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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL OWNERS AND INSTRUCTORS

Boost Summer Camp Enrollments by Creating Themes

By Lee Barden



Before I started running camps, summer had been notoriously slow for my school. It seemed that once children were no longer involved in the normal routine of academic school, their parents didn't seem as dedicated to keeping their kids involved with their martial arts training.

Let me add that I often heard parents praising non-martial arts summer camps that were being offered at the local public schools, YMCA, recreational centers, etc. Each summer, I was losing many students to those types of camps. To remedy this challenge, I decided to start offering summer camps of my own.

Using the information I gathered from the parents, I realized that I had to change my way of thinking. I needed to think like the director of a summer camp that was offering a martial arts motif, rather than an old school instructor who was going to teach the kids martial arts for eight hours a day! The parents mainly wanted their children to have fun. I would have to be creative in both my curriculum and the promotion of my camp. As you'll read, that's exactly what I did.

Choosing Camp Themes

To make our camps sound really exciting and stand out from the others in our community, we decided to come up with a different theme for each week of the summer. We asked ourselves what the latest trends and buzzwords were that could be tied in with a theme. The themes we came up with included: Ninja, Olympic, Black Light, Survivor Challenge, Be a Movie Star, Padded Weapons Competition, Video Game Challenge, and Kickboxing camps. Last year our most popular themes were the Olympic, Ninja, Kickboxing, and Black Light camps. You



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are welcome to borrow some of the themes for your camps, or brainstorm with your team on new themes that you think would be winners at your school.

Creating Theme-Based Camp Activities

Now that we had an exciting and marketable theme tied to each week of our summer camp, we had to figure out how to mold our curriculum and games so that they would evolve around each theme.

As we did this, we kept in mind that the majority of the kids attending the camp would have little or no martial arts training. We also kept in mind what parents had said about wanting their child to primarily have a good time. In the end, we created camp curriculums that contained lots of fun, energetic games. These games were designed to develop our students academically and socially, while teaching them important life skills. In addition, we adjusted some of the most popular games to match the theme for each week and create new games to zero in on the school's objectives and philosophies of teaching. As you'd expect, many of the games helped to build quality martial arts skills, while others were just for good old-fashioned fun.

How to Host a Summer Camp with an Olympic Theme

As mentioned earlier, we came up with about eight different themes for our summer camps and a variety of activities to go with each theme. Take our Olympic camp, for example. Throughout the week, our campers participate in a variety of activities and contests that prepare them to compete in our Olympics, on the last day of camp. On that Friday, each attendee stands on the winner's podium and is awarded his/her own gold, silver, or bronze medal. By the way, the parents really love our "Everyone is a winner" strategy.

Throughout the week, to prepare our competitors for their Olympic competition, we put them through fun, yet thorough martial arts training that includes crunches, jumping rope, push-ups and more. We also incorporate discussions

BLACK BELT **MANAGEMENT**

into our camp on nutrition, health, positive attitude, and we talk about what it takes to become an Olympic champion.

Our Olympic theme contests include:

- Jumping rope
- Olympic long jump
- Holding a horse stance
- Push-ups, crunches,
- Jumping jacks
- The highest jump

The contest for the jump rope, push-ups, crunches, jumping jacks, and holding a horse stance is to see who can do the most or hold the stance the longest. Each student is finished competing when they finally miss jumping over the rope, or when they simply can't do any more push-ups, crunches, etc.

The highest jump contest is to see who can leap over the most focus mitts without going around them. We simply stack them up, by adding one more each round. You just have to make sure that the kids do not start straddling them. That doesn't count.

The object of the Olympic long jump is to have the campers run and jump to see who can leap the longest distance. Simply designate a starting point, preferably on a mat or outside in soft sand. Create a starting line and have the campers stand behind it, squat down, and jump forward as far as possible. Upon landing, have them immediately jump again. Measure to see how far they made it from the starting line to their finishing position.

For the grand finale to our Olympic theme summer camp, we set up three different award podiums. Each podium is at a different height to indicate the places where the Gold, Silver, and Bronze medal winners will stand. The kids win medals for the events that they compete in. The cost of the medals is around \$2.00 each. We are sure to take plenty of pictures during the events and at the actual awards ceremony. At the end of the camp, we give the images out to the children's families and post them up



on our website. Plus, these images really come in handy for marketing future camps.

We love hosting theme-based summer camps. What's great about our Olympic camp is that it helps the kids get into super shape, while having loads of fun during the summer. The parents really appreciate the effort we put forth and enjoy hearing their children talk about the fun activities that they experienced at camp.

So, if you want to make your summer camps stand out from the rest, and make them more marketable to parents and kids, then try adding a theme. It's worked out great for us!

Be sure to check out your NAPMA DVD this month featuring Lee Barden's segment on Fun Summer Camp Games.



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Here are some additional games and drills that you can easily use during your summer camps. You can print out a hard copy of the game descriptions to use for reference in the classroom.

You'll also find these drills on your NAPMA Innovations DVD this month titled " Fun Summer Camp Games – Part 1."

Dollar Drop

Start by having the students pair up facing each other and name one line side A and the other line side B. You will need a dollar bill for each pair of students. Have the students in line A hold their dollar bill at top of it in between their middle index finger and thumb. The students in line B hold their hands out and open, waiting to catch the dollar bill. The students from line A drop the dollar bill and the students in line B try to catch it before it touches the ground. Give each side 10 turns and see who can catch the dollar bill the most times.

Goals: To improve reaction speed, timing, accuracy and eye-hand coordination.

Dragon's Tail

Line the students up in front of a heavy bag. An instructor swings the rope in a vertical circle in front of the bag. Each student takes a turn and tries to fire a punch without letting the rope hit them.

You can vary this drill in a number of ways. Start off with punches, and then try kicks, and even a punch and kick combo.

Goals: To develop reaction speed, timing and to take advantage of openings.

Dodge Focus Mitt

Divide the students into two equal teams. Have them stand facing each other on opposite sides of the room. Give one of the teams two focus mitts (soft old ones, or use a nerf ball) Students will throw mitts at each other (no head shots please) if the mitt hits them, they are out. If someone throws the target or ball at you, and you catch it, the person that threw it is out. The last team standing wins.

Goals: To teach students about reflexes and help develop visual acuity. Talk about teamwork, strategy and sportsmanship.

Helicopter

Have students stand in a large circle. The instructor stands in the center of the circle and swings a rope low to the ground clockwise around the circle. The students in the circle have to jump over the rope as it comes their way. Start out circling slowly and pick up the pace if the students can handle it. The student who gets hit on the foot and doesn't make it over the rope gets to swing the rope for the class next.

Goals: To help students improve timing, footwork, coordination, and jumping skills.