

## Organized Youth Sports Today

# Troubling Signals from Youth Sports

### **The number of kids in organized youth sports**

- 30-40 million kids playing organized sports each year<sup>i</sup>
- 2-4 Million coaches – less than 20% have received any type of training!<sup>ii</sup>
- 85% of these coaches are dads coaching their own children<sup>iii</sup>
- 80% of the kids are in non-school programs
- 20% in school programs
- Less than 20% of high school students are involved in sports<sup>iv</sup>
- 6.5 million interscholastic athletes<sup>v</sup>
- 500,000 h.s. coaches – less than 8% receive specific education to coach<sup>vi</sup>
- Participation in non-school programs, i.e. clubs has increased
- Participation in school programs has decreased

### **What the Kids are saying about abuse**

- 45.3 percent of kids surveyed said they had been called names, yelled at, or insulted by coaches.
- 21 percent said they had been pressured to play with an injury.
- 17.5 percent said they had been hit, kicked, or slapped.
- 8 percent said they had been called names with sexual connotations.
- 3.4 percent said they had been sexually abused. This final number is very conservative because not many will admit it.

Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission 1993

### **Why they Quit**

The Youth Sports Institute at Michigan State, in a survey of 10,000 kids nation-wide, listed the top ten reasons why kids quit organized youth sports:

1. They lost interest
2. They were not having fun
3. It required too much time
4. The coach played favorites
5. The coach was a poor teacher
6. They got tired of playing
7. Too much emphasis on winning
8. They wanted to participate in other non-sport activities
9. They needed more time to study
10. There was too much pressure

Another study conducted and presented in a paper to the American Alliance for Health surveyed 1,183 athletes ages 11-14.

- 35% said they planned to stop playing the next year.
- The same researchers surveyed the parents of 418 athletes aged 6-10, and 50% of those parents said their child was not interested in the sport any more and would stop playing.
- Other studies conclude that as many as 70% - 80% of the kids who begin playing a sport at an early age have dropped out by age 15!<sup>vii</sup>

## **Why they participate**

1990 Athletic Footwear Association Survey of over 20,000 kids nation-wide asked, "Why they participate in sports."

1. To have fun
  2. To improve their skills
  3. To stay in shape
  4. To do something they are good at
  5. The excitement of the competition
  6. To get exercise
  7. To play as part of a team
  8. The challenge of the competition
  9. To learn new skills
  10. To win
- Over 65% said they participate in sports to be with friends.
  - 15% were reluctant to participate
  - Only 20% want to improve their skills
  - Winning was LAST.

A UCLA Sports Psychology Lab survey found the same results.

USA Today and NBC Poll in 1990, published in USA Today September 9, 1990 found that:

- 71% of the kids surveyed said they wouldn't care if no score were kept in their games.
- 37% said they wished that no parents would watch them play
- 41% said they have awakened in the night worrying about an upcoming game
- 51% said that they see other kids act like poor sports frequently

Another Study on Children in Sports found that:

- 95% would rather have fun than worry about winning
- 90% said they would prefer to be on a losing team if they were able to actually play rather than warm the bench on a winning team.

# NFL/PTA Findings

Summer 2003

Results from a survey of more than 400 parents conducted at the National PTA Convention:

- 84 % of parents believe that youth athletic programs place too much emphasis on winning
- 64 % of parents say their children have been dissatisfied with their sports experience
- 44 % said their child has dropped out of an activity because it made them unhappy
- 92 % felt sports programs were important to the overall development of their children
- 56 % said the biggest negative is that sports are too competitive
- 50 % said they would like to see coaches be less focused on winning

## What the Numbers say about Scholarships and pro contracts

Of the 20-30 million kids playing youth sports, 1 in 4 youth stars become stars in H.S.

### Soccer:

- 284,000 H.S. boys playing Soccer – 8,000 (3%) are playing in Div. I & II schools  
There are only 3,306 full scholarships available.
- 209,000 H.S. girls playing Soccer – 7,000 (3.3%) are playing in Div. I & II schools  
There are only 3,479 full scholarships available.

### Football:

- 1 Million boys play H.S. Football - 41,000 play in Div. I – II schools 3.8%  
17,000 in Division I-A and 24,000 in Division II
- Only 150 make it to the NFL - .00015 %

### Basketball:

- 1 Million boys and girls playing H.S. Basketball - only 17,000 (1.7%) make it to Div. I and II schools.
- 500,000 Boys playing H.S. Basketball - only 50 make it to NBA - .0001 %

**The Odds are 6,000 to 1 for a H.S. football player to make it to the NFL**

**The Odds are 10,000 to 1 for a H.S. basketball player to make it to the NBA**

### Hockey:

According to recent reports, there were 600,000 registered players in the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association.

- 53% were under 12 years of age
- 35% were between 12-15 years of age
- 11% were over 15 years of age  
**i.e. only 1 out of 10 kids in Canada was still playing hockey at 15 years of age**

Of 30,000 boys born in Ontario in 1975 that played organized hockey only .0004% made it to the NHL.

- By the time they were Bantam age, 22,000 were still playing.
- Junior Clubs drafted 232 and of these, 105 never played a single game.
- 90 finished junior hockey, and
- 23 went on to college hockey.
- 48 of that total were drafted by the NHL in 1993, and two others signed as free agents.
- 38 ended up with contracts, and
- 22 of the original 30,000 played at least one game in the NHL.
- At age 24, 11 were still in the NHL. That's about .0004%

## **The Ultimate Goal:**

Average Salaries of professional athletes for 2002:

MLB	\$2.3 million annually - up 5.2% from 2001
NBA	\$4.2 million annually
Hockey	\$1.4 million annually
NFL	\$1.1 million annually

\* The Arizona Republic April 3, 2001

Cost to take a family of 4 to:

MLB game	\$114.82
NBA game	\$214.00
NHL game	\$230.00

## **Annual Costs of supporting a child on competitive (elite, all-star) teams:**

Travel Hockey:

Prep School – Exeter Academy \$22,000/year for board and room; Culver Academy \$25,000/year for board and room.

Two week summer camp at Exeter \$1,150

Cost of travel hockey for one season:

\$600 – \$1,500 basic membership per year  
\$800 for skates, sticks, helmets, pads, and gloves  
Travel: airfare, hotels, food \$5,000 - \$10,000 just for one player. Parents often travel with their children!

It can cost as much as \$10,000 for one child to play a year of travel hockey. Multiply that by 7 years of travel hockey = \$70,000.....more than enough for tuition, board and room at Stanford, MIT, Harvard, or any Ivy League school for two full years. !!!!!

**Ironically, 59% of parents rate the concept of all-stars or select teams as “fair” to terrible.**

## **Coaches**

2-4 Million coaches

- Less than 20% have received any type of training!

In a USA Today national survey:

19% were rated as being “excellent”  
55% were rated as being only “good”  
22% were rated as being “fair”  
3% were rated as being “poor”

That means, according to this survey, that one of every four youth coaches is less than good as seen by parents. More than half were only seen as “good.” That’s not particularly encouraging.

## **The Fundamental Questions Parents Must Answer**

1. What are your goals for your child’s participation in sports?
2. What are your expectations for family life?
3. What will be the impact on the rest of the family?
4. What are the anticipated costs in \$?
5. What are the anticipated costs in time spent per week? (3 practices @ 3.5 hrs total per practice including drive time = 10.5 hrs/weekly average - plus drive/travel time and playing time for 60 game/season.)

The ultimate question: Is (was) it all worth it?

## **Conclusions:**

These statistics all indicate that our system of youth sports in this country is not doing what everyone thinks. Clearly, it is not serving the needs of our children and their families. These statistics dramatically expose the myths about sports being fun for all, educational, character building, providing a foundation for life-long exercise and physical activity, fostering teamwork, and promoting self-confidence.

Our system of organizing youth sports is broken, dysfunctional, and serving the needs of only a minute number of athletes and families.

All of these findings and statistics are an indictment of how youth sports have failed. The research is clear. There is more at stake than just the reform of organized youth sports. It is also about our culture, public policy, and Quality of Life issues that affect every American.

## Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Sports

*Will you still love me if I don't win?* Chris Anderson

### **The Potential Drawbacks of a Demanding Sport**

1. The time commitment prevents kids from participating in other activities, school functions, parties, trips.
2. Athletes are often physically and emotionally spent because the workouts are so strenuous. They often have trouble keeping up with homework, and can't get enough sleep.
3. Athletes feel limited as to who their friends can be, because there is not enough time to allow for any free time with non-athlete friends.
4. There is not enough family time. A parent's responsibility often ends up revolving around supplying food, transportation, a bed, money, and domestic service.
5. Young athletes are not able to develop and practice any social skills in the real world. They are isolated in their own small world of the sport.
6. Sometimes a coach ends up spending more time with the kids than do their parents and therefore become more of an influence than the parents.
7. There never seems to be any time for a kid to have to himself or herself.

### **The Potential Benefits**

1. The commitment to something difficult gives young athletes a greater opportunity to develop their sense of determination, will, character, and other inner strengths so necessary for success.
2. When athletes commit to a demanding sport that asks so much of their time and energy, they place themselves in a position of risk. Somewhere along the way they are going to fail. There is always the potential for humiliation, rejection, pain, hurt, disappointment. But in a supportive atmosphere – created by a coach, parents, teammates and friends – surviving the failure becomes a valuable life experience.
3. Athletes feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves when so much of their lives revolve around a sport that is year-round. They can develop a sense of belonging which is a basic human need, particularly for young people.
4. When athletes are committed, disciplined, and have the will and determination to go to all the workouts, competitions, meetings, and trips, they gain a sense of accomplishment in what they are doing.
5. There is a depth of friendship available in demanding sports. Their friends can become one of the main reasons they stay in the sport.
6. Their ability to set goals, discipline themselves, manage their time and responsibilities teaches them valuable skills that will benefit them throughout life.
7. The physical conditioning develops their bodies and allows for their participation in a healthy activity.
8. Provides a safe, supervised, healthy atmosphere (maybe) to share with friends.
9. A skilled and nurturing coach can often offer direction and advice where parents cannot, and remain in contact with them long after they leave the sport.
10. A demanding sport offers kids a chance to experience a sense of passion in their lives. So many kids have nothing except school that offers them an opportunity to feel passionate about something.

11. With so many school districts doing away with athletics, music, and art, there are far less creative avenues for young people to pursue.

The right program can offer a great deal to you and your child. At the same time, some programs can be far more negative than positive. This can occur when there is too much emphasis on performance and minimal attention to the development of the Whole Self. It also occurs when a coach is very controlling, dominating, and abusive to kids. If young athletes are being shamed, humiliated, and hurt, there is something very wrong with the way they are being coached. This is not a positive coach, no matter how “successful” your child might become under this coach.

## **National Health Concerns**

Youth sports, inter-scholastic sports, and school Physical Education programs have contributed to a troubling trend in the health of Americans. In a very real sense, because youth sports have failed to prevent a 70% attrition rate by the age of 15, it is fair to say that youth sports have failed to provide for life-long physical fitness and good health.

The National Center for Health Statistics reports that seven in ten adults do not exercise regularly, and nearly four in ten are not physically active at all.

Nationally, only 29% of high school students had daily physical education in 1999, down from 42% in 1991. Many states have dropped the requirement for Physical Education altogether, and by 1999, only 61% of students – in elementary and high school - had gym class at least once per week.<sup>viii</sup>

Nearly half of American youth aged 12-21 are not vigorously active; about 14% of young people report no physical activity; participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly as age or grade in school increases; 61% of U.S. adults are overweight or obese; and 12% of children between 6-11 are overweight.<sup>ix</sup>

**Obesity kills an estimated 300,000** Americans every year. Smoking kills 430,000 every year. Obesity doubles the risk of premature death and increases the risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, stroke, and depression.

McDonald's spends 1,000 times more on advertising than the federal government spends on promoting good nutrition. The food industry spends \$2 billion a year persuading kids to eat fatty, sugary foods. Kids watch as many as 40,000 ads a year including 10,000 ads for fast foods.

Half of the school lunches served in Arizona don't meet federal nutrition standards. Hamburgers in some schools have twice as many calories as McDonald's, and French fries served in cafeterias have 1,077 calories. One school district makes \$2 million a year selling fast food snacks in vending machines.<sup>x</sup>

Annual medical spending attributable to overweight and obesity is \$93 and \$117 billion in state and federal health care costs. That's more than it cost for the War in Iraq! The federal government spends \$1,500 per person treating disease and about \$1 on prevention. Disease treatment has added 5 years to our lifespan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while public health and prevention programs have added 25 years!<sup>xi</sup>



---

<sup>i</sup> Gould, D., and Weiss, M. (eds) *Advances in Pediatric Sport Sciences*, Vol.2: Behavioral Issues (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1987) pp. 55 ff. cfr also Weinberg, R.S., and Gould, D., “*Children’s Psychological Development Through Sport*,” in J. Silva and R. Weinberg (eds) *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1987) pp 449-466. Also, Gerdy, John. Editor. (2000) *Sports in School: The Future of an Institution*. NY: Teacher’s College Press, Columbia University. P. 55.

<sup>ii</sup> Gerdy, John. Editor. (2000) *Sports in School: The Future of an Institution*. NY: Teacher’s College Press, Columbia University. P. 55.

<sup>iii</sup> Engh, Fred. (1999) *Why Johnny Hates Sports*. NY: Avery. P. 73

<sup>iv</sup> Gerdy, John. (2002) *Sports: The All-American Addiction*. Jackson, MS. University of Mississippi Press. P. 125

<sup>v</sup> NFHS, The National Federation of High Schools, *The Future of Coaching Education in America*, Rainer Martens, Tim Flannery, and Paul Roberts.

<sup>vi</sup> IBID

<sup>vii</sup> Engh. Op.cit. p. 3. cfr. also USA Today, September 9, 1990.

<sup>viii</sup> Gerdy. *The All-American Addiction*. p. 129

<sup>ix</sup> National Center For Health Statistics, The Center For Disease Control and Prevention. On the WWW at: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/faststats](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/faststats); [www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/overwght99.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/overwght99.htm); and [www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/hestats/obese/obese99.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/hestats/obese/obese99.htm).

<sup>x</sup> *Siccing Sam on fat foods*, Peter Aleshire, in *Viewpoints*, The Arizona Republic, May 25, 2003.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.