

## Homeschool Sports Join AAU

from Howard Richman

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Homeschooling sports in Pennsylvania are set to take a big leap forward this year by coming under the umbrella of one of the oldest amateur athletic organizations in America, the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) which from 1888-1978 represented the United States in international athletic competitions, including the Olympics and since then has been providing sanctioning and insurance coverage for sports programs at the grass roots level.

Once we join AAU, organized homeschool sports in PA will be insured for liability and medical injuries and should expand rapidly as more and more support groups take the plunge to field teams and organize tournaments.

This leap brings closer the day when homeschoolers will have almost as many opportunities to play sports as school students. AAU membership will be required this year for participants in the PA Homeschoolers co-ed volleyball tournament. We expect that within the next couple years there will be AAU sanctioned homeschool tournaments for boys basketball, girls basketball, soccer, and cross country. In addition many homeschoolers will participate in some of the already-available AAU tournaments.

### **Past Problems with insurance**

In the past, some homeschoolers' sports teams have disappeared because of difficulties with obtaining insurance.

For example, during the 1995-1996 school year, John and Kay Markiewicz of Berks County organized a homeschool boys basketball team for their son Jonah and other members of the Northeastern Berks Christian Homeschoolers Support group. They planned to compete with other homeschoolers' teams including the Homeschool Hurricanes from Eastern Berks. At first their team practiced in the All Purpose Room of a local public school, sponsored by a church whose youth group rented that room. Then the church decided that they didn't want to keep sponsoring the basketball team, possibly because they were worried about liability.

Kay and John then tried to find another place for the team to practice. Kay tried a community center which was expensive plus required insurance. "Without insurance you're just stuck," she told me. "All the gyms, especially school gyms, wanted insurance."

They looked into the possibility of purchasing insurance, but found the price to be prohibitively high. So their team disbanded and their support group hasn't had an organized team since.

Kay told me that perhaps in the future, now that AAU insurance would be so inexpensive, the Kutztown group might sponsor another homeschool basketball team.

## **This Year's Co-ed Volleyball**

Homeschoolers' state-wide co-ed volleyball tournaments have been an annual event in Pennsylvania ever since the CHESS group sponsored the first tournament in November 1995. Since 1998 there have been two tournaments a year here in Pennsylvania, one sponsored by PA Homeschoolers in the spring and the other sponsored by the CHESS group each fall. Last year's tournaments included both senior (18 years and under) and junior (14 years and under) age groups.

This year PA Homeschoolers, and probably CHESS, will bring their state-wide co-ed volleyball tournaments under the AAU insurance umbrella. This means that all volleyball players must join the AAU in order to participate in the PA Homeschoolers tournament and will probably have to join the AAU in order to participate in the CHESS tournament.

Some teams will have their players join at the last minute just in order to participate in a tournament. The more farsighted will have all their players join in the beginning of September in order to take advantage of AAU's automatic medical and liability insurance for supervised practices throughout the year.

### **Advantages and Costs:**

- The players will be insured for the medical expenses of injuries that occur in practice and competition. (Cost to athletes is \$10 per year, insurance has a \$200 deductible.)
- The gyms where homeschoolers practice will be automatically insured for liability and damages. (The rule, though, is that only AAU members can practice and play and the practices must be supervised.)
- The coaches and volunteers involved will be insured for liability. (Cost to coaches and volunteers is \$12 per year.)
- Homeschool teams or individuals can participate in the many already existing AAU tournaments in sports ranging from cross country in the fall, to wrestling in the winter, to basketball in the spring and summer. (See the article on page 3 by Joshua Ayers about his experience participating on a community AAU basketball team.)
- Homeschool support groups can join as an AAU "Club" for \$30 a year so that they can organize their own tournaments with inexpensive AAU sanctioning and insurance. (This should mean more and more homeschool tournaments in a growing number of sports.)

### **How to Join AAU**

In order to join, get your membership application by dialing 1-800-AAU-4USA Or you can fill out a membership form over the Internet at [www.aausports.org](http://www.aausports.org). If your team doesn't decide to join the AAU as an AAU "Club" (cost \$30/year), then the members of your team can all put down "PA Homeschoolers" and our AAU club number (call or e-mail us for it) when you join. (Our PA Homeschoolers "Club" will have many teams.)

### **Looking for a Team?**

Are you looking for a team? Call the local support groups listed in this newsletter. Some of them might have teams or be thinking of forming one. Perhaps your call will get them moving.

If you're a PHAA (PA Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency) member high school student, just write or e-mail me right away and I'll put a notice in the September issue of The Excelsior, the PHAA student newsletter. In the past we have had notices from teams looking for players and notices from students looking for teams.

### **If You Organize a Tournament**

If you organize a tournament (AAU sanctioned or not) do let us know. We list homeschoolers tournaments in Pennsylvania on the calendar page of this newsletter and on the calendar page at our Internet site. We hope that the ease of getting insurance through AAU will lead to a burst of new homeschool sports tournaments and teams in Pennsylvania.

Last year there were homeschool tournaments in Pennsylvania for co-ed volleyball and boys basketball. This year we hope to see cross country, soccer, and girls basketball added to the list.