell students where they can find more information and steer those who need help toward it. One place to start is the website NIDA for Teens. This offers a youth-friendly explanation about the science of drugs and how to deal with peer pressure. They can find this site at <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/>.
- 5. Decide About Talking with Parents.** You will have to decide whether and when to talk to the students' parents if you discover a player using alcohol and drugs. Your school may have rules about talking to parents in such situations and you should consult and follow those rules. In most cases, families don't want to believe that their child could be involved in alcohol and drugs. Denial plays a big role in substance abuse and addiction and few parents want to face the fact that their son or daughter has a problem with alcohol and drugs. If you talk to parents, be prepared for a variety of reactions, ranging from anger and denial to crying and over-reaction. You should consider involving another person—like a school counselor, in any conversations with parents. It's important that you recognize that the student's parents might be part of the problem, not just enabling, but dealing or providing drugs and alcohol in some cases. This makes the issue harder to deal with but the need of your student in this kind of situation is even greater.
- 6. Use Us!** There are many resources available to you but a free and readily available one is Roots of Promise at the United Way of Yellowstone County. You can also have your players complete an online program at [www.okloa.org](http://www.okloa.org) under “COURSES,” either individually or as a group (using the discussion guide provided on the website). You can request speakers to address your students on this subject if you call the United Way of Yellowstone County.

# KEY PLAYS-

## How to get your message across

The best defense is a good offense. If you want to keep alcohol and drugs from affecting your players' performance and lives, here are six key plays to get your message across.

1. **Clearly express your expectation that players will not use alcohol and drugs.** Some coaches, especially those who have used alcohol and drugs in the past, find it difficult to talk to their team about substance abuse. Athletes and other high school and college students sometimes receive mixed messages about the use of alcohol and drugs and unless a coach clearly states an expectation that players should not drink or use other drugs, the student may not understand what is expected of them.
2. **Ensure that your players know the risks of drug use, especially those that affect performance and their future.** Getting high has both long- and short-term consequences for youth—consequences that your players may not be aware of, but that you understand. You must let them know the rules and consequences for alcohol and drug use. Also let them know the practical effect of alcohol and drugs on performance. For example, your students may not know about research that shows one night of binge drinking wipes out about 14 days of training. Short-term risks of marijuana use include decreased stamina, weight gain, and reduced muscle strength. Steroids can lead to heart disease, infertility, and skin disease, and cause inappropriate aggression in daily life. Laziness, lack of motivation, loss of control, and poor decision making are additional risks associated with alcohol and drug use. Any of these can affect a player's long-term goals, like winning a championship or getting and keeping a scholarship.
3. **Have team leaders reinforce the idea that truly committed competitors don't use alcohol and drugs—they disapprove of it.** Heightening the perception of disapproval by peers is one of the most powerful ways to prevent alcohol and drugs use. A simple way to do this is to select a number of your older players who don't use alcohol and drugs and are respected by younger players. Help them develop knowledge about alcohol and drugs and communication skills. When they are ready, suggest they lead a "players only" meeting to speak openly about the negative consequences they have observed from using alcohol and drugs— including effects on physical abilities and performance. Most importantly, have these players talk about how using drugs lets other

# ATHLETES,

## alcohol and drugs

Athletes remain one of the highest "at risk" groups for substance abuse. When athletes win, they celebrate, often with alcohol and/or drugs. When they lose, they try to kill the pain of defeat with alcohol and drugs. An NCAA study discovered that between 68% and 95% of college athletes (depending on the sport) drink regularly and approximately a third use marijuana. Here is an excerpt from that study:

NCAA Sport	% Who Use Alcohol		% Who Use Marijuana	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Baseball	84		27	
Softball		85		29
Basketball	74	72	24	21
Football	76		27	
Volleyball		78		22
Wrestling	85		30	
Field Hockey	88		38	
Track & Field	69	88	17	38
Golf	83	84	26	21
Gymnastics	83	78	32	14

According to research done by the University of Michigan in 2011, young athletes who play team sports may be less likely to smoke but more likely to drink alcohol and binge drink than non athletes. (Binge drinking is defined as 5 or more drinks at one setting).

"Drinking may be an important social activity on some teams, and there may be peer pressure to drink in post-game environments. And, sports are closely tied to the alcohol industry— just consider all the beer advertisements during the Super Bowl," said Yvonne Terry-McElrath, one of the study's authors from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

# The Negative Impact on Competitive Performance

# You can keep your team ATOD– FREE

These are some of the results of research performed by John Underwood, an Olympic trainer and Director of the American Athletic Institute. John's research indicates athletic performance suffers in important ways when competitors use alcohol and drugs (ATOD).

- ⇒ One night of binge drinking causes an athlete to lose the equivalent of 14 days of training. When your student athletes get drunk they take 14 steps backward instead of 14 steps forward.
- ⇒ Athletes who drink regularly are twice as likely to be injured (54% injury rate) as non-drinkers (24%).
- ⇒ ATOD interferes with an athlete's physical and mental ability. Reaction time is slowed, lung capacity is diminished and strength/speed are reduced in ways that make a difference in competition.
- ⇒ The use of ATOD interferes with the training--recovery--adaptation effect. A body trying to rid itself of alcohol or drugs cannot heal or recover as quickly and drinking dramatically reduces HGH and testosterone.
- ⇒ Elite (Olympic level) athletes lose over 11% from their overall performance when they drink. For high school and college athletes it's between 15% and 30% negative impact.
- ⇒ The use of alcohol or other drugs by athletes can mean the difference between winning and losing, between being competitors and being champions

In all, alcohol and drugs will not enhance performance in competition. There are no positive performance effects; only negative ones.

**“As a competitor you don't want to give your opponent any kind of edge, but if you use alcohol or drugs you're giving your competitor that edge. Using affects your performance not just that day, or the day after, but can affect you for up to two weeks!”**

**-Gerald McCoy,**  
Defensive Tackle for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers who grew up in Oklahoma City and played at the University of Oklahoma. Gerald, and other famous athletes, talk about AOD on FATE's website: [www.changeyourfate.org](http://www.changeyourfate.org)

As a coach you are in a special position to prevent alcohol and drug use by your players. The “DO'S and DON'TS” below are common sense guidelines for handling situations you may encounter:

- DON'T** ignore drug use because the team “needs” a particular athlete to play.
- DON'T** pretend that you did not hear an athlete discussing plans for a party that will involve alcohol or drugs.
- DO** immediately address the problem with the athlete and tell him or her that the plans are inappropriate and unacceptable for any member of your team. Tell the athlete that you are concerned and that you care. Ask if he or she needs any help. Tell him or her that drug use weakens an athlete's body and increases the risk of motor vehicle and other accidents.
- DON'T** choose to ignore the smell of marijuana.
- DO** confront the student immediately. Make sure that he or she knows that you know. If you fail to act, the athlete may assume that this behavior is okay or that you don't care. Explain that marijuana is illegal and that the athlete can be arrested or suspended from school and sports for using it.
- DON'T** avoid enforcing rules—nor enforce them selectively.
- DO** be firm, set limits, and stick to them. Be sure that the rules you set are helpful in changing an athlete's behavior. Don't alienate or stigmatize athletes; engage them in the rulemaking.
- DO** set rules and enforce them consistently. Once you look away, team morale will suffer, as will your moral leadership. By opting to look the other way, you also fail in your responsibility to the athlete. If he or she gets hurt, how will you feel? Emphasize that the same rules apply to all team members and that you, as a coach, have a responsibility to enforce rules consistently.
- DON'T** ignore drug use by the coaching staff.
- DO** ensure that everyone on your staff sets a good example. Your players will heed not just what you say, but what you do.

