



TrueSport



True Sport:

What We Stand to Lose in Our Obsession to Win



About the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA)

USADA is the nonprofit, independent, congressionally mandated entity responsible for the testing and results management process in the United States for athletes in the Olympic and Paralympic movement, upholding the Olympic ideal of fair play, and representing the interests of athletes.

USADA's formation in 2000 was the result of the tremendous courage of the U.S. Olympic Committee and its Joint Task Force on Externalization. This team thoroughly analyzed the doping problem in Olympic sport and recommended that an independent entity operate its anti-doping program. The independent model is now recognized worldwide as the gold standard for effective anti-doping programs.

With a mission to preserve the integrity of competition, inspire a commitment to the core principles of true sport, and protect the rights of U.S. athletes to compete healthy and clean, USADA is equally dedicated to its four main areas of service: 1) the anti-doping testing and results management processes; 2) programs that deter and detect incidents of doping; 3) research that advances anti-doping science; and 4) education initiatives aimed at preventing doping altogether, rooted in building a culture of integrity and priceless life lessons learned through true sport.

In this mission, USADA holds out True Sport as sport that is played fair, by the rules, with respect for oneself as well as for competitors and officials, and that balances the joy of competition and achievement with the fulfillment of challenge, participation, and sportsmanship.

USADA also aims to empower Americans with knowledge of the benefits of living healthy lifestyles through fitness, the dangers of using performance enhancing drugs, the basics of balanced nutrition, and the value of true sport.

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Preface

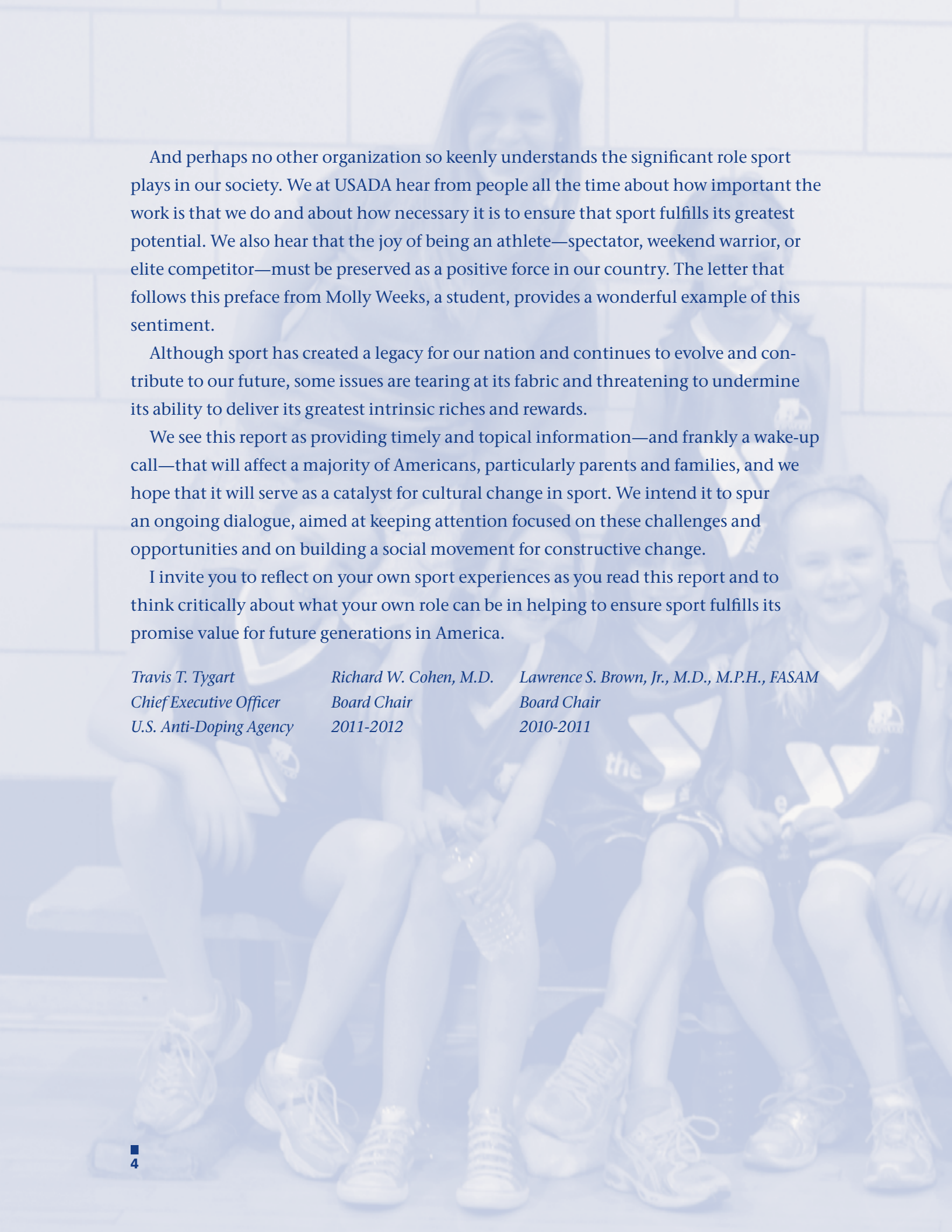
Sport plays a big part in our lives—whether through informal play with friends for fun and camaraderie, team competition as student athletes, coaching young athletes, or as parents of children who play sports both informally and in organized leagues. Like so many Americans, we are fans of sport at all levels, including professional, collegiate, Olympic and Paralympic, amateur, and youth.

In our roles at the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), it is an honor to be a part of helping to preserve the integrity of sport, inspire a commitment to the core principles of true sport, and protect the rights of our U.S. athletes to compete healthy and clean.

The entire U.S. Olympic movement has been praised for implementing one of the toughest and most effective anti-doping programs in the world and for making great strides in the advancement of all anti-doping programs. Olympic and Paralympic athletes are recognized as some of the most positive role models in sport today.

For the past 12 years, USADA has respectfully and faithfully served the nearly 50 national governing bodies for Olympic, Paralympic, and Pan American sports, as well as the tens of thousands of clean athletes who want and need us to be successful and whose partnerships have been critical to our success.

There is nothing quite like sport to bring people together, impart invaluable life skills and tools, and provide unique and profound experiences and adventures. It is undeniably one of our most beloved pastimes and endeavors—woven into the tapestry of our culture and responsible for countless benefits to the vast majority of Americans—in fact, so much so that the rewards and pressures of success in sport can lead some participants to embrace priorities that are seemingly at odds with the potential value of sport.



And perhaps no other organization so keenly understands the significant role sport plays in our society. We at USADA hear from people all the time about how important the work is that we do and about how necessary it is to ensure that sport fulfills its greatest potential. We also hear that the joy of being an athlete—spectator, weekend warrior, or elite competitor—must be preserved as a positive force in our country. The letter that follows this preface from Molly Weeks, a student, provides a wonderful example of this sentiment.

Although sport has created a legacy for our nation and continues to evolve and contribute to our future, some issues are tearing at its fabric and threatening to undermine its ability to deliver its greatest intrinsic riches and rewards.

We see this report as providing timely and topical information—and frankly a wake-up call—that will affect a majority of Americans, particularly parents and families, and we hope that it will serve as a catalyst for cultural change in sport. We intend it to spur an ongoing dialogue, aimed at keeping attention focused on these challenges and opportunities and on building a social movement for constructive change.

I invite you to reflect on your own sport experiences as you read this report and to think critically about what your own role can be in helping to ensure sport fulfills its promise value for future generations in America.

Travis T. Tygart
Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Anti-Doping Agency

Richard W. Cohen, M.D.
Board Chair
2011-2012

Lawrence S. Brown, Jr., M.D., M.P.H., FASAM
Board Chair
2010-2011

Values Make Differences

Dear USADA,

I am writing to thank you for what you do to encourage fair sport. Playing fair is very important to me.

I have played in many sports. The teams that I have played on play to win, but winning is not everything. Because of that, I make friends and I have fun and we play as a team. Sometimes the other team does not seem like they are having fun and that they are not playing as a team. Sports should be competitive but they should also be fun and a learning experience.

I feel that playing fair makes sports more fun for all kids. If the game is not fair, then the game is not fun. So what would be the point of playing the game? Why would people want to play an unfair game?

Coaches need to encourage sportsmanship so that kids have fun no matter what they are playing. If kids have coaches that are only about winning, then, if the kids don't win, what would the coach do?

If a child plays in a sport that has no sportsmanship then later on the child will not be fair, but if the child has a coach with great values, ethics, and sportsmanship then the child will play fair because the coach will have taught these important values.

Kids need coaches that are great so that if those kids become coaches then they will have great values, ethics, and sportsmanship also. Coaches should be competitive but they also need to be sportsmanlike and encourage teamwork and fair play.

Thank you again for making a difference and having the courage to support values in sports.

Values make differences.

Sincerely,
Molly Weeks

Age 10
5th Grade Student





Executive Summary

Sport touches the lives of most Americans, and it plays a critical role in educating youth and shaping the national culture. More than 162 million people in this country have some relationship to sport, whether they are active participants, parents of players, coaches, spectators, or volunteers. Studies show that participating in sport provides a wealth of benefits—physical, emotional, psychological, and social—and that it is a uniting force in bringing people together. Sport participation can help build character, encourage emotional growth, and teach players and spectators the value of honesty, respect, teamwork, dedication, and commitment.

We play sport for different reasons—because it is fun, because the glory of pitting our skills against those of well-matched opponents is exhilarating, because we value our relationships with teammates or coaches, or because we feel the personal accomplishment of pushing our physical and emotional limits. Whatever the reason, true sport—that is, sport played hard, fair, and clean—fosters personal growth and social goods. In sum, sport adds value to our lives.

Beyond these intrinsic rewards of sport are the extrinsic rewards—winning, fame, and notoriety. Certainly everyone who plays sport at any level aims to win—that is the nature of competition. But we know from research presented in this report and in the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency’s (USADA’s) research study, *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport’s Role in Society (Sport in America Report)*, that all too often the lure of the fame and notoriety can distort and undermine the value of sport and lead to a desire to win at any cost. There are many indicators that sport as currently pursued is not always delivering on its promise:

- an unhealthy focus on early specialization;
- overtraining;
- teams and programs that cut less developed and less talented children before they have a chance to grow into their bodies;

- overzealous parents;
- intolerant coaches;
- obnoxious fans; and
- athletes who use performance-enhancing drugs or otherwise break the rules

Elite professional athletes who have lost their moral way also are indicators that sport as currently pursued is not always delivering on its promise.

In early 2011, USADA published *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society (Sport in America Report)*, which was the culmination of a 2010 survey research project, conducted on USADA's behalf by the national research arm of Discovery Education. The survey measured the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the U.S. general population and young athletes in an effort to identify how sport affects society. The report examined the role sport plays in promoting health and wellness and social, emotional, and psychological development; whether sport is meeting society's expectations; the responsibility of role models in youth sport; the role of sport in character development; participation levels in sport nationally; and factors that threaten true sport in the United States. This report is a companion piece to the *What Sport Means in America* report. It is a review of the literature surrounding sport in America, in particular youth and sport, and it provides recommendations for ensuring sport fulfills its promise in America. The major findings are summarized below.

Sport Provides Physical, Emotional, Psychological, and Social Benefits

- Research has shown that physical activity delays the development of chronic diseases and conditions, such as heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis. Sport participation leads to higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness, stronger muscles, lower body fat, and stronger bones. Sport participants often see immediate health benefits, such as the ability to maintain a healthy weight and reduced levels of stress.
- The incidence of obesity in children and youth has doubled over the past 25 years and will affect one-third of all children by the third grade. Sport and physical activity play an important part in helping children maintain a healthy weight.
- Adolescence signals a time when physical activity and team sport participation start to decline. However, studies show that children who play organized sport at an early age have a greater likelihood of remaining active as teens and adults than those who do not play sport.
- In addition to improving physical health, sport also has shown positive effects on emotional, social, and psychological development. Children who participate in sport have shown improved academic achievement, higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and healthier psychological adjustment. Physical movement affects the brain's physiology and is associated with improved attention and better



information processing, storage, and retrieval. In addition, increasing energy levels outside the classroom is associated with higher attention levels in the classroom. Physical exertion leads to short-term relaxation, enhanced creativity and memory, better mood, and improved problem-solving abilities.

- Sport provides youth with opportunities to engage in positive relationships with adults and to safely navigate between right and wrong, thus helping build character. Youth who participate in sport have higher grades in school and complete more years of education. Through sport, young athletes learn valuable life skills, such as emotional control, the value of teamwork, and the ability to show initiative, and these skills transfer to academics, family life, and eventually the work environment.
- Studies have found that girls and young women who engage in sport gain confidence and self-esteem and are less likely to be overweight, depressed, smoke, use illegal drugs, or have teen pregnancies.

Why We Play Sport and Why We Stop

Most children start playing sport because it is fun, and when it stops being fun, they are likely to stop participating. Other motivators to play include receiving social support from peers, parents, and teachers; developing physical skills; getting in shape; and building friendships.



- Youth tend to drop out of sport when they lose interest or the sport is no longer fun, when the coach is unfair or a poor teacher, or when other nonsport activities become a priority. The *Sport in America Report* found that not having fun is the primary reason for quitting, followed by finding another activity, not being as good as teammates, and wanting to focus on schoolwork. In addition, as children age, winning becomes more important, and children do not want to play a sport if they are not likely to succeed.
- Girls drop out of sport at twice the rate of boys; the main reasons are that they find something else to do, their friends quit, they become shy about their bodies, or they want additional free time. In addition, girls often lack the self-confidence that boys have regarding sport, and girls fear embarrassment and the emotional consequences of failure at sport. Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds generally have limited access to sport and physical activity. As publicly funded programs have been eliminated and the economic crisis persists, limited access is a problem for at least half the families in the United States.
- Surprisingly, winning is not the most important motivator for starting to play sport. However, society continuously rewards winning and competitiveness, two values that both children and adults ranked at the bottom in the *Sport in America* survey.

The Importance of Developmental Awareness and Avoiding Early Specialization and Burnout

- Because children’s cognition, perceptions, behaviors, and motor skills progress at different rates, it is important that young children are not pressured to compete at levels beyond their developmental capability. Children who have lower skill and developmental levels should not be shut out of sport. Research shows that children and youth do not need to be competent in a sport to benefit psychologically. Because most youth do not develop a mature understanding of competition until age 12—the age when social skills and self-esteem development are critical—the quantity of play can be just as important as the quality of play in children.

- There is a current trend for children to specialize in a sport at an early age and train for that sport year-round. Experts caution against this practice and instead encourage children to participate in a variety of activities to develop a well-rounded and wider range of skills. Participating in a variety of activities and sport promotes a lifelong engagement in physical activity. If children do not have the opportunity to experience diversity in sport, they may be less likely to be motivated to specialize at a later age and more likely to burn out. In addition, focusing on one sport at an early age may have serious psychosocial and emotional consequences. Burnout also can occur as a result of aggressive coaches, physical and psychological exhaustion, feelings of reduced accomplishment, and no longer caring about the sport.
- At the other end of the spectrum of burnout is the risk of unethical behavior stemming from prioritizing winning at all costs, resulting from the over-professionalism of youth sport participation and the promise and pressure of significant extrinsic reward.
- Research has found that children cite winning as more important in organized sport than when they play informal games with peers. This has led developmental psychologists to suggest that informal settings are important for social and moral development.

In Search of Positive Role Models

- The *Sport in America Report* showed that Americans believe those with whom children interact directly, including coaches, parents, teammates, and teachers, all have a positive influence on today's youth, and they perceive Olympic athletes as offering children the greatest indirect positive influence. Olympic athletes were recognized—over college and professional athletes—to be the greatest indirect positive role models. Following the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games, research found that the U.S. Olympic Committee continues to be the most positively viewed sport organization of all American sports organizations and that it was considered to be a more sportsmanlike organization than, for example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Olympic athletes are seen in a positive light and are considered by many to be positive role models for children and to uphold a strong moral and ethical code.
- Although parents, coaches, peers, and celebrity athletes all play a role regarding whether a child's sport experience is a positive one, the research shows that coaches have the most influence. Good coaches can encourage players and help them improve their skills, perform at their top ability, develop character, and gain confidence. Coaches have many roles, including instructor, teacher, disciplinarian, substitute parent, social worker, friend, manager, and therapist. Coaches also are expected to teach the skills and techniques needed to play a sport, but often they are volunteers who do not have in-depth

knowledge or the resources needed to be positive mentors for young people. Effective, well-trained coaches can have an enormous impact on the children they coach by developing positive relationships, teaching healthy lifestyle habits and leadership skills, promoting sportsmanship and ethical character, and discouraging negative behaviors. By working with parents, coaches have the ability to create healthy, positive sport environments that encourage fair play and respect.

- Coaches who place too much value on winning can contribute to an unsportsmanlike environment. And coaches have the potential to push the psychological, emotional, and physical limits of their players to the point of harm—creating a hostile environment and potentially causing young athletes to leave sport forever. Children’s dislike of their coaches is a common reason for dropping out of sport.
- Girls expect different things from sport than boys. Girls generally seek social rewards through sport and look to their coaches to create positive experiences, and they want warm interpersonal relationships with their coaches.
- Parents’ positive encouragement can instill a greater sense of enjoyment, competence, and motivation in children. Fathers are more influential than mothers when their daughters are sport participants. However, if parents’ expectations are too high, children feel stress that can actually destroy their enjoyment of sport, create difficulties with teammates, and lead to the child quitting the sport. Positive

peer experiences and supportive spectator behavior contribute to the enjoyment and motivation for children in sport.

- High-profile athletes, especially those in highly visible sports, also serve as role models for children and youth. When these well-known athletes break rules, children are more likely to believe it is acceptable to break rules to win.

Teaching Ethics, Morals, and Values

Most of the adults who responded to the *Sport in America* survey believe that sport should play a role in teaching morality by promoting positive values such as honesty, fair play, and respect for others. Sport is not only about playing by the rules, but also about following the spirit of the rules, which requires fair play, clean play, and respect. Effective coaches should be content to lose games through fair play with an honorable team, rather than claim victory with athletes who lack sportsmanship and honor.

- More than 65 percent of Americans believe the state of sportsmanship has gotten worse over time, and even more believe that parents are the best qualified to teach sportsmanship.
- Children’s first encounter with fairness often comes from the behavior of coaches and referees. When children have opportunities to play and improve their skills, they will be more likely to find satisfaction from mastering skills, enjoying the game, and achieving their



personal best. As a result, they also will be more likely to display ethical behavior both on and off the field.

- The *Sport in America Report* showed that many adults believe that sport places too much emphasis on winning and too often overlooks rewarding effort and participation. A good balance is needed so that children have a healthy desire to win, which fosters competition. The narrow focus on winning should broaden to emphasize teamwork, integrity, accountability, sportsmanship, respect, and striving to give one's best effort. Whatever else we do about sport, it is

essential to ensure that children and youth are having fun.

- More than 80 percent of adults believe that bending the rules in sport is cheating and that it should not be tolerated for any reason. Most children understand that breaking the rules in sport is unfair and wrong and that striving to win does not justify cheating.
- Most Americans also say the use of performance-enhancing substances is the most serious problem facing sport, and they believe that athletes who use these substances are unethical and should be punished for this type of cheating.

What We Can Do to Achieve True Sport

It is important to stop and remind ourselves that in sport, like so many other areas of life, experiences can be as important as outcomes. The experience of preparing for and playing sport provides the essential intrinsic rewards that successful athletes talk about. How then can we best support sport in this country and ensure that our children and grandchildren benefit from the great lessons that can be derived from true sport? Survey research finds that, as a nation, we say that we care most about the intrinsic values sport offers—fun, fair play, integrity, teamwork, self-esteem, self-discipline, patience, sense of community, and the like—yet we systematically reward the elements we have ranked as least important—winning and competitiveness.

We have reached a tipping point that requires acknowledgement, commitment, collaboration, and ultimately action in order to protect sport for current and future generations. For people who participate in sport, it can be a vital part of their lives, even if their lives are rich with other interests, other paths to excellence, and relationships outside of sport. The research described in this report, combined with the *Sport in America* survey results, points to six foundational changes we must make to ensure sport fulfills its promise now and into the future.

1. Reward what we value.


Communities and sport organizations must find ways to ensure that “having fun” is always at the top of the list of goals for any athlete, that fair play is required, and that good sportsmanship and respect for opponents, the rules, and the game are recognized and rewarded. This means paying close attention to how sport is executed—are the principles of teamwork, integrity, accountability, sportsmanship, respect, and personal best as important as winning? Are we watching for signs that children and youth are enjoying what they are doing rather than responding to the pressures and needs of others?

2. Teach what we value.

Sport organizations, whether in school, clubs, or in the community, need to encourage active and engaged discussions about what true sport means. We need to identify and develop strategies for communicating the values of true sport to athletes, officials, coaches, parents, and fans, and provide coaching education opportunities to arm them with proper tools for success.

3. Explore new ways to organize youth sport.

There is much good to be found in many youth sport programs around the country. More children are playing sport than ever before, and many communities have made concerted efforts to provide venues—formal and informal—for children and youth to train, play, and compete. Communities need to ensure that “late bloomers” are not shut out of sport forever. All children deserve the opportunity to hone their skills at their own developmental pace. Programs to accommodate later bloomers might include, for example, skills camps,



positive integration into existing teams (for example, “must play” rules that all parties understand and accept), or programs that are based on developmental levels rather than age.

Programs should be available for freshman and junior varsity teams to ensure continuity of playing experience for those who are not able to continue at the varsity level. In addition, organizers of youth sport need to become more family-centric. If a family has more than one child or a child is engaged in more than one activity, league organizers and coaches have to learn to respect the right of the parent and/or child to make reasonable choices, especially at earlier ages, about family priorities. Efforts to be a well-rounded individual should not be met with punishment or extra bench time. And fees to play should not become so high that families have to choose which child can play and which cannot—or whether anyone can play.

4. Provide a landscape of opportunities.

Early specialization is a significant problem plaguing youth sport at the school, community, and elite levels. Children are discouraged from playing multiple sports or from engaging in nonsport activities. Parents need a chance—and permission—to get off the hamster wheel that youth sport has become. Creating venues where children can compete at their own level and on their own time—leaving room for other activities—will be good for them and good for their parents. Parents need permission to say “no” to a sport culture that is more concerned about winning than their child’s happiness, well-being, and healthy development. Exposing children to many activities promotes balance.

5. Model the way.

Celebrity athletes are not the only role models in sport; in fact, the *Sport in America* survey found that coaches and parents are more important role models than anyone else. As adults, it is our responsibility to embrace and model true sport values. Although everyone has a responsibility in ensuring sport plays a positive role in society, adults working with or around young athletes play the most central role, whether they are coaches, teachers, parents, or fans. We cannot control what professional, college, or other high-profile athletes do, and when they set a bad example, our children need to have the experiences and supportive environment to recognize that bad behavior and reject it. Providing and pointing out positive role models allow children “to be what they see.”

6. Create a cultural shift to ensure sport fulfills its promise.

As a nation, we must model and support the true spirit of athletic competition—that is, sport that upholds the principles of fair play, sportsmanship, integrity, and ethics. By working together, leveraging existing programs that promote true sport, and identifying ways to build new pillars for an atmosphere of good sport, we can dramatically improve the promise of sport in the United States, restoring it as an authentically positive force. The foundation of such a movement should include programs that advance fairness, excellence, inclusion, and fun and that promote ideals that enable us as individual citizens, clubs, teams, schools, districts, communities, cities, and states to work toward achieving true sport at all levels.

Which World Do You Want for Sport?

WORLD A

- In the middle of a game, a college soccer player punches an opponent in the back, pulls her ponytail, and throws her to the ground.
- Professional golfers celebrate loudly as one of their teammates finishes the last hole, carrying on with their noisy cheering with the intention of disrupting the putt of the last player on the opposing team.
- A World Cup soccer player pretends he has been hit in the face by another player in order to fool the referee, when in fact he was hit in the shin, unintentionally.
- A college basketball coach is found guilty of breaking NCAA rules regarding the payment of money and other gifts to players he is trying to recruit.
- A company markets videotapes to parents of infants with the promise that they will give the children a head start in sport.
- The father of a softball player is so upset over a call that he threatens and swears at the umpire. He is arrested and spends 5 nights in jail, followed by a requirement to provide 40 hours of community service.
- A high school tennis player has a conflict between attending a match and an orchestra performance. The tennis coach tells him if he doesn't show up for the match, he won't play the rest of the season. The player reports to the tennis courts and spends the entire match on the bench, thus missing both his music performance and the chance to play his sport.
- A high school basketball team defeats another team 100-0, with the winning coach never putting any of his second team into the game.
- A fourth grader tries out for a community swim team and is told she won't make it if she doesn't give up her dance classes.
- Professional ice hockey fans vent their frustration at the officials by littering the ice with bottles and other items after the final goal was scored during a playoff game.
- A girls' soccer team (U14) is suspended for the entire fall season after a teenage referee is harassed and physically threatened.
- A six-year-old girl ends her T-ball game in tears because her father yelled at her in front of the team for missing a fly ball.

WORLD B

- A high school basketball player unintentionally trips an opponent and immediately stops, turns, and helps the player off the ground, giving up the opportunity to block a shot that won the game.
- A softball pitcher helps an opponent round the bases on a home run because the batter is clearly injured after turning back to tag first base.
- Parents in a community organize “free play days” for children to play sport without coaches, referees, or interfering adults.
- A professional baseball player plays clean throughout the era of heightened steroid use in the sport.
- An editorial in the *San Jose Mercury News* cites the fact that fewer than 200,000 of the nation’s 75 million school-age children ultimately will earn full-ride scholarships for their athletic prowess, concluding that, “It’s past time for the 99 percent of parents whose children won’t win college scholarships to reclaim control over youth sport and bring back sanity and fun to our children’s lives.”
- Fans on both sides of the field cheer as a disabled student who serves as a team manager is passed the football and races to score a touchdown.
- A star college football player puts his future NFL career on hold to pursue a Rhodes Scholarship and his goal to become a neurosurgeon.
- When a star high school quarterback learns that his own coach had made a deal with the opposing team to allow him to set a record in his final high school game, he writes a letter to the director of the conference requesting that his final pass be omitted from the conference record book, saying “I would like to preserve the integrity and sportsmanship of a great conference for future athletes.” His request was granted.
- A major league first base umpire botches a call that would have sealed a perfect game for the pitcher. The umpire admitted his mistake when he watched a replay of the call after the game. The next night, the pitcher presented the lineup card to the umpire, shook his hand, and patted him on the back.
- An Olympic swimmer at the Beijing Olympics asks an official to delay the start of the heat because an opponent has torn her swimsuit.
- With seconds left in a tie game, a college soccer player kicks a ball out of play because an opponent is lying on the field hurt.
- Several states institute awards for schools demonstrating consistent good sportsmanship regardless of their win-loss record.



I. Introduction

People have been playing sporting games in one form or another since antiquity. Sporting events appear in earliest mythology, and athletes were major celebrities in Ancient Greece. Over the centuries, crowds have gathered to watch sporting competitions, with sometimes violent, nationalistic outcomes. More recent times have witnessed the growth of formal, more organized sport, governed by sets of rules and expectations for fair play. Athletes might be highly paid professionals, Olympians, college or high school players, children in community leagues, or adults engaging in weekend or evening pickup leagues. Sport is played in the backyard, the city street, the stadium, the arena, the natatorium, or anywhere space can be found that can accommodate enough players to constitute a match.

Sport plays a major role in American life. More than three-fifths of U.S. adults—approximately 162 million people—claim some relationship to sport-related activities, including 25 percent who are actively engaged in sport as participants, parents of children in sport, coaches, or volunteers.¹ Slightly more than 1 in 3 American adults describe themselves as sport spectators, and of these, nearly 4 in 10 describe themselves as sport fanatics.

Participation in highly organized youth sport has become all-encompassing in the United States and is regarded by many as a significant cultural event of modern times, even as a rite of childhood—and parenthood. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census show that the number of youth involved in organized sport in the United States was estimated to be more than 50 million.² A 2003 survey by Grunbaum³ found that 57 percent of high school students reported playing one or more sports at some time in their school or community. The National Federation of State High School Associations⁴ gathers data annually on the number of student athletes nationally and found that the level has increased every year over the past 20 years. Survey data from the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association⁵ show that the number of high school boys' and girls' teams increased

nearly fourfold between 1990 and 2005. In 2007-2008, 4.3 million boys and 3 million girls played on a high school varsity team. Surveys of younger children, ages 9 to 13,

show a participation rate of roughly 39 percent in organized sport.⁶ However you count youth sport participation in America, it is significant and diverse.



Girls and Women Playing Sport

On June 23, 1972, Congress enacted Title IX of the Educational Amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which assures that, in part, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Today, a generation of females has grown up in the post-Title IX era; they have participated in sport and expect the benefits of participation to be available for their daughters as well.

There has been a significant increase in the number of girls participating in sport over the past several decades. One study estimates that 8 million girls grades 3 through 12 participate annually (compared to 12 million boys).⁷ According to tracking by the National Federation of State High School Associations, 294,000 high school girls played interscholastic sports in 1971. The most recent survey data show 3.1 million girls playing high school sports in the 2008-2009 school year, much closer to the 4.4 million boys reported.⁴ A 2008 report following participation of women in intercollegiate sport over the years 1977-2008 also found numbers on the rise. In 2008, there were 8.65 women’s teams per school compared to 2.5 in 1970, two years before Title IX.⁸

Despite the growth in female sports participation since 1972, advocacy and policy challenges remain to ensure that there is access to and support of athletics for girls and women and to create professional development and advancement opportunities for women in sports administration and coaching. Finally, it is critical to note that girls’ participation rates in sport, particularly in adolescence, vary by age and community. The social and health consequences of these low rates of participation can be substantial. Although physical inactivity is problematic for all adolescents, among minority and low-income adolescent girls it contributes significantly to overweight and obesity, as well as to the development of high-risk behaviors.⁹

Those who play or have played sport know it can transform lives in many ways. Beyond the physical benefits, sport brings emotional, psychological, and social benefits, as the athlete learns and experiences self-discipline, the joys of achievement, the lessons of losing, the camaraderie of teammates, and the leadership of coaches and teachers. There is an old saying that sport both builds and reveals character. Sport can even achieve social change through the common language of play by bringing people together—even in places and times of conflict.

Numerous surveys of American beliefs reveal the importance we place on sport. Research by sport researchers such as Brustad¹⁰ and Gould¹¹ have found that youth sport could very well be one of the most important activities in a child's life. Moreover, those who start a sport because they enjoy it and derive benefits from participation may be more likely to make it a lifelong activity.

We know that sport, at its best, can build character and promote the virtues of honesty, respect, selfless teamwork, dedication, and commitment to a greater cause. Sport lessons (good and bad) transcend the playing field, spilling over into the classroom, the business world, and the community, and they contribute to shaping the character and culture of America's citizens. Playing sport instills "a sense of confidence, usefulness, belonging, and influence."¹² These are not empty words. They have been borne out through

hundreds of research studies over the past 50 years. In-depth research has shown that sport can provide a rich and fertile field for social, psychological, and emotional growth.

However, sport also can teach young people how to gain unfair advantage or even engage in unethical behaviors such as cheating or doping in pursuit of glory and success. Just playing sport is not enough to build character. In fact, playing some sports in certain contexts can lead to negative youth development. In truth, sport is only as good as the environment in which it is played. In the extreme, negative sport experiences resulting from an obsession with winning can lead many people to drop out of sport—often at an early age—because they no longer perceive its value. Participation in team sport peaks at age 12 and declines by 50 percent by age 18.

In acknowledging sport as a valuable national asset—and in view of the vast numbers of children and youth involved in sport—we need to pay attention to the ethical issues currently tearing at its fabric. The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's (USADA's) research *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society (Sport in America Report)* finds that U.S. adults are mixed regarding whether sport overall is reaching its full potential in contributing to society's values, despite great hopes for its promise. There are those who place winning above all else and who are willing to cheat for the sake of this goal. This willingness to

prioritize winning—and sacrifice ethics and health—erodes our trust in sport and its inherent value.

Professional sport—and increasingly college sport—is replete with stories of cheating and doping during competition and of immoral behavior off the field. Unfortunately, these highly rewarded and celebrated athletes could be our children’s role models.

The *Sport in America Report* shows that a majority of U.S. adults (75 percent) agree that athletes’ use of performance-enhancing substances is a violation of ethics in sport. This is further underscored by the fact that Americans rank the use of performance-enhancing drugs as the most serious problem facing sport today, closely followed by the focus on money and the criminal behavior of some well-known athletes.

About This Report

As the nonprofit, independent entity recognized by Congress to administer the anti-doping program in the United States for Olympic, Paralympic, and Pan Am Games sports, USADA’s mission is to preserve the integrity of competition, inspire a commitment to the core principles of true sport, and protect the rights of U.S. athletes to compete healthy and clean.

Recognizing that doping, at its core, is not just a drug problem but also a values issue, USADA understands that cheating

by doping is just one manifestation of a fundamental ethical problem—the willingness to win in sport at any cost. This attitude undermines the intrinsic value of sport and all that it offers—physical, psychological, emotional, and social benefits—and incurs serious health and social costs to all who participate. It is with this in mind that USADA’s vision is as guardian of the values and life lessons learned through true sport.

This report is a companion piece to a recent USADA research project that measured the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the nation’s general population, as well as those of athletes competing in sport under the auspices of a National Governing Body (NGB) regarding the impact of sport in our society. The results of that study, *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport’s Role in Society*, were published in early 2011.

This report is based on an extensive review of the literature surrounding sport in America, in particular youth and sport (see Box A). It follows a similar effort conducted by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport in 2008,¹³ which resulted in *What Sport Can Do: The True Sport Report*, an excellent compilation of what we know about how “good sport can make a great difference.”

This report covers the research literature focused on the role of sport in promoting health and wellness, as well as social, emotional, and psychological

development; role models and influential actors in youth sport; the role of sport in character development; and threats to true sport in America. It concludes with recommended steps for achieving true sport in America.

As a nation, we should embrace the role that sport currently plays and can play in our society and confront the issues it now faces in order to ensure its enduring integrity and value. The lessons provided by sport transcend the playing field and contribute to shaping the character and culture of America's citizens. We, and especially our children, stand to lose too much by an unhealthy and increasingly destructive emphasis on winning at all costs. An inappropriate focus on winning creates a welcoming environment for cheating, doping, and poor sportsmanship—all threats to the spirit of true sport. These threats undermine the integrity of the game and can drive children and youth away from participation, robbing them of the myriad benefits true sport provides.

As a nation, we should be asking ourselves, is sport fulfilling its promise?

A National Governing Body (NGB) is a sport organization that has a regulatory or sanctioning function. Sport governing bodies can impose disciplinary actions for rule infractions and serve as the arbiter of rule changes in the sport that they govern. They also set the conditions for and supervise competitions. Every Olympic sport is subject to the oversight of an NGB, which also should provide training and education on the values and ethical expectations of the given sport.

Box A: Methods

For this review, relevant research articles and reports were identified through a search of electronic databases as well as the Internet, using an extensive array of search terms to identify research on youth sport in general with particular emphasis on the following themes:

- the role of sport for children and youth in self-respect, emotional health, and the development of moral and ethical principles;
- influences or role models for children and youth;
- cheating or integrity issues for children and youth;
- performance-enhancing drugs and public opinion;
- body weight/obesity and exercise and sport;
- statistics or data on youth involvement in physical education and sport in school or the community;
- influence of social media/social networking on youth sport involvement;
- family or generational influences on involvement in youth sport; and
- cross-cultural comparison of involvement in youth sport.

Research articles were identified through a search of academic, medical, and public interest electronic databases including:

- PubMed (MEDLINE)
- SPORTDiscus™ database, produced by the Canadian not-for-profit corporation Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)
- Ebsco MasterFILE™ Elite
- Expanded Academic ASAP
- Academic Search Premier
- Google Scholar

In addition, an Internet search identified government, foundation, association, and other sources of reports, statistics, books, and meeting proceedings. It also identified consumer Web sites and special interest sites.



II. The Role of True Sport in Promoting Health and Wellness

Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity. John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States

I think exercise tests us in so many ways, our skills, our hearts, our ability to bounce back after setbacks. This is the inner beauty of sports and competition, and it can serve us all well as adult athletes. Peggy Fleming, Olympic Gold Medal Skater

Engaging in sport and physical activities, including physical fitness activities, plays a significant role in promoting health and wellness among children and adolescents. Not only does such activity help improve the physical fitness and health of children and youth, but also it is an integral strategy for stemming childhood obesity—a critical health priority for our nation.

The health benefits of physical activity are well documented. Health benefits that result from regular participation in physical activity include reducing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome and improving metabolic health in youth.¹⁴ Such activity also benefits musculoskeletal health. “Compared to those who are inactive, physically active youth have higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness and stronger muscles. They also typically have lower body fatness and their bones are stronger. Youth who are regularly active also have a better chance of a healthy adulthood” (p. 15).¹⁴ Physical activity through sport makes it less likely that risk factors for chronic diseases, such as heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and osteoporosis, will develop later in life.



In 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released its *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: Be Active, Healthy, and Happy*, representing the first major review of the science on the benefits of physical activity in more than a decade. It describes what has been learned through research on physical activity and health and provides information about how physical activity and sport promote physical health and well-being—emphasizing that a range of physical activity is best and that more activity leads to more benefits. The guidelines also note that little progress has been made in increasing levels of physical activity for too many children. Inactivity remains high among

American children, adolescents, and adults.

Part of First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” initiative, the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity notes that combined with healthy eating, physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and can help prevent many chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Although risk factors for these diseases can begin early in life, adopting regular habits of physical activity can reduce them. According to the task force, “Physical activity helps control weight, builds lean muscle, reduces fat, and contributes to a healthy functioning cardiovascular system, hormonal regulatory

system, and immune system; promotes strong bone, muscle and joint development; and decreases the risk of obesity” (p. 65).¹⁵ The Task Force also emphasizes that participation in sports has been associated with higher levels of participation in overall physical activity. In addition, adolescents who participate in greater levels of physical activity are less likely to smoke, or they smoke fewer cigarettes.¹⁶

Girls who engage in sport improve their health and well-being in both the short term and the long term. Fitness, maintaining a healthy weight, and stress reduction are among the immediate health benefits. In the long term, physical activity in youth is a key preventive factor for heart disease, cancer, obesity, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer’s disease and dementias in later life.^{8,17,18}

The Potential of Sport in Stemming Childhood Obesity

Over the past quarter century, the rate of obesity has doubled in the U.S. youth population. The percentage of overweight teens has tripled.¹⁹ One in three American children is overweight or obese by third grade.²⁰ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the immediate and long-term health effects of obesity on youth include a greater likelihood of developing risk factors for cardiovascular disease and being at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems. Obese youth also are more

likely to become overweight or obese as adults. Thus, as adults they will be at greater risk for developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several kinds of cancer, and osteoarthritis.²⁰

Sport and physical activity play a critical role in stemming the rise of obesity. Scientific evidence indicates that participating in physical activity helps people maintain a stable weight over time, although how much physical activity results in weight stability varies across individuals.¹⁴ In addition, “regular physical activity also helps control the percentage of body fat in children and adolescents” (p. 12).¹⁴ Moreover, “exercise training in overweight or obese youth can improve body composition by reducing overall levels of fatness as well as abdominal fatness. Research studies report that fatness can be reduced by regular physical activity of moderate to vigorous intensity 3 to 5 times a week, for 30 to 60 minutes” (p. 18).¹⁴

In a large natural experiment, Kaestner and Xu²¹ studied the effects of Title IX and sport participation on girls’ physical activity and weight. They examined the association between girls’ participation in high school sports and weight, body mass, and body composition during the 1970s when girls’ sports participation dramatically increased as a result of Title IX. They found that increased participation by girls in high school sports was associated with an improvement in weight and body mass, demonstrating a beneficial effect on the health of adolescent girls.

As important as it is to encourage children to play sport for its contribution to disease prevention and health promotion, it is just as important to help overweight and obese children gain the confidence to start or re-enter sport. Faith et al.²² studied reasons that children cite for either playing sport or remaining sedentary. Children between fifth and eighth grade, particularly girls, are highly sensitive to weight criticism during physical activity. According to this study, “children who are the targets of weight criticism by family and peers have negative attitudes toward sports and report reduced physical activity levels, although these relationships may be buffered by certain coping skills” (p. 23).²²

Team-Up for Youth (Playing Well) stresses that obese and overweight children are more likely to receive support and benefit from opportunities for physical activity in a structured and supervised environment, such as organized sport, versus physical education classes. Moreover, “once they begin to participate, even those who had believed themselves to be incompetent at sports are more likely to find enjoyment and continue to participate beyond the program” (p. 2).¹⁶

The lack of sufficient opportunities for youth to participate in organized sport robs them of the lifelong benefits of improved physical and mental health. Low-income communities often lack the social infrastructure to support organized after-school and summer sports programs

without assistance. These limitations often contribute to these youths’ unhealthy eating and other risk behaviors.¹⁶

Potential Side Effects of Sport

The positive effects of sport on self-image of competence, mastery, fitness, and healthy weight also may create pressures leading to disordered eating or addiction to exercise for weight loss or to achieve what is perceived as an ideal body. The popular culture tends to emphasize thinness rather than fitness. Girls, unlike boys, tend to associate dissatisfaction about body image with self-esteem.²³ This can either motivate girls to engage in more physical activity, for the aesthetic benefits (i.e., for “impression management” rather than for physical and mental health benefits), or to avoid the judgments of others about physique by avoiding situations in which one might be more exposed. The result for too many girls is a vicious circle. Poor body image leads to lack of participation in sport and physical activity, which then can compound poor body image. At the other end of the spectrum, studies have shown that girls participating in aesthetic- or appearance-oriented sports (e.g., gymnastics, figure skating) report higher levels of concern about weight and body image than do nonparticipants, even at ages five to seven.²⁴ This concern can even translate into eating disorders.²⁵

Research on health risks for both girls and boys associated with overtraining, overuse, and injury prevention is emerging.



Sport injuries are generally more sport specific than gender specific, but girls and women may face anatomical alignment and hormonal and neuromuscular risk factors.²⁶

The Lasting Positive Health Impact of Sport

As children reach adolescence, they typically reduce their physical activity, and many drop out of sport (see later discussion), thus forfeiting the health benefits that are derived from physical activity and the building of a foundation for lifelong, health-promoting physical activity.¹⁴

Children who are physically active, in particular through involvement in sport, are more likely to stay active into their teen years and adulthood than are children who do not play sport.²⁷ Even among children ages three to four, those who are less active tend to remain less active after age three than most of their peers. Perkins et al.²⁷ found that adolescents who are highly active in sport are eight times more likely to participate in sport and physical fitness activities as young adults than adolescents who participate in sport very little.

The *Sport in America Report* showed that most adults who play a sport began playing it in childhood. Nearly three-fifths of the sports that adults currently play were started in grade school or middle school, and four-fifths began in high

school or earlier. Likewise, 82 percent of the sports played by athletes under the auspices of an NGB were started in high school or earlier.

Team-Up for Youth¹⁶ reports that adults are more likely to be physically active during their free time if they participated in organized sport as children. Alfano et al.²⁸ studied whether a history of participating in sport in childhood and youth was related to adult obesity and physical activity among women. They found that a history of sport participation predicted lower levels of overweight and obesity and higher sport activity levels as adults. These benefits pay off in lowered risk for heart disease.

Such findings validate the position that participation in sport may lay the foundation for adult health and health behaviors and that sport participation could be an important component of obesity prevention and other wellness programs. This potential highlights the need for parents, educators, and coaches to become positive role models and to be involved actively in the promotion of sport and physical activity and fitness in children and adolescents.



III. Psychological and Social Benefits of Playing True Sport

Sports do not build character. They reveal it.

John Wooden, Legendary UCLA Basketball Coach

People who work together will win, whether it be against complex football defenses, or the problems of modern society.

Vince Lombardi, American Football Coach

A growing body of research literature finds that in addition to improved physical health, sport plays a primarily positive role in youth development, including improved academic achievement, higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and better psychosocial.^{29,30} Many studies focus on the effects of sport on the five “C’s”—competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring—which are considered critical components of positive youth development.^{31,32} It has long been thought that the many facets of playing sport—the discipline of training, learning teamwork, following the leadership of coaches and captains, learning to lose—provide lifelong skills for athletes.

The literature on youth sport stresses the positive effects of participation in learning the important life skills of goal setting and time management combined with enjoyment; the development of a strong sense of morality; and the development of an appreciation of diversity.³³ Longitudinal studies have shown that children and youth participating in sport, when compared to peers who do not play sport, exhibit:

- higher grades, expectations, and attainment;³⁴
- greater personal confidence and self-esteem;

- greater connections with school—that is, greater attachment and support from adults;
- stronger peer relationships;
- more academically oriented friends;
- greater family attachment and more frequent interactions with parents;
- more restraint in avoiding risky behavior; and
- greater involvement in volunteer work (see Linver et al.³⁵ for a summary).

These outcomes are thought to be related to the contribution of sport to learning values and skills associated with initiative, social cohesion, self-control, persistence, and responsibility.³⁶ Theories of positive youth development stress the importance of sport in acquiring skills that are beneficial in other domains (e.g., school, family, work) that lead to better adaptive skills.³⁷

Sport provides opportunities for children and youth to engage in valuable and positive relationships with adults, which is especially important when such benefits are not available at home. Thus, it is a missed opportunity for children who are “gated”—or not included in sport—during early stages of childhood because they are less well behaved than other children. These children are being prevented from participating in the very thing that could help them learn to control and regulate their behavior.³⁸ Sport provides an opportunity for children to safely navigate and negotiate between right and wrong as they learn to interact with peers and adults.³⁹

Research by Taliaferro et al.⁴⁰ suggests that playing sport can even protect against suicide risk in youth. Compared to non-athletes, male athletes exhibit lower levels of hopelessness and suicidal ideation. Young males involved in multiple sports seem to garner even more protection in this regard. Similar results were found for girls. Research on the role of exercise in adults confirms that it improves mood and alleviates many forms of depression.⁴¹ Bartko and Eccles⁴² found that youth who are highly involved in sport are more “psychologically resilient,” that is, better able to recover from problems. Eccles et al.⁴³ found that sport participation protects young athletes against social isolation.

Taliaferro et al.⁴⁰ propose that youth who play sport have higher levels of social support, which provides higher levels of resilience. Becoming a member of a community that includes teammates, coaches, family, and the greater community provides “fertile ground for adolescent self-esteem development because teams provide opportunities for youth to engage with adults and peers to achieve collective goals” (p. 545).⁴⁰ In addition, physical activity enhances one’s self-perceptions of body, competence, and self-worth.^{44,45}

The assumed association between playing sport and improved psychological and behavioral outcomes (or character) is at times challenged, despite the overwhelming directionality of the positive associations. Skeptics also say that many studies have failed to examine whether athletes

had specific character traits before playing sport. Moreover, many studies do not account for variations in sport participation by level of competition, type of sport played, and other contextual factors. Linver et al.³⁵ caution that participating in other types of nonsport activities also can produce many of these benefits—for example, the performing arts, school clubs, and other prosocial activities. However, sport participation stands out over other activities as a confidence builder, showing a consistent advantage in building self-esteem and improved psychological functioning.⁴⁶ This is particularly true during the later adolescent years (around 11th grade).⁴² Hansen et al.⁴⁷ found that youth who play sport reported higher rates of self-knowledge, managing emotions, and physical skills compared to peers in academic and leadership activities.

Playing Sport Leads to Improved Academic Performance

I figure practice puts your brains in your muscles.

Sam Snead, Professional Golfer

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of playing sport on academic achievement, in large part because of the positive influence of identity formation and emotional development. So, to flip Sam Snead's perspective, practice figuratively puts muscles in your brain.

Data show that high school students who play sport are less likely to drop out.⁴⁸ Participation in sport also has been associated with completing more years of education⁴⁹ and consistently higher grades in school.⁵⁰

CDC²⁰ synthesized and analyzed the scientific literature on the association between school-based physical activity and academic performance and found that the majority of the studies found positive associations. CDC's report notes, "There is a growing body of research focused on the association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance among school-aged youth" suggesting that such activity "may have an impact on academic performance through a variety of direct and indirect physiological, cognitive, emotional, and learning mechanisms" (p. 5).²⁰ Similarly, research aimed at discovering whether sport participation can detract from academic performance found that participation in interscholastic sport and other team or individual sport, as well as other after-school physical activity programs, does not have a detrimental impact on students' academic performance.

Research has shown that physical movement can affect the brain's physiology by increasing cerebral capillary growth, blood flow, oxygenation, production of neurotrophins, growth of nerve cells in the hippocampus, neurotransmitter levels, development of nerve connections, density



Believe me, the reward is not so great without the struggle.

Wilma Rudolph, Track and Field Olympic Gold Medalist

of neural network, and brain tissue volume. These changes may be associated with improved attention; improved information processing, storage, and retrieval; enhanced coping; enhanced positive affect; and reduced sensations of cravings and pain.²⁰ Linder's⁵¹ research suggests that increased energy levels and time outside of the classroom—both byproducts of playing sport—may give relief from boredom, resulting in higher attention levels during classroom time. Research by the Canadian

Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute⁵² has shown that physical exercise causes short-term relaxation, accompanied by improved concentration, enhanced creativity and memory, improved mood, and enhanced problem-solving abilities.

Physical and Psychological Benefits of Sport for Girls

As described above, sport participation conveys myriad psychological, physiological, and sociological benefits. In recent

years, research has begun to explore the particular benefits of sport for girls and young women, who are increasingly playing more sport at all levels. Studies are beginning to tease apart the issues that contribute to girls electing to play, factors that keep them playing, and reasons for their dropping out.

A 2007 study found that women who played sport in high school were 73 percent more likely to earn a college degree within six years of graduating high school than those who did not play sport.⁵³ This advantage held up even for students facing socioeconomic challenges to graduating college.

Playing sport also conveys other beneficial outcomes: Girls and young women engaged in sport are less likely to be overweight or obese, depressed, smoke, use illicit drugs, or have unwanted teen pregnancies. This may possibly be related to the goal of maximizing athletic performance or the goal of protecting sport eligibility or scholarships.¹⁶ Suicide and sexual victimization also is lower in girls and young women engaged in sport.

Sports psychology research has shown that girls gain confidence and self-esteem through participation in sport and physical activity. A positive team sport experience may mediate the risks of low social acceptance and dissatisfaction with one's body. Determining the relationship between self-concept and sport participation is complicated by the measurement models used across studies, but greater participation in sport has been found to be relational to

greater emotional and behavioral well-being. Donaldson and Ronan's³⁸ findings suggest that for girls the psychological benefits of participation are not related to the level of competence but rather to the act of participating.

Sport participation also may meet the developmental needs of adolescent girls, including having a sense of belonging, a sense of mastery over one's body, the experience of generosity, and the sensation of mattering.⁵⁴ Life skills such as persistence, teamwork, goal setting, leadership, and character development may transfer from sport to academics, family life, and the work setting. Sport involvement, in addition to making college attendance more likely, correlates with greater levels of overall extracurricular and community involvement. This is true for both boys and girls.

Peer and parental support also influence girls' enjoyment and learning of sport.⁵⁵ Girls develop important social relationships through the physical activity of sport, both with their teammates and with their adult physical activity leaders, but girls may suffer negative psychological consequences if their developmental needs for feedback and encouragement are not considered by instructors or coaches.

Sport as an Agent for Social Change

Some research has shown that sport contributes to the development of social capital.

Longitudinal studies, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, have found that men at age 32 who played high school sport were paid 31 percent higher wages than men who had not played sport. The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 found that men at age 31 who played high school sport were paid 12 percent higher wages than those who did not.⁵⁶ Of course, there could be other explanations for these findings. Barron et al.⁵⁶ suggest that higher-ability individuals or individuals with lower preferences for leisure are more likely to play sport. These same people are then also more likely to seek higher achievement in the workforce. Athletic competition might serve as an excellent training activity for individuals who are already highly motivated to succeed.

Research has shown that the longer youth play sport, the greater attachment they have to their community, according to a series of measures. Studies using data from the University of Maryland's National Youth Survey of Civil Engagement show that sport participants, compared to those who do not participate in sport, are more likely to register to vote (66 percent versus 44 percent) and to follow the news (41 percent versus 27 percent).⁵⁷

Studies by Eccles and Barber⁵⁰ show that youth sport participation is positively related to adult involvement in community activities that can last a lifetime. Youth who participate in sport are more likely to

make friends, including those of different races.⁵⁸ Young athletes are better able to acquire emotional control, learn the value of teamwork, and exhibit initiative,⁵⁹ all social skills that can contribute to a better community. However, with many of these findings, the associations could be correlative rather than causal, because youth who choose to be highly engaged in sport also may choose to be highly engaged in other community activities.

There is no question that providing opportunities for youth to play sport provides community benefit—if for no other reason than idle time can be filled with activities that are healthy and positive. For example, when Phoenix, Arizona, basketball courts and other recreational facilities were kept open until 2 a.m. during summer hours, juvenile crime dropped 55 percent.⁶⁰ Similarly, crime rates dropped by 24 percent after late night recreation programs were started in Cincinnati, Ohio.⁶¹

Finally, Jamieson and Ross⁶² suggest that sport can even serve as a useful intervention in international peace-building activities. Organized sport efforts in the Middle East have provided youth with positive and constructive experiences, creating peaceful and productive relations with neighbors. “Youth and youth sport leaders play vital roles in transforming dangerous and violent conflict situations associated with terrorism across the world” (p. 28).⁶²

Sport Alone Does Not Build Character—Context and Environment Matter

The benefits of sport do not necessarily always accrue. Positive outcomes are more likely to occur when a sport program emphasizes mastery, includes positive adult behaviors and supervision, and focuses on personal skills.⁶³

In fact, some studies have found that young athletes in some sports are more likely to be involved in risky behaviors—such as alcohol use—than those who do not participate in sport.^{46,64,65} Research also has found that in addition to physical injury, sport can create stress and anxiety and even promote heightened aggressiveness.⁵⁹ These outcomes can be shaped by the nature of the athlete’s experience—for example, the attitudes and behaviors of coaches, teammates, and parents. Research by Zarrett et al.³⁶ highlights the importance of not only the quantity of participation, but also the quality of the experience.

Several researchers have found that some male youth who are highly engaged in sport actually engage in more delinquent behaviors, such as lying and substance use, compared to youth who are more involved in school-based clubs and school work and youth who are involved in multiple, diverse activities.⁴² For example, well-known studies by Barber et al.,⁴⁹ Eccles et al.,⁴³ and others have found that student athletes reported drinking more frequently than nonathletes.



Rutten et al.⁶⁶ tried to understand the possible reasons for and consequences of these findings. They investigated the contribution of organized youth sport to antisocial and prosocial behavior in adolescent athletes and found that “coaches who maintain good relationships with their athletes reduce antisocial behavior, and that exposure to relatively high levels of sociomoral reasoning within the immediate context of sporting activities promotes prosocial behavior” (p. 263). Thus, high-quality coach-athlete relationships can protect against antisocial behavior.

Gardner et al.⁶⁷ also tried to understand the complexities of context and the relationship between an apparent association between sport participation and juvenile delinquency. They found that previous studies had compared behavior of athletes against behavior of students who participate in other nonsport activities (e.g., school clubs, theater). In those comparisons, athletes are more likely to exhibit delinquency than students in nonsport activities, but still less so than youth not involved in any activities.

Gardner’s review of the literature found that several factors mediate the apparent delinquent behavior of athletes, including peer pressure, urban setting, opportunities for unstructured socializing, and prior problems—particularly during childhood. Thus, as in all aspects of adolescent and teen development, the complexity and diversity of context plays an important role. Gardner concluded that participation

in organized sport neither protects against delinquency nor increases its risks.

However, the social stature gained by participation in certain sports can result in more social opportunities that can lead to problem behaviors (e.g., drinking).

There is also research suggesting that certain sports can influence a tendency toward delinquency (e.g., contact, team) and that the nature of the sport in which a high school athlete participates may have more influence on violent and delinquent behaviors outside of sport than any other variable.⁶⁸ For example, students who play in the more highly publicized and physically aggressive sports are more likely to be involved in antisocial acts off the field or court than athletes in other sports.⁶⁹

Thus, playing sport does not automatically build character. Hodge⁷⁰ argues that character must be “taught” not “caught.” When fair play and sportsmanship are part of the game, character can be enhanced. And when sport is played in a caring environment, social, emotional, and psychological benefits for youth are enhanced.⁷¹ Many factors influence a young person’s experience in sport, such as the training of the coach; the support that the young person receives from that coach, family members, and peers to participate in that sport; and perhaps even the type and competitive level of sport being played. Researchers also suggest that the competitive nature of youth sport is a key factor that drives both the positive and negative effects of participation.

Optimizing the Potential Benefits of True Sport

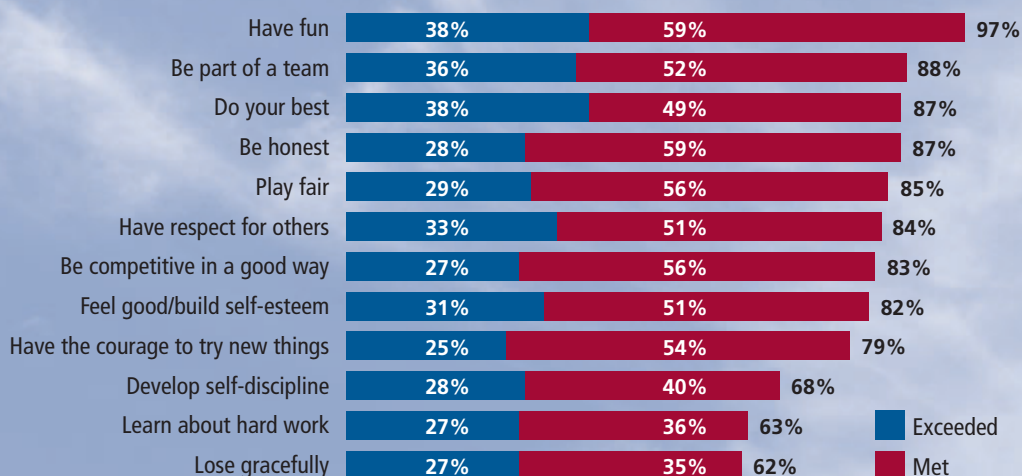
The *Sport in America* research found that, overall, sport is delivering on what most parents expect their child will learn, particularly the values deemed most important by the majority of parents—having fun and doing your best. Indeed, nearly all parents who hoped that sport would teach their children to have fun also say this expectation has been exceeded or met (Figure 1).

However, the *Sport in America* data indicate that, despite their children’s

relatively strong engagement in sport, adults perceive sport generally as having limited positive influence on youth today (Figure 2). Those adults who are personally engaged in sport-related activities or who work directly with children perceive sport as having relatively greater positive influence. Respondents were asked to rank the actual and potential influence of eight factors, including sport, on today’s youth. Although this survey ranks sport ahead of only music and social networking sites in terms of its potential positive influence, general population adults perceive sport

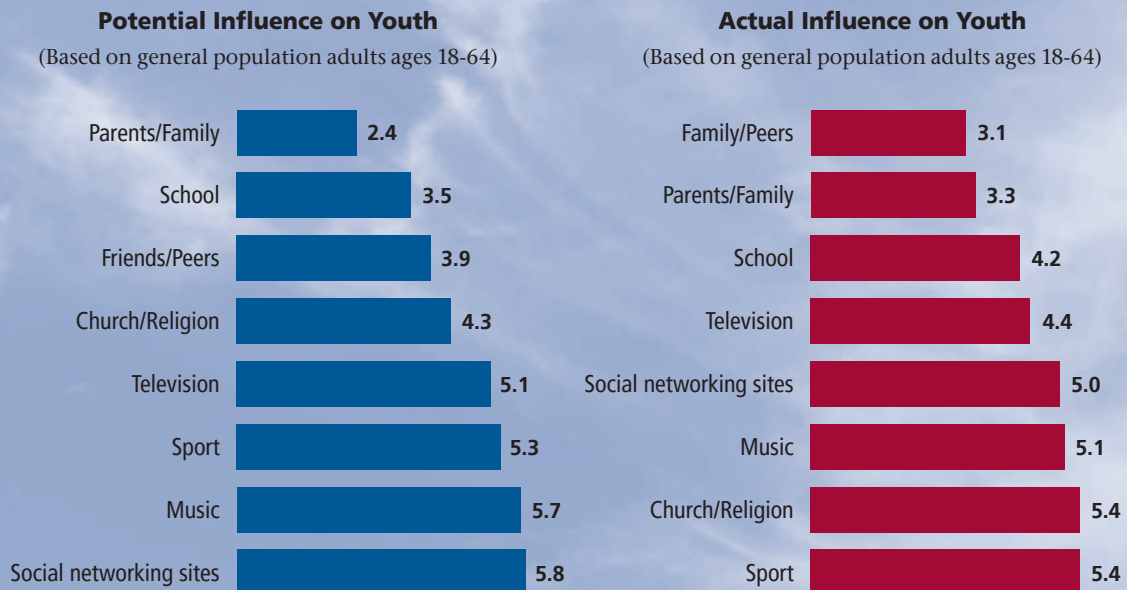
Figure 1: Expectations of Values Your Child Will Learn from Playing Sport Have Been Exceeded or Met

(Based on parents ages 18-64 of children in sport who rated a value in their top 5 in importance; base size varies for each value)



Q 126: And of the five things you selected (as most important in sport), please indicate whether your expectations for your child learning those things have been exceeded, met, nearly met or not met. Base sizes for the following values fall below 50 and are therefore not shown in the chart: develop a sense of community (n=23), be patient (n=36), and win (n=11).

Figure 2: Adults Perceive Sport Generally as Having Limited Positive Influence on Youth Today



Q 101: To what extent do you feel each of the following has the *greatest potential* to be a positive or a negative outside influence on youth today?

Q 102: And please tell me the influence you think each one *actually has* on youth in this country?

Based on **mean scores**. Ranked in order of importance, with 1 meaning it is the most positive influence and 8 meaning it is the least positive.

as having less actual positive influence on youth than all elements listed, including parents/family, friends/peers, and school.

Despite the perception that sport has a relatively soft influence on youth, adults recognize many positive benefits of sport to society. Four out of five adults agree that sport provides a source of fun and enjoyment and can reduce youth crime

and delinquency—and that losing in sport can teach valuable life lessons. However, almost two-thirds of adults also agree that sport overemphasizes the importance of winning, a belief most strongly felt by older adults (ages 45 to 64) who are significantly more likely than adults overall to agree that sport overemphasizes winning.



IV. Why We Play Sport and Why We Stop

You can motivate by fear, and you can motivate by reward. But both those methods are only temporary. The only lasting thing is self motivation.

*Homer Rice, Longtime Coach and Athletic Director at Georgia Tech.
As a high school coach, Homer Rice won nine Coach of the Year Awards.*

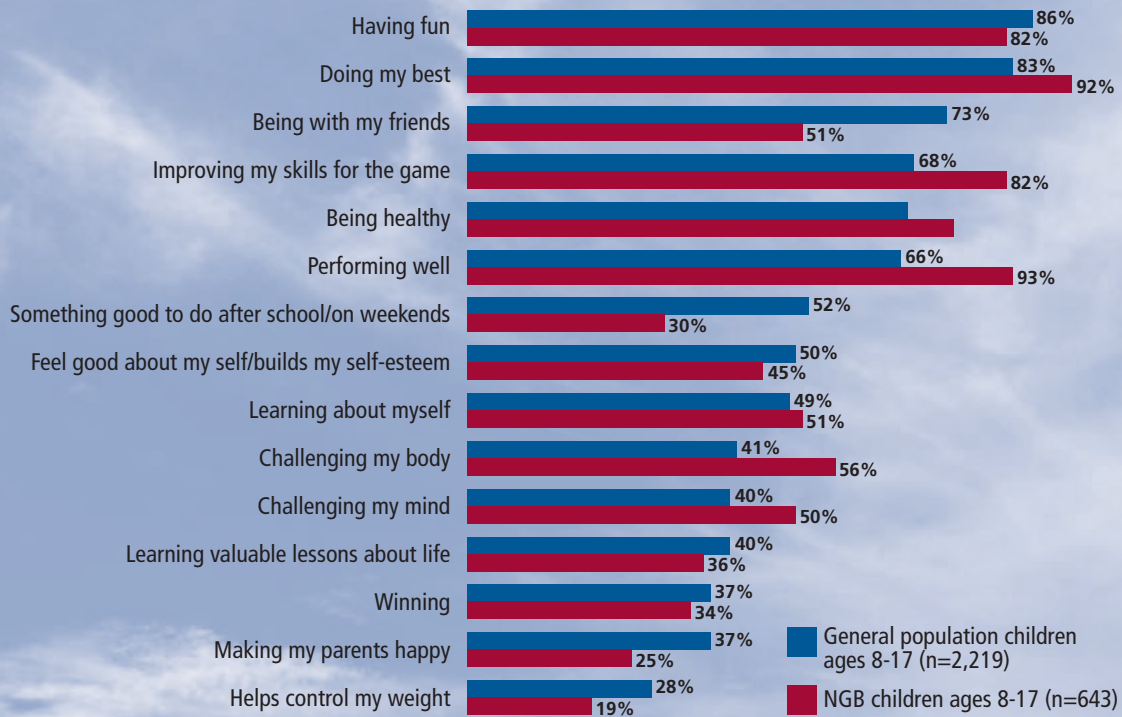
Many studies have found that we start playing sport as children and stick with it because we enjoy it. It is fun and provides us with intrinsic rewards. A 1992 study of 8,000 youth ranked having fun as the primary reason for participating in sport.⁷² More recent research confirms the obvious—that sustained participation in sport is related to an ongoing positive experience, which includes having fun, improving skills, and having positive interactions with peers and adults.^{37,41}

The *Sport in America*¹ research found that for more than 80 percent of respondents, having fun is the most common reason for initially becoming involved in sport. Conversely, when sport is no longer fun, children and youth are more likely to stop participating. At more elite levels, although it sounds obvious, athletes who enjoy sport (and there are some who do not) are more intrinsically motivated to play (Figure 3).⁷³ It is worthwhile to note that winning, an extrinsic factor, is not high on the list as a motivator for playing sport, according to most surveys. Seefeldt et al.⁷² ranked winning as number 8 out of 10 reasons for wanting to engage in sport. The *Sport in America* data showed that people rank winning as less important when playing sport.

Research into why we play sport has found that motivating factors include social support from peers, parents, and teachers; perceived social

Figure 3: “Really Important” When Playing Sport

(Based on children ages 8-17 who play sport)



Q: How important are each of the following when you play sports?

competence; and enjoyment. Research by the Tucker Center at the University of Minnesota found that girls play sport not only for competitive reasons but also to get in shape, socialize with friends, develop physical skills, and have fun.^{55,74} Numerous studies show that having fun is the prevalent reason girls give for playing sport.^{55,75} But like boys, when sport is no longer fun, girls stop playing.⁴⁴

The quality of our engagement in sport influences our sense of fun. Several researchers have tried to get behind this concept of fun. Just what does it mean?

Some studies have linked the concept of fun to developing a sense of competency, becoming socially involved, building friendships, receiving psychosocial support, and feeling mastery over one’s body.^{76,77} What is considered fun also can change as we develop. McCarthy found that younger children associate movement sensations as a source of enjoyment, while older children find enjoyment in the social recognition of competence and the experience of encouragement, excitement, and challenge.

Recognizing Child Developmental Stages in Sport

Sport can be a critical aspect of childhood development if “taught, organized, managed, and led in a manner consistent with sound developmental principles” (p. 299).⁷⁸ Stricker’s⁷⁹ insights into sport skill development stress the importance of not pressuring children to compete at levels beyond their developmental capacity. Stricker’s work also emphasizes the fact that children develop skills in a sequential pattern that is unique to them. Development is age related but not age dependent.⁸⁰ Cognition, perceptions, behaviors, and motor skills progress at different speeds in children,³⁷ which means that parents and coaches need to recognize a child’s developmental stage. Both early and late bloomers are found within a given age range, and tremendous growth can occur within a 12-month period. This makes birth date cutoffs for preadolescent teams even more difficult to manage, with some players having significant physical and developmental advantages over others. This relative age effect can have lasting effects. In fact, researchers who study the relative age effect in sport have found that, within a given cohort, individuals who are relatively older tend to be over-represented at elite levels within sport, particularly in hockey, soccer, and baseball.⁸¹

Numerous research studies show that children, even in early adolescence, do not need to be competent in their sport to benefit psychologically from participating

in it.³⁸ Thus, the structure and expectations for the quality of the play should be considered as much as the quantity of play.

Some children who are late bloomers never catch up as they lose confidence, playing time, and even roster slots to more developed peers. These early lost opportunities can cause lasting harm. Playing sport is often seen as a determinant of social status and acceptance, especially among boys.⁸² Early bloomers benefit from positive reinforcement and encouragement, while the late bloomers might be accused of not trying hard enough—when in fact, they are doing the best that they can.

Coakley⁸³ has studied children in sport and observed that they do not even develop a mature understanding of competition until they reach age 12. Anyone who watches young children play sport has seen the girl in the outfield picking clover, the basketball player running the wrong way with the ball, or all players from both teams chasing a soccer ball in a herd. These behaviors are developmentally normal. Forcing six- and seven-year-olds to hold their positions, work harder, and pay attention is not consistent with their developmental capacity. Getting frustrated with them only makes things worse, because they are unlikely to understand the source of the frustration. Suddenly, this “play” is no longer fun.

Team-Up for Youth recommends that schools and communities consider certain options when working with youth of different ages and developmental stages.

At the middle and high school level—where children begin dropping out of sport—programs should be available for freshman and junior varsity teams to ensure continuity in playing experience for those not experienced enough for varsity sport. Second, programs should provide opportunities for nontraditional and club sport for those who want to start playing a sport in high school but who are not skilled enough to play at the varsity level. There should be a place for anyone who wants to play sport. It should be inclusive, not exclusive.

Threats to Sport—Why Children and Youth Stop Playing

Sport participation tends to drop off around age 12, a critical time for developing social skills and self-esteem. Some studies estimate that roughly 35 percent of children drop out of sport each year, although some might join another sport or return years later.⁸⁴

Seefeldt et al.⁷² studied reasons for dropping out among youth sport programs. The leading reasons were: 1) no longer interested in the sport; 2) it was no longer fun; 3) the coach played favorites or was a poor teacher; and 4) desire to participate in other activities. Studies by Chambers⁸⁵ revealed that lack of playing time, dislike of the coach, too much competition, too many other activities in which to participate, and lack of enjoyment are reasons for youth ending their sport participation. Other researchers have found similar reasons why girls and boys drop out of

organized or team sports—for example, family/money issues, health problems/injuries, or interest in other activities. Other reasons may include lack of playing time, dislike of the coach, or too much competition.^{7,74}

The *Sport in America* data found that not having fun is a primary reason for quitting (Figure 4). Ranked next were finding something else to do, not being as good as others, and wanting to focus more on schoolwork.

The *Sport in America* research showed that adults believe that children start playing sport mostly because they are having fun, but as children age (most cite high school as a turning point), winning begins to overshadow participation, and children do not want to play a sport in which they are unlikely to succeed. Early research by Orlick⁸⁶ found that athletes were discouraged by the overemphasis on winning, which led to lack of playing time and lost opportunities to gain experience.

Burnout is another reason for quitting. Athletes who quit because they are burned out typically have had intensive sport experience, often with great success.¹¹ The reason for burnout relates to the time and intensity of training, demanding performance expectations (both internally and externally imposed), abusive or overly demanding coaches, intense parental pressure, and inability to participate in other social activities.⁸⁷ In other words, despite the successes that can be involved in playing sport, it may not be worth it anymore, because the intrinsic rewards are gone and it is simply not fun.

Figure 4: Reasons Why You No Longer Play Sport

(Based on general population nonsport children ages 8-17 who have not participated in a sport in the past year, but used to, n=156)



Q 6: (If you have not participated in sport in the past year but used to) Please tell us which of the following best describes why you no longer play sport?

The Promise and Perils of Specialization

Few activities are as magnetizing as sport, but providing youth with variety and choice in their physical activities also appears to be helpful with getting youth to come, especially for those who might benefit the most from physical activity (for example, shy, alienated, unathletic, or overweight youth), or for those who might not be attracted to more typical sports like basketball or soccer.⁸⁸

Increasing numbers of children are specializing in a sport at an early age, then training year round for that sport. Some Olympic sports favor the youngest of athletes, for example gymnastics and figure skating. This presents a skewed perception of the ease, or reality, of competing at the elite level at such an early age. Other factors can lead players and their parents to commit to specialized and intensive training in a single sport at an early age, such as the possibility of a college scholarship or a professional career. The low probability of reaching these lofty goals does not appear to discourage many aspirants.



The National Association for Sport and Physical Education⁸⁹ has concluded that:

The most effective sport development and training programs around the world discourage year-round specialization in a single organized sport and, generally, use cross-training methods to develop a full range of skills to prepare young people for specialization at age 15 and older. Exceptions occur only in sports with judging criteria that favor the flexibility and artistic lines of prepubescent bodies, even though those criteria encourage forms of training that jeopardize athletes' long-term health and well-being.... Developing positive identities requires a diversity of experiences and relationships during childhood and adolescence, and participating in multiple sports increases experiences and relationships with peers and authority figures in ways that prepare young people for lifelong enjoyment of sports and engaged citizenship (pp. 3-4).

“Talent development” is the term often used for identifying promising athletes and guiding their development and advancement in a given sport. Studies have shown that talent identification cannot be achieved by discrete measures such as one-time try-outs, but rather must be viewed over longer periods as the athlete grows and develops.⁹⁰ Magill and Anderson⁹¹ and Sage⁹² have conducted motor learning research that found that initial proficiency in a motor skill has little relation to later performance. Early mastery pays a dividend for a while, but then others catch up. Because try-outs typically lead to “cuts” from the team, many young athletes are denied the opportunity to grow

into their sport. Cutting youth from teams before they get a chance to test their skills denies everyone the opportunity of a better playing environment.

Studies of high achievers across many activities have concluded that talent is a developmental process that can be recognized and nurtured. But talent alone is not enough. Motivation, discipline, and adult support are needed as well.⁹³ Single measures or judgments about someone's athletic potential, especially before puberty, are likely to be influenced by factors such as physical maturity that could change over time.

Children involved in sport should be encouraged to participate in a variety of different activities and develop a wide range of skills. The pressure to specialize in sport, giving up all other nonsport pursuits, narrows the landscape of possibilities for children and youth and can lead to early drop-out from sport.⁹⁴ The National Association for Sport and Physical Education⁸⁹ has issued a position statement warning that for youth under age 15:

Year-round specialization in a single sport is more often associated with developmental risks than rewards.... Positive development is most likely when young people have diverse opportunities to explore and develop a range of physical, psychological and social abilities across multiple activities and sports: some competitive and others focused on adventure and self-mastery under different social and environmental conditions.... When young people participate regularly in informal games and sports, they are less likely to drop out of organized sport programs than their peers who specialize in a single sport from a young age.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, which has issued statements of concern about intensive training and sports specialization in young athletes, has stated, "Young athletes who specialize in just one sport may be denied the benefits of varied activity while facing additional physical, physiologic, and psychologic demands from intense training and competition."⁹⁵ Likewise, in 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: Be Active, Healthy, and Happy!* emphasized that a range of physical activity is best and that more activity leads to more benefits. Specifically, "It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable, and that offer variety" (p. vii).¹² The later work of Côté and Gilbert⁹⁶ suggests that sport sampling—that is, diversifying at early ages—more effectively promotes lifelong engagement in physical activity and combats childhood obesity.

Studies of elite athletes validate the importance of playing *many* sports during childhood. Researchers found that many elite athletes experienced patterns of broad-based sport participation throughout their childhood, which provided the bases for later expertise.⁹⁷ Côté⁹⁸ and Bloom⁹⁹ have identified the phases of talent development.

The first phase is the “sampling years” or the “romance phase” (ages 6 to 13), during which children can explore different sports, learn to love one or more of them, and achieve some level of success. The second phase, ages 13 to 15, involves greater specialization, when the child focuses more on skills and technical mastery. The final phase is the “integrative” or “investment” phase, when the athlete focuses more intently on performance excellence. Gould et al.¹⁰⁰ found that parental practices also develop across these phases and that among professional tennis players an early emphasis by parents on fun and enjoyment and few early expectations of a professional career were critical.

Without the opportunity to experience those early phases of sport, with fun and variety, children are less likely to be motivated to pursue the 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice that could lead them to a “career” in sport.¹⁰¹ Gould and Carlson¹⁰² have argued that when parents “professionalize” children’s sport at early ages, they deny the opportunity for their child to love sport for its intrinsic value. Postman¹⁰³ and Suransky¹⁰⁴ write that singular pursuit of a sport at an early age can actually have serious psychosocial and emotional consequences, resulting in the erosion or disappearance of childhood. Many sport psychologists believe that the fact that children are being denied the opportunity for informal play at sport denies them the opportunity to learn problem solving and perseverance—traits

that provide intrinsic rewards.¹⁰⁵ Instead, children are being forced into professional models of sport at an early age, where the focus is on winning and trophies, rather than on the child’s physical and moral development.

Wiersma¹⁰⁶ estimates that 98 percent of athletes who specialize at an early age will never reach the highest level of the sport. Early specialization also increases the likelihood of burnout and withdrawal from sport.¹⁰⁶ Studies have shown that there is actually little relationship between early specialization and later achievement in a given sport.^{107,108} Several researchers recommend that children avoid sport specialization before adolescence and instead participate in less intense and more diverse activities.^{109,110} Rowland describes overly specialized young athletes as socially handcuffed.¹⁰⁹ Gould¹¹⁰ suggests that even giving such focused children more autonomy and decisionmaking opportunities can help ease the strain of specialization by lessening their feelings of powerlessness.

Another rising concern is year-round training in one sport. As early as 1989, 70 percent of high school athletic directors participating in a survey believed that specialization was increasing.¹¹¹ Pressure to train year round comes from coaches, parents, and college recruiters or can result from societal reward for specialization. The truth is that specialization at the appropriate developmental stage can pay off on the field or in the arena. Hill and



Hansen¹¹² surveyed high school football coaches who reported that athletes who specialize are more likely to have better skills, play in an all-star game, or receive a college scholarship. It is important to note, however, that these coaches also said that these specialized athletes experience more pressure to succeed, have fewer meaningful social interactions, and experience a less diverse high school experience. Year-round training also can result in overuse injuries. A 2000 study by Patel and Nelson¹¹³ found that overuse injuries are more common than acute injuries in youth sport.

Finally, burnout is a common reason for highly skilled athletes to drop out.¹¹⁴ Burnout can arise from aggressive coaching behaviors, physical and psychological

exhaustion, feelings of reduced accomplishments, or simply not caring anymore about the sport. Raedeke's research found that female athletes who were playing because they felt obligated to do so were more likely to burn out than others.

Threats to Girls' Participation in Sport

Girls' participation in sport drops off as they become young women—more so than for males. The number of varsity female high school athletes is 17 times greater than the number of female college athletes. A significant number of young women may be denied access to participate at the college level simply because too few opportunities for female athletes have

been created, even as high school female sport participation is at the highest level in history.

At all levels, participation of girls and young women in sport still lags far behind participation of boys and young men. Data collected in 2009 by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association found that overall 68.5 percent of males participate in some type of team sport, versus 31.5 percent of females.⁵ One set of numbers for young children showed that a greater percentage of female than male students in kindergarten through eighth grade were involved in arts, clubs, community service, religious activities, and scouts after school in 2005, but the pattern of participation was reversed for sport.¹¹⁵

Work by the Women's Sports Foundation found that the level of interest in sport by both boys and girls varies more within gender than across genders but is similar for younger boys and girls. However, young girls tend to join sport later than young boys, which translates to less experience, less practice, and less skill development. And by age 14, girls drop out from sport at a rate that is six times higher than that for boys.⁷ Thus, the length of participation in organized sport is greatly reduced for girls, particularly for those of color and those from low-income families.

Data over time consistently show that girls drop out of sport at twice the rate of boys—and at younger ages.⁵⁵ The Women's Sports Foundation's *Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America*⁷ report tracked

entry, drop-out, and re-entry into sport among a national sample of U.S. children. The report states that drop-out patterns are fluid; children may stop and re-enter sports. However, girls are more likely to be nonathletes, and for those girls who are involved in sport, attrition begins in middle school. Attrition at this stage affects both boys and girls, but rates are higher for girls, especially for urban girls. Participation in physical activity in suburban areas is similar between boys and girls; yet a wider gender gap exists in rural and urban communities, with girls participating in less physical activity than boys.⁷ Studies aimed at understanding low rates of participation of urban girls suggest that safety, privacy, and cultural issues play a role.¹¹⁶ Other research on adolescent girls and physical activity reveals that girls living in urban environments often associate sport with exercise and physical education requirements and therefore do not see it as fun.¹¹⁷

The *Sport in America Report* revealed that all groups of adults think that the major reasons that girls quit sport are that they find something else they want to do, that their friends quit, that they are becoming shy about their bodies, and that they want more free time (Figure 5). Parents of teens also are more likely to say that girls drop out of sport because they do not think they are as good as others in the sport. Notably, all adult subgroups rank “becoming shy about their bodies” significantly higher for girls as a reason to quit sport than the teens do themselves.

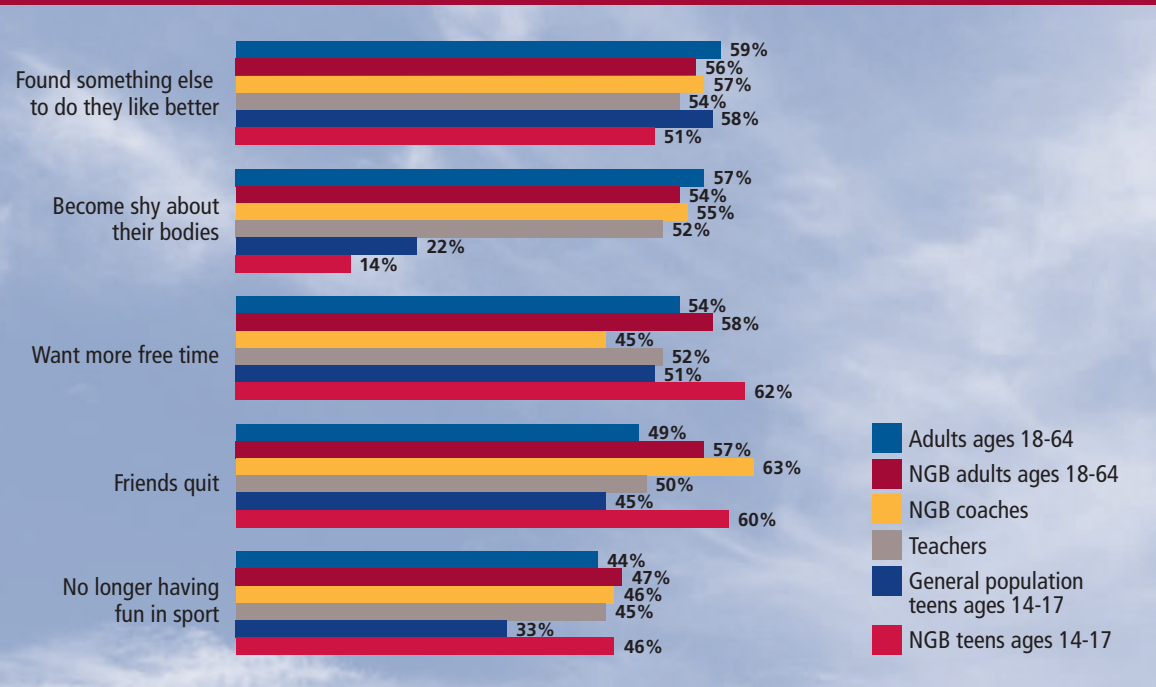
Studies have found that a frequent explanation for girls dropping out is conflict with other activities. In several studies, “not having fun” was the main reason students—and particularly girls—dropped out of organized sport. More girls than boys also stopped playing in order to focus on academics or to focus more on other clubs or activities. Girls may pursue a wider array of social interests than do boys and therefore may respond positively to a wider array of choices in exercise and sport opportunities as a retention strategy.⁷ Reasons for never playing or dropping out

also vary by physical ability, economics, ethnicity, and urban/rural setting.

Across studies, several psychological barriers have been correlated with lack of girls’ participation in sport, such as limited confidence in one’s physical abilities or knowledge of the sport, low perceived behavioral control, and low self-efficacy.⁵⁵ In sum, many girls lack the self-confidence of boys in sport and fear the embarrassment and emotional consequences of public failure on the field or in the arena. For girls who are not great athletes, research shows they are even more vulnerable to

Figure 5: Top Reasons Why Girls Become Less Active in Sport

(Based on ratings of 6 and 7 on a 7-point scale where 7 means ‘strongly agree’, ranked on general population adults ages 18-64 and includes top 3 reasons for each subgroup)



Q 131: You may have heard the statistic that young people tend to be less active in sport in their teens compared to when they were younger. Regardless of whether you’ve heard this before, please indicate why you think this might be the case for girls?

coach and parental criticism than are more skilled athletes.³⁷ Thus, without opportunities to enhance skills, sport participation becomes an increasingly painful experience.

An economically disadvantaged background substantially limits many girls' access to physical activity and sport, especially girls of color and urban girls who are over-represented in lower socioeconomic groups. Urban girls have the lowest rates of participation in sport, entering later in childhood than rural or suburban girls

and boys. They also have the highest drop-out rates in middle school years. Multiple reasons include household and chore responsibilities for younger children; lack of funds for club memberships, transportation, or sports equipment; and unsafe neighborhoods. In some cases, there is no social support that permits and encourages engagement in something that is perceived primarily as a male activity. Urban girls have been described as the "have-nots" of American physical education.^{55,118,119}



V. The Importance of Others in True Sport— Coaches, Parents, Peers, and Celebrity Athletes

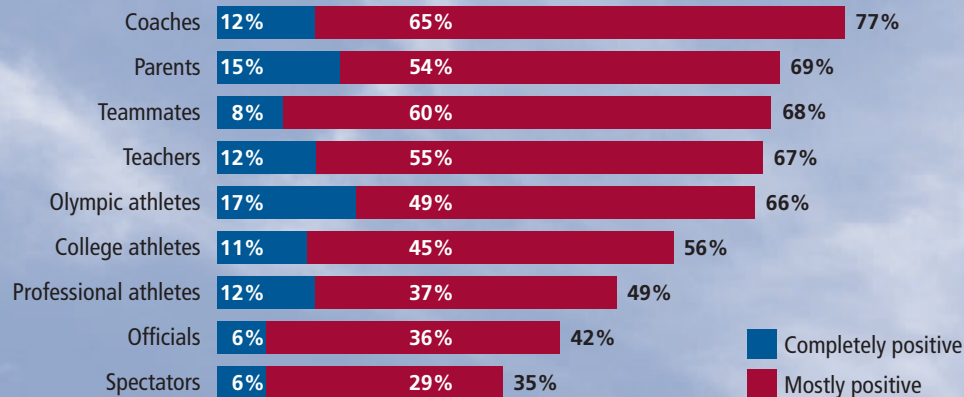
Except for informal sport, where children organize and conduct their own play, children and youth play organized sport under the supervision and watchful eye of coaches, teachers, parents, and spectators. These adults play an important role in making the experience positive—or negative—and in serving as role models for young athletes by teaching and modeling positive and ethical behaviors. In addition, children and youth are likely to seek role models among their peers, college and Olympic athletes, and professional sport figures.

The social learning approach to development focuses on the role of significant others in a child’s moral development, particularly with regard to the reinforcement of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors.¹²⁰ Long-term research by Smith¹²¹ focused on how children learn illegal hockey behaviors from coaches, parents, and teammates. Research by Stephens et al.¹²² measured youth soccer players’ perceptions of their coach’s motivational orientation. They found that a player is more likely to cheat and behave unfairly in a game when he or she perceives his or her coach as having a “win” orientation. Research by Stephens¹²³ conducted with youth basketball players produced similar findings. A primary predictor of a player’s likelihood of engaging in inappropriate aggressive play was the coach’s orientation and his or her request that players do so.

Adults responding to the *Sport in America* survey believe that those with whom children interact directly, including coaches, parents, teammates, and teachers, all have a positive influence on today’s youth, and they perceive Olympic athletes as offering children the greatest indirect positive influence (Figure 6). Although none of the groups earned a strong *completely positive* evaluation, Olympic athletes garnered the highest *completely positive* score. Following the Vancouver Olympic

Figure 6: Positive Influence of Role Models on Young People

(Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



Q 132: Please rate the following on their overall influence on young people – would you say the following generally have a... completely positive, mostly positive, neither positive nor negative, mostly negative or completely negative influence on youth today?

Winter Games, research found that the U.S. Olympic Committee continues to be the most positively viewed sport organization of all American sports and that it was considered to be a more sportsmanlike organization (85 percent) than, for example, NCAA (56 percent). Those surveyed expressed positive views about Olympic athletes, with 84 percent saying they are positive role models for children (compared to 37 percent for NCAA athletes) and 75 percent saying they uphold a strong moral and ethical code. Significantly, although 32 percent of respondents want Americans to win the Olympic medal count, 59 percent say it is more important to demonstrate good sportsmanship.¹²⁴

Among children and youth participating in the *Sport in America* survey, teenagers were more likely than children ages 8 to 10 and tweens to give most role models less positive ratings, including coaches, parents, teachers, officials, and spectators, while rating Olympic and college athletes more positively than did younger players.

The *Sport in America* research found that coaches rank as the number one positive influence on today's youth, according to the majority of respondents. This makes coaches, perhaps even more so than parents and teachers, the guardians of youth sport. These adults are closest to youth sport participants (both proximally and emotionally) and are generally perceived as having a positive influence on young people.

The Importance of Coaches and Coaching

For most athletes involved in sport, their coach is an influential element of the competitive experience. The *Sport in America* survey found that coaches are a leading positive influence on today's youth. Respondents were asked to rate the overall influence of a variety of groups on young people. Across all major demographic groups, coaches rank as the number one positive influence on youth today.

At their best, coaches can help their players improve their skills, perform to their best ability, develop strong character, and gain confidence. That is, they can maximize the positive value of sport, and they can enhance the intrinsic motivation to play sport.^{125,126} The intrinsic values of sport and the experience of mastery are more likely to generate fair play and good sportsmanship. Coaches who overvalue winning can create an environment in which unsportsmanlike behavior flourishes.¹²⁷

At their worst, coaches can push the psychological, emotional, and physical limits of their players to the point of harm, create a hostile and unfair environment, and turn young athletes away from sport forever. A study by Baker et al.¹²⁸ identified the relationship between athlete sport anxiety and various outcomes (e.g., performance and dropout). Athletes were asked to relate seven coaching behaviors—physical training, mental preparation, goal setting, technical skills, competition strategies, personal rapport, and negative personal rapport—to various forms of sport anxiety (total anxiety, somatic anxiety, concentration disruption, and worry). The investigators found that negative personal rapport was a significant predictor of all



My responsibility is leadership, and the minute I get negative, that is going to have an influence on my team.

Don Shula

American Football Player and Coach

A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.

Ara Parasheghian

College Football Coach

measured forms of sport anxiety. Martens¹²⁹ found that when coaches superimpose their goals on children's participation, they can render a child's experience a negative one.

Even coaches who love and respect their teams can lose perspective in the quest to win. This is especially true at the elite and college level, where coaches are under incredible pressure to produce winning and moneymaking teams and earn salaries higher than even university presidents.¹³⁰

The *Sport in America* survey found that 78 percent of coaches surveyed noted the inappropriate behavior of coaches as being the most serious problem facing sport today. Moreover, some studies have shown that student athletes generally want a better coach than they have—or had.¹³¹ Yet surveys still point to coaches as a major positive influence.

What makes a good or effective coach? At the youth level, an effective coach may be the person who provides encouragement to and learning opportunities for his or her athletes. In the book *Just Let the Kids Play: How to Stop Other Adults from Ruining Your Child's Fun and Success in Youth Sports*, Bigelow and colleagues¹³² offer a simple measure of whether someone is a good coach—do children want to play again the next season? At the collegiate level, the metric changes. Coaching effectiveness is measured by the percentage of games that are won and the number of championships that are played.

The role of coach is a complicated one. Surveys of coaches at the youth level find

that they serve as instructor, teacher, motivator, disciplinarian, substitute parent, social worker, friend, manager, therapist, and fundraiser.^{133,134} Ideally, coaches should understand the developmental stage and limits of their athletes in order to tailor practices and playing time appropriately. In addition to these expectations, coaches are expected to have an in-depth knowledge of the sport they are coaching, including the rules and the skills and techniques needed to play the sport. At more advanced levels of competition, they need to understand basic kinesiology, sport psychology, nutrition, and basic first aid.

Yet the average volunteer coach of a community team has little training in any of these areas.¹³⁵ In addition, Gilbert and Trudel¹³⁶ found that most community coaches became involved in coaching because their children played the sport. This also means that they are likely to drop out of coaching once their children are no longer involved.¹³⁷

Only a few states require certification of coaches who work in school systems. They may have been coached in their sport, but might never have coached, and they may have learned their coaching skills by observing other coaches.^{138,139} Research by the Michigan Youth Sports Institute has found that volunteer youth coaches have little knowledge of sport safety, training and conditioning, and child development,^{137,140} despite the fact that many surveyed coaches have asked for effective instruction.¹⁴¹



Studies of Coach Effectiveness Training, which focuses on positive coaching, show that there are real advantages to the children involved. These studies have found that children who start their season with low self-esteem and have a trained coach show greater self-esteem at the end of the season than children who are not coached by a trained individual.^{88,142} Moreover, athletes who played for an untrained coach had an attrition rate of 26 percent compared to 5 percent for children coached by trained individuals. Children coached by trained individuals also reported lower anxiety levels. Gould et al.¹⁴³ found that children's dislike of their coach is a significant reason for discontinuing sport.

Research by Diane Wiese-Bjornstal suggests that the thoughts, feelings, and actions of girls in the area of sport and physical activity largely depend on the influences of coaches, gym teachers, and exercise leaders.⁵⁵ Although girls seek social rewards through sport, they are more likely than boys to rely on adult leaders (coaches, teachers, parents) to create their positive experiences, and, more than boys, they want to develop warm interpersonal relationships with their coaches. Thus, in general, a stinging criticism from a coach is likely to have more meaning to a girl than to a boy.

A critical role for coaches is team building—that is, making all the moving

parts and variable skill levels of a group of athletes work together. In a summary of team-building research, Bloom et al.¹⁴⁴ found that team-building activities can have positive results with elite sport and high school teams. Athletes who participate in team-building activities directed by their coach report higher perceptions of self-worth, athletic competence, physical appearance, and social acceptance.¹⁴⁵ In addition, coaches report improving their own communication and motivational skills as a result of the activities.¹⁴⁶ Studies on team building show that athletes benefit from coaches who employ team-building techniques, which create a more enjoyable environment and increase the likelihood that they will stay active in the sport.^{144,147} In fact, a survey of NCAA Division 1 head coaches identified team culture as a key to their teams' success because it creates a positive environment in which all team members can support and reinforce the best in one another.¹³⁰ Team building breeds prosocial acts by players toward opponents and teammates. In turn, this maintains a continuity of play.¹⁴⁸ By promoting positive relationships, coaches create a supportive environment that optimizes the potential of individual athletes and the team collectively.

Some research has been conducted to determine what coaches expect children should gain from playing sport. For example, Lesyk and Kornspan¹⁴⁹ found that coaches ranked having fun, learning life skills, being part of a team, developing

confidence, and the excitement of competition as important outcomes for their players.

USADA's survey found that 95 percent of coaches responding to the survey say that fair play and respect for others are highly important values to reinforce through sport, but that fewer than one in four coaches believe that sport is effectively reinforcing fair play or respect. Importantly, 82 percent of coaches say their athletes are respectful to others and believe it is important that everyone have a fair chance.

The Coach's Role in Character Building and Leadership

James Thompson of the Positive Coaching Alliance describes the coaching responsibility as a powerful legacy that helps "young people realize their potential as people as well as athletes" (p. 9).¹⁵⁰ Their coaching development programs emphasize the importance of positive role modeling and using competition as a vehicle to teach life lessons.

Coaches can play a critical role in modeling good behavior and providing a positive environment for youth development. They can boost the low self-esteem of marginalized children and teenagers, foster healthy lifestyle habits, discourage the excesses of the "jock culture," teach leadership skills, work with parents to create a healthy and positive sport environment, and steer children away from negative behaviors. For example, research

has found that 10- to 16-year-olds who have a close relationship with a mentor, such as a coach, are 46 percent less likely to start using drugs, and 27 percent less likely to starting drinking than those who do not have this relationship.¹⁵¹ Children who see coaches berating other teams or referees or refusing to shake the hand of the opposing coach are likely to assume that good sportsmanship is not valued. High school and college coaches who turn the other way on bad or delinquent behavior (e.g., drinking, violence off and on the field) are sending a strong signal that such behavior is acceptable, especially if coming from the most valued athlete on the team.

The Importance of Parents and Family in True Sport

Parents can play many roles in sport—athlete or former athlete, coach, fan, motivator, role model, and critic. A few studies have shown that family members may influence an athlete’s involvement and achievement in sport more than coaches.^{152,153} Parents also are the first and most critical sport socialization agents.¹⁵⁴

Parental encouragement is significantly related to a child’s attraction to and competence in playing sport.^{10,155} Parents who provide positive encouragement instill a greater sense of enjoyment, competence, and motivation in their child. Weiss’s³⁷ research emphasizes the importance of parents modeling good behavior and helping their children interpret their sport experiences. Parents are critical in helping their child develop coping strategies to deal not only with competition but also with losing.^{156,157} Children’s perceptions of their parents’ interest in their playing sport also predict their sustained involvement in sport.¹⁵⁸



My heroes are and were my parents. I can’t see having anyone else as my heroes.

*Michael Jordan
Former Professional Basketball
(and Baseball) Player*

My parents played a very big role in my life and growing up as the last of six children I didn’t realize the influence that my parents had on me.

*Nolan Ryan
Former Major League Baseball Pitcher*

Wiese-Bjornstal's work has found that how girls perceive their parents' assessment of their abilities predicts their likelihood of playing and staying in sport.⁵⁵ That is, if their parents do not have confidence in their abilities, neither will they. And dads, are you listening? Studies have found that fathers hold more influence—positive and negative—over their daughter's sport competence and values than do mothers.¹⁵⁹ However, mothers are more likely to first enroll their daughters in sport and then provide ongoing support, such as providing transportation, uniforms, moral support, and snacks.²⁴

There is some good news to report from one study. Researchers from Yale University, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Michigan suggest that children participate in organized activities, such as sport, because they want to, not because their parents make them.³⁰ But parents need to consider whether a child is mentally, emotionally, socially, and physically mature enough to participate in sport. Readiness for a sport is just as important as readiness for school. And, like schooling, younger children need more positive direction at first, until they begin to develop and master the sport.

Parents also benefit from their child's participation in sport. Wiersma and Fifer¹⁶⁰ found that their positive experiences include watching their child learn new skills and having the opportunity to interact with other parents.

On the negative side, parents who expect too much and put too many demands on their young athletes before, during, and after competition can create stress that can destroy their child's enjoyment of sport. Research by Bois et al.,¹⁶¹ Power and Woolger,¹⁶² and Van Yperen¹⁶³ has shown that negative parental support and pressure can result in competitive anxiety, interpersonal difficulties among teammates, and even quitting. Conversely, lower parental pressure has been found to be associated with higher enjoyment by children.¹⁶⁴ An overemphasis on extrinsic goals (winning, trophies, status) by parents can negate intrinsic goal orientation, through which the child gains satisfaction from playing, mastering skills, and improving his or her game. Coaches report that sport performance of children and adolescents is affected by the presence of parents. In addition, parents are most likely to create conflict for coaches during the critical time that their child is improving mastery and transferring his or her trust in authority from the parent to the coach.¹⁶⁵

LaVoi and Stellino¹²⁷ found that the children of parents who create anxiety about failing and emphasize winning are more likely to engage in poor sport behaviors than children whose parents encourage enjoyment and self-mastery. Guivernau and Duda¹⁶⁶ studied how athletes' perceptions of their parents' approval regarding cheating and aggression shape their own views about appropriate

sport behavior. When child athletes feel that their parents are supportive and positive and emphasize mastery and enjoyment, they are more likely to display concern for opponents and grace in losing. They also are less likely to trash talk or whine and complain about the coach or their playing time.

Parents and Spectators Behaving Badly—Yeah, You!

Anyone who has been to a youth sporting event in recent years has seen them. Adults who should know better yelling at their child, the referee, the coach, other players on the team, fans of the other team, or all of them. Angry adult behavior at youth sport events is increasingly documented and studied.¹⁶⁷ Gould et al.¹⁰⁰ surveyed 154 varsity high school coaches across seven sports and found that problems with parents were frequent. Kidman et al.¹⁶⁸ found that parents yell most at their own children during competitions. A 2004 Harris Interactive Survey of 18-year-olds involved in organized sport revealed that 31 percent had seen parents yelling at or arguing with officials, and 28 percent saw parents yelling at or arguing with coaches.¹⁶⁹ The *Sport in America* research found that across age groups, teens are more likely than children ages 8 to 10 to report that they often see adults (including people in the stands, parents, and coaches) behaving badly at games.

In focus groups conducted by Wiersma and Fifer,¹⁶⁰ parents discussed how several specific characteristics of youth sport (i.e., quality of officials) or characteristics of a



*The person you are
is the person your
children become.
Show love and
compassion, self-control
and discipline;
seek knowledge
and demonstrate
good values.*

*John Wooden
Legendary UCLA Basketball Coach*

particular league (i.e., leadership, organization) can influence parent and spectator behavior during youth sport. Research by Arthur-Banning et al.¹⁷⁰ examined the relationship between the sportsmanship behaviors of adults and athletes during youth basketball games. Data were collected on positive and negative sportsmanship behaviors for 142 basketball games, illustrating that “positive spectator and coach behaviors were significant predictors of positive player behaviors. Similarly, negative spectator behaviors were predictive of negative player behaviors, while negative coach behaviors were not” (p.3).¹⁷⁰

In 2007, Holt et al.¹⁷¹ explored what rules parents and children would like to enforce for parents. Participants were asked, “If you could bring in one rule that youth sport parents had to obey, what would it be?” Parents responded that they should be “positive, encouraging, and noncritical” (reported by half of parents), and one in three said they should not “coach from the sidelines.” Players (slightly more than half) also agreed that parents should be “positive, encouraging, and noncritical” and that they should not “yell at the referee” (one in three). Players responded that when parents yell at referees it actually disadvantages them during games, and parents did not seem to understand this consequence of their behavior. Research in Australia also suggests that parents are often unaware of the impact of their behavior (“clueless,” their teens might say).¹⁶⁵

Research by Arthur-Banning et al.¹⁷⁰ found that positive spectator (and coach) behavior predicts positive player behaviors. Conversely, negative spectator behavior predicts negative player behaviors. In other words, negativity is contagious, but so is good behavior. What happens on the sidelines permeates the experience for the athletes and either enhances it—or ruins it. Developmental studies show that so-called background anger can be emotionally distressing for children across the developmental trajectory.¹⁶⁷ It is especially disturbing when the anger is expressed between adults or when it involves men.^{172,173} Seefeldt et al.⁷² postulate that the cumulative effect of this background anger could partially explain why some children drop out of sport at around age 13.

In response to this apparently growing problem, several youth sport organizations have instituted parental codes of conduct. For example, the U.S. National Youth Sports Safety Foundation sometimes imposes “Silent Saturdays,” during which parents agree to stay silent throughout a game—although research showing the importance of positive feedback in fostering sportsmanship suggests that being positive is more important than being silent. Programs such as “Great Fans. Great Sports” aim to change behavior at sporting events through creating a positive competitive environment for athletes, parents, spectators, coaches, and the community.¹⁷⁴ Some programs award fair play points for good sport behavior, which are included in league standings.¹⁶⁷

The Influence of Friends and Peers

Research on influences in sport frequently overlooks the significant role that friends and peers can play in the sport experience. Peers are important to the socialization of all children, inside and outside sport.^{175,176} Numerous surveys and studies have found that establishing friendships is an important reason for beginning and staying in sport.¹⁵² Keresztes et al.¹⁷⁷ studied the sport participation of adolescent girls and found that friends, classmates, and boy/girl-friends are likely to influence sport-related behaviors.

Positive peer experiences in sport contribute to enjoyment, motivation, and future participation.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, negative peer experiences, involving harassment, trash talking, and abusive language toward teammates, create a destructive environment, especially for the least athletically talented on a team. With regard to teammates, children identify misbehavior, selfishness, ridicule, loss of self-control, and dishonesty as having negative effects on their own experience as well as on the team.³⁹ These perceptions are at play during practices and before, during, and after games.

These dynamics can be complicated, however. Although close positive relationships on teams can promote the intrinsic rewards of sport, too much focus on group acceptance can promote unsportsmanlike play.¹⁷⁸

He showed me how to play this game, day in and day out. I thank him for his example and for his friendship.

Former Major League Baseball Player Cal Ripken, talking about his teammate Eddie Murray of the Baltimore Orioles





Role Models for Girls

One of the reasons posited for sport drop-out, or even failure to start playing, is that girls and women simply do not have the role models, encouragement, and positive reinforcement about their sport participation from parents, coaches, schools, and media such as television and newspapers.

A study comparing the quantity and quality of television news that highlighted coverage of women's versus men's athletic events¹⁷⁹ demonstrated that although women's participation in sport is increasing, coverage of women's sport is drastically declining; for example, network affiliates dedicated 6.3 percent of their sport coverage to women's sports in 2004 and just 1.6 percent in 2009. Notably, the 2001 U.S. Women's Open singles tennis match between Venus Williams and Serena Williams drew more viewers than the Notre Dame-Nebraska football game. And the 1999 Women's World Cup soccer final between the United States and China was watched by 40 million people—at the time the most watched soccer game in U.S. television history.^{180,181} But these outliers are just that. Lack of consistent coverage of female athletes deprives girls and women of visibility and role models in the popular culture and perpetuates notions that women's sport is not as important as men's and does not have mass appeal.

Despite this, girls grow up to be women who watch sport. The Women's Sport Foundation estimates that women comprise 35 to 45 percent of the in-arena and television viewing audience of men's professional sport today. Not surprisingly, girls' participation in Olympic sport increases significantly following the Olympic Games, which is one of the few times that the media coverage of women's sport equals coverage of men's sport.⁸

Another barrier for girls in sport is the lack of role models in the form of female coaches. One 2007 study estimated that only 10 percent to 15 percent of youth sport coaches are women.¹⁸² A 2005 study of 600 parents in Michigan by Fredricks and Eccles¹⁸³ found that although more than 27 percent of fathers coached their child's sport team, only 4 percent of mothers did.

Professional Athletes

Becoming a professional athlete is a popular yet unrealistic aspiration for many young boys. Adolescent boys perceive professional athletes as rich, famous, and highly valued. Studies by Cook et al.¹⁸⁴ found that among young boys, the enhanced status and financial wealth of professional athletes are often ranked as more important than the desire to play sport.

Whether Charles Barkley agrees or not, he—and other professional athletes in highly visible sport leagues—are role models for some youth. Yet the headlines are filled with reports of bad behavior on the part of not only professional athletes, but also college athletes.

The *Sport in America* survey of adults found that although 67 percent of spectators spend most of their time watching professional sport, they believe that professional sport lags behind all other categories of sport in actually promoting positive values, while community-based sport is considered to have the most positive actual influence. Only half of those surveyed think that professional athletes have a positive influence on today's youth, and nearly 90 percent agree that well-known athletes have a responsibility to be positive role models for young people. By wide margins, general population adults agree that well-known athletes' personal conduct is as important as their athletic accomplishments.

In 2001, Sailes¹⁸⁵ conducted a random survey of 300 college students at Indiana University and found that 66 percent believed it is the social and moral responsibility of athletes to serve as role models to America's youth. Approximately 30 percent believed that "sport is merely a microcosm of society and consequently mirrors American culture. It is a reflection of the worst and best of society, they felt, stating that it was unfair to hold athletes to a higher standard of social and moral accountability than we hold ourselves" (p.1).¹⁸⁶



***I AM NOT a role model!
I'm a professional
basketball player. I am
paid to wreak havoc on
the basketball court.
Parents should be role
models!***

*Charles Barkley
Former Professional Basketball Player*

***Athletes who refuse to
accept their obligations
as role models are blind
to their responsibilities
as adults.***

*Cedric Dempsey
Executive Director, NCAA*

Children who play sport also set the bar high for well-known athletes. The *Sport in America* survey data found that very few children say they would still look up to a well-known athlete if he or she broke the rules to win and/or took drugs but was still a good athlete. However, it is clear that the behavior of high-profile athletes sends powerful messages to some children about acceptable behaviors. Children responding to the *Sport in America* survey said that if a well-known athlete breaks the rules in a game, it makes children think it is acceptable to break the rules to win. In addition, if a well-known athlete takes drugs, it makes children think it is acceptable to take drugs as well.

Whether professional athletes should be role models, and whether they should be expected to personify true sport, is a matter of some contention. Their glorification can provide a sense of entitlement—after all, we have put them on the pedestal. Especially gifted athletes might not have had the important “others” in their lives—supportive family, coaches, and peers—as they progressed up the ladder. They have survived on their talent alone, and with each success, their challenges to be good role models can become greater. But as Cedric Dempsey said, these are not just highly talented athletes, they are also adults.



Creating a Landscape of Possibilities: A View from the Top

By Doug Glanville

Major League Baseball Veteran and ESPN Baseball Analyst

There are a select few who are able to take their passion for sport and find professional opportunity in that sport. This elite group often is a source of inspiration for many youth sport participants. Young athletes often see such an arrival as a symbol of possibility and the realization of a dream, because the success of those living out the dream makes it tangible to everybody who witnesses it. This dynamic is a part of how top-flight athletes are expected to and therefore become role models.

At the highest level of sport, in practice the convergence of dream and reality is arduous. Hours of training, the bypassing of life balance, the perception that this process happened instantaneously, the expectation of how one is supposed to behave at the top—all of these elements and many more play into the assumption of a role that comes with many responsibilities. It is often true that to attain such a level of excellence, it takes all-out focus at the expense of enjoying other aspects of life. The gymnast trains eight hours a day, the professional baseball player has day-long spring training routines, and the Olympian disappears from family for months at a time to capitalize on a window that opens only once every four years.

In many ways, an athlete's professional status now calls for a level of commitment that dominates his or her life. In fact, it may demand it. As the stakes rise, the expectations rise as well. The athlete needs to be completely focused on the job at

hand to perform and to perform well. This dedication on the part of the athlete is mandatory to make the investment in the athlete worthwhile.

A professional athlete who entertains options beyond the game is seen as having a lack of focus, and players who exercise these options are not seen as wise investments by their backers, because it is assumed that they will walk away for greener pastures.

However, the data clearly show that balance for young people participating in sport is a true asset—it extends the enjoyment of the sport, it allows a participant to find the right fit, and it exposes young athletes to a host of beneficial opportunities.

How do we reconcile the fact that athletes playing at the highest level of sport require a one-dimensional focus with the fact that the emotionally and psychologically healthier athletes are those who have balance in their lives? In theory, one would think that healthier athletes would produce and perform better over time. But most likely, “healthier” may not be quantifiable in the statistical language of the game.

The issues plaguing professional sport today are illustrative. The steroid controversy in Major League Baseball has placed tremendous focus on greed as a motivator. Little attention has been paid to the desperation—real or imagined—that professional ballplayers feel as they age or face failure. In many cases, the greatest

talents have been the worst offenders. This dilemma points to the inadequacy that athletes may feel when, in an environment that demands consistent daily performance, they perceive the door closing on their sport career having already dismissed and lost the possibility of pursuing other careers.

Despite the reality that these professional athletes are uniquely situated to influence young participants in sport, in many cases they have not been able to mature, and in effect they are the ones who need to seek role models. The professional baseball player who signed as a free agent from the Dominican Republic at 16 years of age who is then thrust into a minor league life in a community with little support is at risk of either ethical breeches or failure once the reality of his extremely small chance of really “making it” becomes apparent. Many of these athletes are still at the youth level in maturity in part because playing their game requires levels of persistence that foster emotional stagnation. You must eat, sleep, and drink the game, or the game will eat, sleep, and drink you. Social development slows in part because you must stay in your small team circle and spend all of your time honing your craft. Playing 144 games in 5 months is the Minor League Baseball schedule. Any day off is a bus ride to the next city.

The professional level may appear to be the natural end of the trajectory of participation in sport, but it comes with a new set of demands that filter out the vast majority of participants from previous levels and that can run counter to living

a balanced life and therefore to what may be the healthiest way for young people to enjoy sport.

One strategy used to cope with the tendency toward imbalance is to be productive (a.k.a. “putting up numbers”). Meeting this standard puts a heavy weight on the shoulders of even the most talented performer. In cases in which players did not see any other way to make a living—or did or could not see themselves in any other light—it can be much easier to make the choice to take illicit drugs or use another illicit outlet as a way to hold on to the game and cope. When players do not see a future beyond the game, they will do anything to keep the game going. When they cannot envision other possibilities and paths to success and a productive life, often they can see no way out, and they become trapped in an activity that they once probably enjoyed.

Professional athletes are in a position to positively influence many young participants in sport, but it is important to learn from their true experiences, not just from what we imagine their experiences to be. This involves not only deriving inspiration from the magic of becoming one of the best at a sport, but also learning about the dangers of sacrificing everything for any single pursuit. We can learn that a life in professional sport is most fulfilling when athletes have the tools to be complete individuals. Then, when faced with age or injury or life-changing circumstances, athletes still will be able to envision a fulfilling future.



VI. Ethics and Values Build True Sport

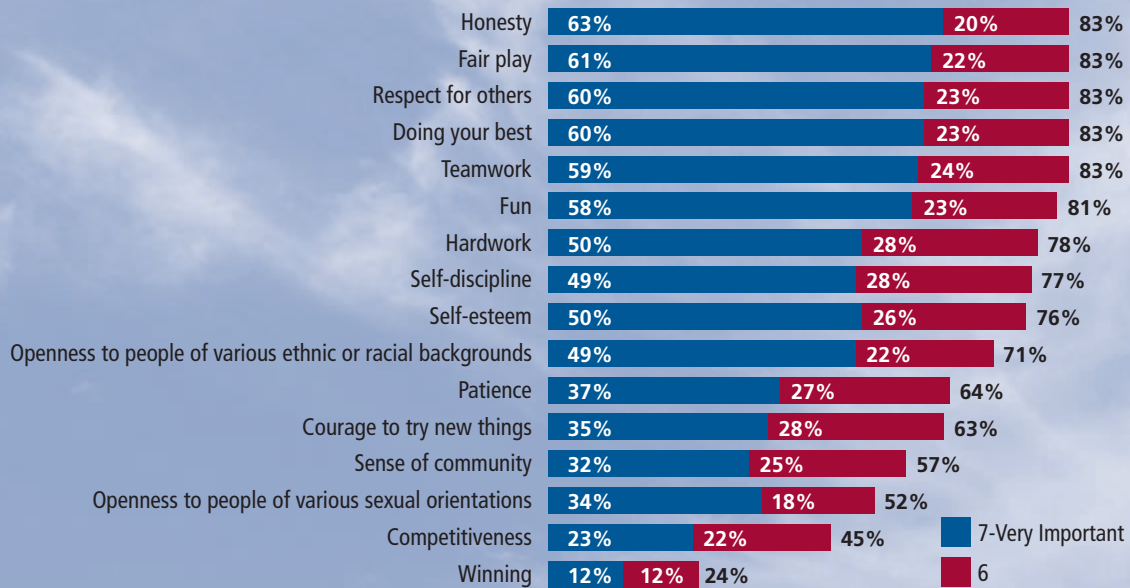
*For when the One Great Scorer comes
to write against your name,
He marks—not that you won or lost —
But how you played the game. Grantland Rice (1880–1954)*

The majority of adults responding to USADA’s survey believe that sport should play a role in teaching morality. More than four-fifths of respondents believe that it is important that sport overall promotes positive values, while three-fifths agree that sport overall actually promotes positive values (Figures 7 and 8). Adults believe that it is very important for sport to reinforce a variety of wholesome values—led by honesty, fair play, respect for others, doing your best, teamwork, and fun. Interestingly, competitiveness and winning rank as the least important values to reinforce through sport, but as highest in terms of the values that sport is actually reinforcing. In addition, fewer than half of adults believe that sport is doing a good job of reinforcing their top five important values. Thus, although adults perceive a benefit in sport reinforcing key values, overall they believe that sport is currently doing the opposite.

At its best, sport is about the honorable pursuit of victory. It is not just about playing by the rules; it is also about playing within the spirit of the rules. It requires sportsmanship, fair play, playing clean, and respect. NCAA defines sportsmanship as exhibiting behaviors that are “based on such fundamental values as respect, fairness, civility, honesty, and responsibility” (p. 15).¹⁸⁶ Ethics violations and the desire to win at any cost threaten the inherent value of sport in America.

Figure 7: Importance of Values to Reinforce Through Sport

(Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



Q 105: The following is a list of values or principles that may or may not be important in sport. Please indicate how important you feel it is that these values or principles are reflected and reinforced through sport programs and activities overall.

Rated a 7 or a 6 on a 7-point scale where 7 means it is very important and 1 means it is not at all important to reinforce this value through sport.

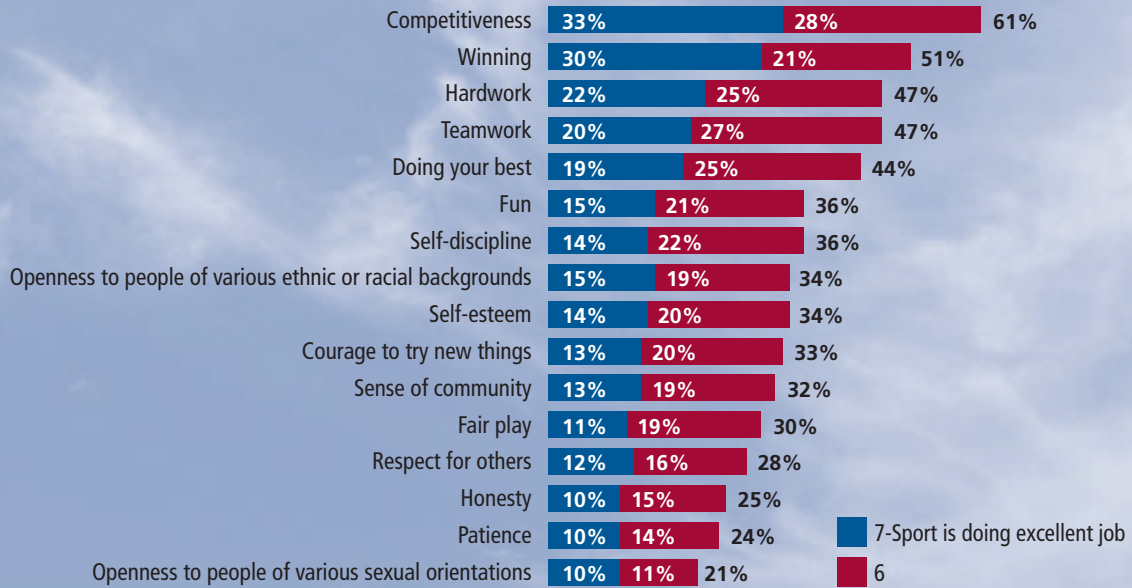
Fair play is violated when athletes engage in poor sporting behavior such as heckling and using offensive language or by losing self-control through tantrums, bragging, bullying, using performance-enhancing drugs, or engaging in overly aggressive play. Fair play also is transgressed through selfish play (e.g., ball-hogging or pursuit of one's advancement over that of the team). Many coaches say they would rather lose a lot of games through fair play with an honorable team than win a lot of competitions with athletes who lack sportsmanship and honor. Rutten has

conducted research on how sport can be understood as a "practice imbued with moral values. Sport not only entails respect for the rules of the game, but also relates to respect for one's opponents, equal opportunities to perform well, mutual cooperation, fairness, and sports-personship. These elements are considered to be constitutive of sport, and may be summarized by the concept of 'fair play'" (p. 256).⁶⁶

Yet many people believe that good sportsmanship is lacking. A 2010 survey by the Awards and Recognition Association

Figure 8: Perceptions of Values Most Reinforced Through Sport

(Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



Q 106: Please indicate how good or poor a job you think sport programs and activities *actually perform* in terms of reinforcing values or principles.

Rated a 7 or a 6 on a 7-point scale where 7 means sport is doing an excellent job and 1 means sport is doing a poor job in reinforcing these values.

found that more than 65 percent of Americans believe that the current state of sportsmanship is worse than it was when they were growing up.¹⁸⁷ According to the survey, respondents believe that “teaching good sportsmanship to children is a parental responsibility. More than 86 percent of respondents reported that a parent is the best person to teach sportsmanship, followed by coaches at 45 percent, teachers at 28 percent, and friends at 17 percent.” The survey found that badly behaving fans present the most common example of poor sporting activities. There is

some good news, though. For four previous consecutive years, 85 percent or more of respondents said the state of sportsmanship is worse now than when they were growing up, so the number has dropped. And, “coupled with other highly regarded sportsmanship viewpoints—more than 85 percent of us feeling one player that displays good sportsmanship makes the entire team stronger—the sportsmanship barometer is changing.”

Perhaps this is not surprising in a climate in which corporate executives fabricate financial records, citizens evade taxes,

professional athletes commit felonies or engage in immoral behavior, college football coaches are caught in recruiting scandals, colleges prefer students with athletic prowess over academic achievements, and university coaches are paid more than the president of the institution. Cheating and unethical behavior appear to pay off, or at least go unpunished in many cases. This breeds an environment in which only “chumps” play by the rules. Sport reflects society, but true sport can serve as a beacon for better behavior and more civility—on and off the field.

Fairness and Fair Play and the Importance of Personal Best

The concept of fairness is a central moral issue for children.¹⁸⁸ Children’s first sense of fairness typically is focused on coaching and the referee’s behavior. For example, children resent being singled out by coaches in terms of field position, playing time, or starting in a game, and they notice preferential treatment of other players that appear not to be based on competency. Child development research shows that as children mature, they begin to ascertain when an adult’s moral authority is legitimate—or illegitimate.¹⁸⁹ And, as children learn about rules and regulations, they also learn that people, including adults, break these rules. How they deal with these dilemmas depends on what they bring to the game and what they expect to get out of it.

The sport psychology literature is replete with studies confirming two primary goal

orientations within which athletes compete. The task-oriented athlete defines his or her success or failure on mastery and learning the game. Many children start out their sport career in this framework. That is, they play sport because it is fun—because it provides intrinsic rewards. Athletes who continue to embrace this orientation as they age are likely to believe that competition is a contest with themselves. Their greatest satisfaction comes from achieving a personal best. This is not to say that they do not enjoy winning. Rather it means that their reward is internal. Truly successful athletes have wedded competition with sportsmanship—witness the careers of Michael Jordan or Cal Ripken.

In contrast, the ego-oriented athlete defines success through wins and superiority—the extrinsic rewards of sport. Research has shown repeatedly that athletes with a strong ego-oriented perspective are more likely to engage in unsportsmanlike play and self-aggrandizing behaviors.^{190,191} Unfortunately, this orientation runs rampant in professional sport. Football players talk trash and dance in the end zone, soccer players head butt their opponents, and baseball players and any number of other athletes use steroids to enhance performance. But these behaviors exist at youth sport levels as well.

Children can be steered in the direction of task orientation at an early age *if they are provided with opportunities to play and improve their skills*—that is, to harvest the intrinsic rewards of sport. This might mean using lower basketball hoops, instituting

must-play rules, using smaller playing fields, or marking “buddies” to guard in a basketball game. These little prods and gifts to children allow them to enjoy the game, master skills, and develop a task orientation to sport.

In the long run, these investments in building a desire for intrinsic rewards are more likely to lead to ethical and appropriate behavior on and off the field. For example, Chantal et al.¹⁹² looked at anabolic steroids users in sport. They found that athletes who use anabolic steroids were less self-determined in their motivation (i.e., they felt more pressure to obtain external rewards or avoid punishment) and displayed weaker sportsmanlike orientations. In addition, they were perceived as more likely to engage in reactive aggression (i.e., intent to injure one’s opponent versus merely hinder his performance).

The Price of Winning at Any Cost

Increased pressure to win comes from all parties—coaches, parents, institutional leadership, communities, and peers. Yet a 2004 Harris Interactive Survey¹⁶⁹ of 18-year-olds involved in organized sport found that 63 percent of respondents said they would rather be on an a team that loses most of its games but allows them to play most of the time rather than on a winning team where they sit on the bench.

As early as 1969, Webb¹⁹³ noted that as athletes age, their attitude toward their sport tends to professionalize—that is, they pay less attention to equity and fairness in sport and place a greater focus on winning. It is not surprising, then, that athletes become increasingly motivated by competition and victory¹⁹⁰ and become more accepting of irregular and aggressive behaviors in competitive sport.^{194,195} Greer and Stewart¹⁹⁶ have observed that children cite



If you make every game a life-and-death thing, you’re going to have problems. You’ll be dead a lot.

*Dean Smith, Coach
University of North Carolina
Men’s Basketball*

winning as more important in organized sport than when playing with peers in their neighborhood (i.e., informal sport such as sandlot or pickup games). Developmental theorists suggest that these informal play settings are better learning environments for children with regard to social and moral development.^{197,198}

As discussed earlier, athletes with ego orientations rather than task orientations are more likely to adopt a “win at any cost” mentality. When this orientation is egged on by coaches, parents, and spectators, it can become the mode of conduct for an individual or a team.

The *Sport in America* research supports the idea that in this country society places strong importance on winning in sport; many adults agree that sport places too much emphasis on winning, and many regard our society as one in which winning is rewarded but effort and participation are often overlooked. However, many also believe that the focus on winning in *professional* sport is acceptable and appropriate, contending that the paychecks received by professional athletes justify this pressure.

The *Sport in America* research also found that many coaches admit to believing that, although winning should not be the only goal in sport, it is important to strive to win. They believe that allowing children to be content with just having fun fails to instill in them an appreciation for healthy competition and pushing one’s limits.

Both quantitative and qualitative research suggests some key differences in attitudes toward winning and tolerance

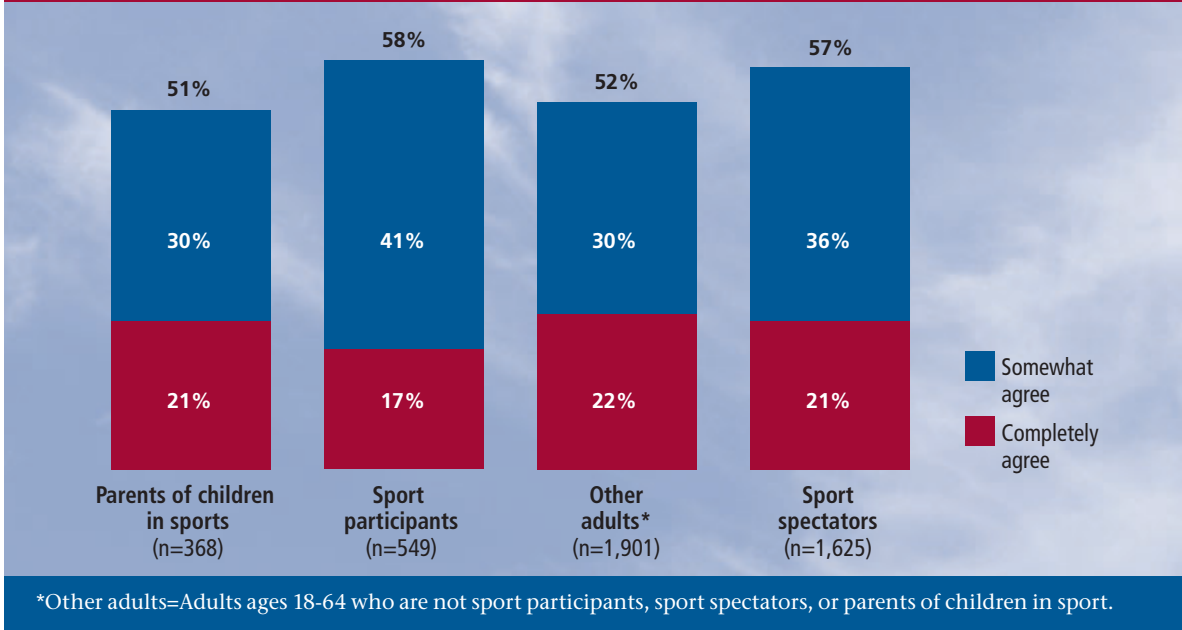
of cheating among teenagers compared to younger children (ages 8 to 10). Consistent with the pattern seen in the general population regarding issues of cheating and winning being more tolerated by younger adults (ages 18 to 34), these data similarly suggest a greater tolerance for cheating (coupled with more direct experience with the behavior among both teens and boys) and a slightly different perspective on winning among teens. Although the majority still recognize that cheating is never acceptable (80 percent), teens are less likely than children ages 8 to 10 to agree that bending the rules to win is the same as breaking them and that bending/breaking the rules is always cheating and never acceptable.

Teens also are more likely than younger children (ages 8 to 10) to report that their parents often expect them to win. In qualitative interviews, teens did admit that winning was the biggest motivator when playing sport because the level of competition for them is often higher and there is more at stake (i.e., college scholarships and various championships).

USADA’s survey data show that 56 percent of sport participants and 49 percent of children who play sport agree that they have a stronger sense of right and wrong because of the sport they play. In contrast, only 22 percent of spectators agree that they have a stronger moral code from watching sport.

Although sport can positively impact ethics, many adults also believe that some sports accept unethical behavior (Figure 9).

Figure 9: There Are Sports That Are Accepting of Unethical Behavior (Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



More than half of general population adults agree that there are sports that are accepting of unethical behavior. In addition, more than one-third of children agree that some sports do a bad job of teaching the difference between right and wrong. Football is the sport general population adults most frequently mention as accepting of unethical behavior, followed by hockey, wrestling, and baseball.

Cheating to Win

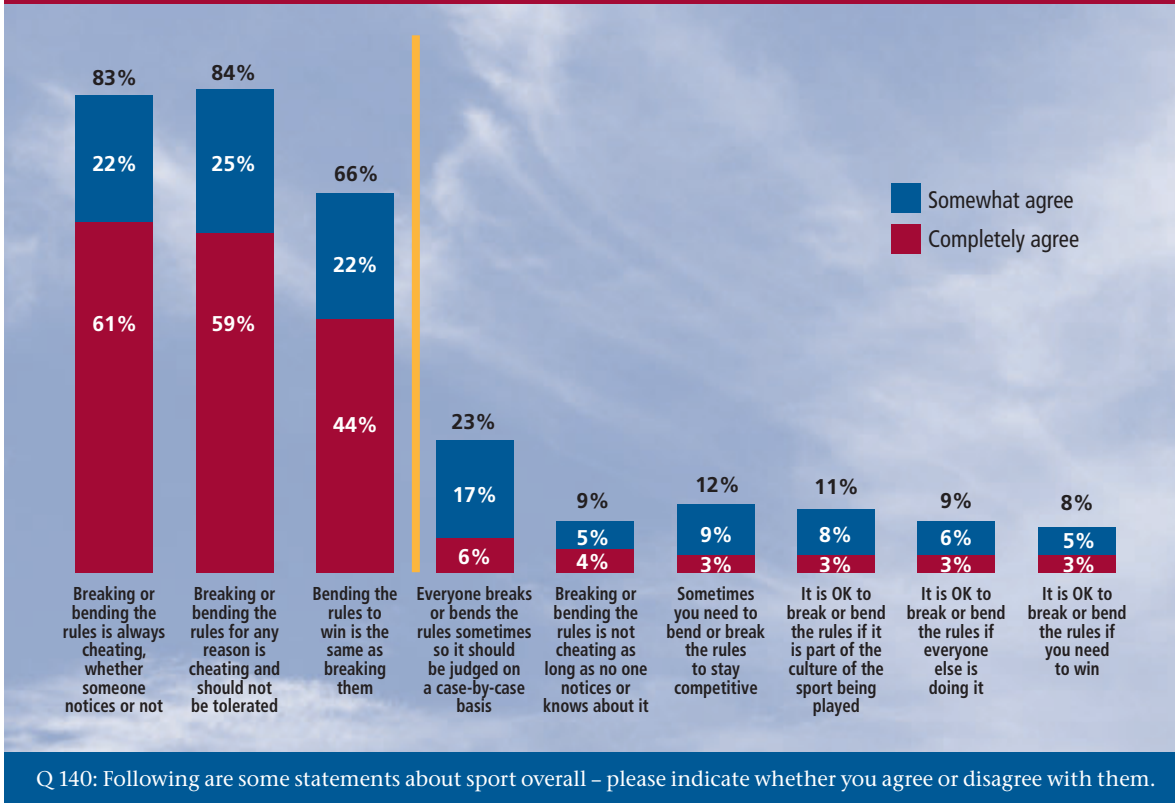
The incentives to cheat increase the more a sport is commercialized, with sponsorships and endorsements. Although less than half of adults think cheating is a highly serious issue facing sport, there is little tolerance for breaking or bending the rules in sport¹ (Figure 10). More than four-fifths

of adults agree that breaking or bending the rules in sport is always cheating, whether or not someone notices, and/or that breaking or bending the rules for any reason should not be tolerated. In general, women and older adults (ages 45 to 64) have even less tolerance for cheating than men and younger adults (ages 18 to 34).

Despite the overall disdain for cheating, about one in five adults admits to having bent or broken the rules in a sport (Figure 11). Sport volunteers, sport participants, and fathers of children ages 8 to 17 have the highest rates of admitted rule bending or breaking.¹

Nearly half of adults surveyed for the *Sport in America* research say they know someone who has bent or broken the rules in sport, a figure that jumps to more than

Figure 10: Acceptability of Breaking or Bending the Rules in Sport (Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



two-thirds among sport participants and children. This number is even higher for those who have cheated themselves—nearly all (96 percent) respondents to the *Sport in America* survey who admit to bending or breaking the rules say they know someone else who has done the same.

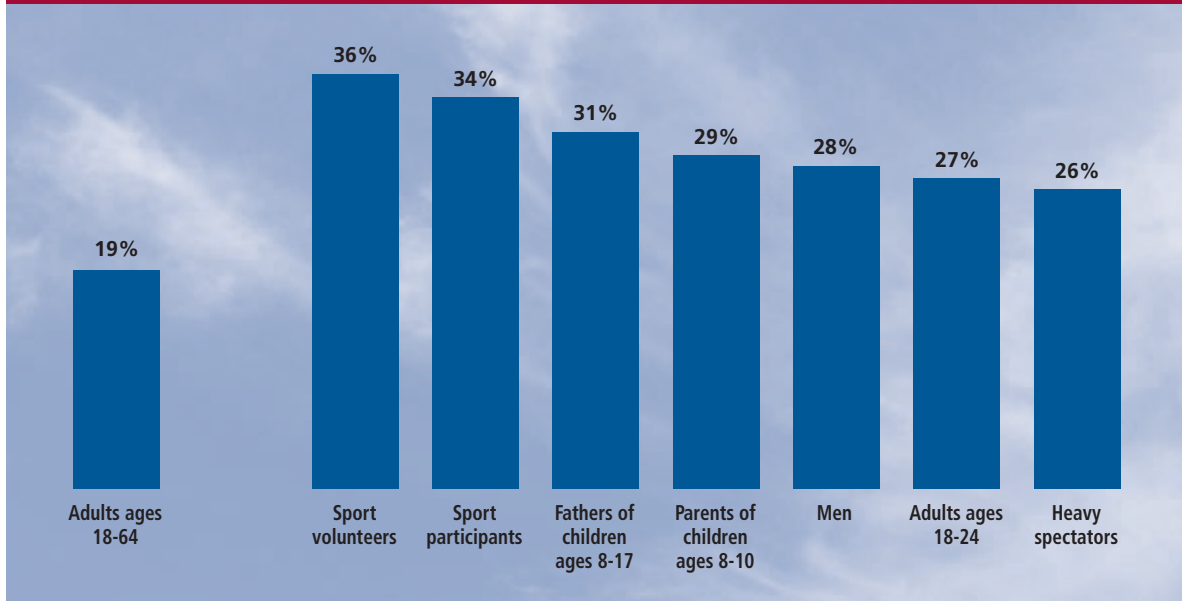
Among children, tweens and teens are more likely to have observed cheating than children ages 8 to 10, and boys are more likely than girls to be aware of cheating in sport. Overall, children understand that breaking the rules in sport is unfair and wrong and that the desire to win does not justify cheating. According to the *Sport in*

America data, more than half of reported incidences of cheating in sport came in the form of intentionally violating the rules.

In qualitative interviews conducted for the *Sport in America* survey, respondents drew a distinction between minor rule breaking and breaking the rules in order to win, with the latter considered more akin to cheating than the former. Some believe that the motives of the player must be taken into account, saying that accidents should not be punished as severely as willful violations. However, the majority of respondents agree that breaking rules to ensure a win is never justified.

Figure 11: “Yes,” I Have Bent or Broken the Rules in a Sport

(Based on general population adults ages 18-64)



Q 141: Have you ever bent or broken the rules in a sport?

There may be a rule that in long distance track, you need to stay within the white line of the track. But if there is bumping going on and you are bumped outside the line, I don't believe it to be your fault and as long as an effort is made to get back inside the line it would be alright (male, age 25 to 34).

Holding in football to protect your quarterback is against the rules but an acceptable offense that brings with it a 10-yard penalty but keeps your quarterback healthy. Then there are people who break the rules to gain a competitive advantage—that's unethical and unacceptable (male coach, age 55 to 64).

Some respondents mentioned instances for which strict rule enforcement may actually lead to the least fair outcome. Others believe that when safety is at stake, it might be worthwhile to violate the rules and be penalized rather than have an athlete get seriously injured. A few respondents observe that “pushing” the rules through innovation in technique is one of the ways that sport evolves.

Everyone tries to find a way to get an edge in competition—as long as they are staying in the rules, is that bending them?... For example, dolphin kicking underwater off the walls in swimming. In the past it wasn't always explicitly against the rules but people started doing it because it was faster.... Now it's accepted and explicitly allowed in many situations. The earlier bending brought innovation (male coach, age 25 to 34).



Children likewise understand that the issue of rule breaking in sport is complex and point out circumstances and situations where they believe that breaking the rules is not the equivalent of cheating. First, informal play (gym class, recess, playground) is more lenient when it comes to following the rules, and children are less concerned with winning in these arenas and may even devise their own rules. Second, accidental or minor violations such as unintentionally breaking the rules as a result of aggressive play are not regarded at the same level as deliberate or malicious rule breaking. Third, there are instances in sport where the principles of honor and respect justify not following the rules, such as not continuing to score points when a team has already sealed its victory.

If you accidentally get a handball in soccer it is breaking the rules but it sometimes can't be helped if the ball is kicked right at you (female, seventh grade).

When asked about their motive for bending or breaking the rules in sport, adults who cheated are most apt to say they like being a “winner,” which highlights the negative influence of “winning at any cost.” However, one in five admitted cheaters claim they did not realize they were breaking the rules.

The good news is that a majority of children agree that sport does a good job teaching them a host of values.¹ Foremost, children agree that sport teaches them to have fun, be part of a team, be competitive in a good way, and play fair.

The Hall of Shame— Doping to Win

Fair play, both in academics and sport, is a concept that is challenged by the notion of performance enhancement. Both cognitive and physical performance can be viewed as potentially enhanceable, and arguments can be made that enhancement can serve two purposes: 1) gaining an edge or 2) keeping up with others (who may or may not have used performance-enhancing substances). A study by Donohue et al.¹⁵² found that student athletes consistently reported pressure to use performance-enhancing drugs.

The *Sport in America* survey found that a majority of adults (75 percent) agree that athletes' use of performance-enhancing substances is a violation of ethics in sport. This is further underscored by the fact that Americans rank the use of performance-enhancing drugs as the most serious problem facing sport today, closely followed by the focus on money and the criminal behavior of well-known athletes. When serious cheating does occur, adults favor punishment. For example, there is broad support for punishing Olympic athletes who use performance-enhancing drugs. More than three-quarters of adults think that Olympic athletes who cheat in this way should be held accountable. The use of such performance enhancers is overwhelmingly associated with ethics in sport, and athletes who use them are seen as personally unethical.



If you can react the same way to winning and losing, that's a big accomplishment. That quality is important because it stays with you the rest of your life, and there's going to be a life after tennis that's a lot longer than your tennis life.

*Chris Evert
Grand Slam Champion
Professional Tennis Player*

Ehrnborg and Rosen's research¹⁹⁹ has found that the use of performance-enhancing drugs has not always been regarded as cheating. Some motives for doping have been to improve and maintain physical functioning, to cope with pressures and the striving for social and psychological goals, and to attain economic benefits.

Research by Wiefferink et al.²⁰⁰ found that users of performance-enhancing drugs seem to justify their actions based on the norms of sport. In addition, research by Rosenfield²⁰¹ reveals that high school users of ergogenic agents seem unaware of the risks of their use.

The fact is that doping is cheating.



VII. Conclusions: What We Can Do to Achieve True Sport

Playing sport, and learning how to compete, provides a crucial venue for educating our nation's youth and shaping our national culture. It is a vehicle for building positive relationships, fostering personal growth and perseverance, and learning ethical behavior. Myriad benefits to our health and general well-being can be attributed to sport, not only by diminishing obesity and disease, but also by fostering positive psychological and social outcomes. The physical, mental, and social health benefits of sport are enormous and can last a lifetime. Sport can build character, provide a moral compass, and bring people together. Beyond the love of family and friends—and good parenting—there are few human activities that can make that claim.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden wrote in his memoirs, *The Wisdom of Wooden*, that his father was formative in instilling the values of sport and life:

Basketball or any other sport can be great fun to play and entertaining to watch. However, it offers something more important. The lessons it provides—taught properly—apply directly to life. Many of those lessons are usually taught first by a good mother and father, but sports can help make them stick and add a few more.²⁰²

We might play sport for different reasons—because it is fun, because the glory of pitting our skills against those of a well-matched opponent is exhilarating, because we value our relationships with teammates or coaches, or because we feel the personal accomplishment of pushing our physical and emotional limits. Whatever the reason, true sport—that is, sport played hard, fair, and clean—fosters personal growth and social goods.

Beyond the intrinsic rewards of sport are the extrinsic rewards—winning, fame, and notoriety. Certainly, everyone who plays sport at any level wants to win—that is the nature of competition. But we know from research



presented in this report that the most successful competitors—those who win at true sport—love what they do and strive constantly for their personal best. In the words of National Football League legend Walter Payton, “I never played to get into the Hall of Fame. I only tried to be the best that I could be.”

All too often, though, the lure of winning, fame, and notoriety stretches its grasp from the world of professional sports down to the preschool playground. The indicators of a society that aims to win at any and all costs are plentiful: early specialization, overtraining, teams and programs that deny opportunities to less developed and less talented children before they have a chance to grow into their bodies, overzealous parents, intolerant coaches, obnoxious fans, athletes who use performance-enhancing drugs or otherwise break the rules, and elite professional athletes who have lost their moral way. The athletes placed on pedestals by our

youth are modeling the way for the next generations, for better or for worse.

Do we really want to win at *any* cost? Setting that as a goal invites a multitude of abuses. If we can learn to lose with grace after a fair and well-fought match, respect ourselves or the athletes on the field because of their efforts, and look forward to the next contest, then not winning can become a lesson learned. Especially at the youth level, we need to remember why we play sport. It is to reap the benefits of engaging in an activity that provides returns on so many levels, regardless of the outcome.

We have to remember that in sport, like so many other areas of life, outcomes are not always more important than experiences. The experience of preparing for and playing sport provides the essential intrinsic rewards that successful athletes talk about. Winning is the “cherry on top,” the “icing on the cake.” But it is not the “only thing” we should want from

sport. And if we let the desire to win run rampant and unchecked through sport, then we will continue to see the transgressions among athletes, coaches, and fans mount. If we cannot save sport from an obsession with extrinsic rewards, then where will our children turn to learn the lessons that true sport offers? And is our nation well served by a citizenry that learns to prize winning and extrinsic rewards at any cost as the values held most dear?

How then can we best support sport in this country and ensure that the next generations benefit from the great lessons that can be derived from good sport? Survey research finds that, as a nation, we *say* that we prioritize the intrinsic values sport offers—fun, fair play, integrity, teamwork, self-esteem, self-discipline, patience, sense of community, and more—yet we are systematically rewarding the elements we have prioritized as least important—winning and competitiveness.

We have reached a tipping point that requires acknowledgement, commitment, collaboration, and ultimately action, in order to protect sport for current and future generations. For all people who participate in sport, it can be a vital part of their lives, even if their lives are rich with other interests, other paths to excellence, and relationships outside of sport.

Together, we need to start rewarding what we value, teaching what we value, creating a landscape of opportunities, modeling the way, and ultimately creating a true cultural shift for the future of sport. Everyone has a role to play.

1. Reward what we value.

Study after study and survey after survey reveal that people play sport because it is fun. When it ceases to be fun, we stop playing. The many things that make sport no longer fun include burn out; pressures from parents, coaches, and peers; unethical behavior of teammates and fans; and wanting to be involved in other activities. We also value sport because of the vast contributions it makes to greater health and well-being at the individual and community levels.

What parents say they want for sport to instill in their kids are positive values and principles, such as integrity, teamwork, fair play, self-esteem, self-discipline, and a sense of community. Yes, competing and even winning are good. And importantly, while honoring and congratulating those who win, we also should be rewarding fair play, hard work, good sportsmanship, and respectful behavior.

Can we start to find ways to reward what we value? We think we can. Communities and sport organizations must find ways to ensure that “having fun” is always at the top of the list of goals for any athlete, that fair play is required, and that good sportsmanship and respect for opponents, the rules, and the game are recognized and rewarded.

This means paying close attention to how sport is executed—are the principles of teamwork, integrity, accountability, sportsmanship, respect, and personal best as important as winning? Are we watching for signs that children and youth are enjoying what they are doing rather than responding to the pressures and needs of others?

2. Teach what we value.

There are forces at work in sport that have created an environment that, if unchecked, can erode the core values of sport. The growth and expansion of professional sports, the reliance of colleges and universities on revenue-generating teams, the celebrity status granted elite athletes, the pack-like mentality of some sports fans, and the obsessive behavior of parents to produce elite athletes highlight the priority we place on the extrinsic values of sport. This is not to suggest that athletes should not get paid, that colleges should not fill their arenas, that fans should not love their team, or that children and their families should not aspire to healthy competition and excellence in sport. Rather, to save sport it means that those in a position to reinforce its intrinsic values must be vigilant and persistent in communicating those values.

The *Sport in America* research found that coaches are the number one influence in children and youth sport, followed by parents and teachers. These are the adults who are directly involved—face-to-face—with young athletes. Coaches have more influence than professional athletes, college athletes, or Olympians. In fact, they can help guide children and youth not only in their game, but also in how to understand the examples set by others. That is a tall order for coaches, especially those who volunteer, and they need all of the support they can get from their leagues, schools, officials, parents, and communities to impart and enforce the core values of sport.

Sport organizations, whether in schools, in clubs, or in the community, need to encourage active and engaged discussions about what true sport means. We need to

identify and develop strategies for communicating the values of true sport to athletes, officials, coaches, parents, and fans, and comprehensive education must be widely accessible to coaches on fostering ethical coaching, as well as on such topics as empowering athletes with character, moral development, and citizenship; performance enhancing substance prevention; and others.

3. Explore new ways to organize youth sport.

There is much good to be found in many youth sport programs around the country. More children are playing sport than ever before, and many communities have made concerted efforts to provide venues—formal and informal—for children and youth to train, play, and compete.

However, many parents are finding that there is still a significant chasm between playing at the high school varsity level and not playing at all, with few alternatives in between. As a result, many youth (and their parents) are either on the highly scheduled regimen of intense training and specialization in pursuit of a place on the varsity roster or are left out of positive sport experiences altogether.

This societal norm perpetuates the notion that youth must get “on track” early and young and make haste to secure rightful spots on high school teams, even leading to practices such as “redshirting” kids at kindergarten age to facilitate later success as more advanced students/athletes. It is important for organizers of youth sport to remember that even though only a small percentage will go on to become college athletes, let alone elite or professionals, all can benefit from the life experiences sport provides.

Communities need to ensure that “late bloomers” are not shut out of sport forever. All children deserve the opportunity to hone their skills at their own developmental pace. Programs to accommodate later bloomers might include, for example, skills camps, positive integration into existing teams (for example, “must play” rules that all parties understand and accept), or that are based on developmental levels rather than age. Programs should be available for freshman and junior varsity teams to ensure continuity of playing experience for those who are not able to make varsity teams.

Youth sport organizers would do well to provide opportunities for young participants to have greater control over the organization of play, without parents, officials, and referees dictating or managing the parameters. Young people can learn a great deal from the experience of making decisions, determining on their own what is right or wrong—or fair or unfair. The process of establishing appropriate action and behavior can set an invaluable course for character development and self-identity. As Wooden said, sports reveal character, and the playing field is a place where children can develop a life-long moral compass that transcends the sport experience itself. To professionalize sport and over-organize at a young age can deny youth the opportunity to build their own moral identities and to take personal responsibility for fair play.

In addition, organizers of youth sport need to become more family-centric. If a family has more than one child or a child is engaged in more than one activity, league organizers and coaches have to learn to respect the right of the parent and/or child to make reasonable choices, especially at earlier ages, about family priorities. Efforts to be a well-rounded individual should not be met with punishment or extra bench time. And fees to play should not become so high that families have to choose which child can play and which cannot—or whether anyone can play at all.



We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair; that success is not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline.

*President Barack Obama
State of the Union Address
January 25, 2011*

4. Provide a landscape of opportunities.

This issue of early specialization is a significant problem plaguing youth sport at the school, community, and elite levels. Children are discouraged from playing multiple sports or from engaging in non-sport activities. Research demonstrates that children, and then athletes, thrive in a landscape of many possibilities. The pressure to specialize, at the exclusion of other well-rounding activities, increases as children enter high school and college. Some children can tolerate such specialization and even flourish in such an environment. However, many do not; thus, we need to give children and youth the permission to play the saxophone and soccer, to be a member of 4-H club and the tennis team, or play basketball and run cross country. Why should a 10-year-old have to decide between swimming and ballet?

Parents need a chance—and permission—to get off the hamster wheel that youth sport has become. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2010) has warned that:

Allowing young people to specialize intensely and year-round in a single sport usually immerses their families in team cultures within which parental moral worth depends on investing so many family resources to the sport that the diversity of a young person's physical activities, experiences and relationships is compromised.

Creating venues where children can compete at their own level and on their own time and leaving room for other activities will be good for them and good for their parents. Parents need permission



to say “no” to a sport culture that is more concerned about winning than their child’s healthy development.

Research shows that there is little relationship between specialization and later achievement and that specialized sport perversely can lead to adverse psychosocial and emotional consequences. Conversely, a landscape of opportunity can foster a richness of invaluable life experiences that transcend sport and competition and provide exposure to myriad choices for personal achievement and fulfillment. Exposing children to many activities promotes balance.

For those young athletes who live under the high pressure of specialization, the concern is that they might fall prey to the justification or rationalization that anything goes in the race to win at any

cost—even including taking performing-enhancing drugs.

We need to treat sport as we treat education—we want our students to be well rounded and to learn more than any one subject and at a pace that is appropriate to their skill levels. This means having courses for beginners, advanced, and even gifted students. We do not reward only the gifted; we recognize that everyone has something to offer and everyone can benefit.

5. Model the way.

Professional athletes are not the only role models in sport. In fact, the *Sport in America* survey found that coaches and parents are more important role models than anyone else. As adults, it is our responsibility to embrace and model true sport values.

Although everyone has a responsibility to ensure that sport plays a positive role in society, adults working with or around young athletes play the most central role—whether they are coaches, teachers, parents, or fans. We cannot control what professional or college athletes do, and when they set a bad example our children need to have the experiences and supportive environment necessary for them to recognize that bad behavior and reject it. Providing and pointing out positive role models allow children “to be what they see.”

6. Create a cultural shift to renew the true spirit of sport.

Sport takes place in an environment that has been severely tarnished by scandals and cheats, and the question remains regarding how this generation of sport players will be remembered. Well-founded concerns about sport center on the overemphasis on winning, specialization, and commercialization, as well as the underemphasis on ethics. This signals the critical need for a cultural shift in how we experience and value sport.

As a nation, we must renew the true spirit of athletic competition—that is, sport that upholds the principles of fair play, sportsmanship, integrity, and ethics. By working together, leveraging existing programs that promote true sport, and identifying ways to build new pillars for an atmosphere of good sport, we can dramatically improve the promise of sport in the United States, rebuilding it as a positive force. The foundation of such a movement should include programs that advance fairness, excellence, inclusion, and fun and that promote ideals that enable us as individual citizens, clubs, teams, schools, districts, communities, cities, and states to work toward achieving true sport at all levels.

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True Sport USA Report Team

USADA's True Sport USA Report Advisors

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Douglas M. Glanville grew up in Teaneck, New Jersey, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in systems engineering. He then entered professional baseball as the first round draft pick of the Chicago Cubs in 1991. He was a recipient of the Jackie Robinson Award and was an Academic All-American and Athletic All-American in 1992. Mr. Glanville had a nine-year major league career playing center-field for the Chicago Cubs, the Philadelphia Phillies, and the Texas Rangers. His baseball career includes a 293-game errorless streak and 1,100 career hits. Mr. Glanville was the Players Representative for the Major League Baseball Players Association from 1997-2004, at a time that was critical to Major League Baseball. Following his baseball career, Mr. Glanville wrote a column for the *New York Times* online titled "Heading Home," which unveiled the human side of a life as a professional baseball player and led to his first book—*The Game from Where I Stand*. His commentary on life in sport led to his current role as a baseball analyst for ESPN's *Baseball Tonight* and his running opinion column

with TIME.com. He has worked closely with Baseball Factory to develop high school student-athlete mentoring programs and is currently serving on the boards of Athletes Against Drugs and the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association. Mr. Glanville has received numerous recognitions and awards for his commitment to youth and community service activities.

Thomas H. Murray is past President and CEO of The Hastings Center. Dr. Murray was formerly the Director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics in the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, where he was also the Susan E. Watson Professor of Bioethics. He serves on many editorial boards, has been president of the Society for Health and Human Values and of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, and among other current posts serves as Chair of the Ethical Issues Review Panel for the World Anti-Doping Agency and as International Expert Advisor to Singapore's Bioethics Advisory Committee. Dr. Murray has testified before many congressional committees and is the author of more than 250 publications including *The Worth of a Child*. Dr. Murray is currently Principal Investigator of The Hastings Center's project on ethics and synthetic biology, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. In January 2004, he received an honorary Doctor of Medicine degree from Uppsala University. Dr. Murray is currently working on a book on ethics, drugs, and the meaning of sport.

Author

Kathi E. Hanna has more than 25 years of experience in science, health, and education policy as an analyst, writer, and editor. Dr. Hanna served as Research Director and Editorial Consultant to President Clinton's National Bioethics Advisory Commission. She currently serves in a similar capacity to the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. In the 1990s, she served as Senior Advisor to the President's Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses and later served as the lead analyst and author of President Bush's Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans and the Task Force on the Future of Military Healthcare. In the 1980s and 1990s, Dr. Hanna was a Senior Analyst at the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, contributing to numerous science policy studies requested by congressional committees on science education, research funding, science and economic development, biotechnology, women's health, mental health, children's health, human genetics, bioethics, cancer biology, and reproductive technologies. Over the past two decades, she has served as an analyst and editorial consultant to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. National Academies, the U.S. Office for Human Research Protections, FasterCures, the American Heart Association, the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, and the March of Dimes. She has authored or co-authored 40 reports and papers ranging across studies of children and environmental health, obesity, immunization, genetics, emergency care, epilepsy, cancer, and general health

and science policy. Before moving to the Washington, D.C., area, where she is currently located, she was the Genetics Coordinator/Counselor at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Dr. Hanna received an A.B. in biology from Lafayette College, an M.S. in human genetics from Sarah Lawrence College, and a Ph.D. in government and health services administration from the School of Business and Public Management at George Washington University.

USADA Staff and Consultants

Erin Hannan has a background rich in a variety of enterprise marketing, branding, communications, and outreach initiatives. She currently serves as the Communications and Outreach Director for the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA). She is focused on contributing to a positive atmosphere in which the anti-doping movement can prosper and facilitate effective change. Her particular concentration is on ensuring that competing athletes and our nation’s youth are equipped with valuable tools and skills for making healthy, informed, and ethical choices in their lives. In 2010, she served on the World Anti-Doping Agency Athlete Outreach team at the Vancouver Games. Her background before USADA includes public relations and marketing management in the nonprofit sector, brand management, intellectual property management, marketing and advertising management in agency and for-profit environments, and small business ownership, as well as a commitment to volunteer board governance for nonprofit organizations.

Lisa A. Voight has served the U.S. Olympic movement since 1985. She was one of the first interns for the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) in 1985 and worked her way up to serve as the Executive Director of the U.S. Cycling Federation (1993) and the first Chief Executive Officer of USA Cycling (USAC) from 1995-2002. She led the acquisitions of professional bicycle racing and BMX racing and oversaw the corporate merger and governance restructuring of USAC. In 1995, Ms. Voight became a member of the USOC Board of Directors as a representative of the National Governing Body Council and was elected in 2000 to the USOC Executive Committee. She has served on a number of important USOC committees including the landmark 2003 Governance and Ethics Task Force—the cornerstone for the governance restructuring of the USOC. She has also served on a number on international commissions, including the UCI Ethics Commission, and she was named to Street and Smith’s Sports Business Journal Listing, “Super 50 Women Sport Executives,” in May 1998. Ms. Voight served as the Chief Executive Officer of the International World Games Association (2003-2007), with responsibility to The World Games event and 33 International Sport Federations. Currently, she is an independent consultant to USADA, focusing on education outreach and ethics. She is involved with ethics, values, sportsmanship and character curriculums, research, and programs.

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Sport in the United States

Approximately 162 million U.S. adults (more than three-fifths) have some relationship to sport-related activities.

About 3.6 million people who volunteer in this country say their main volunteer activity is coaching, refereeing, or supervising a sports team.

The number of youth involved in organized sports in the United States is estimated to be more than 50 million.

Nonprofit, nonschool, youth sport organizations collect \$5 billion a year.

Americans overwhelmingly believe that sport can and should be a positive force in teaching our youth the values of honesty, fair play, respect for others, teamwork, and self-discipline.

Studies have shown that children and youth participating in sport, compared with those who do not, exhibit greater academic success, greater personal confidence and self-esteem, stronger peer relationships, greater family attachments, more restraint in avoiding risky behavior, and greater involvement in volunteer work.

Nearly 90 percent of Americans believe that well-known athletes have a responsibility to be positive role models for young people.

Across a variety of audiences, coaches are believed to be the number one positive influence on today's youth involved in sport.

Almost two-thirds of U.S. adults believe that sport overemphasizes the importance of winning.



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