

Hazing: What's the big deal?

Stories shared from the Globe and Mail newspaper September 20th and October 25th 2006 on-line editions and the websites: HazingatCornell.edu, badjocks.com and stophazing.org

In Vermont, hockey players grab each others' genitalia and parade around in a freshman initiation ceremony. In Connecticut, a high school wrestler is hog-tied and sodomized with the blunt end of a plastic knife. In Oklahoma, a football player suffers a head injury after being jumped by teammates. In Indianapolis, a phone rings off the hook. "It's just been non-stop," sighs Hank Nuwer, a leading hazing authority, of the media's recent interest in sports-team hazing. After decades, perhaps even a century, of darkness, the hazing of athletes by athletes is getting its first thorough public examination. Once seemingly the province of fraternities and the military, hazing has emerged from the shadows. A series of initiation-related incidents gone wrong have forced the world of sports to look inward to quantify and address any problems.

May 2003, Glenbrook North High School gained notoriety after an off-campus, non-school sanctioned event involving students dressed in school colours turned into a major hazing incident that attracted media attention. The event was the annual "powder-puff" girls' football game between a group of juniors and seniors. The game took place on Sunday, May 4, 2003, in Chipilly Woods, A.K.A. Grant & Lee, part of the Cook County Forest Preserve District. There was no playing of football. The hazing began as soon as the junior girls arrived. About 20 junior class participants were sat in the middle of a clearing while they were covered in paint, urine, feces, and animal guts. Some were shot with paintball guns, others were kicked and beaten. After it was over, at least five of the participants had injuries requiring medical attention, including one receiving stitches to her head. Thirty-one students — twenty-eight females and three males — were suspended from school for 10 days. They were later expelled. Some of the expelled students and their parents filed a federal lawsuit because they would then be unable to graduate from school. The plaintiffs and the school district reached an agreement where the expelled students would have their diplomas mailed to them provided they dropped the lawsuits and did not make any book or movie deals about the incident. The juniors who participated were suspended but it was lifted when they agreed to counseling and also to not make any book or movie deals. Local law enforcement authorities investigated the hazing incident and filed charges against 15 students for assault and battery. Two mothers were charged with providing alcohol for the event. All were convicted and the sentences received were light, ranging from probation to community service. A community-wide task force was established after the hazing incident. Their final report stressed the needs for recognizing and preventing hazing incidents

In the U.S. hazing has resulted in several deaths and serious injuries. [Matthew Carrington](#) was killed at California's Chico State University on February 2, 2005. As a direct result a number of colleges and parents, as well as sorority and fraternity members are taking steps to bring an end to criminal hazing practices. Hazing is considered a felony in several U.S. states, and anti-hazing legislation has been proposed in other states. SB 1454, or Matt's Law, was developed in Carrington's memory, and is one bill up for legislation to eliminate hazing in California.

Citing a hazing incident, McGill University cancelled the rest of its men's football season in the fall of 2005. School officials announced that a four-week investigation uncovered hazing rituals performed during "Rookie Night" on Aug. 27 of that year. "Hazing is based on humiliation and degradation," said McGill's interim provost Dr. Anthony Masi in a statement.

Masi revealed that the evidence showed "the event did involve nudity, degrading positions and behaviors, gagging, touching in inappropriate manners with a broomstick as well as verbal and physical intimidation of rookies by a large portion of the team."



Since the death of Nicholas Haben, who died in a lacrosse team initiation in 1990, awareness of athlete hazing has grown.

October 2005 - The Ontario Hockey League handed the Windsor Spitfires' Moe Mantha a one-year suspension as general manager and 25 games as coach for a hazing incident involving several of his players. OHL commissioner David Branch made the announcement Tuesday after wrapping up his two-week investigation that included discussions with club owner Steve Riolo, Mantha, two assistant coaches, two team trainers and 25 players. The alleged hazing incident occurred following a Sept. 9 pre-season game when the league claims rookie players were told to strip and made to stand naked inside a small bathroom at the back of the team bus.

In the May issue of the American Journal of Emergency Medicine, Michelle Finkel, MD, reported that hazing injuries are often not recognized for their true cause in emergency medical centers. The doctor said hazing victims sometimes hide the real cause of injuries out of shame or to protect those who caused the harm. In protecting their abusers, hazing victims can be compared with victims of domestic violence, Finkel wrote.

Cliff Muntu (June 8, 1987 - April 3, 2007) was a sophomore student of IPDN, The Indonesian Institute of National Governance, who died as a result of being beaten by his seniors during hazing. He was a member of the North Sulawesi contingent. His death has invoked critics from the public as the Institute has allowed seniority in the form of violence towards the junior students to happen under the pretext of discipline.

An autopsy and investigation found Muntu had bruises on several of his organs from a beating by five senior students. Four have since been expelled. The case has attracted nationwide attention of the Indonesian media as well as high level officials in the Indonesian government, particularly because this is the 35th death in the school since 1993, as revealed by the whistleblower: a suspended IPDN professor Inu Kencana. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has appealed to totally demilitarize the school in order to break the cycle of violence.

Betsi Burns, director of student development at Northwestern, recounted her school's hazing incident involving the women's soccer team in 2006 in which photos wound up on badjocks.com. Only a month earlier, the team had heard someone speak against hazing. The team was suspended, the captains removed, the coach resigned and the entire team had to do community service. "Fortunately, no one was physically injured that evening. As we've heard throughout the day, we don't know what the hidden harms were and the repercussions those young women are facing to this day," Burns said.