

ONLINE THREATS & YOUTH TEAMS: What Coaches Need to Know

WHY TEAMS ARE TARGETED

Individuals who commit sextortion often look for youth who are:

- Highly connected through teammates and group chats
- Easy to find online via rosters, tags, and team accounts
- Under pressure to perform and protect their reputation

Once one athlete is targeted, perpetrators may threaten to contact teammates, impersonate players, or move quickly through a team's social network.

COMMON TACTICS

- Pretending to be another teen or athlete
- Moving conversations quickly to private platforms
- Creating fear, urgency, or shame to silence the athlete
- Threatening to share private content with teammates, coaches, or schools
- Contacting or impersonating teammates after gaining access

MESSAGE FOR ATHLETES

"If someone online pressures or threatens you—stop, don't respond, and tell a trusted adult immediately. You are not alone, and help works best when it happens early."

Sextortion is an online crime where someone pressures a young person into sharing private images or information, then uses it to demand money or harmful actions. Youth athletes and clubs are increasingly targeted, and entire teams can be affected. Clear expectations and early action can prevent serious harm to athletes and teams.

WARNING SIGNS IN YOUTH

- Sudden anxiety or withdrawal
- Panic around phones or social media
- Avoiding teammates or practices
- Unexplained emotional distress after being online

WHAT COACHES CAN DO

Normalize reporting

- Clearly state: "You won't get in trouble for speaking up."
- Reinforce that anyone can be targeted, and discourage compliance with demands

Respond quickly to warning signs

- Stay calm and supportive
- Preserve messages, usernames, and screenshots
- Follow school policy to involve administration and parents
- Report to platforms and cybertipline.org; call local law enforcement for emergencies

Protect the whole team

- Encourage private accounts and cautious follower approval
- Watch for fake or impersonation accounts
- Alert administration if a team may be targeted
- Encourage athletes to look out for and report concerns about teammates



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