

# Creating A Safe and Effective Paintball Ministry That Changes Lives



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**Presented by:**

David Maynard  
President  
Pleasant Vineyard Ministries  
1259 Swann Beatty Rd.  
Camden, Ohio 45311  
[www.pvmcamp.com](http://www.pvmcamp.com)  
[david@pvmcamp.com](mailto:david@pvmcamp.com)  
937-452-0072

# How Can You Play Paintball And Be A Christian

BY DAVID MAYNARD

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It's amazing how many times I have been asked this question over the years, especially when we first started advertising our summer camp paintball program for kids in the mid 1990's. As far as we can tell, Pleasant Vineyard Ministry, a summer camp located in southwest Ohio, was the first camp in the U.S. to offer weeklong paintball programs for kids, and it causing some eyebrows to be raised among the Christian community. At times I could hear the condescension in the inquiring voices as they expressed their views on kids playing with guns or how we were "training" them to shoot other kids. Others, however, were more curious about this new program and truly wanted to understand how paintball could actually be utilized as a Christian activity. Either way, I needed to be able to explain how this up and coming sport truly was a sport and how it can be utilized to change lives.

Today, many youth pastors, camp directors, and paintball players are facing these same questions and do not know how to respond other than "it's a lot of fun". This leaves parents, camp boards, church elders, and adults with an uneasy feeling and lack of understanding of the true benefits of paintball. Only when you are able to effectively communicate the benefits of this sport and explain how it can be utilized as an evangelical tool will they gain a better respect for the game and have a greater peace in allowing their child to play. However, you will still have those who will not be willing to listen or who will want to argue that paintball is not a very "Christian" thing to teach kids.

Over the many years of discussing the benefits of paintball with disagreeing parents, one thing I have learned is that it is not my responsibility to try to change their mind. For some it is a matter of personal conviction and we should respect their opinion. Most of these individuals wholeheartedly believe that kids should not even play with toy guns. My wife and I used to have this same perspective when we were raising our first child Luke. We wouldn't even let him point a stick at his buddies when they would play army. We thought that allowing our son to play with guns would somehow corrupt his character. We were also underestimating his ability to decipher the difference between playing and reality. Over time we could see that our rules were causing him much confusion and frustration. After all, I was a hunter and would go hunting in the fall in order to provide food for our family. So we decided to take a new approach. We sat down with him and explained the difference between playing with toy guns and the purpose of real guns. We also set boundaries on how he could play with his toy guns. Today, when we teach youth about paintball, we utilize these same principles. We set boundaries of safety and emphasize the need for them to understand that their gun is not a toy and should be treated with respect.



You can imagine the conflict that the disapproving individuals would face if they were to allow their child to shoot a paintball gun that project a paintball at a high velocity toward another person. If I take the approach that it is my duty to persuade them to allow their child to play, then I automatically put them on the defensive to the point that they will not consider listening to how paintball can be utilized as a mechanism to transform kids. The more I argue my point of view, the more resolute they will become in their point of view and not willing to listen.

Typically, when parents, church elders, or camp boards question the legitimacy of paintball in a Christian environment, there are two primary reasons for their concern. First and foremost is the fact that paintball is a game where you actually point a gun at someone and shoot them. These individuals find this to be a compromise of their Christian values. Their question, “How can you be a Christian and shoot another person with a paintball gun?” comes from a deep conviction within their heart that is not to be treated lightly. Respect their questions about paintball as you answer them. Let them know that you appreciate the fact that they are concerned about this sport and that they are asking very viable questions. They will often allow you to share the positive aspects of the sport if you treat them with respect and not try to convince them that you are right. In an attitude of Christian consideration, share the positive elements of the sport and allow them to make their own decision.

The second reason for not allowing their child to play paintball is for safety reasons. Again, do not treat these questions lightly either. They have good reason to be concerned about safety issues. Today, there are many kids who are playing paintball without having any formal training in safety precautions related to the sport. Johnny gets a paintball gun for his birthday and goes over to his friend’s house to play paintball with his buddies with out any supervision, refs, or knowledge of safety rules. A perfect set up for an accident. Safety must not only be emphasized, but also explained how it is enforced on and off the playing field. At PVM Paintball Camps, the first order of business every morning is to go over the safety rules so well that the kids can recite them by the time they leave camp.



As parents, camp boards, church elders, and adults ask these questions, do not hesitate to explain the benefits of paintball but do not try to adamantly defend the sport with the attitude that you are right. The explanation, if done correctly, will allow these individuals to gain a greater understanding of why paintball is one of the nation’s fastest growing sports.

When someone asks me about paintball I do not try to hurl statistics and facts at him or her in order to win my case. I also don’t want to get in a doctrinal war with them either by trying to out gun my questioner (no pun intended) with scriptures. I have found the best way to explain how Christians can play the game of paintball is to focus on how we can eternally change the lives of those playing through the utilization of the sport. I was once speaking to a parent who was considering sending their child to our camp and they just couldn’t quite understand why a Christian camp would allow paintball. To them it seemed to be somewhat of an oxymoron. I described to her, as I do with most doubting parents, an illustration of how paintball can be utilized to reach the hearts of children.

“How many of you were hit last game?” we ask. Sporadic hands pop up along with laughter and chatter of who shot whom. “If you were in a real battle how many of you would be considered wounded?” Again, a myriad of hands go up along with chatter of where they were hit and what condition they would be in. “How many of you who were hit would be considered fatally shot?” Once again several hands go up, usually those who boast a large paintball splat on their facemask. “If this was a real battle, and you were killed, where would you be now?” Silent contemplation. When we relate the personal experience of the moment to spiritual principles, the impact is life changing. Once parents understand this they are able to bridge the gap between paintball and Christianity.

For an even greater understanding of our program I also explain how we daily teach each participant the importance of safety, tactical strategies, and the utilization of our paintball devotional that relates Biblical principles to the game. Parents are able to see that our program is

structured to strengthen faith, teach team strategies, emphasize safety, is well supervised, and overall is a lot of fun paintball creates memorable “war” stories to be told for years to come. When properly informed parents have a better sense of security about allowing their child to participate.

When a person participates in an activity where they are learning through hearing, seeing, and doing, they are 80 percent more likely to retain what is being taught. I am amazed how many times I have heard paintball players recall something that took place during a particular game that might of happened three or four years earlier. They can give such a detailed description of where they were hiding, where the enemy was, who shot whom, and how many people they eliminated during a particular incident as if the event happened just yesterday. Imagine how much more they will remember if we incorporate lessons of truth about Christ and the importance of integrity and character into the program.

In Matthew 13:23 it says, *“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”* NIV Seeds that are planted in good soil will produce fruit. Paintball is an activity that cultivates fertile soil in the hearts of those who are playing and allows seeds of faith to be planted when spiritual truths are related in context with the sport. This is the same principle that has been practiced by football, basketball, and baseball coaches for years when instructing kids in their sport. At PVM, we have seen this principle work not only in paintball but also with the many other unique programs that are culturally relevant. When kids come to camp they expect to have a great time especially when involved in a program they love. Their hearts are fertile with eager anticipation and immediately open to receiving instruction, not only in the area of their interest, but also in character development and Biblical principles.

***When we relate the personal experience of the moment to spiritual principles, the impact is life changing. Once parents understand this they are able to bridge the gap between paintball and Christianity.***

Today, compared to 15 years ago, paintball is becoming more universally accepted by parents, church leaders, and camp boards. I do not encounter as many objections or questions of its legitimacy as I use to. Some churches are now even setting up paintball courses on their church property as a means to draw kids to their youth programs and are even sponsoring paintball teams within their youth groups. At PVM, we have men’s groups come and play paintball during their retreat as a means of drawing their group closer together. We have even seen this sport as a great opportunity for fathers and sons and daughters to have a fun time together.

As this sport continues to become more mainstream with Speedball Tournaments now being broadcast on ESPN and Walmart stocking paintball equipment on their shelves, we are seeing a greater acceptance through the understanding of this sport. One of the reasons so many people are attracted to the game is that paintball is a sport where individual players are truly equal on the playing field. It is not a matter of size or agility. Paintball is just as much a mental game as it is a physical game. I have seen all too often the biggest and strongest player on the field taken out by a mediocre child because that child has more patience than the big aggressive player.

Can you be a Christian and play paintball? Yes, but not everyone will agree. Just remember, it is not up to you to convince others that it is permissible. Respect their decision, and share your personal convictions on how this sport can impact the lives of children and adults.

## **Why Paintball at your camp and conference facility?**

### **Revenue building**

- Paintball is a great additional source of income for your camp. If done correctly, camps can pay for all of their paintball equipment within the few games offered. We have seen camps pay for their paintball program within the first month of operation.
- Paintball can be an add-on program activity for summer camp, guest groups, youth retreats, men's retreats, and open play.
- Paintball revenue includes field fees, equipment rental, paintballs (per box or per bag), and concessions.

### **Ministry outreach**

- Paintball is a great way to teach people Biblical principles when paralleled with the sport. We view the paintball experience as a mechanism to reach the hearts of young men and women who enjoy participating in this sport. When a child is seeing, hearing, and doing an activity, like paintball, they are 80% more likely to retain what is being taught. What a great opportunity this gives us to instill Biblical truths and character development into the lives of young men and women.
- Stories are one of the best outcomes of paintball. After a game there will be chatter of who shot who along with laughter and high fives. This is where camaraderie is built and memories are made. I can still remember my first paintball game and the first person I shot over 20 years ago. This is where you plant the seeds of life, in fertile soil of hearts tilled by the sport of paintball.

### **Fast growing sport**

- Paintball is one of the fastest growing sports in the US and is in high demand by youth as a favorite activity. American Sports Data Inc. has shown that paintball is the fourth largest alternative sport in the United States. Other alternative sports include BMX freestyle, B.A.S.E. jumping, motocross, knee boarding, and sky surfing. The sport already enjoys a significant world following and continues to grow. From 1998 to 2004, participation in the game increased from 5.9 million to 9.6 million players. In the United States, the sport is one of the most commonly played athletic disciplines and even compares well to soccer, football, baseball, and hockey. Paintball is often listed in the category of extreme sports, even though it does not pose the same risks that other extreme sports do.
- Paintball has no age barriers. It is a sport that is enjoyed by both youth and adults equally and this can be seen on any given weekend at many paintball fields. At the Michigan Monster Game, one of the largest paintball games in the U.S., with over 3000 players playing on that weekend the majority of players are 18 years of age and older. Some up to 70 years of age.

## Paintball Statistics

- Paintball is the #1 extreme sport in the United States, with 9.97 million participants.
- Paintball is the fastest growing extreme sport in the United States, with a 44.0% growth from 2001 to 2006.
- 83.2% of Paintball participants are in the 12-34 demographic.
- The average age of Paintball participants is 22 years old and 81.1% are male.
- 61.2% of the Paintball participant household has annual income greater than \$50,000 per year.
- Of the “extreme” sports, only inline skating and skateboarding had more participants, but paintball was still more popular than sports like snowboarding and mountain biking.
- From 1998 to 2004 the number of people playing paintball increased by 60% from 5.9 to 9.6 million a year, an average of 750,000 a year.
- Players spent \$390 million on paintball equipment in 2003 alone

## FAQ

The most frequently asked questions asked by parents are:

1. Is it safe?
2. Does it hurt?

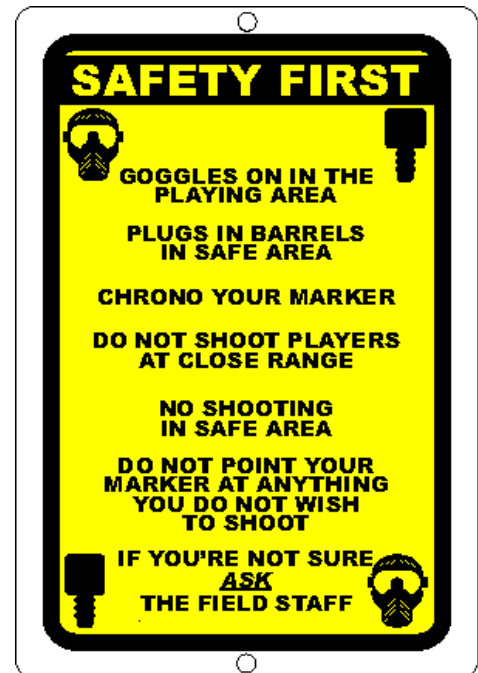
## PAINTBALL SAFETY

Statistically, paintball is one of the safest sports played today. The National Injury Information Clearinghouse of the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington D. C. has provided injury estimates through use of the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System. In the number of estimated injuries per 1,000 participants, paintball had the **LEAST NUMBER OF INJURIES** of all the listed sports. The number of injuries for paintball is less by far than bowling, tennis, archery, basketball, and many other sports.

Safety should be the number one priority and responsibility of every paintball facility and it is up to each referee and player to ensure safety during and after each game is played. Most serious injuries in paintball occur in the “SAFE ZONE.”

## EQUIPMENT

- Mask- Must be worn at all time while on the field.
- Marker – Must be chronoed 280-ft. or less prior to play each day. We allow players to bring their own markers but they must be inspected and chronoed by our staff.



- Barrel bag – Must be attached to the marker when not in play with no rips or tears in the barrel bag. Barrel plugs are no longer allowed.

## REFEREES

- Each field must have adequate supervision of each game. We encourage 1 trained referee per every 10 players and 1 trained referee or supervisor in the safe zone area to enforce safety standards. When determining how many refs are needed on a field you must consider several things:
  1. Group size - When a group is small, one person may be able to handle each of the roles above. A good ratio to use is one ref per every ten players. Experienced refs can sometimes handle a larger ratio but be aware that this can sometimes take away from the paintball experience if players needs are not being met or safety issues are compromised.
  2. The size of the field – This will also dictate the number of staff you need to run a safe and fair game. The larger the field the more staff required especially if the fields terrain is such that a ref cannot see great distances. Heavy foliage and hilly ground may require more refs on the field.
  3. Player experience – If you have a lot of inexperienced players on the field it is good to have a few extra refs on hand, especially if they do not understand the rules or how to operate the equipment. New players are known to take their masks off on the paintball field during and after a game or not put their safety or barrel sock on afterwards.
  4. More is better – The more refs enforcing the safety standards and game rules the better.

## **PVM Paintball Mandatory Standards**

- **Chronograph** – Each paintball field must be equipped with at least one bench chronograph for the target area and one for field checks. Every paintball marker must be chronographed prior to play with the maximum velocity of 280 feet per second.
- **Barrel Bags** – Each paintball marker barrel must be covered with a barrel bag, in good condition with no rips, tears, or stress marks, when not in use on the field of play. Barrel plugs will not be acceptable.
- **Secured storage** – All paintball markers, CO2 and nitrogen tanks, and fill stations must be locked up when not in use. This includes those brought from home.
- **Paintballs** – All paintballs must be stored in a climate controlled environment. Field paint only.
- **Field Identification** – All fields shall be marked with paintball warning signs at all entry points to the field and along the perimeter of the field where the possibility of entry may occur.

- **Goggles** – All goggles shall be certified for paintball use, have no cracks, chips, or blurred vision in the lens.
- **Netting** – Paintball netting shall be utilized for the protection of all people, livestock, or property that could be struck by a paintball. Netting shall be 12-ft. in height or higher depending upon the terrain.
- **Barricades** – All field barricades must be secure and safe from harming any individuals while playing.
- **Trees** – Any trees, limbs, or parts of a tree that may cause harm to an individual must be removed or trimmed.
- **Field Safety Rules** – All field safety rules must be posted in the staging area and repeated to all players prior to the beginning of game play.
- **Release Forms** – All players must sign a Paintball Release Form prior to play. All releases shall be filed in the camp office for that year. Children under 18 must have a parent or guardian signature on their release form along with the signature of the child.
- **Referees** – All referees must wear a shirt, vest or color that signifies that they are a referee.
- **Signal** – The referees will have means to signal all players on and off the field that the game is either starting or finishing. Signals could include a whistle, air horn, bullhorn, or other device that can communicate the status of the game.

## Does It Hurt?

Answer: Yes, it can. Most shots do not hurt but there is the occasional souvenir maker, the one that leaves a welt. This is why it is important to enforce safety on and off the field. Here are a few standards we implement on our field to limit injury.

- 20-ft. rule - This rule states that no player may shoot another player within 20-ft.
- Chrono – With new players we sometimes chrono the markers between 250 and 260 ft./second.
- Mercy rule – One player may say mercy to another within the 20-ft. area to eliminate them from play.
- Always keep ice on hand at your field for close range shots and/or sprained or twisted ankles.



# Types Of Paintball

## Woodsball

Played outdoors, typically in natural settings such as forests or mountains. Fields are determined by the terrain and players use trees, rocks, gullies, etc. for cover and movement.



## Scenarioball

Scenario paintball is similar to woodsball, with the addition of a scenario and team goals in a war game like setting simulating military operations. Players often dress accordingly. Scenarioball is more often played by experienced teams that train together than the recreational woodsball.



## Speedball

Played on small, fenced-in fields with artificial barriers and obstacles. Play is fast-paced and games rarely go past the ten minute mark with paint flying almost constantly. As the name implies speed and creativity are the hallmarks of the game.



## Hyperball

Hyperball is played with plastic sewer pipes and giant drainage pipes used as obstacles. A version of capture the flag, elimination, or both are played. There is either a flag at a flag station for each team, or one flag in the middle (just like Center flag). The flag must be hung on the other teams' flag station, even if the other team is eliminated.



## Starting a Paintball Program

To start a paintball program at your camp you will need the following:

- Paintball markers
- Paintball netting – This is required for all safe zone areas and areas of high traffic or buildings.
- Chronograph – No game should ever start without the markers being chronographed. We recommend at least one bench marker and one handheld.
- Paintball masks – There are many brands that are adequate for play. One per each marker with additional masks for referees.
- Paintball signage – For giving instructions to players and to the public.
- Field requirements – Woodsball - Speedball - Hyperball
- Depending on the number of player will determine the number size of the field and the number of bunkers.
- Training – We recommend attending the 4-day Christian Paintball Symposium for your staff where you will receive in-depth training on all aspects of starting and maintaining a paintball program.

## Devotions

There are many illustrations that can be utilized to parallel Biblical principles with the sport of Paintball as well as skills relating to the sport. Each daily lesson comes with a scripture and game scenarios or activity that will help emphasize what has been discussed in the lesson. However, you as instructors must look for other opportunities throughout the day in which spiritual truths and character lessons can be correlated to the paintball experience on the field. As you develop your own program, look for ways in which you can add lessons and ideas that would best meet the needs and issues of the group at your facility. Here is an example of one of our devotions.

### Don't be a Rambo

1 Corinthians 12: 14-22

14. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

16. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

17. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

18. But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

19. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

20. As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

22. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,



On the paintball field we face many challenges with each game. Sometimes we are outnumbered, pinned down, or caught in a cross-fire. In life, we also face many challenges at one time or another with greater consequences. It could be from the actions of mean and hurtful people, words spoken in anger from a close friend or family member, a sudden illness or injury, or possibly the death of a loved one. The question in life and in paintball, will we choose to face these challenges alone?

One of the biggest mistakes many paintballers make is being a "Rambo" on the field. At the sound of the horn they run off on their own to take out as many opponents as they can only to find a quick demise. This is all too common on all paintball fields everywhere. What they fail to realize is that their individual strength is multiplied by the number of team members working together giving each other support. Being an army of one is not smart paintball.

As we face difficult challenges in life we need the support of others to help us through. On our own, life's challenges can be overwhelming but, just as on the paintball field,

when we garner the support of others our strength is multiplied, especially when they support us in prayer. However, the most difficult task for “Rambos” is asking for help. “Rambos” are loners. They do not like following orders or sticking to a plan. Their approach to life is also very similar. They will not ask for help, which eventually leads to isolation, fatigue, stress, worry, heartache, and despair.

In verse 21 we are encouraged as Christians not to live a life of isolation. We are a body of believers that equally needs one another for support. On a paintball team each member is also just as equally important. Whether you are a Heavy Gunner, Sniper, Rifleman, or Commander, each one needs the other for protection and to carry out their function to accomplish the team’s plan.

In life we need Christ for our ultimate support. It is up to us to ask him for his help and support in good times and in bad. We need to choose not to be a Christian Rambo, not just for ourselves, but because others may be relying on us for support.

**Field Application: Play “Protect the President”. This scenario requires a team to protect one unarmed player from being eliminated. The protecting team must get from one point on the field to another without the “President” being eliminated. This will require a lot of teamwork.**

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Please feel free to contact us with any question regarding your paintball program. We are here to serve you and help make your program a success.

#### **Pleasant Vineyard Ministries**

1259 Swann Beatty Rd.

Camden, Ohio 45311

[www.pvmcamp.com](http://www.pvmcamp.com)

Tim Gray –

[blackshadow32@hotmail.com](mailto:blackshadow32@hotmail.com)

937-452-3347 office

517-425-8405 cell

David Maynard – [david@pvmcamp.com](mailto:david@pvmcamp.com)

937-533-9572 cell

937- 452-3347 office

#### **To order paintball supplies contact:**

Wayne Berry

T.C. PAINTBALL

849 US-31 South

Traverse City, MI. 49684

231-943-0248

[www.tcpaintball.com](http://www.tcpaintball.com)

[tcpaintball@gmail.com](mailto:tcpaintball@gmail.com)

**Christian Paintball Academy Website** – This website is for you to share ideas, post events, discuss paintball questions, and keep in contact with one another.

[www.christianpaintballacademy.org](http://www.christianpaintballacademy.org)