

USA Volleyball Statement in Regards to Youth Membership Protection Safeguards

In light of the recent publicity USA Swimming has received on ABC News' "20/20" show in regards to its youth membership protection safeguards, USA Volleyball wants to proactively re-affirm to its leadership, coaches, club directors, membership and parents of junior players that we take this topic very, very seriously. We, along with USA Swimming and other National Governing Bodies who deal with a large population of junior-age athletes, have many procedures and policies in place that help protect the safety of our young players.

USA Volleyball supports a very large junior-age membership, a region organizational structure and many privately-owned clubs. For its child protection safeguards, USA Volleyball (along with other NGBs with junior membership) has a safety training program, background screening, educational programs, code of conduct and a procedure to report complaints. Yet, these strong procedures can never provide a 100 percent safety net to halt misconduct in the coach-junior athlete relationship. Even one episode of abuse – sexual, physical or mental – is too much in our eyes and the eyes of every other NGB. USA Volleyball cannot make that statement any stronger to its membership.

For the past five years at the national office level, USA Volleyball has required background screenings and immediately notified regions and clubs when individuals fail. The background screen includes criminal history, charges for sexual misconduct and illegal drug use among other disqualifiers. USA Volleyball also provides educational material on appropriate behavior through our IMPACT level coaching courses and enforces a code of conduct for those involved with minors.

What can USA Volleyball learn from the recent unfortunate incidents in the swimming community? First, we need to constantly evaluate our policies to protect the safety and well-being of our membership. Although our current policies are well-established and provide a solid foundation for protecting our youth, USA Volleyball is committed to reviewing its background screening process, and specifically the disqualifiers, on an annual basis to make changes to more effectively screen out likely offenders. All ideas that may provide additional safeguards for USA Volleyball members are welcomed and encouraged.

Moving forward, USA Volleyball will concentrate significant efforts toward providing better education and awareness to combat these societal issues. We plan to expand these topics further in IMPACT courses, which all junior coaches are required to take. Additionally, USA Volleyball will create an awareness campaign that reaches our young athletes and their parents, stressing the tell-tale signs of abuse and the importance of reporting incidents to the local police or some other appropriate authority figure. We are already testing a Parent Education program in five regions, and these topics will be prominently included. With parent input in this test program, we can craft a better message that hits home across the country.

While USA Volleyball is fully committed to allocating the necessary resources, we know we cannot do this alone. The background screenings required by USA Volleyball and other

committed organizations are a good first step to diminish the likelihood of future incidents occurring. However, the background screens are not perfect as criminal charges must be filed in order to appear on the background report. Also, there are additional tools available in this process. USA Volleyball urges all our club and region leaders to assume a greater responsibility for conducting pre-employment screenings, talking to previous employers and performing reference checks prior to hiring coaches and individuals who may have contact with junior members. Clubs must be vigilant in the hiring process, as well as during the season itself to identify and eliminate potential problems.

USA Volleyball is investigating the creation of a confidential hotline system in which all complaints, whether by the victim or a third-party aware of the incident(s), can be filed such that referrals or action can be taken.

USA Volleyball continues to have the most detailed and broadest ranging safety standards of any organization serving volleyball juniors in the United States. Continuing with that commitment, USA Volleyball will devote time to this subject at its Annual Meetings in May. Please come to these meetings with an open mind to discuss this very important issue.