



BUILDING A FAITH-BASED PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY
DIOCESES OF BIRMINGHAM ALABAMA & THE COACHSAFELYSPORTS POLICY INSTITUTE

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Purpose

The partnership was created to address a growing national challenge: preventable youth sports injuries resulting from inconsistent safety practices, limited coach education, the lack of implementation of youth sports safety best practices, and the absence of standardized safety requirements across youth athletic programs. Through the implementation of evidence-based coach education, nationally recognized youth sports safety best practices, injury prevention training, and technology-enabled compliance management, the initiative applies a comprehensive system of standardized youth sports safety practices throughout the Diocese's after-school athletic programs.

By combining the Diocese's extensive youth-serving network with the Institute's policy expertise, evidence-based best practices, and standardized training framework, the pilot serves as a scalable model for faith-based organizations seeking to improve athlete safety, strengthen organizational accountability, and establish consistent, measurable safety practices that can be replicated nationally. The initiative will also evaluate how the systematic adoption of youth sports safety best practices influences coach preparedness, organizational compliance, injury prevention, and the overall safety culture within community-based athletic programs.

OBJECTIVE

A primary objective of the initiative is to engage at least 25% of Alabama's faith-based youth sports organizations by the end of the three-year project. Through outreach, technical and implementation support, the partnership seeks to expand adoption of evidence-based injury prevention practices beyond Catholic schools, creating a scalable model that can be replicated by churches, faith-based athletic leagues, and other religious youth-serving organizations throughout the United States. This objective will help establish a sustainable network of faith-based organizations committed to protecting young athletes while promoting a culture of safety, accountability, and continuous improvement in youth sports.

PARTNER BACKGROUNDS

CoachSafelySports Policy Institute

The CoachSafelySports Policy Institute was established in August 2026 to advance policies and partnerships that reduce preventable injuries and deaths among youth athletes ages 14 and under. The Institute focuses on establishing consistent safety expectations across youth sports programs through research, advocacy, education, and collaboration with lawmakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and youth sports organizations.

The Institute's work is informed by the youth sports injury crisis, with approximately 8 million sports-related injuries requiring a medical visit which occur annually. Research demonstrates that many youth sports injuries can be reduced through improved coach education, emergency preparedness, and evidence-based prevention practices.

Catholic Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

Established in 1969, the Catholic Diocese of Birmingham serves the Catholic community throughout northern Alabama and provides educational, pastoral, and community services across 39 counties.

Through its network of Catholic schools, parishes, religious education programs, and ministries, the Diocese serves children, families, and communities throughout the region. Its longstanding commitment to youth development, education, and community service made it an ideal partner for implementing a comprehensive youth sports safety initiative.

CoachSafely and PlaySafelySports

The CoachSafely Foundation and its technology affiliate PlaySafelySports provide the peer-review and research basis for the coach training course and software for the registration, learning management and reporting functions of the course through a mobile app. The efficacy of the is surveyed routinely. The course has a base cost of \$25. The cost is adjustable to volume discounts and economic need assessments. The Foundations provides grants to underserved communities based on funding partner agreements.

PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY RECOGNIZES NATIONAL INSTITUTION OF HEALTH (NIH) RESEARCH

The 2011 report cited faith-based organizations played a major role in youth sports programming in underserved communities nationally.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3157503/>

"Lower income neighborhoods had more faith-based locations and court, trail/path, event, and water-type amenities. Higher income neighborhoods had significantly more for-profit businesses offering youth physical activity opportunities. Funding for youth physical activity opportunities in lower income neighborhoods was more likely to come from donations and government revenue (e.g., taxes), whereas most youth physical activity opportunities in the higher income neighborhoods were

supported by for-profit business revenue. Differences between lower and higher income neighborhoods in the type and amenities of youth physical activity opportunities may be driven by funding sources. Attention to these differences could help create more effective and efficient strategies for promoting physical activity among youth."

WHY THE PARTNERSHIP WAS CREATED

The partnership between the Diocese of Birmingham and the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute was established to address a growing public health challenge: reducing preventable injuries among children participating in organized youth sports. While Catholic schools and athletic programs provide thousands of young athletes with opportunities for physical activity, character development, teamwork, and leadership, these programs—like many youth sports organizations nationwide—depend heavily on volunteer coaches whose levels of safety education and emergency preparedness vary considerably.

The partners recognized that effective youth sports safety requires more than individual coach training. It requires a comprehensive system that combines standardized education, organizational leadership, administrative accountability, parent engagement, technology-enabled compliance monitoring, and sustainable implementation. Although Alabama's Coach Safely Act established annual injury prevention training requirements for volunteer coaches, there remained an opportunity to demonstrate how these standards could be implemented consistently within a statewide faith-based athletic system.

To address this need, the Diocese of Birmingham and the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute launched a three-year demonstration project designed to evaluate a comprehensive implementation model for youth sports safety. The partnership integrates evidence-based coach education, standardized safety protocols, parent education resources, administrative support, and a Learning Management System to strengthen accountability and document program implementation across participating schools and athletic programs.

PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

The pilot was designed to achieve six primary objectives:

- Improve coach education and annual safety certification across Diocese schools and athletic programs.
- Increase awareness and preparedness related to concussion recognition, heat illness prevention, sudden cardiac arrest, overuse injuries, and emergency response.
- Establish consistent youth sports safety standards throughout the Diocese.
- Expand parent education and engagement to promote a shared culture of athlete safety.
- Implement a technology-enabled system for certification tracking, compliance monitoring, and administrative reporting.

- Accomplish these objectives through a sustainable model that minimizes financial and administrative burdens for participating schools.

WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

The Diocese of Birmingham and the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute partnership demonstrate how a statewide faith-based organization can successfully implement a standardized youth sports safety framework while maintaining accessibility, accountability, and long-term sustainability. By integrating coach education, organizational leadership, parent engagement, technology, and philanthropic support into a single implementation model, the initiative moves beyond compliance to establish a culture of prevention throughout Diocese athletic programs.

As a three-year demonstration project, the partnership will generate practical lessons on implementation, organizational readiness, technology adoption, and sustainable funding. These findings will help inform future expansion and provide a replicable framework for other Catholic dioceses, faith-based organizations, schools, and youth-serving institutions seeking to strengthen athlete safety and reduce preventable injuries nationwide.

THE CHALLENGE

Alabama faces significant challenges affecting children's health and overall well-being. The 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranked Alabama 43rd nationally in overall child well-being, reflecting ongoing challenges related to health, education, economic stability, and family and community conditions. While participation in youth sports provides important opportunities for physical activity, healthy development, teamwork, and confidence building, these benefits depend on safe athletic environments supported by trained coaches, consistent safety standards, and effective injury prevention practice.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

To address the need for consistent youth sports safety practices across Diocese athletic programs, CoachSafely's proposed implementation of the PlaySafelySports online Learning Management System as the foundation of the partnership's training and compliance framework. The proposed solution provides a centralized platform designed to deliver standardized safety education, support administrative oversight, and create measurable accountability across participating programs.

The proposed partnership includes a three-year implementation period beginning in August 2026. During this period, the PlaySafelySports platform will provide annual online injury prevention training for coaches, certification tracking, administrative reporting capabilities, compliance monitoring, parent education resources, and technical support to assist schools and athletic leaders throughout implementation.

By combining evidence-based education with technology-enabled tracking and ongoing implementation support, the solution creates a sustainable approach to improving youth sports safety. The model

allows the Diocese to establish consistent expectations for coach preparedness while providing administrators with the tools needed to monitor participation, document compliance, and evaluate program effectiveness over time.

THE PROCESS

Coach Education and Certification

The Diocese of Birmingham's established infrastructure, statewide reach, and longstanding commitment to youth development positioned the organization as an ideal partner for implementing a standardized youth sports safety framework. Through its network of Catholic schools, educators, and athletic programs, the Diocese provides a strong foundation for delivering injury prevention education and demonstrating how faith-based institutions can serve as trusted partners in advancing public health and child safety initiatives. As part of the pilot, the Diocese recommends that all coaches utilizing Diocese-owned athletic facilities complete the PlaySafelySports Injury Recognition and Prevention Course annually. This requirement promotes consistent safety education, strengthens

COACHSAFELY NEW COURSE AND YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY TRAINING PROGRAM SUMMARY

CoachSafely is a comprehensive youth sports safety education program designed to equip coaches and youth sports leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to prevent injuries, respond to emergencies, and create safer athletic environments for young athletes. A complete course structure and descriptions are provided in Appendix I and II.

The approximately 90-minute online course includes eight video-based modules covering essential areas of youth athlete safety. The evidence-informed curriculum includes interactive learning, quizzes, and certification upon completion. Training focuses on key safety areas, including:

- **Coaching Youth Athletes** Promotes positive coaching practices, effective communication, athlete development, and prevention of burnout and early specialization.
- **Concussion, Head, and Neck Trauma:** Teaches recognition of injury signs, appropriate response protocols, and safe return-to-play practices.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Helps coaches develop emergency response awareness, understand Emergency Action Plans, risks associated with youth-specific medical conditions, including heat illness, sickle cell trait, head and neck injuries, asthma, and severe allergic reactions.
- **Heat and Weather-Related Injuries:** Provides strategies for preventing and responding to heat illness and severe weather risks.
- **Injury Prevention and Recognition:** Educates coaches on common youth sports injuries, overuse injuries, and prevention strategies.
- **Sudden Cardiac Arrest:** Covers emergency recognition, CPR fundamentals, and AED awareness.
- **Mental Health and Athlete Well-Being:** Addresses bullying, child protection, mental health concerns, and creating supportive team environments.
- **Physical Conditioning and Equipment Safety:** Promotes age-appropriate training methods and safe equipment use.

coach preparedness, and establishes a uniform standard for those responsible for supervising youth athletes.

Parent Education and Engagement

Recognizing that athlete safety depends on a shared commitment among coaches, administrators, and families, the partnership extends education opportunities to parents and caregivers. Parents are encouraged to learn foundational injury prevention principles, understand the risks associated with youth athletics, and access the online training course independently if they choose. This approach helps build greater awareness and reinforces a culture of safety beyond the playing field.

Technology Platform and Compliance Management

A central component of the pilot is the use of the PlaySafelySports Learning Management System which provides a scalable system for delivering training and tracking implementation. The platform includes online learning management capabilities, coach enrollment, progress monitoring, certification tracking, administrative dashboards, and reporting tools. These features allow program leaders to document compliance, evaluate participation, and maintain visibility into the effectiveness of safety initiatives.

Administrative Support and Implementation Resources

To support successful adoption, the partnership includes a structured implementation process for school and athletic leaders. This support includes principal onboarding, virtual software training, athletic director education, ongoing technical assistance, implementation resources, and reporting support. By providing both the training infrastructure and operational guidance needed for execution, the pilot reduces administrative burden and increases the likelihood of sustained program adoption.

Together, these components create a comprehensive implementation model that demonstrates how faith-based organizations can successfully integrate standardized youth sports safety practices while building accountability, accessibility, and long-term scalability.

Funding Model

Rather than requiring schools or families to absorb the cost of coach education, the initiative is supported through philanthropic investment by the John Carroll Athletic Foundation. The Foundation provides an annual grant of \$5,000, funding training for approximately 500 coaches each year at a discounted rate of \$10 per coach, for a total three-year investment of \$15,000. This funding model demonstrates how community philanthropy can remove financial barriers to implementing standardized youth sports safety practices while ensuring that coaches receive essential training to better protect young athletes.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Preventing injuries and creating safer environments for young athletes requires more than well-intentioned policies or one-time training. Effective youth sports safety programs depend on a comprehensive approach that integrates standardized coach education, consistent implementation of evidence-based practices, administrative oversight and accountability, active parent engagement, technology to monitor training and compliance, and sustainable funding to support long-term success. The Diocese of Birmingham pilot brings these six essential components together within a single implementation framework, creating a practical, scalable model for faith-based organizations and other youth-serving institutions. By demonstrating how these elements can work together, the initiative provides a blueprint for strengthening athlete safety while promoting organizational accountability and long-term program sustainability.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Diocese of Birmingham and CoachSafelySports Policy Institute partnership represent a significant innovation in youth sports safety by moving beyond traditional training approaches to establish a comprehensive, scalable implementation model. The partnership demonstrates how a faith-based organization can serve as a catalyst for advancing athlete safety by adopting standardized practices, building organizational accountability, and creating a culture of prevention across multiple youth sports programs.

The model's is reflected in its integration of measurable safety strategies, including standardized coach education, certification tracking, compliance monitoring, and data-informed oversight through a Learning Management System. These tools allow administrators to measure participation, verify completion of safety requirements, and identify opportunities for continuous improvement. By

Alabama Youth Sports Safety

- According to Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) nearly **60,000 youth coaches** serve recreational sports programs across Alabama, many of whom are volunteers responsible for recognizing and responding to sports-related injuries.
- Approximately **8 million youth sports injuries requiring a medical visit** occur annually in the United States, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that **about one-half are preventable** through proper education, training, and evidence-based safety practices.
- Alabama became the **first state in the nation to enact the Coach Safely Act (Act 2018-496)**, requiring annual injury prevention training for volunteer coaches of athletes age 14 and younger participating in high-risk sports.
- ADPH maintains a statewide **CoachSafety Database** and continues to enhance reporting and compliance systems to monitor coach certification and implementation of the Coach Safely Act.
- Since 2018, the CoachSafe;y Foundation has trained approximately **75,000 youth coaches**. In 2026, the Foundation has trained approximately **6,000**.

embedding safety practices into the operational structure of youth athletics, the partnership shifts safety from an individual responsibility to an institutional commitment.

A key lesson from the pilot is that successful youth sports safety initiatives require alignment among leadership, coaches, families, technology providers, and funding partners.

The partnership's philanthropic funding approach reduces financial barriers and demonstrates how community investment can accelerate adoption while supporting sustainability. Rather than placing the cost burden on schools or families, the model leverages strategic investment to expand access and participation.

The broader significance of the partnership lies in its potential for replication. Designed as a demonstration project, the initiative provides a framework that can be adapted by other Catholic dioceses, faith-based organizations, schools, and youth-serving institutions seeking to implement consistent safety standards. The lessons learned from this pilot will help inform future expansion efforts by identifying effective strategies for governance, training delivery, technology integration, funding, and long-term program sustainability. Through this approach, the Diocese of Birmingham partnership serves as a national example of how collaborative leadership can transform youth sports safety practices at scale.

EXPECTED OUTCOME AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

Over the initial three-year implementation period, the Diocese of Birmingham and Policy Institute partnership is expected to generate measurable improvements in youth sports safety practices while establishing a model for broader adoption. Key anticipated outcomes include hundreds of coaches completing annual safety certification, increased consistency in the application of injury prevention practices, and greater awareness among parents and families regarding athlete health and safety.

The partnership is also expected to strengthen administrative accountability through improved oversight, centralized documentation of coach training, and the ability to monitor compliance across participating programs. These systems will provide valuable data to assess program effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and support continuous refinement of safety practices.

Beyond the immediate impact within Diocese athletic programs, the pilot is designed to serve as a replicable framework for other Catholic dioceses and faith-based youth organizations nationwide. Lessons learned from implementation—including strategies for leadership engagement, training adoption, technology integration, and sustainable funding—will help inform future expansion efforts and demonstrate how collaborative partnerships can create lasting improvements in youth sports safety.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Diocese of Birmingham pilot demonstrates that successful youth sports safety initiatives require more than training alone. Sustainable implementation depends on strong partnerships, administrative leadership, technology infrastructure, legal clarity, and financial support.

The model illustrates how schools, churches, athletic organizations, nonprofit safety organizations, and philanthropic partners can work together to create safer environments for young athletes while establishing a framework that can be adapted by other dioceses and faith-based organizations across the United States.

CONCLUSION

The partnership between the Diocese of Birmingham and the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute represents an important step toward creating a safer, more accountable, and sustainable model for youth sports participation. By moving beyond traditional approaches focused solely on individual coach training, the initiative demonstrates the value of integrating standardized education, organizational leadership, technology-enabled accountability, parent engagement, and philanthropic support into a comprehensive youth sports safety framework.

As a three-year demonstration project, the partnership will provide valuable insights into how faith-based organizations can successfully implement evidence-based youth sports safety practices across diverse athletic programs. Through the PlaySafelySports platform, annual coach certification, compliance monitoring, and ongoing implementation support, the initiative establishes measurable systems that strengthen emergency preparedness, improve organizational safety culture, and promote consistent safety standards across participating schools and athletic programs.

A central objective of the project is to engage at least 25% of Alabama's faith-based youth sports organizations by the conclusion of the three-year initiative. Through strategic outreach, technical assistance, and implementation support, the partnership will expand the adoption of evidence-based injury prevention practices beyond Catholic schools to include churches, faith-based athletic leagues, and other religious youth-serving organizations. Achieving this objective will establish a sustainable statewide network of organizations committed to protecting young athletes while demonstrating a scalable model that can be replicated by faith-based organizations throughout the United States.

The significance of this partnership extends well beyond the Diocese of Birmingham. It provides a replicable framework for Catholic dioceses, schools, community organizations, and other youth-serving institutions seeking to reduce preventable injuries and create safer environments for children. The lessons learned through implementation will help identify effective strategies for leadership engagement, technology adoption, sustainable funding, and long-term organizational change that can strengthen youth sports safety nationwide.

Ultimately, this collaboration demonstrates that improving youth sports safety requires collective action. When nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, academic researchers, community leaders, and philanthropic partners unite around a shared commitment to protecting children, meaningful and lasting change becomes possible. By achieving its goal of engaging at least one-quarter of Alabama's faith-based youth sports organizations and documenting effective implementation practices, the Diocese of Birmingham demonstration project will serve as a national model for how innovation, partnership, and accountability can transform the culture of youth athletics—ensuring that every child has the opportunity to participate in sports where safety, preparation, and well-being are prioritized.

Appendix I

COACHSAFELY YOUTH SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION COURSE STRUCTURE

The CoachSafely course is a comprehensive youth sports safety education program designed to provide coaches with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to protect young athletes and create safer sports environments. The approximately 90-minute online course consists of eight video-based modules covering nine essential youth sports safety areas. Each module includes quizzes and a final certification upon successful completion.

The curriculum is grounded in evidence-informed practices and addresses critical areas of youth athlete safety, including athlete development, mental health and well-being, concussion recognition and management, overuse injury prevention, youth-specific medical conditions, sudden cardiac arrest, emergency response, and emergency preparedness. Through this training, coaches learn how to identify potential risks, respond effectively to medical emergencies, implement injury prevention strategies, and foster a healthier, safer, and more supportive athletic experience for young athletes.

The CoachSafely curriculum is organized around eight core injury prevention and athlete safety areas:

- **8 training modules**
- **Approximately 90 minutes** to complete
- **Self-paced**—start and stop at any time
- **Five-question quiz** after each module
- **100% passing score** required (unlimited retakes)
- **Certificate of Completion** issued upon successful completion
- **Annual certification** for coaches

NEW COACHSAFELY YOUTH SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION TRAINING MODULES

1. COACHING YOUTH ATHLETES

- Understand best practices for communicating with, training, and protecting child athletes.
- Recognize the developmental needs of young athletes.
- Promote positive coaching practices that support athlete growth and well-being.

2. CONCUSSION, HEAD, AND NECK TRAUMA

- Identify the signs and symptoms of concussions and other head injuries.
- Understand appropriate response protocols and safe return-to-play guidelines.

3. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- Understand the essential components of an Emergency Action Plan (EAP).
- Recognize risks associated with youth-specific medical conditions, including heat illness, sickle cell trait, asthma, and severe allergic reactions.
- Develop awareness of appropriate emergency response procedures.

4. HEAT AND EXTREME WEATHER-RELATED INJURIES

- Understand prevention strategies for heat-related illnesses.
- Differentiate between heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.
- Learn lightning safety protocols, including the 30/30 Rule, to reduce weather-related risks.

5. INJURY PREVENTION AND RECOGNITION

- Identify common youth sports injuries, including Osgood-Schlatter Disease and Sever's Disease.
- Recognize signs and symptoms of overuse injuries.

6. SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

- Understand the difference between sudden cardiac arrest and a heart attack.

- Learn the fundamentals of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the proper use and importance of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).

7. MENTAL HEALTH AND ATHLETE WELL-BEING

- Recognize bullying and its impact on youth athletes.
- Understand different forms of child abuse and the coach's responsibility in protecting athletes.
- Learn how to identify and respond appropriately to youth mental health concerns and crises.

8. PHYSICAL CONDITIONING AND TRAINING EQUIPMENT

- Understand age-appropriate strength, conditioning, and training principles.
- Learn proper techniques for using training equipment safely.

Appendix III

THE ALABAMA COACHSAFELY ACT

The Alabama Coach Safely Act (Act 2018-496), codified in Chapter 11F of Title 22 of the Alabama Code, was enacted to reduce preventable injuries among youth athletes by requiring safety education for coaches and athletics personnel. The law became effective in 2018 and is administered by the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH).

https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/injuryprevention/assets/hb_9_act2018-0496.pdf

KEY REQUIREMENTS

The Act applies to youth athletic associations that sponsor or conduct high-risk sports for children:

- 14 years of age and younger
- Not yet admitted to the seventh grade

ANNUAL COACH TRAINING

All coaches and athletics personnel must complete an ADPH-approved injury prevention course:

- Within 30 days of beginning coaching duties
- Annually thereafter, by the anniversary of their start date
- Associations must maintain records of course completion for as long as the individual serves as a coach.

REQUIRED TRAINING TOPICS

At a minimum, the course must include:

1. Emergency preparedness and response

2. Concussion and head injury recognition
3. Heat illness and extreme weather safety
4. Physical conditioning and proper equipment use
5. Sudden cardiac arrest and heart abnormalities ([Alabama Administrative Code](#))

EXEMPTIONS

The following individuals are exempt from the training requirement:

- Licensed athletic trainers
- Physicians
- Nurses
- First responders
- Other healthcare professionals with acute traumatic life support training

LIABILITY PROTECTION

The Act provides that coaches who:

- Complete the required training, and
- Reasonably follow the safety practices taught in the course,

may be entitled to a legal defense against liability for injuries occurring during covered youth athletic activities.

ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

ADPH regulations implementing the Act require youth athletic organizations to:

- Establish a coach safety training program.
- Track compliance.
- Maintain training records.
- Use ADPH-approved training resources. Updated administrative rules took effect in January 2026.

APPROVED TRAINING RESOURCES

The Alabama Department of Public Health lists several approved training providers, including CoachSafely, which is available at no cost to Alabama volunteer coaches through the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA). ([Alabama Department of Public Health](#))



CoachSafelySports Policy Institute
Coach Jack Crowe, President
Terri Winston, Executive Vice President
Casey Maples, Communications Director
www.coachsafesportspolicy.org

The **CoachSafelySports Policy Institute** is a policy and advocacy organization dedicated to establishing a national standard for youth sports safety through state legislation. Its primary objective is to reduce preventable injuries and deaths among athletes age 14 and under by requiring standardized coach certification across all youth sports.

