

Recommendations for Communities

**Helping Community Leaders Establish a Strong
and Positive Youth Sports Culture**



Presented by

National Alliance for Youth Sports



Purpose Statement/Letter of Support



Dear Community Officials, Recreational Leaders, Parents and Concerned Citizens:

There is no doubt that sports participation has the power to be tremendously beneficial for children. Statistics tell us that youth sports participants will also be less likely to be involved in crime, violence, drugs and other unsafe activities – an outcome that makes all of our communities better places to work, live, play and raise our families.

On the other hand, we are well aware of incidents of violence and negative behavior over the years across the youth sports landscape. Many communities have taken strides to improve their programs through background checks and volunteer training. However, there are many communities and even more independent leagues which have yet to put any measures in place to ensure their programs are safe and fun for participants.

It is imperative that elected officials and recreation staff unite – for children’s sake – and work toward strengthening our sports programs. It is our responsibility to have proper control and oversight of all youth sports programs in the community.

With that in mind, I urge you to give careful thought and consideration to the implementation of the Recommendations for Communities set before you. I firmly believe that the Recommendations for Communities represent practical solutions for resolving the negativity that infects today’s sports programs for children.

No more excuses. Regardless of the size, state and structure of youth sports in your community, begin to make changes today. Children deserve safe, positive and fun sports experiences and you play an important role in making it a reality. Together we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Marty Johnston

Chairman of the Board, National Alliance for Youth Sports



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I. Executive Summary



Organized youth sports programs are one of the greatest resources available for instilling valuable life skills in youngsters. More than 30 million children participate in a wide range of organized youth sports programs nationwide – and they deserve to enjoy a fun, safe and rewarding experience.

For many years, the climate surrounding many programs had become less than ideal. Reports of physical altercations and verbal sparring among volunteer coaches, parents and officials had dramatically increased. The alarming nature of these problems led the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) to convene the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children’s Sports in 2001. Recreation professionals from 34 states across the country gathered in Chicago, Illinois to examine the widespread problems affecting organized sports and to devise usable guidelines that can be implemented in any community. In 2002, NAYS originally released the Recommendations for Communities document as a consensus of the contributions from the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children’s Sports.

Since the Recommendations for Communities were first released, changes have occurred in the youth sports environment that required NAYS to re-examine these initial guidelines, most importantly, the dramatic increase of volunteer, parent-led youth sports organizations (YSOs). To further analyze the state of youth sports, especially as it relates to the relationship between public entities and volunteer YSOs, NAYS conducted a Facility Usage Survey of recreation professionals in 2012. Results showed:

- **88%** of public entities have volunteer youth sports organizations (YSOs) utilizing public facilities.
- Nearly **70%** of recreation professionals agree public entities are responsible for the actions of YSOs using their facilities.
- **92%** of recreation professionals agree volunteer league administrators/board members would benefit from an education program. However, only **19%** require it.
- **82%** of recreation professionals require volunteer coach training for their own programs. However, only **48%** require it of YSOs using their facilities.

Due to the increased prevalence of YSOs, the inconsistency in management techniques of volunteer organizations, as well as the perceived lack of control over public facilities from the recreation standpoint, the updated Recommendations for Communities resource were deemed necessary.

The Recommendations for Communities now address how communities can improve the culture of youth sports and deliver a fun and stress-free playing environment for youngsters by focusing on reform, education and accountability. These Recommendations outline aggressive steps that are aimed at mending a multitude of problems – such as over-aggressive parents, untrained league administrators and win-at-all-cost youth coaches – that are leaving an indelible mark on youth programs.

I. Executive Summary

The detailed Recommendations are organized into three parts:

- **Part 1 - Adopt a community philosophy that makes youth sports safe and positive for children.**
- **Part 2 - Appoint a professional youth sports administrator to ensure adherence to the philosophy.**
- **Part 3 - Hold everyone associated with community youth sports accountable for their behavior.**

The *Recommendations* also include supporting evidence for taking action in youth sports policy, including an overview of children's sports in this country, the purpose of youth sports, a look at how they are commonly structured and the valuable role they play in a child's physical and psychological development. Specific problems and issues affecting youth sports are addressed, as well as the primary factors behind these problems and what steps can be taken to change the culture of children's sports.

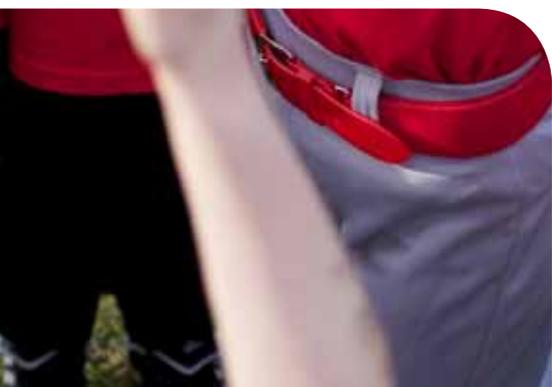
The update to the Recommendations incorporates a self assessment exercise for community leaders and recreation professionals, refined tactics for overseeing YSOs, and customizable templates to easily implement recommended procedures.

A youth sports program should not be something that a community simply hopes will turn out well. There simply is too much at stake when the emotional and physical well-being of children are involved. Changing the culture of children's sports will not be easy. In fact, most people will probably resist change at first. But focusing on high quality youth sports is not as difficult as it may appear, because the resources and training programs exist - and so does a plan to implement them.

If the next generation is going to reap all the wonderful benefits that organized youth sports provide, it is imperative that the Recommendations for Communities is fully understood and adopted by every youth sports organization.



II. The Recommendations for Communities



The following is a three-part plan that was developed by highly qualified recreation leaders around the country who attended the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports. The three parts are equally important and dependent on the others.

Part 1 - ADOPTING A COMMUNITY PHILOSOPHY THAT MAKES YOUTH SPORTS SAFE AND POSITIVE FOR CHILDREN

“Local leaders must adopt a resolution that clearly states how youth sports should be operated in their community.”

The bottom line is if the leaders in the community believe strongly enough in the value of sports in the overall development of children both physically and emotionally, and that there is a strong consensus that the philosophy of its youth sports programs must focus on putting the needs of the children first, then positive changes can be made to the existing youth sports culture.

First, local leaders must adopt a resolution that clearly states how youth sports should be operated in their community. The resolution should include guiding principles aimed at enhancing the overall youth sports structure, as well as reinforce the community's commitment to ensure that every program is held to the highest standard and conducted in the appropriate manner.

To draft a written community youth sports philosophy, gather input from all levels of community youth sports staff, recreation and parks professionals, elected officials, outside sports providers and other stakeholders. Use the following sample resolution as a guide:

II. The Recommendations for Communities

Sample Resolution for Communities

Total buy-in at all levels is necessary to change the culture in youth sports. To ensure that the entire community operates consistently with regard to children’s sports, it is necessary for the public entity to adopt a resolution.

WHEREAS, {the name of community} recognizes the need to inspire changes in youth sports to make the experience safe, positive and fun for everyone involved; and

WHEREAS, we believe in the benefits and importance of youth sports as a means to teach the children of this community values and skills that will be of benefit to them throughout life; and

WHEREAS, we believe that in order to realize the true value of youth sports participation and to provide a safe, positive and fun environment for youth and their families to participate, we must raise the standards among the users of our community’s youth sports facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Recommendations for Communities that were derived from the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children’s Sports outlines a comprehensive community strategy to assist us in meeting these objectives; and

WHEREAS, we believe that our community must appoint a qualified professional youth sports administrator who has been trained and certified to oversee all organized youth sports programs to ensure a high standard among the users of our community’s facilities; and

WHEREAS, we believe that league organizers and administrators must be educated on how to provide a safe, positive and fun youth sports environment before being granted permits to use facilities; and

WHEREAS, we believe volunteer coaches and parents must receive orientation and education as to their individual roles and responsibilities in our community’s effort to raise the standards of youth sports programs and that volunteer coaches and parents be held accountable for their behaviors; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary and desirable to establish requirements and procedures for youth sports organizations utilizing the public facilities; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the {the name of community} in a meeting duly assembled and by the authority thereof, recognize and encourage official implementation of this Community Strategy to improve the culture of youth sports for all participants.

PASSED AND APPROVED:

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Organized youth sports are a highly complex structure. Every entity and YSO must be required to meet the standards set forth in the resolution. Regardless of whether the group using the facility is an affiliate of a national youth sports group such as the American Youth Soccer Organization, Little League or Pop Warner football; or is a local organization without an affiliation, the philosophy and rules laid down by the community to ensure that every child has a positive and safe experience must be strictly monitored and enforced equally for everyone.

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Part 2 - APPOINTING A PROFESSIONAL YOUTH SPORTS ADMINISTRATOR TO ENSURE ADHERENCE TO THE PHILOSOPHY

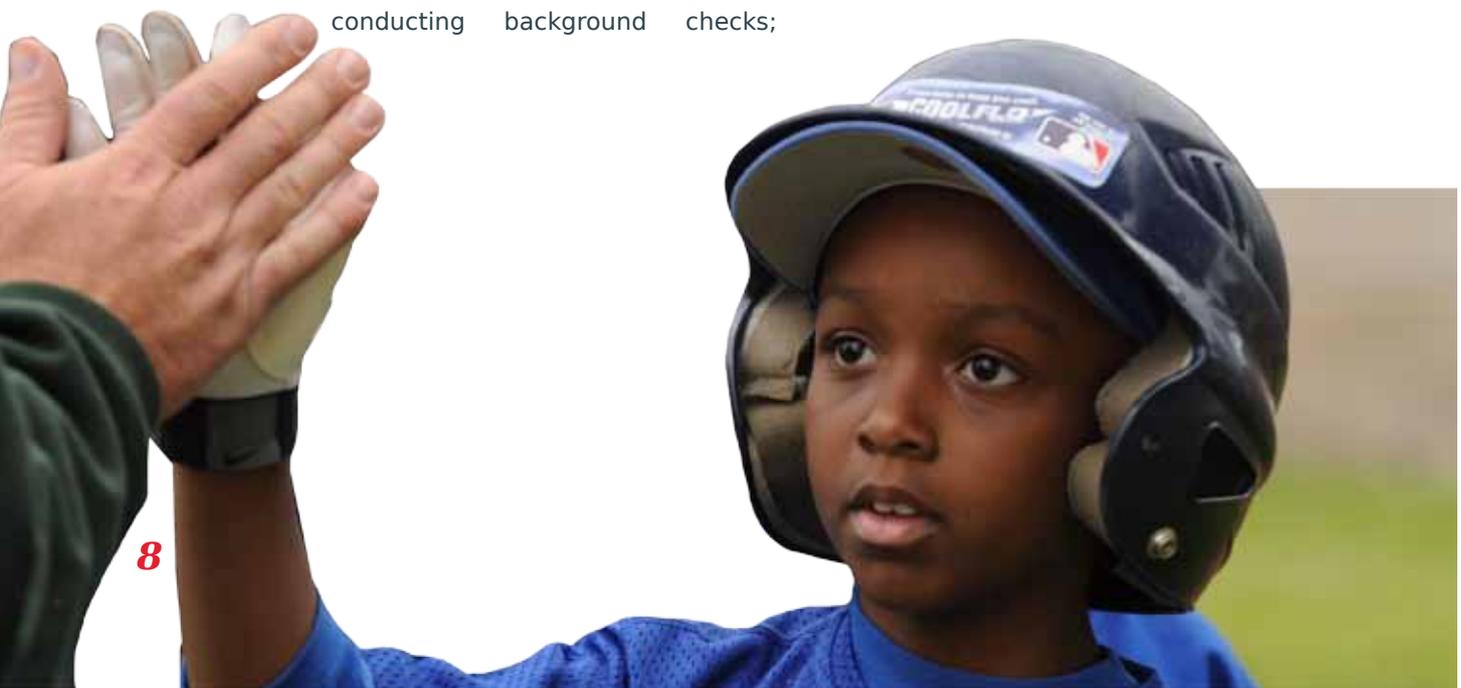
The most effective approach available for ensuring that the community's stated philosophy is adopted is to appoint a professional youth sports administrator to oversee the entire youth sports operation. This is much the same as in the educational system whereby a superintendent is responsible for providing parents with the comfort that teachers are trained and knowledgeable individuals working to ensure a quality education for every child.

Along with overseeing their own programs, the professional youth sports administrator's role is to work closely with each group that applies to use the community's facilities to ensure that the rules and policies are clearly understood, and that deviating from them will not be tolerated in any way. The responsibilities of this position should also include providing information and resources to enhance the sports experience for not just children, but adults, in whatever their respective roles may be. Every group that applies to use the community's facilities should be required to participate in a brief educational program that addresses the importance of youth sports in a child's development, and what the behavior expectations are for the adults, including coaches, officials and spectators. A number of useful resources are available to professional youth sports administrators, including screening tools for conducting background checks;

sportsmanship training programs for parents; and coaching orientation programs for volunteers, among others.

The professional youth sports administrator is a vital component of the youth sports structure. Every school system across the country functions at a higher level of efficiency with a superintendent of schools overseeing everything that takes place within his or her jurisdiction. The superintendent is also ultimately responsible for the quality of the education each child receives. So clearly, it is imperative that a qualified professional youth sports administrator is appointed to fulfill the same type of role that is needed for a community's youth sports programs. With a professional youth sports administrator in place, programs can be strictly monitored to ensure that they meet established standards; and problems that arise can be addressed in a more timely fashion with the person adhering to the established protocol for resolving issues before they escalate into something unmanageable.

Refer to the following for a complete overview of the professional youth sports administrator's role, as well as the qualifications needed to fulfill the position. Keep in mind these responsibilities may be filled by an existing staff member.



II. The Recommendations for Communities

Professional Youth Sports Administrators

Why is it important to have a Professional Youth Sports Administrator?

- To raise the professionalism of youth sports administration.
- To be connected to all youth sports programs in the community.
- To enforce the community's policies and procedures.
- To have someone who is accountable and educated about how youth sports should operate and who can act as a liaison between the recreation department and the community leaders and elected officials.
- To understand the needs of the community (keep a finger on the pulse).
- To demonstrate a community's dedication and commitment to ensuring safe, positive and fun sports experiences for all youth sports participants.

Suggested Credentials of the Professional Administrator

- College degree
- Certification in youth sports administration
- Excellent communication skills (verbal and written)
- Commitment to positive and safe sports for children
- Leadership skills essential
- Maintain professional administrators credential

Roles and Responsibilities of the Professional Youth Sports Administrator

- Serve as the ultimate authority within the community as it relates to youth sports. The professional youth sports administrator should oversee the entire youth sports community, making decisions that can positively affect all participants.
- Educate and inform community leaders and elected officials on a regular basis.
- Responsible for working with volunteer youth sports organizations (YSOs) and determining Facility Usage – must ensure that all YSOs understand the community's philosophy with regard to youth sports and the requirements for utilizing the public entity's facilities.
- Responsible to provide or oversee educational requirements for all volunteers, including:
 - ◇ Volunteer Administrators (Board of Directors)
 - ◇ Volunteer Coaches
 - ◇ Parents
- Develop relationship and communicate regularly with all YSOs that utilize the public entity's facilities.
- Respond accordingly to all complaints and conflicts.
- Develop relationships with other community-based youth sports providers regardless of whether they utilize public facilities.
- Create a task force of community volunteers who are committed to making youth sports safe and positive.
- Make a commitment to quality youth sports by setting an example for the community with its own programs.
- Maintain professional certifications and stay up to date with youth sports news, trends and opportunities.
- Attend conferences and networking events with other Professional Youth Sports Administrators.

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Part 3 - HOLDING EVERYONE ASSOCIATED WITH COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORTS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR

To provide the greatest protection for children, all groups using public facilities must adhere to high standards. Public agencies (e.g. parks and recreation departments and school administrators) must build collaborative relationships with every organization that utilizes the public facilities to ensure that all children have a safe, positive and fun experience.

“It is imperative that the public agency utilize an application process to identify and select only qualified groups that desire to use the public facilities for organized programs.”

In order to build relationships with groups that embrace the community’s youth sports philosophy, the public agency must create a system that fosters quality and accountability. To maintain high standards that promote the well being and safety of children, it is imperative that the public agency utilize an application process to identify and select only qualified groups that desire to use the public facilities for organized programs.

Every YSO that desires to use the public agency’s facilities and fields must be required to demonstrate the following:

- Must adopt the community’s youth sports philosophy.
- Must fully complete facility usage application. *See Sample Facility Usage Application*
- Must provide proper documentation of insurance coverage that meets the minimum requirements.
- Must agree to abide by the policies and procedures established by the public entity.
- All volunteer administrators, volunteer coaches and parents must successfully complete an orientation program that includes an understanding of the community’s philosophy, policies and procedures, and specific knowledge required for each position.
- Must administer background checks for all program volunteers.
- Must submit organizational by-laws for review

Through the professional youth sports administrator, YSOs that use facilities can be monitored and regularly evaluated on their effectiveness. Those who fail to adhere to the policies prescribed will risk the opportunity to use public facilities in the future. Since the professional youth sports administrator is the liaison between the YSOs and the public entity, he/she also handles complaints, reviews YSOs on a continual basis to ensure that they are meeting the agreed upon standards laid out in the resolution, and responds when YSOs violate the established codes of behavior.

When the situation arises in which more than one organization is requesting facility usage at the same time and date, a prioritization system should be in place. Including the prioritization process in written



II. The Recommendations for Communities

policies and procedures can help to avoid conflict. Some factors that could play a role in an organization receiving priority over another are their good-standing status with the recreation department, their participant residency rate, if their program is recreational in nature as opposed to competitive, and if their program is in-season.

It is strongly recommended to meet annually or more frequently with all YSOs. Attendance at these meetings by the President or Director of each organization should be a requirement to obtain facility usage. Meetings should be used as an opportunity to review changes in policies and procedures, verify each organization's requirements for facility usage, update contact information, and allow organizations to provide feedback to the community. Also, education and training about related youth sports news and trends should also be provided to YSOs. Providing training at meetings will make YSOs see the recreation department as a helpful resource, thus building upon the partnerships.

In addition to planned meetings with volunteer organizations, incorporating site visits and spot checks into established monitoring procedures is recommended. One of the best ways to gauge if an organization is adhering to a community's youth sports philosophy is to see them in action.

The following are suggested education and accountability standards to include in policies and procedures and to require of all programs and YSOs:

Volunteer Administrators/Board of Directors Orientation (for those volunteers who are responsible for the planning and implementation of out-of-school youth sports programs to help them set and maintain high standards for their league for the benefit of the children in their care). The following areas should be covered:

- Philosophy of Children's Sports
- Managing Parents
- Overseeing Volunteers
- Managing Conflict
- Risk Management
- Fund Raising
- Emergency Procedures

Volunteer Coach Training (to "sensitize" coaches to their responsibilities when working with children in sports and hold them accountable to a Coaches' Code of Behavior). The following areas should be covered:

- Philosophy of Children's Sports
- Skills and Drills of the Sport
- Injury Prevention
- Practice Organization
- Game Rules
- Legal Liability
- Psychological, Physical and Social Needs of Children
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Concussion Training
- Emergency Procedures



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Parent Orientation (to educate and motivate them to create the ultimate youth sports experience while holding them accountable for their behaviors). The following areas should be covered:

- Philosophy of Children’s Sports
- Program Goals
- Role of the Parent
- Role of the Coach
- Providing Positive Reinforcement
- Being a Role Model
- Discussing Concerns
- Expected Parent Behavior



Comprehensive **Screening** Requirements for Volunteers

Each YSO must screen all volunteers and staff by using as many elements of a comprehensive screening process as possible. The eight steps in a comprehensive screening process are the following:

- A Written Screening Policy
- Job Descriptions for All Positions
- Completed Application Forms
- Completed Consent and Release Forms
- Verify References and Information
- Interview Applicants
- Conduct Formal Background Checks
- Evaluate Results



“A screening process is not just a background check.”

A screening process is not just a background check. There is no way to be 100 percent certain about any person involved in youth sports. The more preventative measures that are taken, however, the more likely children and your organization will be protected. To view Background Screening in Youth Sports, which includes detailed information about the screening process and provides general guidelines as well as disqualifiers as they pertain to youth sports volunteer background checks, visit www.nays.org.

An important tool for public entities that allow outside YSOs to utilize public facilities for games and practices is the Application Form. Each YSO must submit a form along with all required documentation by the set deadline date. This sample form can be used as a guide for drafting a customized application.

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Sample Youth Sports Facility Usage Application

Name of Organization/Group/Program _____

Describe Program Scope (include number of children served) _____

Mailing Address _____

Primary Contact Person: _____

• Address _____

• Telephone _____

• Email _____

Secondary Contact Person _____

• Address _____

• Telephone _____

• Email _____

Requested Facility (physical location) _____

Request Dates

• Start Date _____ • End Date _____

Required Attachments

- List (names and addresses) of program leadership (board)
- Documentation of proper insurance coverage
- Verification Form acknowledging receipt, understanding and distribution of policies and procedures
- Documentation of Training for Board of Directors, Volunteer Coaches and Parents
- Documentation of Screening Procedures
- Organizational bylaws, policies and procedures

The {name of public entity} is an equal opportunity agency and will not exclude or discriminate, with regard to its services, programs and activities regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or disability. Users of the {name of public entity} facilities or fields are also required to provide equal access.



III. Support for Taking Action

Structure of Youth Sports Programs

Organized youth sports exist to provide children, who are interested in participating, a positive and enjoyable recreation experience. Ideally, youth sports programs are structured so that they are open to all children, regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability; and every effort is made to provide financial assistance to those youngsters unable to afford participation, including the cost of safe equipment.

“The youth sports landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation over the years - and not all of it for the better.”

Virtually every community across the country offers some type of organized athletic activity for children. These typically range from the traditional sports of baseball, softball, soccer, basketball and football, to relatively newer sports like Ultimate Frisbee and lacrosse, for example. With the sheer popularity of sports, the youth sports environment has evolved into a complex array of opportunities for children.

The youth sports landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation over the years - and not all of it for the better. Generally speaking, typical sports seasons are being stretched longer and longer. Many parents are spending increased amounts of time shuttling children back and forth between two or three sports at a time. There is a proliferation of summer camps, travel teams, All-Star competitions and an endless string of practices. While there are far greater opportunities for children to participate in an organized setting than there were just a couple decades ago, this intricate structure that now exists

has virtually eliminated any chance for youngsters to enjoy free time playing simple pick-up games with their friends.

In most communities, the local government has a park and recreation department that provides youth sports programs and recreational activities in which parents may register their children. On public facilities, programs are either run by the public agency or volunteer, parent-run groups. An estimated 70 percent of all youth sports programs are operated by parent-interest groups, which use public facilities that are provided through community tax dollars. Most of these parent-run groups utilize facilities that are conveniently accessible, including those that are owned by the public agency or the school system. A small number of these parent-run programs provide their own private facilities.

Organized sports programs may also be held on private facilities, which are overseen by private groups and/or volunteer groups. Community-based organizations, such as the Boys & Girls Club, YMCAs/YWCAs, Police Athletic Leagues and church recreation departments also offer sports opportunities.

Parents who are dissatisfied with the programs of existing organizations often venture out and create their own programs so they can implement their own policies and rules. The perception that parents using public facilities are in some way an extension of the local program is often incorrect.

All organized sports programs are administered by adults, whose own motives, morals and beliefs influence, to varying degrees, how the program is conducted. These programs also feature many other tangible variables, including level of competitiveness, length of season, cost of participation, qualifications required for coaches and officials, and skill levels of the athletes involved, to name just a few.

III. Support for Taking Action

Take a moment to consider the youth sports landscape in your community.



III. Support for Taking Action

As more and more children are enrolled in organized sports programs, the competition for available facilities escalates, as well. In a model youth sports environment programs that embrace the concept of equal playing time for every child would take precedence over a program that operates similar to what is seen in the professional ranks where the best players play and the less talented rarely make it off the bench; where programs that teach parents what is appropriate behavior would have priority over those programs that allow parents to berate officials, players and other spectators; and programs that mandate training for volunteer coaches would have priority over those that hand over a group of youngsters to anyone who says they are willing to coach. But that is not how it typically works.

At times, public facilities are turned over to organizations or groups without any formal application or review process. Even if policies are in place to determine the best use of facilities, they are often compromised to accommodate a variety of interests. Either way, the facility becomes fertile ground for problems to emerge, which has become evident across the country.

The way youth sports programs are structured today across the country has opened the door for many wonderful opportunities for children. Unfortunately, that same structure is also a magnet for serious problems – both on and off the playing field – as most communities have not devoted the necessary time and attention to implement and enforce policies

that serve and protect the best interests of children. Because so many different parent groups and organizations are involved in the entire process, the risk factors involved have increased, as well.

The Value of Sports

Sports are one of the greatest tools that exist in society to help children develop positive character

traits and life values. Early adolescence is a time when children are looking for basic values that they can count on in their lives. Under the right conditions, many youth sports experiences can be enormously beneficial. Sports can help a young person learn the importance of teamwork, cooperation, hard work, setting goals and following rules, among many other lessons. (Hanson, K. and Savage, M. “Ethics in Sports.” Institute for Sports Law and Ethics. 2012.) In spite of this enormous potential for good, many youth sports experiences, which lose focus on what is truly best for children, can be emotionally damaging – and that damage can last a lifetime.

“A child’s experiences during these years are crucial, especially when we consider the positive role sports can play in their overall development.”

During the years in which most children are typically involved in organized sports they are learning about themselves psychologically, physically, emotionally and socially. During this stage their personalities are being molded, their bodies are going through all sorts of changes, and their minds are forming lasting impressions on the importance of sports in their lives. It is at this level that parents, coaches and administrators play the greatest role in making the sports experience positive, healthy and safe. Clearly, the results of a child’s experiences during these years are crucial, especially when we consider the positive role sports can play in their overall development.

III. Support for Taking Action

LIFE LESSONS

Children learn a multitude of important lessons through sports that are basic to leading productive adult lives in our society. Sports provide an ideal forum to teach such valuable fundamentals as ethics, abiding by the rules, winning and losing with grace, coping with success and failure, respecting authority figures, always striving to do your best, etc. These traits provide the building blocks that help young citizens of our communities become well-balanced adults, and which translate into leading productive lives. Activities at home, church, school and clubs, to name just a few, all play a big role in a child's growth and development. Organized sports are certainly at, or near the top, of that list.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

There is a strong, well-documented correlation between youth sports participation and academic success, as well as success in other walks of life. (LA84 Foundation 2012 Summit Report: Youth Sports & Academic Achievement.) Furthermore, a study conducted by Hardiness Research of Wyoming found that by a 2:1 ratio for boys and a 3:1 ratio for girls, those who participate in sports perform better in school, do not drop out, and have a better chance to get through college.

FOR GIRLS

A survey done by the Women's Sports Foundation found that girls who participate in sports are 80 percent less likely to have unwanted pregnancies and 92 percent less likely to get involved with drugs than those who do not participate in sports.

Numerous studies also indicate that sports participation for girls directly correlates to the development of positive attributes. Girls who play sports have higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression than girls who do not play sports; girls who play sports have a more positive body image

and experience higher states of psychological well being than girls and women who do not play sports; and girls who play sports learn about teamwork, goal-setting, the experience of success, the pursuit of excellence in performance, how to deal with failures, and other positive behaviors - all of which are important skills for the workplace and life. (Sabo and Veliz. *Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America*. Women's Sports Foundation. 2008) In fact, according to a survey of executive women conducted by MassMutual Financial and Oppenheimer Funds, 81% played sports growing up and 69% said sports helped them to develop leadership skills that contributed to their professional success. (From the Locker Room to the Boardroom: A Survey on Sports in the Lives of Women Business Executives. MassMutual Financial Group, 2002)

LIFELONG FITNESS

A study found that while levels of activity often decrease with age, those who were active as children were more likely to stay active as adults. Sports participation could create enjoyment of physical activity for a lifetime, thereby helping a child avoid a future sedentary lifestyle and the health problems and weight issues that correlate with inactivity. ("Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science and Sports"; Organized Youth Sport as a Predictor of Physical Activity in Adulthood; L. Kjønniksen, et al.; August 2008)

HEALTHY CHOICES

Sports and fitness activities promote a variety of healthy habits. In fact, rese th Medical School study published in the "Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine" found that sports play a protective role against smoking in youth, as those who do not participate in team sports are more likely to become established smokers. ("Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine"; Influence of Movie Smoking Exposure and Team Sports Participation on Established

III. Support for Taking Action

Smoking; Anna M. Adachi-Mejia, et al.; July 2009)

Students who play at least one sport are 40 percent less likely to be regular smokers and 50 percent less likely to be heavy smokers. Regular and heavy smoking decreases substantially with an increase in the number of sports played. (Escobedo LG, Journal of the American Medical Association, 1993.)

COMBAT OBESITY

In 2010, more than one third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese, and excess weight in childhood and adolescence has been found to predict being overweight as an adult (Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. Prevalence of obesity and trends in body mass index among U.S. children and adolescents, 1999-2010. Journal of the American Medical Association 2012.). The increased physical activity of youth sports participation will have a positive impact on obesity risk. The World Health Organization cited increased physical activity as a key factor in fighting obesity.

Physical activity helps control weight, builds lean muscle, reduces fat, promotes strong bones, muscles and joint development, and decreases the risk of obesity. ("Get Active." Let's Move! Campaign. Retrieved April 26, 2013)

Regardless of which sports they choose to pursue, children will reap the positive benefits since regular physical activity is the basis for a healthy and active lifestyle.

"Ask children why they participate in sports and the top response will most often be: to have fun!"

ENJOYMENT

Ask children why they participate in sports and the top response will most often be: to have fun! A study conducted by Michigan State University in 1993 found that the top 10 reasons why boys participated in non-school sports programs were 1) to have fun, 2) to do something they were good at, 3) to improve their skills, 4) for the excitement of competition, 5) to stay in shape, 6) for the challenge of competition, 7) to get exercise, 8) to learn new skills, 9) to play as part of a team, and 10) to go to a higher level of competition. The top 10 reasons why girls played non-school sports were 1) to have fun, 2) to stay in shape, 3) to get exercise, 4) to improve their skills, 5) to do something they're good at, 6) to learn new skills, 7) for the excitement of competition, 8) to play as part of a team, 9) to make new friends, and 10) for the challenge of competition.

All of the wonderful attributes that organized sports provide children are only attainable if standards are in place to ensure quality programming at all levels.

Issues & Problems in Youth Sports

The age-old notion that children's participation in organized sports should be fun, contribute to physical and emotional development, and enhance social skills has been swept aside in what has become an increasingly hostile environment that is ultra-competitive, high-pressured, and often encourages and rewards a do-anything-it-takes-to-win approach. Parents and volunteer coaches, the most important role models in a young athlete's life, pay lip service to the importance of good sportsmanship and simply doing the best they can. But it has become all too clear through their actions that what the scoreboard says at the conclusion of the game is what it is really all about. Experts have identified two main factors that play a role in determining whether youth sports are enjoyable or detrimental for young participants. The first is the quality of adult supervision and coaching. The second is the amount of pressure parents place

III. Support for Taking Action

on their children to perform. (Allowing Youth Sports to be Child's Play. Nationwide Children's Hospital Sports Medicine. 2008.) Adults, in their roles as coaches, league administrators and spectators, are often inflicting their misguided motives and ideals on youth sports and, in the process, depriving youngsters of what should be a fun-filled experience.

“A coach or parent’s unkind words or actions on the playing field may not make the headlines of the local newspaper or that evening’s TV newscast, but that does not mean the damage to the youngster is any less severe.”

Youth sports have become a hotbed of chaos, violence and mean-spiritedness. Physical and emotional abuse of children, rampant cheating, and total disrespect for opponents are but a few of the unacceptable behaviors being tolerated. These disgraceful behaviors have polluted the youth sports landscape, poisoned the fun, distorted child development and left behind countless children with broken hearts, crushed dreams and shattered psyches.

Unthinkable incidents have taken place over the years: Two women assaulted a mother leaving her unconscious following a youth baseball championship game; a youth baseball coach for children ages 12 and 13 was taken into custody on accusations that he grabbed and wrestled an umpire to the ground; a baseball coach assaulted one of his 13-year-old players during a practice; more than 30 adults brawled

at the conclusion of an under-14 soccer tournament game that led to three parents being arrested; a youth league baseball coach was thrown out of a game following a profane outburst that led sheriff's deputies to cite him for disorderly conduct; a 16-year-old was charged with attempted second-degree murder after he used an aluminum bat to bash the head of a pitcher who struck him out during a youth baseball game; an umpire and parent were called into police headquarters after exchanging blows at a baseball game among grade schoolers; a soccer dad was arrested after taking a swing at the father of an opposing player at a game; a parent was arrested on charges he hit a Little League umpire and cut one of his truck tires after a game; a parent had a complaint filed against him by another parent accusing him of yelling obscenities and threatening a child on the opposing team; and a youth soccer player fractured a goalie's cheekbone with a kick to the face at the end of a game that left the player unconscious, along with injuries to his eyes, nose, jaw and teeth.



III. Support for Taking Action

These are just a few examples of the many incidents that are taking place in big cities and small towns across the country. Sadly, there are thousands of other incidents of physical and emotional abuse of children that go unnoticed, or are simply ignored due to misguided adults who fail to distinguish the difference between sports at the professional and collegiate levels with those of children playing in youth leagues across the country. A coach or parent's unkind words or actions on the playing field may not make the headlines of the local newspaper or that evening's TV newscast, but that does not mean the damage to the youngster is any less severe.

As discussed earlier, children can learn many positive attributes through their sports participation that they can carry with them the rest of their life. Unfortunately, the same holds true for negative aspects as well. If children are told that it is acceptable to cheat in sports in order to win, then the message they are hearing is that it is all right to cheat in everyday life. If they see that violence is used to settle disputes on the playing field, then that is likely an option they will choose when they encounter a difficult problem later in life. It is a vicious cycle, and every child who is instilled with these attitudes is one

more person that is being sent out into the world with the negative tools to contribute to the moral decay of our society.

In an article entitled Kids Speak Out: Violence in Youth Sports that appeared in the August, 2001 issue of Sports Illustrated For Kids, 57 percent of the more than 3,000 responses said there was too much violence in youth sports; and 74 percent said they have seen out-of-control adults at their games. Thirty-six percent of the children cited embarrassment as the top emotion they felt when witnessing bad adult behavior, followed by disappointment (25 percent), anger (23 percent) and fear (16 percent). In response to what kind of bad behavior they had seen, 37 percent said parents yelling at kids, 27 percent said parents yelling at coaches or officials, 25 percent said coaches yelling at officials or kids, and 4 percent said violence by adults. When children were asked what is the best way to get parents to behave; 48 percent said the kids should tell their parents to relax, 36 percent said parents should be banned from games if they cannot control themselves, and 15 percent said they should have parents sign a code of conduct.

What children are saying

The Kids Speak Out: Violence in Youth Sports article that appeared in the August, 2001 issue of Sports Illustrated For Kids featured more than 3,000 reader responses to a youth sports violence survey. It found that:

57% of the respondents said there was too much violence in youth sports

74% said they have seen out-of-control adults at their games

36% cited embarrassment as the main emotion they felt while witnessing bad adult behavior

37% said they have witnessed parents yelling at kids

27% said they have seen parents yelling at coaches or officials

25% said they have seen coaches yelling at officials or kids

4% said they have seen violent behavior by adults

III. Support for Taking Action

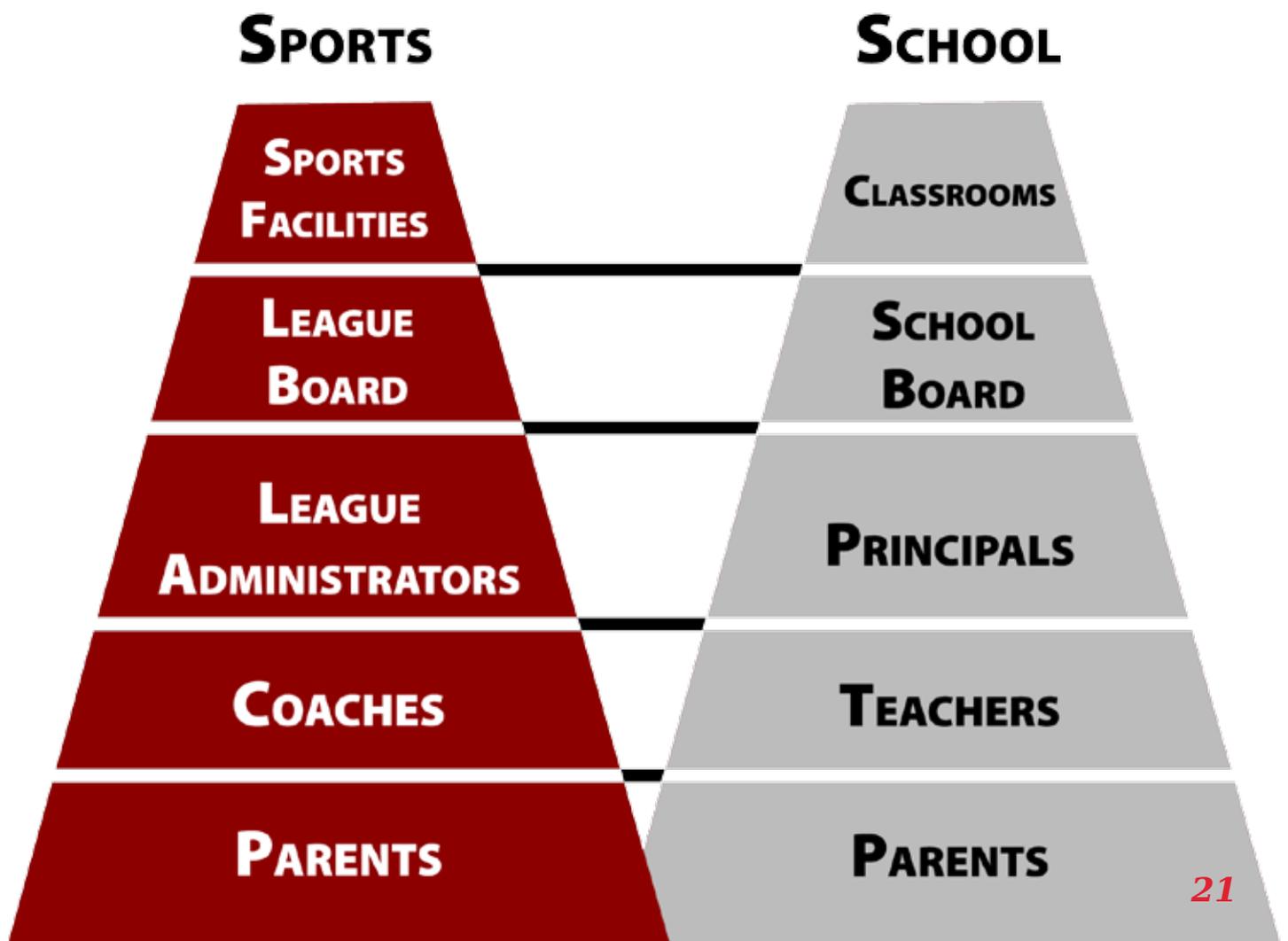
In 2008, the National Alliance for Youth Sports polled 2,100 parents nationwide on their views on violence in youth sports. The survey found that 76 percent of the parents polled said they have seen a coach arguing with another coach, official or parent at youth sporting events; and 29 percent of the parents said they have witnessed a physical altercation involving coaches, officials or parents at a practice or game.

One of the primary weaknesses found in many organized youth sports programs is that policies to deal with basic problems that often surface typically do not exist. In fact, even when policies are in place, they often are outdated or simply do not focus on the well-being of children, and consequently they end up fueling problems rather than alleviating them.

Furthermore, when a large number of adults are thrown together in a youth sports setting, they are each going to be bringing their own morals, attitudes and beliefs to the games. Consequently, the chances of conflict arising are quite high. The potential for these problems to surface is even greater when programs or trainings do not exist to inform coaches, parents, officials and administrators of their roles and responsibilities and expected behavior, as well as if no policies are in place to deal with basic issues that are sure to emerge at some point during the season.

Again, consider that the problems that are prevalent in youth sports today concerning violent behavior, verbal abuse and the mistreatment of children would not be tolerated in our school systems. So why are they accepted in youth sports?

To further illustrate the link between school and sports the following comparison can be made:



III. Support for Taking Action

Sparking Change in Your Community

Throughout the country 2 to 4 million volunteers fill vital roles as coaches and administrators in youth sports. These individuals are well-meaning, and more often than not have the best of intentions when they assume these positions. Unfortunately, it is estimated that less than 20% of volunteer coaches have been trained in their roles and responsibilities. This often leads to implementing policies and making decisions that do not serve the best interests of the children who are participating. Consequently, an abundance of youth sports programs currently exist that actually are exposing children to needless risks - both physically and emotionally.

Since the existence of organized youth sports in this country, programs have continually been conducted in which few, if any, individuals are held accountable for what transpires on the playing field. Programs that operate in a mode in which education and accountability are not an integral part of the process are asking for trouble in the form of needless and time-consuming litigation; exposing itself to a greater chance of on-field violence; and causing irreparable harm to countless children.

So how do leaders in the community begin to get all the adults involved to bond together and work toward a common goal? It starts with a firm belief entrenched throughout the community regarding the importance of positive sports in a child's life. This common understanding sets the framework to achieve top-quality programming. This foundation is necessary to get buy in from all levels of the community.

The positive attributes that are often associated with sports have been discussed and are proven.

Educational systems and sports programs are quite comparable when

it comes to their critical role in helping children learn and develop life-long skills. In fact, it can safely be said that youth sports is an extension of the child's education, where they can continue to learn and develop each of these important aspects basic to positive and productive human growth and development.

Ironically, youth sports are not held to the same high standard as our educational system, though. In our educational system children are not sent to schools with teachers who are not trained when it comes to teaching and working with children. So why does it happen in youth sports? At school functions, such as plays and spelling bees, adults are not allowed to yell at children who forget their lines or misspell a word. So why is similar behavior tolerated in youth sports when a child drops a ball or misses a tackle? In our educational system teachers who demean, ridicule or embarrass children would not be tolerated. So why when volunteer coaches exhibit the same type of behavior at a practice or game is it ignored and simply considered a part of the whole youth sports experience?



III. Support for Taking Action

If the operational philosophy suggested above is adopted, whereby the primary goal is to generate outcomes in sports programs that match the expectations of our school system, then great strides can be made in the overall delivery and effectiveness of sports programs.

There may be resistance in the community from recreation staff or volunteer organizations. There could possibly be feedback similar to “That’s not how we do things,” “We don’t need to do that” or “Our programs are just fine.” Resistance is a natural reaction and is bound to occur with the suggestion of change in any organization. Overcoming this resistance and sparking change in the culture of children’s sports is not as difficult as it may seem at first. Resources and educational tools are readily available that can enhance a community’s youth sports programming and help redirect its focus to ensure that youngsters reap the many benefits that are available. The Recommendations for Communities are one such resource.

Hopefully it will not take a horrible event close to home to trigger the need for change. Be proactive and avoid issues through proper policies and procedures. One inspired individual has the ability to positively affect generations of youth sports participants. Who will it be?



III. Support for Taking Action

Self - Assessment

Youth sports administrators beginning to make changes will benefit from taking an honest assessment of their community's current state of youth sports. Compare existing conditions and policies with attainable and measurable goals. Below is a sample form to help briefly assess a recreation department's oversight of youth sports operations.

National
ALLIANCE
For Youth Sports **ASSESSMENT**

Find out what you know about what's happening in your community by taking our youth sports assessment.

- 1. Does your community have an established youth sports philosophy?**
Yes No I don't know
- 2. Do recreation staff members have training specific to youth sports administration?**
Yes No I don't know
- 3. Does your community run any of its own youth sports programs?**
Yes No I don't know
- 4. Does your community have an established background screening policy for volunteers?**
Yes No I don't know
- 5. Does your community require volunteer coach training?**
Yes No I don't know
- 6. Does your community allow facility usage to any independent youth sports organizations?**
Yes No I don't know
- 7. Are more than 50% of the youth sports programs in your community administered by independent organizations?**
Yes No I don't know
- 8. Are board members/volunteer administrators of independent youth sports organizations required to complete a training program?**
Yes No I don't know
- 9. Are independent youth sports organizations required to have an established background screening policy?**
Yes No I don't know
- 10. Are independent youth sports organizations required to train volunteer coaches?**
Yes No I don't know
- 11. Do recreation staff members meet with all independent youth sports organizations at least once per year?**
Yes No I don't know
- 12. Are your community's facility usage policies and procedures reviewed by municipal leaders at least once per year?**
Yes No I don't know

IV. Conclusion

Conclusion

Fortunately, the majority of children who participate in sports have a positive experience. But the grim reality is that the youth sports system that is currently in place in many communities across the country actually facilitates the emotional and physical abuse of children and encourages inappropriate behavior. Every year more and more children are dropping out of sports – not because they don't like to play – but because the system is failing them.

There are several problems inherent with today's youth sports programming that have been addressed that are doing a terrible disservice to children. While many of these problems are well documented in newspaper accounts and on television reports, a significant number occur behind the scenes and oftentimes cause severe damage, as well. It is all of these factors that combine to undermine all the potential for good that exists in programs that are run in the appropriate fashion. Until now, the majority of these problems have been tolerated by most adults, with little concern for their effect on the emotional and physical well-being of children.

The delegates to the 2001 National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports agree that the Recommendations for Communities laid out in the preceding pages must be adopted to restore order and civility to youth sports, and help ensure that every child who steps onto the local field, court or rink has a safe and rewarding experience.

It is up to individuals within the community to take a stand and exercise leadership for positive change at the local level. There is simply too much at stake to let all the problems that have been well documented continue to destroy organized sports. The highly respected recreation leaders from around the country have spoken on the steps that need to be followed. The Recommendations for Communities are the voice of reason.

**For additional resources related to the Recommendations for Communities
visit www.nays.org/resources/recommendations.cfm**



National _____
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