



Handbook for Athletic Directors and Coaches

The Rockford F.I.R.E. sincerely thanks you for using your God-given gifts to serve, lead, and guide our young athletes in a Christ-honoring way. We are grateful for God's continued faithfulness and consider it a true blessing to serve alongside such dedicated individuals. Your commitment to this program and the generous sharing of your time and talents are sincerely appreciated. We hold each of you in the highest regard and value your partnership.

This handbook outlines the history, policies, and procedures of Rockford F.I.R.E. for all Athletic Directors (A.D.s) and coaches. It is intended to support you as you lead with excellence and uphold the mission and values of our program.

Our Philosophy and Objectives

Mission Statement

Our athletic program strives to develop homeschool athletes spiritually and physically, while boosting confidence and emphasizing integrity, teamwork, and perseverance. We seek to honor God through athletic competition by promoting character development, good sportsmanship, and a commitment to pursuing excellence. We believe sports provide an opportunity for athletes to grow in faith, discipline, and discipleship.

Our Vision

We aim to use sports as a platform for teaching biblical principles of teamwork, perseverance, and grace, while empowering our athletes to become leaders who represent Christ in every aspect of their lives. We believe sports provide an opportunity for athletes to grow in faith, discipline, and discipleship.

Our Story

In 1993, Lois Dixon, together with a group of like-minded families, established Hallstrom Homeschool Workshops (Hallstrom) to support local homeschooling families by offering upper-level classes for those seeking additional academic assistance. Over the years, Hallstrom has continued to grow as more families choose home education for their children.

Building on the foundation of Hallstrom Homeschool Workshops, Rockford F.I.R.E. was launched to give eligible local homeschool students the opportunity to participate in athletics, including girls' volleyball, boys' basketball, and girls' basketball.

Athletic Director Procedures and Policies

Expectations and Standards

- Conduct yourself in a manner that honors God, demonstrating integrity in your decisions and actions, and refrain from practices that are inconsistent with biblical principles.
- Agree to and uphold the Statement of Faith as well as all handbook policies and procedures.
- Agree to complete a background check every four years and renew DCFS mandated reporter training every three years.

Non-Compete and Confidentiality Agreement

As a condition of serving as an athletic director for the Rockford F.I.R.E. Program:

- You must agree to not use any Hallstrom or Rockford F.I.R.E. contact information, rosters, or distribution lists for purposes outside of the F.I.R.E. program.
- You must agree not to recruit athletes or families away from the F.I.R.E. program for another sports program during your time of service or after your departure from the program.
- All program-related contact information is the confidential property of the Hallstrom/F.I.R.E. program and must remain within the organization.

Operational Procedures

- Oversee and coordinate all communications related to the program.
 - Ensure athletes and parents are receiving all necessary communications.
 - Utilize official F.I.R.E. social media platforms to publicize events and recognize team achievements.
 - With approval from the Program Director, posting access to social media accounts may be extended to trusted parents or athletes.
 - The creation of any Rockford F.I.R.E. accounts, including social media accounts, are strictly prohibited.
- Arrange and confirm gym locations for practices and home games.
 - A Certificate of Insurance (COI) can be provided upon request through the Program Director.
- Create and post practice and game schedules.
 - Book officials for home games.
 - Avoid scheduling events on the same day as the Hallstrom Family Picnic, Christmas Program, or Spring Program, and consider other co-op events with significant member participation when planning.
 - Monitor weather conditions, and in the event of inclement weather, evaluate travel safety and venue availability.
- Collaborate with the coaches to organize a parent and athlete informational meeting at the beginning of the season to outline expectations and share essential information.
- Collaborate with coaches to develop or update a program-specific code of conduct. A copy of all finalized documents must be provided to the Program Director for approval.
- Waivers must be completed for all athletes during the online registration process at the start of each season. Additional waivers are required for any events held outside the regular season. Athletes without a completed waiver on file are not permitted to participate in any event.
- Sports physicals are required for all athletes and, per Illinois policy, are valid for 395 days. The goal is to have all sports physicals collected before an athlete may begin practicing with their team. Check sports physicals to ensure each athlete is cleared for play.

- Ensure volunteer needs are organized and available for families to sign up. While this task may be delegated to a parent, the A.D. retains responsibility for proper oversight.
 - If this task is delegated to a parent, coordinate with the Program Director to provide them with the necessary website access to complete it.
- Collaborate with coaches to ensure that necessary program needs—including equipment, uniforms, and other essential items—are identified and incorporated into the budget.
- Collaborate with coaches to establish a process for distributing uniforms at the start of the season and collecting them at the end of the season, as uniforms are program property loaned to athletes for seasonal use.
 - In the event a uniform is lost or damaged, the family may be assessed a replacement fee.
 - Designate a storage location for uniforms and any other program-owned items and maintain an inventory list.
- Organize program spirit wear sales early in the season. A.D.s may select vendors and structure sales at their discretion as a fundraising opportunity. All pricing decisions rest with the A.D.
 - F.I.R.E. logos may not be shared or used by anyone outside of F.I.R.E. leadership.
- Fundraising and sponsorship opportunities are supported but must receive prior approval from the Program Director before implementation.
- Maintain open communication with the F.I.R.E. Program Director and provide advance notice of any tryouts, fundraisers, camps, or other events held outside of regular season practices and games.
 - All registrations must be created and managed through the Rockford F.I.R.E. website in collaboration with the Program Director.

Safety Guidelines and Protocols

- Neither A.D.s nor coaches should be left alone with a player(s) at a team practice or a game. If the A.D. or another coach is not present, please arrange for a parent volunteer/helper to be present. This policy intends to provide a layer of protection for all parties involved.
- Provide a first aid kit to coaches for each division.
 - First aid kits are to be collected at the end of the season for restocking and use for the following season or event.
- If implemented, concussion and/or first aid training may be required and will be covered by the program.

Financial Procedures and Record-Keeping

- Create a season budget and provide a copy to the Program Director and maintain open communication on all financial matters.

- Establish a set budgetary margin to be preserved for rollover into the next season's budget
- All receipts, financial documentation, and collected athletic fees (cash or check) must be promptly submitted to the Program Director or other designated individual for accurate record-keeping, deposit, and application to family accounts.
- All program related expenses/bills must be paid in full and settled by the end of the season.
- Ensure that referee W-9s are collected or are already on file. Newly completed W-9s are to be given to the Program Director or other designated party for tax record purposes.

Parent Volunteers/Helpers

- Parent volunteers are welcome to assist with program operations but should be under the direction and oversight of a program leader at all times.
- Parent volunteers may support practices or games under the coach's direction but should not lead practices or assume coaching responsibilities during practices, games, matches, or tournaments.
 - Parent volunteers or helpers should never be referred to as 'Coach' or any other title that implies they are part of F.I.R.E. leadership or have completed the interview, background check, and mandated reporter training required for those roles.

Coach Procedures and Policies

Expectations and Standards

- Conduct yourself in a manner that honors God, demonstrating integrity in your decisions and actions, and refrain from practices that are inconsistent with biblical principles.
- Agree to and uphold the Statement of Faith as well as all handbook policies and procedures.
- Agree to complete a background check every four years and renew DCFS mandated reporter training every three years.

Non-Compete and Confidentiality Agreement

As a condition of serving as a coach for the Rockford F.I.R.E. Program:

- You must agree to not use any Hallstrom or Rockford F.I.R.E. contact information, rosters, or distribution lists for purposes outside of the F.I.R.E. program.
- You must agree not to recruit athletes or families away from the F.I.R.E. program for another sports program during your time of service or after your departure from the program.

- All program-related contact information is the confidential property of the Hallstrom/F.I.R.E. program and must remain within the organization.

Operational Procedures

- Oversee and lead practices and attend all games, matches, and tournaments.
 - If a conflict arises, be in communication with your A.D. and arrange for another F.I.R.E. coach to cover in your absence.
- Collaborate with your A.D. to host a parent and athlete informational meeting at the start of each season.
- Oversee and coordinate all communications related to your team via the app.
- The creation of any Rockford F.I.R.E. accounts, including social media accounts, are strictly prohibited unless specific permission is granted by the Program Director.
- Do not share or use F.I.R.E. logos without permission.
- Maintain open communication with the program A.D. and the F.I.R.E. Program Director

Safety Guidelines and Protocols

- Neither A.D.s nor coaches should be left alone with a player(s) at a team practice or a game. If the A.D. or another coach is not present, please arrange for a parent volunteer/helper to be present. This policy intends to provide a layer of protection for all parties involved.
- Bring your F.I.R.E. provided first aid kit to all away games, events, and tournaments.
 - Notify your A.D. if you need any not included or replacement supplies for your kit.
 - Return the first aid kit to your A.D. at the end of the season.
- If implemented, concussion and/or first aid training may be required and will be covered by the program.

Parent Volunteers/Helpers

- Parent volunteers are welcome to assist with program operations but should be under the direction and oversight of a program leader at all times.
- Parent volunteers may support practices or games under the coach's direction but should not lead practices or assume coaching responsibilities during practices, games, matches, or tournaments.
 - Parent volunteers or helpers should never be referred to as 'Coach' or any other title that implies they are part of F.I.R.E. leadership or have completed the interview, background check, and mandated reporter training required for those roles.

Standards of Conduct and Accountability

If a concern of serious misconduct is raised against an A.D., coach, or assistant coach, they will be respectfully asked to recuse themselves from the situation while the Hallstrom Board reviews the matter and determines an appropriate course of action. This process is intended to ensure objectivity and fairness for all parties. The individual may continue fulfilling their role during the review unless otherwise determined by the Board.

Any program leader involved in an interaction with an official or during a game that results in a technical or ejection must document the incident by completing an [Incident Report](#). F.I.R.E. supports and expects its leadership to model composure and integrity, demonstrating to our athletes how to navigate adversity and respond appropriately even when disagreements with officials occur.

The Hallstrom Board reserves the right to dismiss any coach, assistant coach, or A.D. at any time to maintain high Biblical standards and adherence to policies; though, this is a last resort and requires a board vote. This policy is consistent with Hallstrom's policy regarding its board members, directors, teachers, families, students, and athletes and is not directed at F.I.R.E. leadership specifically.

Compensation and Reimbursement Guidelines

Family Registration Discount

- Athletic Directors and Coaches receive a \$40 discount on their family registration fee (if not already applied).

Athletic Fee Discount

- Athletic Directors and Coaches each receive a discount on one athletic fee for a participating family member within their program.

Stipends

- End-of-season stipends are provided as a gesture of appreciation and to help offset expenses incurred throughout the season. Stipend amounts are determined with careful consideration of the program's financial capacity to offer game and tournament opportunities while keeping fees manageable for families. We deeply value the time, dedication, and personal investment our A.D.s and coaches contribute throughout the season.

- Junior High / 12U / 14U Coaches: \$250 stipend
- High School Coaches: \$300 stipend
- Athletic Directors: \$300 stipend

Overnight Travel Reimbursement

- For programs participating in extenuating travel events that require overnight stays, the program will reimburse lodging expenses up to \$200 per night.
 - This reimbursement is available to the athletic director and coaches of teams involved in such events.
 - Program A.D.s will approve of and collect lodging receipts and submit them to the Program Director.

Athlete Eligibility

- All athletes must agree to the Hallstrom Statement of Faith and F.I.R.E. Code of Conduct.
- All athletes must be home-schooled for at least 51% of their current education.
- Once an athlete has been listed as a ninth grader, the athlete will be limited to the next four consecutive seasons of participation. A tenth-grade student has three more seasons of participation. An eleventh-grade student has two more seasons of participation. A twelfth-grade student has one season to participate.
- Any student reaching the age of 19 before August 1, shall not be eligible for participation in Rockford F.I.R.E. sports.
- Once an athlete has graduated or gone through a graduation ceremony, he/she will no longer qualify for a Rockford F.I.R.E. sports team regardless of his/her age.
- Any athlete who is under disciplinary action and transfers from a public, private, or another home school program/co-op must wait one year before he/she is eligible to participate in Rockford F.I.R.E. sports.
- Sports physicals are required for all athletes and, per Illinois policy, are valid for 395 days.
- To be eligible for participation, athletes must maintain a minimum grade of 70% in all academic classes and an attendance rate of at least 75%.
 - Athletes will be placed on academic probation if their grades and/or attendance do not meet the above criteria. A.D.s will work alongside parents and Hallstrom (if applicable) to monitor athlete eligibility and update the appropriate coaches if players are placed on academic probation.
- All parents of athletes in the F.I.R.E. programs are expected to understand that their involvement is essential to the success of the program and that volunteer participation is required of every athlete's family.

Athlete Registration Process

- Hallstrom's F.I.R.E. programs are open to all eligible local homeschoolers, regardless of whether they take classes at Hallstrom. We represent a diverse background of local Christian homeschoolers and coaches.
- All interested athletes must begin the application process by completing an application on our website. After careful review of the application, assuming F.I.R.E. is a good mutual fit, the applicant will be contacted for an interview. Sports-only interviews are typically conducted by the F.I.R.E. Program Director, the program A.D., and/or the program coach(es) during a specified time. Not all interested families are guaranteed an opportunity to play for F.I.R.E., as many factors are considered before offering an opportunity to join the program. These factors may include whether the applicant agrees with our Statement of Faith and Code of Conduct, availability, and whether the family is willing to contribute to the running of the program.
- It is recommended that any planned tryouts be held prior to conducting interviews to respect the time of all parties involved. Tryout registration must be managed through the Rockford F.I.R.E. website, and all participants are required to complete a waiver, which can be completed electronically as part of the registration process. If a program chooses to collect a tryout fee, approval is needed by the Program Director.
- All athletes pay a registration fee. Students who take classes at Hallstrom have their registration fee included in their family's semester registration fees. Sports-only students pay their registration fee at the start of the season and only pay it once a school year for their entire family. The registration fee covers overhead expenses, including, but not limited to, administrative fees and insurance. Registration fees are separate from and in addition to athletic fees, which go directly to the program to cover all related expenses to running the program.

Application and Registration Steps

Tryout Registration (If Implemented)
Invitation to Play (Pending Application and Interview Approval if New to Hallstrom/F.I.R.E.)
Application Submission (If New to Hallstrom/F.I.R.E.)
Family Interview (If New to Hallstrom/F.I.R.E.)
Pay Sports-Only Registration Fee (If Applicable)

Athlete Expectations

Faith - *We view each game or match as an opportunity for worship and witness. We expect exemplification of Christ through conduct and speech at all times.*

Integrity - *We expect all participants to compete with integrity by playing by the rules, showing respect for opponents, coaches, and officials. We expect all F.I.R.E. participants to play through adversity, even when there is disagreement with a call or a decision.*

Respect - *We expect all members of F.I.R.E. to commit to making each practice and game, and be on time. Absences and tardiness are to be communicated in advance and are not to be a common occurrence. We expect our athletes to be coachable, open to correction, eager to learn, and focused on improvement.*

Excellence - *We expect our athletes to pursue their best, not only in their physical performance, but also in their character, working to honor God in everything they do.*

Players and parents electronically sign the F.I.R.E. Athlete Expectations document upon registration, but it is recommended that it be discussed during your parent and athlete meeting.

Athletic directors and coaches are encouraged to develop their own Best Practices/Code of Conduct tailored to their programs, which will be included in the registrations process and will need to be electronically agreed to. All documents or guidelines must be submitted to the F.I.R.E. Program Director for review and approval before implementation to ensure consistency and alignment with organizational policies

Athlete Disciplinary Procedures

- Hallstrom stands behind our F.I.R.E. coaches and athletic directors, and we are committed to working alongside you to address disciplinary matters and uphold our policies. Your insights are valued and play an important role in the resolution process.
- To strengthen support and streamline communication, the Rockford F.I.R.E. provides a direct way for A.D.s and coaches to report concerns about an athlete's conduct or behavior and any other concerns. A [F.I.R.E. Incident Form](#) is available on the Hallstrom website under the *Rockford F.I.R.E. Athletics* tab.
 - It is important to document any developing concerns, so please use this form to record anything which may or may not develop into a bigger concern. Doing so ensures we can come alongside you and provide appropriate support in addressing behavioral issues if needed.
- For the rare urgent or time-sensitive matter, requiring immediate support, please send a text to the F.I.R.E. Program Director, who will coordinate next steps with the Hallstrom Director of Safety and Discipline and loop them in the conversation.

- A.D.s and coaches are encouraged to address minor disciplinary issues promptly and directly, while maintaining open communication with an athlete's parents when concerns arise. Because behavior often reflects deeper heart issues, our goal is to foster repentance and guide athletes toward positive change. Minor infractions are often resolved quickly and may result in consequences such as reduced playing time, running laps, or other reasonable measures, as determined by the coach or A.D.
- Ongoing or escalating concerns should be communicated to the Hallstrom Board using the F.I.R.E. Incident Form to ensure proper support. In some cases, a meeting may be scheduled involving the athlete, their parent(s), coach(es), the program A.D., and a Hallstrom Board representative to address the issue, encourage repentance, and work toward reconciliation.
- If necessary, the board may issue a citation. In such cases, both the athlete and a parent must sign the citation before the athlete may return to play or, if applicable, resume participation in Hallstrom classes. Depending on the severity of the offense, the athlete may also be required to sit out a game. During this time, they are expected to attend the game in uniform and support their team from the bench. For away games requiring significant travel, the coach may choose to excuse the athlete from attending.
- Greater misconduct of an athlete occurring at Hallstrom, a F.I.R.E. event or elsewhere, has the potential to result in suspension or dismissal of a student and his/her family from F.I.R.E. sports and Hallstrom if applicable. This includes but is not limited to: the use of tobacco products, illegal drugs or alcohol, and posting or sending inappropriate information over the internet or via any social media, habitual disrespect at Hallstrom and/or F.I.R.E. sports, possession of a weapon (including pocket knives and toys resembling weapons), or conduct that conflicts with Hallstrom's Statement of Faith or Code of Conduct.
- Athletes are expected to show good sportsmanship by respecting opponents and officials. If an athlete has an interaction with an official that results in a technical, coaches may refer to the disciplinary steps outlined, and/or bench the player for a portion of or entirety of the remainder of a game.
- While coaches, assistant coaches, and athletic directors do not directly have the authority to issue citations, suspend players, or remove them from the team, their observations and input are valued and taken into account during the decision-making process.

Thank You

Thank you again for your dedication to the Rockford F.I.R.E. program! If you have any questions or concerns about this handbook or anything that was not covered, please don't hesitate to contact the F.I.R.E. Program Director. We respect and value your input as we seek to serve the F.I.R.E. community to the best of our ability.

Acknowledgment and Agreement

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read, understand, and agree to the terms outlined in this document, and you commit to serving within the Rockford F.I.R.E. program in accordance with these standards.

Name: _____

Position (A.D./Coach): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____