

FURTHER READINGS CHAPTER 5

This file contains additional readings from earlier editions of *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, and some extra materials provided by Jay Coakley. These have not been included within the book as much of the content is explicitly focused on the USA, but users of the book may find these readings useful and interesting. Please feel free to send your feedback and/or suggest additional readings to us at jcoakley@uccs.edu or e.pike@chi.ac.uk.

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Topic 1. Fathers and youth sports

The Good Father: Parental Expectations and Youth Sports

by Jay Coakley

Adapted from an article published in 2006 in Leisure Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 153–163.

ABSTRACT

Family life and expectations for parents have changed dramatically over the past two generations. In the United States these changes have been fuelled by a combination of factors, including a conservative emphasis on traditional family values and fathers as heads of households, a neoliberal emphasis on individualism and the need for fathers to take responsibility for the development of their children, a liberal feminist emphasis on gender equity in family life, and progressive ideas about the meaning of gender and sexuality. As a result of these factors mothers and fathers today are held responsible for the whereabouts and actions of their children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This standard, never before used in any society as a baseline measure for good parenting, serves as a foundation for linking the character and achievements of children to the moral worth of parents. Because sports are activities in which a child's success is visible and objectively measurable, and because fathers are more likely than mothers to have or claim expertise in sports, the development of athletic skills among children is often monitored by fathers who act as coaches, managers, agents, mentors, and advocates for their child athletes. Therefore, the involvement of fathers in youth sports is grounded in complex cultural changes and it has implications for families and father–child relationships. These implications are discussed in light of new expectations that connect the moral worth of parents to the success of their children.

Introduction

When I was successful in youth sports, people told my father that he was lucky to have a child like me. When my son and daughter were successful, people told me that I must be proud of them and their achievements. Today, when sons *and* daughters excel in sports, their success is directly attributed to parents, most often to fathers. In fact, the fathers of age group champions are now interviewed and questioned by others seeking the secrets to their success in 'creating' athletic prodigies.

These generational shifts in popular perceptions of a father's role in the sport participation of his sons and daughters are part of general cultural changes related to family, gender, and sports, especially in the United States. Fathers who don't actively advocate the interests of their children are seen by many people today as not meeting widely accepted standards for good parenting. In many communities fathers are expected to actively promote their children's success. In the case of youth sports this means that fathers are expected to support and guide children as they learn to play sports. Not surprisingly, some fathers take this expectation seriously and serve as teachers, coaches, managers, agents, mentors, and advocates for their child athletes.¹

Fatherhood and the involvement of fathers in family life have not been given much attention by social scientists. Research does exist (LaRossa, 1988, 1997; Aldous *et al.*, 1998; Deinhart, 1998; Lamb, 2004; Marsiglio *et al.*, 2005), but it tells us much less than we should know about the concrete, practical implications of recent cultural changes in the meaning of fatherhood. I have found that youth sports provide a window for viewing and studying these implications in

the everyday lives of fathers and families. But as I look through this window I confess that, like my colleagues in sociology and the sociology of sport, I have ignored fatherhood and fathers in my 35 years of studying sports in society. It was only when Tess Kay, the editor of this issue of *Leisure Studies*, called attention to this oversight that I focused on this topic.

Because I approach fatherhood through the window of youth sports I will begin with background on the growth of youth sports in wealthy, post-industrial societies, primarily the United States. Then I will discuss the connections between this growth and changing definitions of 'the good father'. Finally, I will attempt to theorize these changes drawing on the ideas of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and suggesting that parental commitment to their children's sport participation is grounded in an emerging family habitus centred in the middle- and upper-middle class of post-industrial societies.

The Growth of Youth Sports

Since the 1950s, the leisure activities and sport participation of young people have increasingly occurred in organized programmes supervised by adults (Adler & Adler, 1998). This growth is the result of a combination of the following cultural and structural factors related to family, parenting, and childhood in many postindustrial societies:

1. An increase in the number of single parent families and families with both parents working outside the home.
2. An emerging neo-liberal view that parents are solely responsible for controlling and socializing their children and that child development is shaped primarily by parenting strategies.
3. A longstanding cultural belief that sport participation automatically involves positive character-building experiences.
4. A media-inspired belief among many parents that the world outside the home is a dangerous place for children.
5. A general fear that children, especially boys, are bound to get into trouble if they are not controlled and properly socialized by adults.
6. The increased visibility of high-performance sports represented as important cultural events and athletes represented as cultural heroes.

Taken together, these six factors, among others, have created a context in which parents actively seek adult-supervised activities for their children. In this context, organized youth sports are seen by many parents as high priority activities because they occur under the control of adult coaches and teach important cultural lessons related to competition and working with others to achieve goals in rule-governed situations.

Additionally, youth sports are attractive because they have predictable schedules, provide parents with measurable indicators of their children's accomplishments, and enable children to gain status among peers and in the larger community. From a parent's point of view, organized youth sports keep their children off the street, out of trouble, and involved in a character-building activity that is enjoyable, popular with peers, and valued in society. In short, when children play sports, mothers and fathers feel that they are meeting their responsibilities as parents. For many fathers, organized sports also provide a setting in which they feel comfortable and competent as a parent. Their knowledge of sports and their past experiences serve as a basis for fathering and participating in child rearing in ways that are consistent with traditional ideas about masculinity and widely approved in society.

Fathers and Fatherhood in Contemporary Society

For most of the 20th century good fathers were good breadwinners. Although interpreted differently across cultures and social classes, this definition of fatherhood served in the US and other industrialized societies to focus the attention of many fathers on work to the point that they spent little time on the quality of family relationships. As this occurred, fathers were gradually marginalized from family life. In the United States in particular, this led many families to be characterized by father–child and husband–wife alienation (Griswold, 1993).

Correspondingly, the power of fathers in the domestic sphere became increasingly tenuous and dependent on a combination of their income and an ideology of male supremacy. Despite romanticized, post World War II depictions of families with breadwinning fathers and stay-at-home mothers, the social and economic realities of family life in the latter third of the 20th century led an increasing number of women to seek full time employment. As more mothers assumed part of the breadwinner role in many families, the foundation of fathers' power and authority eroded further. The pace and depth of erosion was accelerated after the mid-1960s as the ideological premises of the women's movement were accepted by many people. The feminisms that grew with the women's movement directly challenged the ideology of male supremacy and further undermined the traditional cultural foundation of fathers' power and authority.

These changes left fatherhood in a social and cultural limbo and forced people to confront a longstanding dilemma that first emerged when changes in the organization of work created a clear split between the private and public spheres of everyday life. After this split, the private sphere of family and home came to be organized around the values and experiences of women, whereas the public sphere of work and politics was organized around the values and experiences of men. Under these conditions meaningful fatherhood depended on dealing with the dilemma of how to simultaneously domesticate masculinity and masculinize domesticity (Gavanas, 2003).

According to feminists and other progressives, the strategy for resolving this dilemma required that fathers become co-parents, do their share of housework, and accept a definition of masculinity based on a commitment to gender equity and reformist, if not radical changes in gender relations. According to conservatives and neo-liberals the dilemma could be resolved only if fathers asserted themselves as heads of their families and adopted a directive, hands-on style of leadership based on a commitment to traditional family values and individual responsibility.

In the face of these ideologically contradictory resolutions many men felt confused, threatened, or trapped. The strategy offered by feminists and other progressives required radical changes that made many men uncomfortable, if not desperately and aggressively defensive. The strategy offered by conservatives and neo-liberals was consistent with traditional and idealized conceptions of manhood and the family, but many men felt that it was out of touch with the realities of everyday life and the experiences of their wives and children. And both strategies required commitments inconsistent with jobs that provided little or no flex-time and had no father-friendly benefits (LaRossa, 1997). Therefore, fathers faced a difficult challenge: negotiate your job and/or career so that you can choose between entering and learning to participate in a feminized domestic sphere, or taking charge of the family and assertively change the domestic sphere to reflect an ideology supportive of hegemonic masculinity.

Of course, this explanation of fatherhood is oversimplified and it gives less credit to fathers than they deserve. The challenge described above did not catch most men by surprise. They already knew that it was difficult to negotiate the demands of work and family so that expectations could be met in each sphere. However, the stark contrast between the resolutions

offered by feminists/progressives on the one hand and conservatives/neo-liberals on the other hand forced many men to revisit this challenge and consider the ideological approach and/or the strategic actions that might best resolve the fatherhood dilemma and guide their involvement in the family.

There is little research that helps us understand the diverse strategies employed by fathers as they have coped with the dilemma in family settings. We do know, however, that discourses describing a 'new fatherhood profile' now pervade some post-industrial cultures, and that many fathers perform household and childrearing tasks that their fathers never did. But at the same time we also know that the actual time that fathers spend with their children has increased only slightly over the past three decades (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). This means that there is a need to understand more fully the structural and cultural constraints faced by fathers articulating a rhetoric of new fatherhood on the one hand but not making significant changes when it comes to spending time with their children.

In light of this background information, an analysis of the involvement of fathers in youth sports provides useful information about the dynamics of fathering in the context of the 21st century.

Fathers and Youth Sports

Sports in general and youth sports in particular have since the 1950s provided fathers with a context in which they can be involved with their children without accepting a need to resist or change dominant gender ideology. In fact, youth sports are unique in this respect because most activities related to the domestic sphere in post-industrial societies lack institutionalized support for the involvement of fathers. For example, the everyday operation of schools and churches has come to depend largely on the involvement and labour of women. And child care, when available, has been organized by women in response to the needs of mothers. In each of these feminized contexts many fathers continue to feel out of place even though there has been an emerging cultural consensus that they should be there. Not so with youth sports, a context that has been organized and controlled by men in ways that reaffirm traditional gender ideology at the same time that they meet expectations for father involvement.

In an insightful discussion of the politics of fatherhood in the United States Anna Gavanas (2003) notes that sports, as largely homosocial arenas, serve as convenient sites for men to negotiate masculinity and be involved as fathers without being forced to make a choice between domesticating masculinity or masculinizing domesticity. She explains this in the following terms:

...by transposing the cultivation of masculinity and male parenting into sport arenas and framing fathering practices in terms of coaching and team sport, [men]... can differentiate between fatherhood and motherhood, and simultaneously make fathering seem manly, heroic and appealing. (Gavanas, 2003: p. 8)

Although this statement is accurate, especially in connection with the US-based Fatherhood Responsibility Movement that Gavanas was studying, it is an incomplete description of the way men have either resolved or skirted around the fatherhood dilemma described above.

In some cases, it is very clear that the men serving as coaches, league administrators, and officials in youth sports are committed to traditional gender ideology and use it on the playing field to help boys understand what it means to be a man. These are the men who chastise boys by referring to them as 'girls' or 'ladies' when they play poorly or incorrectly. Similarly, there are fathers who coach teams or simply encourage their son's involvement in sports with an eye

toward making their boys into men tough enough and competitive enough to succeed in a “man’s world.” Even some fathers who coach girls’ teams, and encourage their daughters to play sports, are strongly committed to traditional gender ideology and use their expertise with sports to reaffirm male superiority and teach girls that they are ladies as well as athletes.

Research by Janet Chafetz and Joseph Kotarba (1995) shows that mothers also reproduce traditional gender ideology and essentialize gender differences as they provide labour that makes youth sports possible. The upper-middle class little league mothers observed in their study engaged in many gender-specific tasks that facilitated enjoyable sport experiences for their sons and husbands. The mothers laundered uniforms, bought and cooked meals, served as chauffeurs and social directors, and organized their daughters as cheerleaders (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Thompson, 1999). At the same time, fathers consulted with coaches, scouted opponents, provided strategic advice to their sons, assessed the quality of playing fields and umpires, and critiqued the games that were played. In the end both mothers and fathers claimed moral worth as parents because each of them, in their highly gendered roles, enabled their sons to experience success in sports.

After studying youth sports for 35 years, mostly from the perspectives of the children who play them, I know that parental involvement in general and the involvement of fathers in particular may also be guided by progressive ideas about gender and fatherhood. Some fathers make concerted efforts to choose or organize for their children sports programmes that emphasize gender equity, cooperation, and the pleasure of movement in the place of male-centred, competitive, and performance-oriented ethos. These fathers integrate youth sport participation into family life in ways that clearly involve co-parenting, sharing household chores, and gender equity. But we know nothing about the conditions under which this occurs or the dynamics of how it occurs over time.

Other fathers use youth sports and a wide range of away-from-the-home recreational activities as experiences that they can enjoy as they spend “quality parenting time” with their children. This often occurs at the same time that these fathers expect their wives to take care of in-and-around-the-home aspects of childrearing. As a result, this form of father involvement enables men to meet general expectations for spending time with their children while they also avoid choosing the feminist/progressive or the conservative/neo-liberal resolutions of the fatherhood dilemma. It appears that these fathers can use youth sports to incorporate masculinized activities into a realm of the domestic sphere, thereby avoiding the task of actually changing the culture and dynamics of lived everyday family life. This is the strategy used by fathers who buy moto-cross bikes, snowmobiles, ski boats, kayaks, camping gear, rock climbing equipment, and other recreational toys that can be enjoyed with children (see http://fatherhood.about.com/od/sportsandrecreation/index_r.htm). In these activities fathers are the teachers of instrumental skills outside the home, a role that involves a form of parenting without accepting the changes called for by feminists/progressives or altering predominantly feminized forms of everyday family life as called for by conservatives/neo-liberals.

Finally, in cases when a child is an exceptional athlete it often is the father who makes important decisions about training and competition. He may not drive his son or daughter to practice or launder their sports clothes, but he is likely to select the coach, the club, or the team on which his child will train and compete. He also supervises the selection of equipment and plans strategies for upcoming matches or games. And he often pays most of the bills related to training – sometimes amounting to as much as \$10,000–\$40,000 (USD) annually. To the extent that a father’s child is successful, he is defined as a good parent.

With youth sports offering fathers a wide range of parenting opportunities it is not surprising that many fathers feel comfortable using them as sites to be involved with their children. This is one of the reasons that fathers and mothers are willing to invest so many family resources into organized sports participation for their children. Even as youth sports programmes have increasingly become privatized and expensive, parents have been willing to alter family budgets to support participation. For example, when my students and I interviewed the parents of elite youth ice hockey players who had travelled from near and far to play in a highly publicized tournament, we found that parents routinely spent between \$5000 and \$20,000 per year to support their sons' participation in hockey alone.³ Although they realized that such expenditures were excessive they explained that the benefits for their sons were worth the money and the time that the family spent traveling to and attending hockey games.

The general issue of parental commitment to youth sports has been the focus of limited research. Although data are scarce, it is possible to use them to develop hypotheses related to contemporary parenting and fatherhood.

Parental Commitment to Youth Sports

Parental commitment is a key factor in the sport participation of children because participation usually depends on parental expenditures of money, time, and energy (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Hellstedt, 1995; Duncan, 1997). Prior to the 1980s in the United States, for example, the majority of youth sport programmes were publicly funded and neighbourhood-based, so children could manage their participation without extensive parental commitment and involvement. Fees in these programmes were minimal. Parental participation usually was limited to volunteer coaching and minor forms of administrative support. However, as youth sport programmes have become increasingly privatized, regionally located, expensive, performance-oriented, and highly structured in terms of participation schedules, children have become more and more dependent on their parents to make participation possible. At the same time, many parents have come to see participation in sports, especially performance-oriented, competitive sports, as an important part of their children's overall socialization.

Research on youth sports gives us a glimpse into the origins and dynamics of parental commitment to the sport participation of children. Most researchers have raised social psychological questions and focused on how young people are socialized into sport participation and how parental support and beliefs are associated with the enjoyment, enthusiasm, self-esteem, beliefs, goal orientations, achievement, and continued participation of children (Power & Woogler, 1994; Averill & Power, 1995; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Brustad, 1996; Kimiecik *et al.*, 1996; Hoyle & Leff, 1997). There have also been studies highlighting the outcomes that parents believe or hope to be associated with their children's sport participation (Jambor & Weekes, 1995; Horn *et al.*, 1999). However, none of these studies helps us understand the social and cultural context in which parents make commitments to the sport participation of their children.

When Richard Dukes and I (Dukes & Coakley, 2002) studied parental commitment among the upper-middle class white parents of swimmers in USA Swimming's competitive developmental programmes we were amazed at what parents did to support the sport participation of one or more of their children.⁴ Parents explained their commitment in terms of the benefits they expected their children to gain from participation. But our data did not explain why, at this point in time in US culture, parents felt so totally responsible for the development of excellence among their sons and daughters.

Our explanation highlighted the prevalence of the conservative and neo-liberal view in the United States that parents are accountable for the behaviour and whereabouts of their children 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year round. In line with this view, if a child fails in a visible and measurable way, parents are held responsible for the failure. If a child succeeds, parents are deemed to be meeting expectations. If the child is a prodigy, parents are held in such high esteem that they are interviewed and even consulted by others interested in perfecting their own parenting. To the extent that parents internalize these expectations they blame themselves when their children do not meet or surpass relatively high developmental expectations; at the same time, when development surpasses expectations, parents often feel that they are morally worthy and deserve special credit.

Under these conditions, the achievements of children in an activity as visible and highly publicized as sports come to symbolize proof of one's moral worth as a parent. Talented child athletes, therefore, become valuable moral capital in neighbourhoods, communities, and the subcultures associated with high-performance youth sport programmes. This leads many parents to feel obligated to 'invest' in their child's sport participation. Not to make this investment would be taken by many people as a sign of a parent's moral failure. Of course, this also means that single parents, low income parents, and others who lack resources to support participation are, by definition, failures as parents, thereby reproducing the privilege of upper middle class people.

It is not surprising that in the United States, where competition and individualism are highly valued, some people become competitive when making their claims to moral worth as parents. They look for ways to document progressive skill development as their children play sports. Percentile ranks become important, as does moving up to higher levels of competition in a sport; in fact, many sport programmes are deliberately organized to make achievement explicit and visible. When children receive trophies and other external rewards, such as "promotions" from the 'silver' to 'gold' level in a programme or receiving martial arts belts in colours representing "advancement" in skills, these are used and often displayed as concrete proof of parental moral worth. This can be witnessed as parents describe the sport events in which the awards were earned by (them and) their talented children and the sacrifices that they have made to make possible the success of their children.

As Dukes and I theorized the relationships between parental commitment, parental moral worth, and youth sports we suggested that children's sport participation, especially in upper-middle class families in the United States, occurs in connection with a particular family habitus that began to emerge during the 1980s. Our use of family habitus involves an extension and application of Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984, 1985; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). According to Bourdieu, habitus is an open, but relatively durable system of dispositions, perceptions, tastes, preferences, and activities learned through socialization processes and regularly expressed by people as they make lifestyle choices and take action under particular social and material conditions.

As we used it to make sense of the data on parental commitment to youth sports, family habitus refers to a historically and socially situated system of dispositions and the family activities associated with them. It encompasses a combination of a belief system and lifestyle that is influenced by material conditions and historical practices that currently constitute family life in US culture. This concept is useful because it enables us to simultaneously consider cultural and structural factors as we try to understand the choices made within families.

Among the families we studied it seemed that family habitus involved a belief system and lifestyle that encompassed identifiable dispositions and practices related to social class, family

life, parenting, child development, and sport participation. Family habitus incorporated developmental goals and identified the types of activities believed to be helpful in reaching these goals. By implication, family habitus subsumes activities that parents think will best facilitate the development of their children while also conforming to the current, widespread belief that parents are directly responsible and even legally accountable for the behaviours and achievements/failures of their children. As such, it entails the interrelated notions that child development is important, that development ultimately depends on the actions of parents, and that the type of development most valued among many middle- and upper-middle income parents is achieved best through participation in adult-supervised, rationally organized programmes in which skills are built and manifested visibly and progressively through regular performances. Parents also see these programmes as sites where their children can gain or sustain social capital in the form of peer acceptance and cultural capital in the form of knowledge about how to succeed in organized, competitive reward structures in school and work.

Family habitus among middle and upper-middle class households is also associated with norms that prescribe individualism and personal responsibility (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). In a society where individualism and personal responsibility are so highly valued, parental support and love can be ‘...narrowed to a reward for doing well. [Under this condition] moral standards give way to the aesthetic tastes and technical skills of the achievement-oriented middle class. “Being good” becomes a matter of *being good at things...*’ (Bellah *et al.*, 1985: p. 60; italics in original). Organized, competitive, performance-based sports are among those “things” because they are highly visible and involve progressive skill development that enables parents and others in the community to assess their children’s achievement relative to age peers. These two factors have contributed heavily to the emerging positive status of organized youth sports in neo-liberal societies.

Do issues related to fatherhood contribute to the commitments that parents must make to support the participation of their children in youth sports? My guess is that these issues are very important. As fathers seek to become increasingly involved in their children’s lives, youth sports provide parenting contexts that privilege men at the same time that they enable fathers to nurture relationships with sons and daughters and claim that they are sharing childrearing responsibilities with their wives, former wives, or partners. But the absence of research on this topic means that much of what is contained in this paper is best described as informed speculation. Hopefully, it will encourage future research on the dynamics of fatherhood and emerging ideas about the moral worth of parents today.

Notes

1. Research shows that fathers spend more time with sons than daughters (Yeung *et al.*, 1999; Lundberg & Rose, 2002), and fathers are likely more often involved directly with their sons’ sport participation than their daughters’ participation. However, men, including many fathers, play an active role in the sport participation of girls/daughters. I have no data on changes over time, but it is clear that fathers spend more time with their daughters in sports today because there are more sport opportunities available to girls. Fathers coach girls’ youth team sports more often than do mothers, even though there have been significant increases in the number and proportion of women/mothers who coach teams and serve as administrators in leagues (fixtures). But the local and fragmented organization of youth sports in the United States makes it difficult to obtain reliable data on these issues. However, as I speak about fathers in this paper, my comments apply to their relationships with sons *and* daughters.

2. In many cases, fathers and mothers provide some or all of the (volunteer) labour needed to initiate and/or maintain the organized youth sports programmes in which one or more of their children participate (see Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Thompson, 1999).
3. These were informal interviews conducted every February from 1998 through 2004 as part of a course project. As parents sat in the stands, sociology of sport course students introduced themselves and asked if they could talk with them about the ways they integrated their son's hockey participation into their family lives. One of the last questions asked was how much money they estimated spending each year to support their son's participation in hockey. Their sons were unique in that they played on teams that travelled to tournaments regularly in addition to playing local games and being on the ice for practices and open hockey time. An estimated 300 interviews were done during the six years, and financial estimates were received from over half of the parents interviewed.
4. Data in this study were collected in 1996 in a questionnaire mailed to a random sample of 1100 households with USA Swimming membership. A total of 767 questionnaires were usable, and data on parents and family life were analysed using structural equation modelling.

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Topic 2. Informal games and organized sports

One way to learn about children's experiences in organized youth sport programs is to compare the games in those programs with the games children play on their own. The students in my sociology of sport classes used this approach through the mid-1990s when informal games became so scarce that it was difficult to study them.

Through our comparisons we learned that the young people in each of these game settings defined and interpreted their personal experiences in different ways. We also discovered that there were consistent patterns of differences between what actually occurs in adult-controlled, organized games and the player-controlled informal games.

Informal, player-controlled games

In one set of observations we collected data on informally organized, player-controlled games over a 12-month period. We observed 84 games in backyards, parks, vacant lots, and school playgrounds. In each one, interviews were conducted with at least two of the players. The observations and interviews indicated that when children got together and played on their own, they were interested in four things:

1. Action, especially action leading to scoring
2. Personal involvement in the action
3. A close score (that is, a challenging or exciting contest)
4. Opportunities to reaffirm friendships during the game

In the majority of games observed, the number of players ranged from 2 to 12. Usually the players knew one another from games played on previous occasions. In most cases, teams were formed quickly. Skill differences and friendship patterns were the criteria used to choose teams. A process of systematically choosing players one-by-one seldom occurred. However, it was clear that getting an informal game started and keeping it going was a complex operation. The amount of action in the game depended on how good the players were at managing interpersonal relationships and making effective decisions.

The games and game rules resembled those used in organized programs, but they contained many modifications to maximize action, scoring, and personal involvement while keeping the scores close at the same time. For the sake of action, free throws were eliminated in basketball, throw-ins were kept to a minimum in soccer, yardage penalties were dropped from football, and the pitcher's mound in baseball and softball was moved closer to the batter when someone was having a hard time hitting the ball. Similar types of rules were found in kickball, team 4-square, individual 4-square, 2-square, 1-wall handball, street hockey, tennis, Frisbee, volleyball, and other games. Further proof of the importance of action was the extremely high scores in nearly all the games.

Personal involvement was maximized through a number of clever rule qualifications and handicap systems. Restrictive handicaps were used to keep the highly skilled players from dominating the action in the games. Other forms of handicaps allowed advantages to the less skilled players. Furthermore, the less skilled players seemed to have unstated permission to use special rules in their own favor; they were the ones most likely to use "do-over" or "interference" calls to get another chance or to compensate for the impact of their mistakes on the outcomes of games. This tactic seemed to save them personal embarrassment and preserve their integrity as "contributing" members of their teams. It also served to keep the game scores close. The overuse

of these special rules was not usually a problem, but when it was, it was controlled informally through jests or teasing.

The personal involvement of each of the players was also promoted by unique game rules. In baseball there was a rule against called strikes; this allowed most everyone a chance to hit (and catch the ball in the field). In football there was usually a rule that made everyone on the team eligible to receive a pass on any play. When the interviewers asked the players what the biggest source of fun was in their games, answers almost always referred to hitting, catching, kicking, scoring, or some other form of action in which they were personally involved. All the young people liked to be a crucial part of what was going on in the game.

Keeping order in the games depended on the extent to which players were committed to the action. Usually, the more they were personally involved, the more committed they were. Tactics (sanctions) used to control behavior were most often used to keep players from disrupting the action of the games. The players did joke around, and sometimes even ignored the rules, but these forms of deviance were ignored as long as they did not interfere with the flow of action. The observers noted that many different performance styles, such as batting left-handed, throwing around-the-back passes, running unplanned pass patterns, and moving out of position, were all accepted as long as action in the games was not destroyed. The players with the greatest skill were the ones who had the most freedom to use these styles because they could do it without upsetting game action or interfering with the personal involvement of the other players.

Prestige among the players was important because it usually determined the extent to which individuals became involved in decision-making processes during the games. The older players or those with the greatest skills usually had the most prestige, although prestige was sometimes given to other players when they were especially good at solving arguments.

Surprisingly, arguments among the players were not major problems. Over 50% of the observed games did not contain any arguments lasting long enough to slow down the normal flow of action. In the remaining games, arguments occurred, but they were solved in all but eight cases. It seemed as if the players had played together enough times to work things out so that games were seldom stopped because of fighting.

A word of caution.

The informal games of children should not be romanticized; problems occurred on a regular basis and sometimes they got out of hand. Bigger and stronger children occasionally exploited smaller and weaker ones. Girls were often treated in sexist ways when they tried to participate in the boys' games. And the children who were chosen last or ignored during team selection processes often felt rejected by their peers.

Additionally, the dynamics of games usually varied with the availability of play spaces and equipment. For example, when a large group was using the only basketball court in the neighborhood, the games excluded many young people who wanted to play. In fact, the team that won retained possession of the court and took on the next challenger rather than giving up the court to others; those with less-developed skills were not given special concessions allowing them to participate. But when there were many courts and only a few players, the goal usually was to accommodate everyone's interests so that everyone would stay to play the game. For this reason, the games played by children in low-income neighborhoods where there were few sport spaces often differed from games played by children in neighborhoods where sport spaces were plentiful. This reminded us that external conditions in the society as a whole had important effects on the way informal games were played.

Adult-controlled, organized games

The students and I also observed 121 formally organized, adult-controlled games and interviewed at least two of the players in each game. We found a strong interest in action and personal involvement, but, unlike the participants in informal games, those in the organized games were more likely to be serious and concerned with performance quality and game outcomes. The most apparent aspect of these games was that the action, personal involvement, and competition were strictly regulated by specialized rules that were enforced by adults.

Important to the players were the formal positions they played on their teams. In fact, they often referred to themselves in terms of those positions and they even took pride in describing themselves as “defensive halfbacks” or “offensive ends” or as “center forwards,” “left wingers,” “catchers,” or whatever. This was the case for substitutes as well as first-string players. The importance of positions was further emphasized by coaches and spectators, who often encouraged players to “stay in position” during the games. This occurred regularly in basketball, soccer, and hockey—and sometimes in softball.

The actual play of the game was governed by time schedules, the weather, and the setting of the sun. Individual playing time for the participants varied according to skill levels. Most often it was the smaller, visibly timid and less skilled children who sat on the sidelines. Although everyone usually got into the game for at least a short period of time, those whose action time was low often maintained only a token interest in the game. While these substitutes were on the sidelines, they were usually bored with the whole situation or interested in things unrelated to the games. Highly skilled players were most likely to exhibit strong interest in the games and express visible disappointment when taken out of the lineup. When taken out, they stayed close to the coach and waited or sometimes asked to be put back into the games.

An additional consequence of adult control and the high degree of organization was the visible absence of arguments and overt displays of hostility between players from opposing teams. The few arguments noted by observers were between members of the same team and the cause was usually a player’s inability to remember game rules, stay in position, play the position efficiently, or carry out team strategy. Adult control and the formal organization (rules plus positions) not only held the group together but also restricted the visible display of affection and friendship during the play of the game. Exceptions to this were observed during the scheduled breaks in the game (halftime or the half of the inning during which a team came to bat in baseball and softball), but apart from these breaks, it was difficult to determine who was friends with whom. And the nature of interpersonal relationships seemed to have little relevance to what happened in the game itself.

The major purpose of game rules seemed to be the standardization of competition and the control of players. The impact of the rules on the extent of action and involvement was most apt to take the form of an interruption, but there were few visible indications from the players that they resented these breaks in the action. The only signs of displeasure came when the delay was caused by a penalty called against their team. Rule enforcement (social control) was based on the self-control and obedience of players, but it ultimately rested in the hands of adults--coaches and referees. The applications of rules by adults were based on universalistic criteria. In other words, no visible exceptions were made taking into consideration individual abilities or characteristics; individual freedom was restricted by rules and the expectations of coaches.

Compliance with rules and with the expectations of coaches was extremely high. Deviance resulted more often from a player not knowing or forgetting what to do than from attempts to

gain an unfair advantage over opponents. On the playing field, the observed cases of deviance were usually accompanied by formal sanctions regardless of whether the deviance had an effect on game action or on the success of the team. Off the field, rules varied from one team to another. When deviance occurred, it usually took the form of “joking around” or exhibiting a lack of interest in the game or the team. Responses to these behaviors also varied. Coaches and parents used both verbal and nonverbal sanctions. The game rules, team rules, and sanctions were all used to control behavior and to preserve the organization of the game and the values underlying the authority of referees and coaches.

The observations and the interviews indicated that the players in organized games were usually serious about their participation, but excessive concerns about playing well and winning games were not characteristic. Interestingly, those most likely to be overconcerned with these things were the highly skilled players and members of the most successful teams. In other words, the outward emphasis on performance and victory was highest for those who performed best and won most frequently. Among the majority of others, participation was typically described in terms of intrinsic rewards. Similarly, the disappointment associated with a game or an entire season was usually related to personal opportunities to play. Of course, a desire to play more is not only related to intrinsic rewards. Playing for the better part of a game or making a starting team is also a means for gaining extrinsic rewards from peers and parents. Lastly, players were almost always able to provide an exact statement of their team record and what the record meant in the league standings.

Status on the organized teams seemed to depend on the coaches’ assessments of the relative physical abilities among players and the potential of those players to contribute to a team’s success. It was also observed that the better players were sometimes given more responsibility on the team and more latitude in determining what they would do during the game. Physical skill and acknowledgment by the coach were usually the basis of status and autonomy among the players. And acknowledgment by coaches usually depended on following team rules.

Finally, the stability of the group was extremely high. Games did not end until the “final whistle” and players never walked away from the games without permission from a coach or referee. The games always continued regardless of the quality of play or the satisfaction of the players. The rules and the adults who enforced them controlled the time when the games were over.

Analysis of differences

The personal experiences of the young people in each of these game settings were considerably different. The informal games were generally action-centered, whereas the formal games were rule-centered. The experiences in the informal games revolved around the maintenance of action, and action was maintained through making decisions and managing relationships between players. The experiences in the formal games revolved around learning and following rules, as well as obeying the adults who made and enforced the rules.

Which of these experiences is more valuable in the development of children? The answer to this question is not only important to the children involved but also to the adults who have invested so much of their time and resources into organized programs. My review of the research leads me to conclude that each experience makes different contributions to the development of young people. However, the contributions made by participation in organized programs have traditionally been overrated by the general public, and the contributions made by participation in informal games have often been forgotten or taken for granted.

Topic 3. Youth Sports Report Cards

Go to <http://www.sportsmanship.org/> and click on any of these links:

[National Report Card](#)

[Report Card for Parents](#)

[Report Card for Youth Sports Leaders](#)

Additional Resources:

[Report Card Tools at a Glance](#)

[Report Card Panel Members](#)

Topic 4. Americans with disability regulations

Abridged from:

Basic Information about The Americans with Disabilities Act

By Reid Prinzo, Associated Content—An Open Content Network;

www.associatedcontent.com/article/83150/basic_information_about_the_americans.html.

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines disability as:

- A person with a mental or physical impairment that limits their life activities, someone who has a previous record of mental or physical impairment, or finally someone who is seen by others as having such an impairment (Wisconsin Department of Health & Family Services, 2006).
- The Americans with Disabilities act defines a physical impairment as a physical problem such as an anatomical loss or cosmetic defect related to the neurological, sense organs, respiratory, reproductive, digestive, cardiovascular, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, musculoskeletal, skin, or endocrine systems (Wisconsin Department of Health & Family Services, 2006).

Does Tatyana McFadden's* [see below] disability qualify as a disability under the ADA?

- Yes, Ms. McFadden is a disabled person because she has the physical impairment of spina bifida which has paralyzed her from the waist down; rendering her physically unable to use her legs (Gallo and Otto, 2006).

What implications does the ADA have for sports programs?

- The ADA affects sports programs in various ways, ranging from employment to communications. More money will need to be spent to help accommodate disabled people. Exercise and sporting facilities and programs must consider hiring disabled individuals. Telecommunications and phone services have to be made readily available to disabled peoples. The disabled individuals must have public transportation made open to them in order to help them participate in the sport, and the field of play and public accommodations it is part of must all be made reasonably accessible to the disabled individual. All of these things must be handled by the sports program and are significant in the disabled person's participation (MSU, 2001).

How does a school go about determining whether a person with a particular disability can participate in the sport?

- The school must determine if the disabled person applying for the team or sport is a "qualified individual," which means if they have the required skills to participate in a sport. The school cannot discriminate against disabled individuals, but they can modify the event for them to protect the safety of the other athletes involved (MSU, 2001).

Are there limits to how far a school must go to accommodate a person with a disability?

- A school must make reasonable and common sense modifications to programs and buildings that a disabled athlete or persons is going to use. These modifications could include wheel chair ramps to enter buildings and sporting areas, creating special equipment for the disabled individuals, or providing special help for a mental challenged person. A school is not expected to rebuild the entire facility or buy all new equipment for a team to accommodate a disabled person, they just need to provide the disabled

individual with an equal opportunity to participate in activities such as sports (MSU, 2001).

What accommodations were granted to Ms. McFadden?

- Tatyana McFadden will be allowed to race in four events (200, 400, 800, and 1600 meters) in her next high school track event, and each time she will be racing against other girls, not on a track by herself. The ability to compete against other runners on the same track in her wheelchair is the major accommodation that she was given (Gallo and Otto, 2006).

What is the basis for the distinctions between the opportunity to participate and the opportunity to score points?

- The opportunity to participate merely gave Tatyana McFadden a chance to race around the track by herself; not the possibility to compete with other high school athletes. Although Tatyana will be scored on a different scale from her racing competitors, she will still be in direct competition with them and have a chance to help her team win, and actually feel like she is in the same event (Gallo, 2006).

Do you believe once the opportunity to play is granted then it should follow that whatever points she scores should count as though she were a non-disable athlete? Why?

- Although Tatyana McFadden is disabled, her points should not be counted as equally as a normal racers. Now that she is allowed to compete versus the average runner in her wheelchair, she gains a distinct advantage speed-wise over a normal person, as she can wheel herself much faster in the chair. Since she gains this advantage her point system should be handicapped as to bring her onto the same level as the average normal runners. This would be to ensure that her disability doesn't give her or Atholton High an unfair advantage in track, as the Americans with Disability Act only grants her equal opportunities, not greater ones.

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*Tatyana McFadden was a high school student with spina bifida, which paralyzed her from the waist down. After winning two medals in the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, Greece she wanted to practice with and compete on her high school track team. There were no wheelchair events, so she wanted to experience connections with teammates and competition by racing against able bodied runners on the track. The school district prohibited her from racing on the track with others, even though she was not an official contestant in the races. She sued the district and won the right to participate on her track team for the rest of her senior year.

New regulations as of January 1, 2009.

by Jay Coakley

In September, 2008, George W. Bush signed a bill that added amendments to the 1990 Americans With Disability Act that was signed into law by his father 25 year earlier; the amendments became law on January 1, 2009.

The new amendments give people with disabilities greater access to courtrooms, swimming pools, golf courses, stadiums, theaters, hotels and retail stores. They also establish more rigorous requirements across many situations and meet the needs of older people and disabled war veterans. For example, they set standards for the location of light switches and the height of retail service counters, among many other things.

The 215,000-word document outlines new rules and describes situations in which changes are needed. For example,

- Courts must provide a lift or a ramp so that people in wheelchairs have access to the witness stand, which often has one or more stairs.
- Auditoriums must provide lifts or ramps people in wheelchair can “participate fully and equally in graduation exercises and other events” where audience members have direct access to the stage.
- Sports stadiums with seating capacity of 25,000 or more must provide safety and emergency information by using scoreboards and video monitors to post written messages; this intends to alert people who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- Fishing piers must have at least 25 percent of their railings no more than 34 inches high, so that people in wheelchairs can fish over the railing.
- Miniature golf courses must have at least half of their holes accessible to people using wheelchairs, and these holes must be joined by continuous, unobstructed pathways.
- New swimming pools with perimeter of more than 300 feet must provide “at least two accessible means of entry,” such as a chair lift or a gentle sloping ramp.
- New playgrounds must provide access to play equipment, including slides and swings, so they are usable by children in wheelchairs.

Other new rules apply to theaters, hotels, and other commercial facilities. The 1990 law mandates that businesses remove barriers to people with disabilities if the changes are “readily achievable,” and can be made “without much difficulty or expense.”

A lawsuit combined with anticipation of these new amendments led the University of Michigan to make plans to alter their massive football stadium and increase by nearly four times the number of seats accessible to persons with wheelchairs. In 2010 there will be about 330 such seats. Additionally, the stadium will have better access to restrooms and offer limited number of accessible seats in luxury boxes and club seats. All these changes were resisted by the university because they would decrease spaces for wealthy able-bodied fans willing to pay high ticket prices.

Other sport venues, including Madison square garden in New York City, will now be expected to make similar adaptations when they build new stadiums or make major renovations to older stadiums.

Topic 5. Pros and cons of early childhood specialization in sports

Sport Specialization: Does It Create Excellence or ‘One-Trick Ponies’?

© Jay Coakley, 2009

Published in Sandra Spickard Prettyman and Brian Lampman, eds. 2009. *Learning Culture through Sports*, Volume 2. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Education.

Introduction

People often set priorities for what they wish to learn and do, especially when they have multiple opportunities and choices. In other words, they *specialize* in learning and doing some things rather than others. For example, when college students choose sociology as their major field of study, they take courses enabling them to become specialists in the study of social relationships, interaction, and the organization of groups and societies. When a student accepts a scholarship to play soccer for a college team, he or she chooses to specialize in soccer rather than other sports.

We can't do and be experts in everything. Therefore, specialization is a normal and even necessary way of keeping our focus and sanity as we negotiate our lives in complex social worlds. But specialization can have negative effects when it prevents us from experiencing things that contribute to normal development and maturation.

When it comes to the psycho-social development of children and adolescents, it's important to understand the dynamics and possible consequences of specialization in youth sports. Through the mid-1970s, most people believed that *all-around athletes were the best athletes*. For example, young men who played and “lettered” in three or more varsity sports in high school were given special status in their schools and communities.¹ The students who played only one sport were seen as athletically inferior to their multi-sport peers. But this perspective began to change in the 1970s as people discovered that the highly talented, medal-winning Olympic athletes from the communist nations of the Soviet Union and East Germany had specialized in their sports from a young age.

By the beginning of the 1990s, most young people in the United States specialized in formally organized sports controlled by adults and they spent less and less time playing informal games which they created and controlled. At the same time, young people were encouraged to specialize in a single sport through the year so they could develop elite skills and move to higher levels of competition where the rewards were greater. These two types specialization, (a) playing only in adult controlled, formally organized sports and (b) playing in only one sport for most or all of the year, have dramatically changed youth sport experiences over the past two generations.

What do we know about these two forms of specialization? Do they have positive or negative consequences for young people? Should we encourage them, or should we think about “de-specializing” youth sports for the sake of young people and their overall development? These are the questions discussed in this chapter.

Youth Sport Experiences Then and Now

¹ Prior to the late-1970s girls had very few opportunities to play sports because schools provided very few if any teams for girls.

When I was growing up in the 1950s, I spent at least 10 hours playing in “pickup games” and informal, player-controlled sports for every hour I spent playing games or practicing in an organized sport. Few of my sport experiences were ever seen or evaluated by parents, coaches, or referees. They were my experiences and it was up to me to give them meaning, because neither parents nor coaches were there to interpret my experiences for me. I decided if I had fun, played well, succeeded or failed. My judgments were influenced by my peers with whom I played, but there were no spectators. Further, there were no official statistics, scores, records, game films, or coaches’ ratings to influence how I judged and then integrated these experiences into my life.

Because I was interested in many sports I played five different sports in high school, and then played other competitive sports during summers. Only in college did I specialize because I had a full scholarship to play basketball and my coaches prohibited us from playing other sports that might lead to injuries or disrupt our basketball training. However, I played softball and golf every summer and played in a number of summer basketball leagues (in the 1960s this was not against NCAA rules).

Two generations later, Maddie, my 10-year old granddaughter was chosen to be on a “select” soccer team organized by a non-profit club. The team is scheduled to play two seasons, one in the fall and another in the spring. About half of her games are out of town and involve 3-7 hours of round trip driving. Her team also plays in 3-4 major tournaments that require significant out-of-town travel, and all team members are encouraged to play in one or more summer and “between season” soccer camps administered and coached by people associated with the soccer club. This specialization is required if Maddie wishes to play soccer at a level that offers her challenging competition and a chance to be with friends she’s made in past soccer seasons. When I was 10 or when Maddie’s parents were 10-years old we were never asked to specialize in this way, and we would have found it to be disruptive of our lives and our participation in the diverse sports we wanted to play.

Playing on the select club team requires major time commitments and expenses. Therefore, Maddie will drop karate, another sport she loves, and she won’t have time to play basketball in a league that she’s enjoyed the last two years. Her interests in gymnastics, swimming, and ice- and inline-skating will be put on hold for the most part, as she plays on the soccer club “select” team and follows team rules.

Maddie has played in organized sports since she was 4-years old, but she’s played few informal sports and “pick-up games” with friends. Parents today feel uncomfortable allowing their kids the freedom to roam around the neighborhood and play informal games in whatever open spaces they might find. And parents fear that their kids might get into trouble if they are not supervised by an adult. Therefore, for every hour Maddie has spent playing informal sports, she’s spent at least 10-hours practicing or playing games on organized teams under the watchful eyes of adult coaches and parents.

Maddie and I typify our respective generations. Informal games were the major part of my sport experiences, whereas Maddie’s sport experiences have occurred almost exclusively on organized teams controlled by adults. I didn’t specialize in a sport until I was a 19-year college student, and Maddie is specializing in soccer as a 10-year old fifth grader.

Does this mean that “playing sports” involved different learning experiences for me than for Maddie and her peers? If there are differences, can we say that one set of experiences is better than the other? The answers to these questions are important because so much individual and family time today is being used to enable young people to play a single organized sport that requires nearly year-round participation. I explore these questions in the rest of this chapter.

Experiences in Informal versus Organized Sports

The experiences of children in adult-controlled, organized sports differ from those that young people have when they play informal, games and sports that they create and control. Research indicates that each of these experiences involves opportunities to learn important, but different things, and neither set of experiences is without problems. However, people tend to overrate the importance of organized sports in the lives of young people, whereas they underrate the importance of informal games and sports (Schultz, 1999).

Informal sports are *action-centered*, whereas organized sports are *rule-centered*. Organizing and maintaining informal sports involves creativity and interpersonal skills. Games involve decision-making and conflict resolution in response to unanticipated situations and problems. Unless the participants understand and accept the rules they create, the games will end in disagreements. This means that the players must learn to cooperate with peers and follow the rules on which their game is based. Such experiences provide important learning opportunities for young people as they mature and enter adolescence and adulthood.

Research shows that playing informal games and sports involves cooperation, planning, creativity, decision-making, organizing, negotiating, problem solving, and the ability to distinguish self-interest from the common good of the group playing a game. After spending eight years studying the everyday lives of children and adolescents in an upper-middle-class community, sociologists Patricia and Peter Adler (1998) concluded that young people learn valuable lessons when they create and control their own games and sports. But the Adlers were not able to measure the types and extent of learning that may have occurred during these games, nor were they able to say whether the learning that occurred in these games carried over to other settings and relationships.

Playing organized sports involves different experiences than those observed by the Adlers and others who have studied play and informal games and sports (Coakley, 1983; Schultz, 1999). Young people in organized sports must manage relationships with adult authority figures, learn the rules and strategies used in their sports, and abide by the schedule of practices and games that they are given. Playing organized sports acquaints young people with the operation of formal organizational structures, rule-governed teamwork, and adult models of work and achievement (Adler and Adler, 1998). But we don't know if their experiences teach them how to effectively manage relationships in formal structures, or if they teach them to passively accept formal structures without question.

As we discuss these issues, it's important to recognize that some sport experiences occur in contexts that are partly informal and partly organized by adults. For example, adults may provide subtle guidance to young people as they play informal games and sports, and young people may have opportunities to be creative and make decisions in organized sports controlled by adults. These "hybrid" sport experiences can be valuable contexts for learning. The adults involved in hybrid games say that it takes tact and patience to put up with children's mistakes and oversights, but they also say that it is a joy to see the creativity and compassion shown by many children as they play these games.

Because organized sports are so prevalent today and informal sports are rare, many experts in child development have tried to remind people of the benefits of play and informal games in the lives of children (Bloom, 1985; Chudacoff, 2007; Elkind, 2007, 2008; Lauman, 2006; Sternheimer, 2006). For example, a recent report of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ginsburg, 2007) emphasizes that without experiences in self-initiated games, young people miss

opportunities to learn critical skills needed to be successful in the world today. Creativity, innovation, sharing, conflict resolution, decision-making, group skills, and self-advocacy, the report highlights, are learned in free, unstructured and self-structured play and games rather than in organized, adult controlled sports. Similarly, leadership skills based on calculated risk taking and thinking outside the box are more likely to be learned in unstructured and self-structured activities than in formally organized activities controlled by adults.

Former international soccer star, Brandi Chastain suggests that sport experiences for children today are “overly organized” and that young people need to play informal games and sports if we want them to learn “to be independent, creative, and self-motivated” (2004, p. 125). She also notes that young people are more likely to develop a longlasting love of physical activity and sports when they “dictate the place, the time, the rules, and the structure—or lack of it” in their sports. Chastain’s point is that it is difficult to feel a sense of ownership and an intimate connection with a sport if you’ve always played it according to the wishes of an adult with a whistle.

Recent research shows that young people who regularly participate in diverse informal games and sports between 6 and 12-years old have lower dropout rates and those who specialize from an young age (Baker and Robertson-Wilson, 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin, 2005; Fraser-Thomas and Côté, 2007; Kirk, 2005; Weirsmma, 2000). Additionally, athletes who have not played informal games are more likely than others to retire early after reaching an elite level (Barynina & Vaitsekhovskii, 1992).

Pressure to Specialize in Organized Sports

Despite what we know about the value of play and informal games and sports, there are social factors that push children toward specializing in organized sports at the same time that they impede the revival of informal sports. These factors influence both children and their parents. They include the media, cultural changes in the definition of a good parent, the privatization of youth sports, and misinformation about the benefits of specialization.

Television introduces children to organized sports at a very young age. They quickly learn that these sports are highly valued by those around them, including parents and family members, and that playing organized sports brings positive feedback in the form of status and social acceptance. Further, once they play an organized sport, they see how their parents alter the family to accommodate their sport involvement. This makes them the center of attention, especially the attention of their fathers and, for many children, this feels so good that they give high priority to playing organized sports.

For parents, specializing in organized sports fits their desire to find for their children supervised activities after school and on weekends. This, parents believe, keeps their children out of trouble, provides a constructive activity that they believe teaches children valuable lessons about achievement, teamwork, commitment, and competition at the same time that it serves as a basis them to claim moral worth as parents (Coakley, 2006). These factors are very important in families where both parents work, worry about child care issues, and seek to meet the expectations that people have for parents today. This is crucial in neo-liberal societies where parents are held totally accountable for the actions and whereabouts of their children 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Organized, adult-controlled activities in this cultural context become a necessity for parents trying to meet this standard, which has never before existed in a society. Organized sports come to be highly valued in comparison with other activities, because they are culturally valued, highly visible, and structured in ways that make achievement quantifiable and

understandable to everyone (Coakley, 2006). To claim you are a good parent because your child plays informal games will not work in a neo-liberal culture where individual choices and self control are the basis for establishing moral worth.

Specializing in a Single Sport at an Early Age

Early specialization and decreased involvement in diverse physical activities is becoming increasingly common in youth sports (Côté & Hay, 2002; De Knop, Engström, & Skirstad, 1996; Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996; Hill, 1988; Hill & Hansen, 1988; Hill and Simons, 1989). Most adults, including parents, realize that specialization does not provide all that their children need in terms of overall physical, psychological, and social development, especially when a child is younger than 14-years old. But concerned parents also know that youth sports today are often organized in ways that demand early specialization if children are to succeed and progress to higher levels of competition. Specialization has even become a prerequisite for playing on certain high school teams and elite club teams where players come out of a preparatory pipeline that gives them the “sport résumés” that are favored by high school and college coaches.

Many parents today are confused about what to do. They know that early specialization involves excessive costs for them and their children, but they believe that playing organized sports is good for their children. Additionally, they know that their moral worth as parents will be evaluated in terms of how they manage their children, and keeping children in organized sports is seen by nearly everyone as a responsible child management strategy.

When a child specializes in a “select, club team sport,” parents must make commitments and devote personal and family resources to their children’s sport participation to a degree that is unprecedented in human history. The money and time required to sponsor early sport specialization is so great that it often undermines alternative family activities and opportunities for siblings to play sports other than the one played by an older brother or sister.

When specialization occurs, many parents find that they become part of a “sport and team culture” in which the sport-related needs of their child must come first in their lives. If they don’t set priorities in this way, other parents and coaches question their moral worth as mothers and fathers. For this reason, parents of children in highly specialized youth sport programs often make sure that other people know about the money they spend on their child’s sport participation, how many miles they drive, how many mornings they wake up before dawn to drive a child to before school practices, how many weekends they spend driving to and watching games, how many vacations they’ve organized around tournaments, and how many days they leave work early to accommodate the sport-related needs of their children. These sacrifices become parents’ “moral worth merit badges,” and parents display them for everyone to see.

Many parents don’t realize that the current emphasis on early specialization in youth sports is due in great part to the privatization and professionalization of youth sports. When sport clubs, both non-profit and commercial, hire staff and coaches, there needs to be a way of insuring that payrolls, facility costs, and other expenses can be paid 12-months a year. The only way this can be done is to convince parents that year round participation is in the best interests of their children, and that dues must be paid every month of the year. But this approach is grounded in the logic of economic profit and it has nothing to do with the best interests of children.

Children who specialize in a single sport at an early age often develop impressive skills sooner than other children and are more likely to be age group standouts among pre-teens in a particular sport. However, there is little evidence that specialization is the best or the only way to

produce highly skilled athletes. In other words, specialization may not pay off as many parents hope and is advertised by many sport clubs (Côté and Fraser-Thomas, 2006).

Research shows that early specialization in youth sports is more likely than diversified sport participation to be associated with higher rates of overuse and overtraining injuries (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000; Gorman, 2005; Pennington, 2005), an overly focused self-concept, weak and highly variable self-esteem (Coakley, 1992; Côté, 2004), burnout and early retirement from sport (Barynina and Vaitsekhovskii, 1992; Bompa, 2000; Boyd and Yin, 1996; Coakley, 1992; Wall and Côté, 2004), and restricted psycho-social experiences that can interfere with normal maturation and development (Côté, 2004; Côté and Hay, 2002; Wright and Côté, 2003). Long term specialization through childhood and adolescence may also put young people into a developmental rut that makes it difficult to see and experience the world from vantage points unrelated to their sport. When this occurs, a young person will face developmental and maturational challenges as they reach early adulthood. Therefore, even when young people achieve athletic success after specializing in a sport from an early age, we cannot assume that their experiences will lead to positive developmental outcomes or even good physical health (Côté and Fraser-Thomas, 2006).

Steve Swanson who has coached Stanford, Dartmouth, and the University of Virginia to conference championships and has coached U.S. national teams at the U-16 (under 16-years old), U-17, U-18, and U-19 levels notes that elite soccer players today often suffer serious self esteem problems, despite their skills. He explains that the long term, year round specialization that is now the norm in soccer puts young people in a situation where their sense of self and self-esteem is tied exclusively to their performance and identity as a soccer player. This means that every mistake, every loss, and every time that perfection is not reached spins these athletes into emotional turmoil and creates doubt about their competence in soccer and their self worth as a person. Consequently, many of these elite athletes experience dramatic emotional swings corresponding to their latest performance on the field. As elite athletes, they've learned that success in the past means little when compared to what you do today. This puts them on a perpetual self-esteem roller coaster at the same time that outsiders look at them and assume that they are supremely self-confident on and off the field. Swanson says that this changes what he must do to be effective as a coach. In addition to being a teacher of tactics and techniques, he must also be a "clinician" who reassures highly skilled athletes that they are worthy people.

An expanding series of studies by Jean Côté and his colleagues provide support for the idea that early diversification, rather than early specialization, is the most effective way to develop elite athletes (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2003, in press; Baker and Côté, 2006a, b; Baker et al., 2003; Soberlak & Côté, 2003). It appears that when children play a variety of sports before they are 12-years old and then gradually become more specialized during early adolescence, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to their sport than those who have specialized from a young age. It's not clear why this is so, but it may be that when young people gradually come to choose a sport in which to specialize, they feel a greater sense of "ownership" of their sport career. If this choice comes during mid-adolescence when the young person can make an informed decision about the sport that they want to take seriously, participation is more likely to occur on terms set by the athlete rather than parents and coaches. When young people specialize in a sport from an early age, they may never feel a similar sense of ownership, because they've never had the opportunity to make an informed choice about the sport they play. Consequently, they see their participation occurring on everyone else's terms rather than their own, and this can lead to burnout and early retirement, even when they are at the top of their game.

From the perspective of sport development, early specialization has additional problems. First, it cuts out young people who are “late bloomers” when it comes to skills in a particular sport. In fact, once young people become part of the specialized, highly select club team structure in a community, they may have a very difficult time becoming re-involved after skipping a year or two of participation. Newcomers have even more difficulties because they are unknown and outside the pipeline through which players in a particular sport go as they move to higher levels of competition.

Second, early specialization often leads to high rates of burnout among “early bloomers” who are selected to play on the select teams that have demanding practice and season schedules. By the time these children are 11 or 12-years old, they feel that they’ve been in their sport ever since they can remember, which may be literally true, and they are now bored or stressed out by the sport because it gives them little freedom of choice.

Third, early specialization often puts those who stay in the sport through mid-adolescence into a developmental rut and presents them with the challenge of digging themselves out if they wish to move successfully into adulthood. This occurs when young people focus so exclusively on their sport that they have little time to expand their interests, identities, and experiences beyond the confines of their sport. This compromises the normal development that occurs during adolescence.

Overall, a youth sport system that emphasizes early specialization is organized to *cut out* late bloomers, *burn out* early bloomers, and force successful athletes to *dig out* of developmental ruts. Furthermore, long term specialization often turns young athletes into “one-trick ponies” that excel in one sport, or even one position in a sport, but have a difficult time when they are asked to do something that does not involve the highly specialized skills they’ve spent their lifetime learning. This suggests an obvious conclusion: If we’re interested in the overall development and health of young people as well as the development of athletic talent in general, it would be best to emphasize playing a variety of sports, both formal and informal, rather than specializing in one formally organized, adult-controlled sport, and to delay year round participation in a single sport until mid-adolescence when a young person can make an informed decision about what they’d like to do for the next decade or two of their lives. The message that parents and young people need to hear today is that de-specialization is the way to go—until a young person has enough experience, maturity, and knowledge to choose a sport in which they’d like to specialize.

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Topic 6. When are children ready to play sports?

Note: This issue is discussed in the 8th edition of *Sports in Society*, but here is a more complete discussion from the 6th edition.

Answers to “readiness questions” depend on what the term sports means. If sports refer to physical play, there is one answer; if the term refers to organized physical activities, there is another; and if it refers to organized competitive games, there is yet another answer. The three answers and their explanations follow.

Answer 1: It’s never too early for physical play

It’s never too early for children to begin playing in physical ways. Body knowledge is an important part of our lives, and we begin learning about our bodies shortly after birth. Body learning occurs in the normal process of growing up and dealing with the physical environment. How children play and what they learn depends primarily on the freedom and encouragement they have to use their bodies and explore the environment. The more freedom and encouragement they have, the more they learn.

This sounds simple, but cultural factors influence how people think about body learning and physical play. For example, preferred childrearing practices in some cultures involve restricting the physical movements of infants and children. Definitions of what is normal when it comes to how children use their bodies vary with different cultural ideas about morality, gender, sexuality, and even definitions of physical space. This means that physical activities have a cultural dimension that influences how they are defined and included in children’s lives. The definitions people attach to physical activities often influence how they hear and apply answers to the question of when children should begin various forms of physical play.

These points about cultural influence can be illustrated by considering physical play among North American children. Most children in North America are encouraged to be physically active from birth. Of course, parents and other adults influence patterns of physical play when they put children in different environments and give them access to different play objects. Parents and adults who define physical skill development as important tend to encourage forms of physical play that involve less emphasis on expression and more emphasis on practice and achieving performance goals. These adults might encourage children, even very young children, to keep practicing physical movements until they “get them right.”

This cultural emphasis on performance over expression could restrict the range of physical experiences in children’s lives, and could encourage children to define physical pleasure in terms of achieving goals rather than feeling good about movement itself. If this happened, it could lead to a society in which many children were physically inactive, while others were active primarily in goal-oriented physical activities. It also could lead children to be concerned with “being perfect” in what they did and in what they might attempt in the future. This seems to have occurred to some degree in North America. However, it is not clear exactly how cultural processes affect specific forms of physical play among children. This topic is difficult to study, but studies are needed.

Answer 2: Any child in school is ready for organized physical activities

Children should begin playing in organized programs when this enables them to expand the range of their physical experiences beyond what they can do on their own. Children as young as three or four years old can be organized into groups in which they are encouraged to join peers in expressive physical play. In fact, a benefit of organized programs is that they provide children with safe physical environments and with adults who can intervene when egocentric behaviors, common among preteen children, interfere with play.

Organized physical activities are appropriate for children as young as five or six years old. However, the activities should encourage physical expression and creativity, along with the development of basic movement and coordination skills. The best organized programs are run by people committed to listening to children and allowing them freedom to use their bodies on their own terms. Then organization becomes liberating, rather than suffocating or oppressive. Children are usually good at distinguishing freedom from oppression and knowing when organization enables them to expand their physical experiences and when it restricts them. When it comes to noncompetitive organized physical activities, children themselves often can answer our question about readiness; we just have to listen.

Answer 3. Organized sports before age 8 and competition before age 12 must be matched with children's needs and interests.

This answer is explained in detail in the 10th edition.

Topic 7. Parents beware: Don't lead your children to think that their relationships with you depend on sport participation

Many parents today are aware that they should not make parent-child relationships dependent on children's sport participation or performance. However, they may unintentionally lead their children to make such connections. To see how this can happen, put yourself in the \$130 top-of-the-line athletic footwear of an eleven-year-old in an organized sport program:

As an eleven-year-old, you clearly remember that before you became a skater, football player, soccer player, etc., your parents were good to you and told you they loved you. But now things are different. In the past, they always let you know how hard they worked for the ten-dollar allowance they gave you and told you that money did not grow on trees. But now that you play sports, they do not hesitate to spend from \$300 to \$1,000 per season to outfit you in the best sport gear and pay entry fees and instructional fees that can amount to thousands of dollars. After years of hearing how busy your parents were and how they needed a vacation, they now are giving up weekends to drive you to games, meets, and practices. They even changed the family vacation schedule to accommodate your playoff games. They now fix special dinners five nights a week so you can get to practice on time. They come home from work a little early to see your practices or games. They make it a point to ask how things are going at practice and they give pep talks about sports.

At the same time, they did not attend the quarterly PTA meeting when your latest art project was displayed, and they complained about how it was impossible for them to miss work to attend a parent-teacher conference to discuss your schoolwork. Of course, they continue to tell you that education is important. But you see that their behavior indicates something different: what happens at school is not nearly as crucial as what happens in your game next Saturday.

Under such conditions, most eleven-year-olds conclude that playing organized sports is much more important than their parents say it is. If parents are not careful about the content of these unspoken messages, their children will think that being an athlete is a prerequisite for continued parental interest and concern. This is upsetting for most eleven-year-olds, and can damage a parent-child relationship.

Topic 8. Do boys and girls play sports differently?

The answer to this question is yes. But as we identify the differences and explain why they exist, we begin to see that asking “gender difference” questions may lead us to overlook important issues related to behavior, sports, and culture. For example, when we look for gender differences, we often ignore all the overlap in how boys and girls play sports, and all the differences that exist among boys and among girls.

My students point out the problems with using gender difference questions to guide research whenever they read and respond to findings in these studies. For example, when students see descriptions of the characteristics of boys’ informal sports and girls’ informal sports, a number of them quickly point out that the gender-specific lists do not accurately describe their experiences. At first, I was inclined to tell them that they were exceptions, and the lists were generally accurate. After a while I felt uncomfortable with this response, because it was leading students to either see themselves as weird or question the validity of the lists. Furthermore, it was cutting me off from learning about their experiences.

So I changed my approach and began to ask them about their experiences. As they talked and everyone listened, we saw that many different things have an impact on how children play sports. After a while, we started to see gender issues in connection with a wide range of reasons for why people play sports the way they do. Gender did not disappear, but it became meaningful only in how it was linked to other factors in people’s lives. In other words, when explaining how children played sports, we saw that a girl’s gender was less important than whether the girl had parents who controlled her life and wanted her close to home after school, or whether the girl lived in a low-income family and was obliged to baby-sit a younger sibling. And a boy’s gender was less important than whether he had a father who played catch with him nearly every day and always let him go to the well-kept local park after dinner so he could play baseball with his friends. When boys had parents who were overprotective and wanted them close to home or demanded they care for younger siblings, this had an impact on when and how they played sports. And when girls had fathers who played catch with them and let them go to the well-kept local park to play baseball after dinner, this too had an impact on when and how they played sports. Gender was important only in connection with these other factors that set limits or opened possibilities in children’s lives.

The “gender difference lists” that are so popular today tend to obscure these influential factors or to see them as gender-dependent, which they are not. The focus on difference leads us to lose sight of experience. But this does not mean we should ignore gender in our research. Gender is indeed important in children’s lives. Asking gender-difference questions can help us gather concrete information about inequities that exist in society. But unless we move beyond those questions, we end up perpetuating the same differences that led to the inequities to begin with! This is discussed in the next topic.

Topic 9. Gender differences versus experiences: What should we study?

Many sociologists today use “experience questions” rather than “gender difference questions” when they study behavior. So instead of asking, “What are the differences between boys and girls in the ways they play sports?” we ask, “How and why do children play the way they do?” Asking our research question in this way enables us to avoid seeing the world in terms of two “opposite” sexes, when, in fact, boys and girls share well over 96 percent of their biological traits and are capable of seeing and doing things in many ways that have nothing to do with the few biological differences that do exist.

This does not mean that we ignore gender when we ask “experience questions.” For example, when we study children’s experiences, we begin to see how children become “gendered” in ways that impact when and how they play sports, and to what end. We look at the gendering process in the lives of all children rather than asking a “difference” question that forces us to see boys and girls as “opposites” despite all their similarities.

“Gender difference questions” are loaded, because they lead us to ignore important things about variations in human experiences and behaviors when we do research. In the sociology of sport, these questions sometimes prevent us from seeing and explaining all the variations in girls’ play behaviors and experience, and the variations in boys’ play behaviors and experiences. Instead, we do study after study looking for boy-girl differences; then, after we find them, we conclude that boys and girls are indeed different and look for reasons for the differences.

Over the short term, the strategy of asking “difference questions” in our research adds something to our knowledge of behavior and how the world works, but over the long term, it takes us in big circles and leads us to reaffirm the very gender assumptions that prompted our “difference questions” in the first place. This happens because “gender difference questions” force us to conceptualize our research in terms of a set of assumed either-or differences, and then search for evidence that fits our assumptions.

“Experience questions,” on the other hand, are much more useful in the long run because they force us to focus our research attention on real-life experiences and why they happen. So we ask, “How do children play?” Then, after we have identified patterns in children’s play experiences, we ask other questions, like this one: “When children are on their own after school, why do some play competitive sports in relatively large groups while others don’t play sports at all, or play noncompetitive sports, or play sports in small groups?” These questions force us to explore issues that go beyond assumed male-female differences in experience.

This approach makes some people uncomfortable, because they’ve learned to see the world in terms of a two-category, male-female classification system. For their entire lives they have used that system to explain why people do what they do. Once a person gets into this way of viewing the world, it is difficult to change. But maintaining this view means bypassing the complexity and variation of human experiences across all women and across all men. Eventually, this view presents problems for those who use it. When they use it in research, it raises serious questions about the accuracy of what we call “knowledge.”

Topic 10. Youth advocacy guidelines: Do we need them now?

“Good things happen when young people play organized sports.” This statement is so widely believed in the U.S. that little attention has been given to the issue of child abuse in youth sports or to the need for identifying explicitly the responsibilities of adults who work with young athletes.

As more children play organized sports it is important to pay close attention to the quality of their experiences. Coaches have unique physical, technical, and social control over young athletes, and many young athletes learn that they should not question the authority or behavior of coaches. The hierarchical organization of many sport teams, and the power wielded by most coaches in youth sports makes it especially important for us to establish guidelines for assessing the quality of the relationships between adult coaches and child athletes.

At a time when the rights of children and the responsibilities of adults who work with children have been explicitly identified in many organizations, it is important that these issues be addressed in sports. At a time when the status or incomes of an increasing number of adults depends on the sport performances of child athletes, it is especially important to have clear guidelines for what children need and what adults should do to help children develop in positive ways.

Many people see sports as special contests when it comes to issues of control, discipline, and punishment. For example, the use of fear or corporeal punishment to control children and teach them lessons is accepted more often on playing fields than in classrooms. Theories supporting the notion adults should not hit or verbally demean children in an effort to motivate them are widely accepted in schools, but are not as widely accepted in sports. The notion that sports builds character, and that character is forged out of hardship and sacrifice, encourages forms of control, discipline, and punishment on playing fields that would not be accepted in other settings.

When organizations make clear the rights of children and the responsibilities of the adults who work with them, it creates a context that encourages those adults who give priority to child development and discourages those motivated by other interests.

For all these reasons, we need explicit guidelines for the adults who work with child athletes. Insurance companies increasingly demand that organizations have such guidelines coupled with training programs to teach those guidelines to those responsible for children. In the case of youth sport programs, coaches must know how to be safe and supportive as they work with children. Realistic guidelines create a context in which coaches know what is expected of them. Furthermore, they enable coaches to interact with children without wondering how others might judge their actions in terms of subjective and arbitrary assessment criteria. Positive experiences for children and peace of mind for coaches—these are two good reasons for developing youth Advocacy Guidelines.

A summary list of reasons for developing Youth Advocacy Guidelines now:

- Human rights gradually have been expanded to include the rights of children.
- We in the US generally have ignored the issue of abuse in the context of sports and coach-athletes relationships.
- Many people define sports as settings in which rules and constraints applicable in other settings don't apply. For example, some people readily disapprove of a 6th grade teacher who grabs child's hair and pulled him to the ground in a submissive position. But they do not disapprove of a football coach who grabs a young man's

helmet face mask, forces him to his knees, and expresses anger about a mistake made on the last play.

- Many people feel sports are appropriately organized along hierarchical lines so that child athletes have no real power to control the conditions of their own sport participation, and that adults have power over child athletes by definition.
- There are an increasing number of situations in where the material livelihood and professional reputations of adults depends on the sport performances of children.
- The role of athlete has traditionally been defined in terms of obedience to a coach, conformity to the wishes and expectations of a coach, following the absolute rules of coaches, and accepting punishments given by coaches when rules are not followed or expectations are not met.
- There is a growing awareness that fear-based approaches to controlling children are not appropriate.
- There is a general cultural acceptance of corporal punishment as a means of exercising control or teaching lessons.
- We do not have widespread coaching education programs through which coaches can be trained to know the limits of their authority and the limits of their behavior.
- There are traditions of abuse in certain sports.
- There is a high likelihood for children to develop dependency relationships with adult coaches. Kids seek adult approval and they may accept abusive relationships in their quest for acceptance.
- Research shows that pedophiles avoid contexts where there are clear and widely enforced rules governing adult-child relationships and the behavior of adults towards children.
- Insurance companies often demand explicit guidelines and training sessions related to following those guidelines for adults working with children.
- Coaches are increasingly aware of the need for guidelines so they can deal with children safely and constructively.

As we think about what might be included in a set of Youth Advocacy Guidelines that could be used in sport settings, it is useful to consider a scale of scale of inappropriate/abusive behaviors by coaches. Such a scale might include the following behaviors ranked from the least objectionable to the most objectionable:

- Insulted or swore at athlete
- Sulked or refused to talk to athlete when expectations were not met
- Stomped out of the gym or off the field in response to actions of athlete(s)
- Took actions to spite a child athlete
- Threatened to hit or throw something at child athlete
- Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something in response to a child's actions, attitudes, etc.
- Threw something at a child athlete
- Pushed, grabbed, or shoved a child athlete
- Slapped a child athlete
- Kicked or hit a child athlete with fist
- Hit or tried to hit a child athlete with an object

This list was inspired by material in Strauss, M. 1994. *Beating the devil out of them: corporal punishment in American families*. New York: Lexington Books.

I have constructed another list from the perspective of child athletes. This list is based on my ideas and material from Richard Tolman's article, "The development of a measure of psychological maltreatment of women by their male partners" (1989, *Violence and Victims*, 4(3), pp. 159–177). This list could be used when gathering information from child athletes. The children could be asked questions about the behavior of their coaches. The following list could be used as a basis for questions:

My coach...

- *Put down my physical appearance or criticized my body*
- *Insulted me or shamed in front of others*
- *Treated me like I was stupid*
- *Told me I was nothing without him/her.*
- *Called me names*
- *Swore at me*
- *Yelled and screamed at me*
- *Made me run until I was sick to my stomach (vomited)*
- *Grabbed and pulled me by my clothing or equipment because he/she was mad at me*
- *Grabbed a part of my body and held it until it hurt because he/she was mad at me*
- *Pushed me because he/she was mad at me*
- *Hit me because he/she was mad at me*

The issue is whether organized youth sport programs should have such a scale or list so that everyone will have a concrete set of identifiable behaviors that are "out of bounds." I think such a list would be helpful for coaches, parents, and children.

Topic 11: Helping parents keep their children involved in sports—A self-assessment tool for parents

Parents are the key to improving youth sports for everyone. Take this self-test to see if you're doing all you can to keep your child active in sports and receiving the benefits of sports participation.

Do you know your role?

- I realize that there are only four roles in sport – player, coach, official or fan – and I pick one and stick with it.
- I understand that my child is the participant, not me, and my expectations are based on my child's needs, not mine.
- I avoid “coaching” from the stands, and I also avoid criticizing officials, coaches and opposing players.
- I seek to be a positive and encouraging fan, applauding good plays for both teams.
- If I coach my child's team, I seek to model appropriate behavior and sportsmanship.

Do you have it all in perspective?

- I understand that children play sports for fun, fitness, friends, participation and skill development.
- I examine my own reasons for being involved and make sure my child's reasons for playing come before mine.
- I focus on encouraging skill development and fun participation, not on winning.
- I realize that children's work is “play,” and I try not to interfere with their experience.
- I am focused on my child's development as a whole person, not on his or her prospects for a sports scholarship or for a professional career playing sports.

Do you model the kind of behavior you'd like to see in your child?

- I let the coaches coach and the officials officiate.
- I avoid criticizing officials, coaches or players – both during the game and after.
- I applaud good plays for both teams.
- I treat coaches, officials, players and other parents with respect.
- I provide only positive encouragement before, during and after the game. If I can't say anything nice, I don't say anything at all.

Do you encourage sports participation for the long term?

- I do all I can to make sports participation fun, particularly since experts advise that most children stop participating when sports are no longer fun for them.
- I am quiet after the game and avoid critiquing or analyzing my child's performance on the way home. I know my child wants to hear me say, "I love watching you play."
- I seek out leagues with trained coaches who focus on the positive aspects of sport, including sportsmanship, fun and skill development.
- I try to make five positive comments for every one critical comment to my child. Experts advise "filling the child's tank" with positive comments to aid in learning.
- I resist efforts to make my child specialize in any particular sport at a young age.

Source: Citizenship Through Sport Alliance. 2006. *Through a Child's Eyes: A Parent's Guide to Improving Youth Sports*. Brochure developed for and with the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the Youth Sport Coalition – structures in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

Topic 12. Research faculty are not eager to study intercollegiate sports

Research faculty have seldom used a critical approach to study college sports. This led Dr. Myles Brand, the president of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), to invite scholars to the NCAA annual convention to discuss whether college sports were a legitimate topic for scholarly inquiry.

I was asked to lead off this discussion by explaining why faculty members who spend much time doing research have not studied the sport programs that constitute such a visible representation of their own universities. The point of my presentation was that doing such research can be risky to a scholar's career at the university. In making this point, I identified four factors that constrain faculty research on college sports and then recommended how the NCAA might minimize those constraints and create incentives for researchers to turn their attention to college sports. The following essay is an abridged version of my presentation:

The Risky Business of Studying College Sports by Jay Coakley

There are four factors that inhibit critical research on college sports. These factors are located in the university, the community, traditional academic disciplines, and the NCAA.

University Constraints

First of all, studying the immediate contexts of our everyday lives is challenging. We often take for granted the events and routines that frame our daily experiences and don't see them as topics to be studied. Being immersed in these contexts makes it difficult to view them critically, especially when faculty achieve enough status to have a vested interest in maintaining them as they are. Studying valued traditions and rituals in our social worlds is especially challenging because research often exposes their inconsistencies, internal contradictions, and taken-for-granted ideological foundations.

Secondly, it is risky to study traditions and rituals that serve the interests of powerful people in our social worlds, including our campuses. As some of us know well, research can create quite a fuss when it exposes the problematic aspects of intercollegiate sports. This is why studies of intercollegiate sports, when they are done, tend to be historical and descriptive rather than critical and analytical. Most faculty members understand that it is risky to do research that threatens what is valued by powerful university administrators or influential university benefactors. Therefore, unless they are asked to study intercollegiate sports, most researchers won't jeopardize their careers doing so when there are many other topics they can study. Why take the chance of doing research that could attract negative attention from the people who sign your paychecks, approve promotions and tenure awards, allocate university resources, or influence campus decisions with major donations?

Third, when researchers cannot design studies that directly serve athletic department needs, they're not likely to gain access to much useful data on intercollegiate sports, especially data on the experiences of athletes and the internal dynamics of teams and athletic departments. Relevant here is that many athletic departments are characterized by institutionalized suspicion. Although

this suspicion is justifiable in some cases, it generally precludes collecting data from representative samples of athletes or teams. Furthermore, some teams have cultures organized around the belief that outsiders are not to be trusted because they cannot understand how the athletes give meaning to their experiences and to each other as members of sport-specific social worlds. These cultures are sustained partly by a vocabulary stressing that team members are “family,” and that survival and success depend on sticking together and providing mutual support in the face of a potentially hostile world. Further, the people in that world cannot know what it means to be part of a select group that is dedicated to a sport and willing to pay the price, make sacrifices, and play through pain for the sake of membership. Entering such a culture and gaining the trust of athletes is impossible without the consent of the head coach and assistants. This means that collecting valid and reliable data about intercollegiate sports requires administrative, athletic department, and coach support in addition to the interest and commitment of research faculty and their ability to develop rapport with people who create and live within sport cultures – a rare combination indeed.

This point is not made to malign athletic departments or coaches. All of us know that it is risky to allow others to critically scrutinize our lives when their interests may not overlap with ours, reality television notwithstanding. Those who control access to data on intercollegiate sports realize that researchers are more interested in discovery and knowledge production than win-loss records and other athletic department priorities. Therefore, when coaches and athletic directors have the power to do so, they close their teams and athletes off to researchers – unless, of course, they commission a study in which the findings are reported only to them and never made public. This is not new and it’s the reason why public knowledge is grounded in research that focuses on the poor rather than the powerful; on employees rather than employers; and on lower division undergraduate students in introductory courses rather than deans and administrators.

The validity and reliability problems created by restricted access to data certainly discourage many serious researchers from studying intercollegiate sports, apart from doing descriptive studies or those designed specifically to enhance player performance and team success. There are a few notable exceptions to this rule, including Patti and Peter Adler’s research summarized in their book, *Backboards and Blackboards: College Athletes and Role Engulfment* (1991). But most exceptions, including the Adlers’ research, involve studies of single teams or small, unrepresentative samples of athletes; they may not be seen as credible by journal review boards; and they may elicit nasty public critiques when they’re published. Mounting a defense against these critiques is difficult when data are limited. In any case, these studies are not likely to earn the merit needed to maintain one’s status as a member of a research faculty.

Discipline Constraints

Further limiting research on intercollegiate sports is the low priority given across nearly all academic disciplines to physical culture as a research topic. Knowledge production in U.S. universities has long been based on clear-cut mind-body distinctions. An uncritical acceptance of Cartesian mind-body dualism has lead researchers to ignore bodies or relegate them to the repair shops located in university medical schools or departments that focus on body mechanics. Unlike scholars in Asian cultures, where widely used ontological approaches assume mind-body integration as the foundation for being human, U.S. scholars seldom acknowledge that human existence is embodied or that clearly embodied activities, such as sports, ought to be studied seriously.

This intellectual climate has made physical education such an oxymoron that it has all but disappeared from the curriculum in many U.S. schools -- from kindergarten to doctoral programs. There are a few universities where it has survived under cover of kinesiology and human performance departments, but it is not viewed as academically legitimate by researchers who treat bodies as fleshy machines to be examined in laboratories part-by-disembodied-part. As a result, sports and other forms of physical culture remain risky topics for research, and there is little funding for those of us who think otherwise. As my colleagues have told me, "If you want to study athletes, do a proposal with faculty from the medical school." As a result, there are few studies of the embodied student experience, on or off the field.

Community Constraints

Another source of factors inhibiting research on intercollegiate sports is the local community, especially when powerful and influential people are boosters of intercollegiate sport programs and want them to grow, maintain near perfect records, and attract more spectators. Many such boosters have long accepted the unsupportable ideology that sports build character and are essentially pure activities sullied only by "bad apples," mostly in the form of undisciplined athletes and unscrupulous outsiders such as agents or gamblers. This may lead them to help recruit coaches who can effectively control athletes but it doesn't make them supportive of research that helps us understand the connection between intercollegiate sports and higher education.

Research that threatens the interests of these boosters invites attention that few scholars are prepared for or willing to confront. When this attention takes the form of critical attacks it often has a negative impact on a scholar's career and turns his or her everyday life into a tedious exercise in self-defense. Defusing criticism with logic and data is difficult because it is usually infused with emotions and grounded in the personal interests of people who don't see the point of asking critical questions about the things that provide them pleasure, prestige, and profit. Furthermore, unless a researcher has an established relationship with journalists it is likely that influential boosters can frame a public discussion of issues in ways that put a scholar at a distinct disadvantage when trying to explain and defend a research project. When local media are networked with regional and national media, the stakes associated with media coverage increase, and defending one's scholarly reputation can become a full time job. After seeing noteworthy examples of this over the past two decades, why would scholars at any point in their academic careers risk studying intercollegiate sports, unless, of course, they can present results acceptable to all the non-academic stakeholders? But that's no basis for quality research.

NCAA Constraints

Finally, the NCAA is a source of factors inhibiting research on intercollegiate sports. As an organization, the NCAA is rightfully dedicated to representing the interests of its member institutions. In this capacity it gathers massive amounts of quantitative data and has an able research staff that constantly analyzes them to answer questions raised privately by NCAA committees. Some of these data, often in numerically aggregated forms, appear in NCAA reports but they have limited usefulness for faculty interested in doing analytical research. Apart from working on an NCAA research project it is impossible for research faculty to gather data that would rival data already possessed by the NCAA—or within its reach on relatively short notice.

To understand the practical implications of this issue, imagine that I pulled together a few resources to do a qualitative study of the post-university lives of thirty former Division-I athletes

whose eligibility in football or men's basketball expired before they graduated. My resources are very limited, and I control expenses by including only former athletes who live in two metropolitan areas that are less than a two hour drive from my office. My graduate assistant and I work hard to collect valid and reliable data through in-depth interviews, and our analysis identifies a clear pattern: that is, chronic career problems occur frequently among athletes who received no post-eligibility support from their university and athletic departments as they attempted to complete their degrees. In fact, the former athletes were unemployed for significantly more months and had lower incomes and lower status jobs than peers who spent a similar number of years in college. Imagine too, that this finding is reported in a widely read newspaper article that sparks many letters to the editor. Journalists call me and ask for details that I cannot provide without violating the privacy rights of the young men in my study. When I respond in general terms, subsequent letters question my credibility and suggest that I have personal reasons to put college sports in a bad light, or they accuse my university of being guilty of using and then losing athletes in revenue producing sports.

Let's ignore, for the moment, my university president, athletic director, and the highly paid football and men's basketball coaches, and ask: what if the NCAA has previously unreported data showing that former athletes, on average, have relatively favorable career success rates? Would they, in the interest of their member institutions call a press conference and present data that contradict my study? If they did this, would others use those data to discredit my research and raise questions about my status as a scholar?

This scenario may sound farfetched, but my point is that the NCAA is unwittingly and unintentionally positioned to inhibit research on intercollegiate sports. This is mostly because academic researchers do not know if the research questions they want to ask have already been asked and answered privately by NCAA researchers working with internal committees, or if data have already been collected by the NCAA and could be presented in forms that would be widely defined as more credible than studies done by individual research faculty.

This scenario is not presented to question the motives of NCAA research staff or the integrity of NCAA officers obliged to act in the service of their members. It is presented only to highlight the politics of research, an issue that evokes interest from any of us sensitive to the hazards of investigating issues that concern powerful others who possess resources and a position of influence that no individual scholar can match. This doesn't mean that research faculty cannot effectively work with NCAA staff on particular NCAA-sponsored projects – something I'll suggest later in this paper; nor does it mean that the NCAA are not interested in certain types of research done by academic scholars. However, it does mean that research faculty with a mandate to produce knowledge, often by asking critical questions about the world, and NCAA researchers with a mandate to ask questions consistent with the organization's mission and the interests of member institutions, have goals that often differ. This is not a minor point.

Minimizing Constraints and Creating Incentives

In light of constraints faced by research faculty, it's not surprising that in-depth studies of intercollegiate sports are relatively scarce despite President Brand's observation that college athletics has a profound impact on millions of people. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that doing independent, critical research on intercollegiate sports can be a high-stakes exercise. It triggers responses from powerful people who are motivated by strong emotional, ideological, and financial interests in the status and public perception of sport teams and programs.

These constraints are not listed in the recent Knight Commission study of Faculty Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics, but they can be used, in part, as explanations of the findings presented in the commission's report. For those who don't know, this report is based on a survey of 2000 tenured and tenure-track faculty members at twenty-three NCAA Division I universities that are in the Football Bowl Subdivision, that is, Division IA. The sample was intentionally drawn to over-represent faculty involved in campus governance and experienced in teaching athletes in their courses. In other words, these are faculty *most likely* interested in and concerned about intercollegiate sports on their campus.

The survey was designed by researchers at The University of Michigan's Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education. Its goal was to identify faculty beliefs and concerns about intercollegiate sports, faculty satisfaction with the athletic programs on their campus, faculty willingness to participate in efforts to rectify problems they perceive in those programs, and an overall sense among faculty of the possibility for meaningful changes in the athletic program on their campus.

In summary, the data from this study indicate that faculty see intercollegiate sports as an auxiliary enterprise on their campus, tied as much to the entertainment industry as to education. They are generally dissatisfied because they lack knowledge about intercollegiate programs and have no control over decisions related to athletic departments. They are interested in intercollegiate sports and the athletic department on their campus, but perceive them to be a low priority faculty governance issue. Overall, faculty also believe that campus administrators do not want their input on matters related to intercollegiate sports and that current decision-making structures have no clearly defined role for faculty involvement. As a result they are generally disengaged from sports on their campuses.

The authors of the Knight Commission report suggest that a lack of knowledge about key athletic department policies and practices is the major factor constraining faculty engagement with intercollegiate sports. To the extent that this is true, the first and most important strategy for stimulating research on intercollegiate sports is to institutionalize the dissemination of information about the athletic department, sport teams, and athletes to the faculty. This type of transparency can be managed to respect the privacy rights of individuals involved, but it must be done so that faculty acquire a knowledge foundation upon which to propose, initiate, and complete quality research on intercollegiate sports. Additionally, this strategy should be planned in ways that provide research faculty with some form of access to data collected by the NCAA. Again, this can occur in many ways, but there's an urgent need for NCAA officials and research staff to meet with faculty representatives to discuss how this can occur so that faculty knowledge of research possibilities is established at the same time that individual privacy rights are respected. (I realize that the NCAA has ethical responsibilities in handling the data they collect, but research faculty have similar ethical responsibilities and have established institutionalized processes to insure that they are taken seriously when research is proposed and initiated.)

The second strategy for reducing constraints is to provide research grants. Researchers are very predictable actors: they follow data and live on grants. Without data access and grant support, they wither and are eventually trimmed from the academic vine. At present, most research on intercollegiate sports is self-funded by those willing to risk that it won't be a waste of their personal resources or compromise their careers. But these studies seldom involve large enough samples or data sets to make major contributions to knowledge or policy decisions; consequently, some people might say that they lack the quality and objectivity that is often attributed to research based on adequate funding and data. To combine possible funding with the

rising tension between perceived academic and athletic department needs would certainly make more faculty across many disciplines willing to propose and initiate research. If they had support they could do studies that are methodologically sound and able to withstand the critical scrutiny of everyone from local boosters and sports writers to journal review boards and promotion and tenure committees.

About this time last year we heard from President Brand that simply sponsoring a conference and inviting scholars to submit manuscripts does not elicit enough quality research papers to fill a conference program. But if there is a genuine interest in fostering quality research, there's a need to present concrete forms of support that reaffirm public statements. Funding is one form of support; access to data is another; and yet another is to lobby the presidents, top academic officers, athletic directors, and coaches in NCAA member institutions to facilitate research and cooperate with researchers. Initiating this publication, the *Journal of Intercollegiate Sports* will, by itself, do little to stimulate quality research; it will unify the literature, but it won't stimulate additional research without other incentives. (NOTE: There already are two journals devoted exclusively to education or higher education and sport, and many other journals readily accept articles on intercollegiate sports.)

A third strategy for fostering research is to commission brainstorming/focus groups consisting of faculty, athletic directors, coaches, athletes, and journalists so each group can identify and prioritize research topics from their perspectives. Collating these topics into one or multiple lists would stimulate research projects and enable researchers to document the need for the studies they propose in grant applications. Funding agencies often consider the relative importance of research topics when awarding grants, so lists of systematically prioritized topics would help researchers obtain the support they need to do quality research.

A fourth strategy would be to do a study of the experiences of faculty, academic support personnel, and others who have experienced negative consequences when raising issues about intercollegiate sports. If we knew more about the patterns of their experiences we might be able to assist campus administrators in efforts to produce more transparency in programs related to athletics. For example, maybe the NCAA needs an independent ombudsperson who can advocate the interests of scholars and other university personnel concerned enough about issues of academic integrity to do research and to identify problems.

Conclusion, But Not the End

There are real and important conflicts between the culture and goals of academic faculties and the culture and goals of most athletic departments. As far as careers and paychecks go, the definitions of merit in these two realms are very different. Ideas and beliefs about learning and teaching as well the processes through which learning and teaching occur are very different. Academic faculty question the educational relevance of sports because athletic departments and teams don't use traditional curricula or processes of evaluation that document learning and teaching in terms allowing them to see "education in operation." Athletic department administrators and coaches feel that faculty do not understand what and how they teach and cannot do research that would assist them in meeting the expectations that dominate their lives. The width of the academia-athletic department culture gap varies from one institution to another, but it's a rare campus, even in the NCAA Division III category, where the gap is narrow enough to allow regular, constructive, and policy-informing communication.

Let me give you an example. Now that I'm retired and don't have a semester-to-semester teaching schedule, I write and do public speaking. But my favorite activity is to go to a campus

for a week or two as a “scholar-in-residence,” present a general campus lecture and do a series of presentations in classes covering topics related to the sociology of sport. I meet with students and faculty and let people know that I’d also like to meet coaches and athletes, if people are willing. When I was a scholar-in-residence for a week last April (2007) at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY, my visit was arranged by faculty who wanted to bridge the academia-athletic department culture gap and facilitate constructive conversations between people from both sides. But for the reasons I just mentioned, this did not occur as they hoped. I even led a focus group-like discussion involving faculty, athletic directors, coaches, and athletes—about 15 people in all. I’m not a trained focus group leader but issues from both sides of the gap were put on the table so that we could at least begin to brainstorm possible gap reducing strategies. After two hours of generally cordial interaction, we had progressed to the point where two faculty members and two coaches agreed that they’d try to meet and discuss things further and in more concrete terms. But I wasn’t optimistic that this commitment would lead to more than friendly relationships that didn’t exist before, and I would have bet my honorarium that it wouldn’t narrow the gap at an institutional level.

As I sat on the plane flying back to Denver, I wondered what I could have done to more effectively instigate change at the institutional level. Further, I was discouraged by knowing that if I failed to bridge the gap at Hobart and William Smith Colleges where commercialism and dreams of playing professional sports were practically non-existent, what could I do elsewhere? My sense of discouragement was exacerbated by the memory of another failure. Between 1983 and 1990 I worked to found and administer a center designed in part to prevent the formation of an academia-athletic department culture gap as a new intercollegiate sport program was developed on campus. I was dedicated to this task; I did it for no pay and it added about 15 hours a week to a workload that was already beyond normal expectations. But as the athletic department grew the gap formed and grew consistently wider, despite what I thought were creative strategies. [Actually, this is a long and interesting story.]

Then I began to wallow in discouragement when I thought of what could be done at the University of Colorado campus in Boulder where a lawsuit involving the football team and its staff recently settled for an amount that would fund at least 100 good studies of how to bridge the academia-athletic department culture gap; and the lawyers fees that the University insurance policy paid would fund at least an additional 100 major research projects. For me or anyone else to think that funds would be dedicated to such research rather than an insurance policy to cover the next such lawsuit is unrealistic – and probably pure fantasy.

After presenting and revising this paper, I’d like to feel more hopeful than I did in the spring of 2007. There is much we need to know about the sport experiences of the young people on thousands of diverse and variously organized intercollegiate teams. How do they integrate those experiences into their lives? When does this integration serve, interfere with, or directly undermine educational goals? How can research encourage those whose ideas are currently based on sport-builds-character ideologies think more critically about intercollegiate sports and education? I could add pages of additional research questions, but they would be identified with me and the academic side of the gap even though I spent a number of years on the other side as well. This means that the questions must emerge out of a continuously sponsored series of gap-jumping conversations focused on improving higher education as an embodied experience.

Topic 13. A brief history of NCAA academic reforms

- 1983—NCAA passes Proposition 48 setting for the first time minimum standards for first-year athletes to be eligible to play on any Division I team.
- 1986—Proposition 48 takes effect. First-year students are eligible to participate in sports at a Division I school only if they have a 2.0 GPA in 11 core subjects in high school and a score of 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or 15 on the American College Test (ACT). Proposition 48 permits students who meet only one of the requirements (SAT/ACT score or a 2.0 GPA in core courses) to be accepted at college and given athletic aid if they graduated from high school with a 2.0 GPA in all their courses. But these partial qualifiers are not permitted to work out with their teams during their first year, and they have to forfeit one year of athletic eligibility, which means they can play for only three years instead of the normal four years.
- 1990—U.S. Congress passes a law requiring all colleges to make public their athlete graduation rates starting in 1991.
- 1991—*USA Today* and major media companies publish data on athlete graduation rates; this creates an embarrassing situation for many universities with low rates.
- 1991—The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics publishes its report, “A New Model for Intercollegiate Athletics.” The report emphasizes that university presidents must control big-time sports, and that intercollegiate programs must have academic and financial integrity.
- 1993—NCAA boosts Proposition 48 initial-eligibility requirements to a 2.5 (not 2.0) high school GPA in 13 (not 11) core courses and a minimum score of 68 (not 60) on the new ACT scale, or 820 (not 700) on the new SAT scale.
- 1996—New initial-eligibility requirements take effect. All high school students wishing to play sports at Division I or II schools must register and be certified by an NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. An index of GPA and test scores is used to determine “qualifiers” and partial qualifiers.” The lower the GPA is, the higher the test scores must be. For example, a student with a 2.0 high school GPA must score an 86 on the ACT or a 1010 on the SAT to be fully eligible; a student with a 2.75 GPA needs a 59 on the ACT and a 720 on the SAT. Students failing to meet the standards cannot play in games, practice with a team, or receive athletic grants during their first year, although they can get need-based financial aid.
- 1997—Passage of the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act requiring all NCAA member institutions to provide annual reports on gender and resource allocation. This federal requirement enables the government and other interested parties to monitor gender equity and enforce compliance.

Other NCAA changes in the 1990s

Athletic dormitories were eliminated; training table was limited to one meal a day; new limits were placed on the hours teams can practice during a week and on the length of seasons; new definitions were formulated of “academic progress” that must be used to determine student-athlete eligibility on a year-to-year basis; new degree completion grants were established for selected students who have completed athletic eligibility and remain 30 or less hours away from graduation; all athletic departments must conduct annual exit interviews with student-athletes as

part of a team-by-team self-assessment process; and junior college transfers must have 48 credits and a two-year degree to be eligible.

Jay Coakley

Topic 14. School-community relations

Interscholastic sport programs do two things in the realm of school-community relations: they attract attention, and they provide entertainment. In other words, interscholastic sports help make the school a part of community life, and they help bridge the gap between “town and gown” that exists in some communities. One of the only times people who do not have school-aged children hear about the local high school or college is when there is a news story about one of its sport teams. Even for some of the parents of students, the fates of varsity teams may be of more noticeable concern than the fates of academic programs. Sports are an easy connecting point with schools and they may become “identity pegs” for significant numbers of people in a local community. Through sports, people can maintain an interest in their local high school or college without having to know about all the complex dimensions of academic life.

It is easy to see that sports can connect schools to communities, but we do not know if these connections benefit academic programs or the achievement of educational goals. Benefits are most likely in small towns, where local attachments to high schools are strongly reinforced by school teams. In the case of larger high schools in metropolitan areas, and universities with big-time sport programs, people may attend games and read team scores in the paper, but their attachments to the schools themselves seldom go beyond occasional attendance at games.

Do high schools and universities have an obligation to provide community entertainment through sports? It is difficult to argue this case, even though some communities seemingly have become dependent on school sports for weekend enjoyment. When varsity sports are defined as entertainment, the needs of student-athletes and students in general often become secondary to the need to put on a good show. This has happened in a few high schools and more than a few intercollegiate programs around the United States, and it usually subverts the achievement of educational goals.

Jay Coakley

Topic 15. Ethnicity and sport participation among high school girls

The U.S. Department of Education has collected data on the ethnic minority backgrounds of girls who play interscholastic sports over the past 16 years. Here is a comparison of the data for 1990 and 2002. The data can be used to see if a particular group has representative participation rates over time. The data in the following table indicate that the participation of white girls has increased more than the participation of girls with other ethnic backgrounds. Most important in the table are the figures in the fourth column indicating that Native American and Asian girls have experienced little or no increases in participation over the 12-year period represented.

Does this lack of increase represent a problem? Does there exist a systematic form of exclusion that disproportionately affects girls in these categories? In the case of Asian girls, is the absence of an increase related to immigration and the proportion of first-generation students in schools? Is poverty a factor for either or both of these categories of girls? Are these girls missing out on particular benefits of sport participation that are not being produced through other means, such as physical fitness, identification with the school, opportunities to be noticed and have their interests advocated by adults? These are questions that await research. Do you have any hypotheses to explain the patterns? If so, let me know (jcoakley@uccs.edu).

Increases in Interscholastic Sport Participation Among U.S. Sophomore Girls by Ethnicity, 1989–90 to 2001–02.

ETHNIC GROUP	1989–90 Participation Rate	2001–02 Participation Rate	Percentage <i>INCREASE</i> over 12 Years
White	44%	56%	27%
Hispanic (any race)	29%	36%	24%
Black	38%	47%	24%
Native American	38%	40%	5%
Asian	36%	36%	0%

Source: Based on data collected by the U.S. Department of Education and analyzed by Sylwester (2005).

Topic 16. Conformity or leadership in high school sports

Too many high school programs are organized to emphasize obedience rather than responsibility. But in fact, the educational benefits of sport involvement are greatest when athletes themselves make decisions affecting the nature of their sport participation. This does not mean that athletes do not need guidance; they do. But they also need chances to become independent, autonomous young adults. Autocratic coaches with rigid, externally imposed sets of rules reduce these chances and perpetuate immaturity and dependence—even though they may win games.

My recommendation is that student-athletes in most high schools should be more involved in decision making for their teams. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. In fact, sports are ideal settings for students to learn responsibility through decision-making. For example, team members should be involved in the development of team rules and enforcement policies, they should be asked to play a role in developing team strategies, plays, and game plans, and they should have opportunities to voice their thoughts during games, meets, and matches at appropriate times. Why should adult coaches make all the decisions on student sport teams? How does that build responsibility?

Ideally, the coaches' goal should be to prepare teams to be self-coached. What would happen if coaches had to allow players to coach themselves for the last two games of the season? This would force coaches to build real leadership among players. Athletes also should be involved in the evaluation of coaches and sports programs. Internships should be organized to enable senior athletes to serve as assistant coaches, or as coaches for junior varsity and junior high school teams. This would give them opportunities to handle many different tasks and get management experiences in the process.

Varsity sports should be based on the principle that responsibility grows out of making decisions and living with the consequences of those decisions. Responsibility is learned, not implanted in a young person's character by the commands and warnings of adults in positions of authority. Unfortunately, many varsity sports are organized to teach conformity and obedience instead of responsibility and independence. This should be changed carefully so that sports can become more clearly educational.

Jay Coakley

Topic 17. Should Intercollegiate Athletes Be Paid?

Pay for student-athletes is one of the most contentious issues facing big-time sport programs today, and it highlights what happens when universities enter the entertainment business. As ESPN Radio announcer said in 1999, “College sports are the only show business in which the actual entertainers get no money. Believe me, the NCAA isn’t getting six billion so we can watch . . . a bunch of chem majors [play basketball]. . . Give the player some money, for crying out loud.”

My sense is that universities should get out of the entertainment business, or they should treat their student-athletes as workers. They could do this in a variety of ways. For example, they could provide need-based financial aid packages enabling student-athletes to receive stipends for educational resources, vouchers for trips home to visit families on holidays, and insurance coverage for all medical bills and treatments through college (and indefinitely for any condition indirectly related to their sport participation).

Monthly stipends for living expenses also might be appropriate, and a variety of strategies could be developed so that student-athletes could combine learning with receiving revenues from their sports. For example, faculty members could work with student-athletes to involve them in individual and team-based business ventures. A Student-Athlete Speakers’ Bureau could train athletes to do paid speeches for groups; part of the fee would go directly to the speakers, and part would allow the bureau to pay athletes to give speeches to worthy nonprofit groups that cannot afford to pay a fee. This would combine community service with developing public speaking skills.

There are many ways to combine learning with forms of fair compensation to student-athletes. Most require creative leadership, but that’s what universities have, or are supposed to have.

Jay Coakley