

Philosophy of Sport and Coaching

Role of Sport

Youth across America engage in all sorts of physical activities. Some in their backyard with their siblings, while others actively participate in organized sports. This continues through maturity in to secondary, post-secondary and on in to adulthood. Whether it is organized or not, sport plays a critical role in American culture. Sport benefits the individual and society in a variety of ways, including but not limited to; health, social skills, responsibility, accountability, motor skills, and entertainment.

Health

Sport offers a variety of health benefits for people of all ages. The health benefits of sport are both mental and physical. Mentally, sport keeps the mind sharp and focused on tasks and goals. According to the Australian Institute of Sport, physical activities can also help overcome mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety (Australian Participating, 2010). Physically, sport allows individuals to develop a strong muscular system and improves their cardiovascular, nervous, and immune systems.

Social

When individuals engage in sport, they also benefit socially. Participation in sport allows people to develop self-confidence and high self-esteem. Through sport, individuals gain a sense of achievement, which builds confidence (Australian Participating, 2010). When people participate in team sports, they gain a sense of belonging, which helps them find their place and role in

society. Every player on a team has a role, some are the vocal leader, some lead by example, some follow, and some manage time. Whatever their role is on the team, it will carry over to affect the aspect of their life that does not involve sport. This can help them develop their identity as a member of a classroom, community, or society.

Individuals that participate in sport develop communication skills that benefit them socially. Especially in team sports, individuals learn and practice various types of speech. Captains of teams will motivate and persuade their teammates to work towards a certain goal. Teammates often debate with each other over strategy and skill development. Players may also take part in creating and implementing team strategy, in which case they will interact with coaches and other adults and learn how to speak respectfully, even when they disagree. The ability to effectively communicate is a skill that benefits all individuals in sport and out.

Accountability and Responsibility

Accountability and responsibility are two words that often go hand in hand. It is almost impossible to have one without the other. Sport provides individuals with opportunities to acquire both. In team and individual sports, every athlete is held accountable for their role on the team. If one player does not perform as expected or does not show up for practice, s/he is accountable. Playing a sport ingrains in individuals that other people rely and depend on their actions. For many individuals, being held accountable determines what decisions they make. At all levels, athletes must be held accountable for their actions and decisions and they must know that there are consequences and rewards for those actions and decisions.

Responsibility helps build character. If athletes at a young age are given responsibility, they learn at a young age the importance of being responsible and making the right decisions. This also allows them to “practice” responsibility before the decisions they make become more trivial. At a younger age, all athletes should be given some responsibilities to begin to teach them life skills. As athletes mature and enter secondary and post-secondary schooling, responsibility should be earned and can be taken away when athletes do not fulfill their responsibilities.

Another aspect of accountability and responsibility is the ability to manage time effectively. This is a skill that needs to be learned at a young age. An effective way to do this is by getting individuals involved in sport. This needs to continue through the school age years. Athletes can be taught and shown examples of how to effectively balance time between academics, sport, leisure, and other extra-curricular activities. Athletes that cannot manage their time effectively will experience their performance in one or multiple areas.

Motor Skill Development

Participation in sports helps youth develop their motor skills. Active involvement at a young age will assist youth develop their discrete, serial, and continuous skills. Sport provides youth with another avenue to practice these skills. Numerous sports also help enhance both open and closed skills. Open skills are those in which the environment is unpredictable and closed are those skills performed in a predictable environment. Sports such as baseball provide an unpredictable environment when athletes are required to catch or hit a moving ball. This benefits athletes later in life when they are required to perform other skills in unpredictable environments, like driving (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2008).

Entertainment

One of the aspects of sport that is never forgotten is the role it plays as a form of entertainment. Every Sunday, millions of Americans watch their favorite National Football League (NFL) team on television. This love of watching the game, watching other people perform skills that they cannot do goes all the way down to youth sports. People across America fill high school football stadiums on Friday nights even when they are not related to any athlete playing. People love watching sports.

Functions/Objectives of Sport

Sport can be broken down in to four levels; youth, high school, collegiate, and professional. At each of the four levels, the functions or objectives that sport serves varies. While there is some overlapping from one age group to another, there are some differences in how the functions are prioritized.

Youth

1. Health – sport at this young age needs to be geared towards promoted good health and making healthy decisions. Involvement in the sport is a start, but healthy skills must be taught to the athlete
2. Education – sports offer a variety of learning opportunities, including learning about healthy living. Sport is a good teaching mode for developing life skills.
3. Fun – athletes must enjoy the sport they are playing or they will burnout and quit playing.
4. Winning – defined in its traditional sense as defeating an opponent, winning should not be a priority at this age. Winning, however, can be defined as achieving a desired result.

This can be as simple as correctly putting down a bunt. Winning in this sense installs a sense of achievement in athletes. It also makes the athlete aware of what s/he can and cannot accomplish.

High School

1. Health – still a high priority at this level because athletes need to develop a healthy living style. At this age, athletes have more control over eating and sleeping habits and they need to make the right decisions.
2. Education – as athletes have more control and freedom in their lives, they need to be taught how to make the correct healthy decisions.
3. Fun – sport should still be fun at this age so that athletes still want to continue playing. This is the age when athletes start to get to make their own decisions about participating. Previously parents may have signed them up for leagues, but at this age athletes are gaining autonomy from their parents. When sports are no longer fun at this age, athletes begin to drop out quickly.
4. Winning – obtaining a sense of accomplishment at this age can help athletes gain self-confidence, self-respect, and improve their self-image at an age when their body is changing drastically.
5. Entertainment – At this age, athletes begin to understand how sport can serve as entertainment for other people not directly tied to the team or sport. This fascination with watching sport continues from high school through professional sport.
6. Business – for those athletes that no longer desire to play the sport, at this age they need to be made aware that there is a business aspect to sport. Numerous former athletes

participate in sport, but in advertisement, analysis, broadcasting, management, or equipment manufacturing to name a few.

Collegiate

1. Winning – at this level the primary goal is to move on to the professional level. In order to do this the athletes must achieve a desired result. The official team wins and losses do not always matter, but personal wins do.
2. Fun – collegiate athletes are only still playing because the sport is fun. It needs to stay this way or players will burn out and not seek a professional sport job.
3. Entertainment – millions of Americans watch college sports simply to watch athletes perform skills they cannot accomplish.
4. Business – hand in hand with entertainment, collegiate sport serves a business, as a way for colleges and universities to make money off of the athletes.
5. Health – at this level most athletes have already chosen to lead a healthy lifestyle. College athletes are surrounded by people that live and promote the same lifestyle.

Professional

1. Entertainment – this is the highest function for professional sport for most Americans. Only a select few very talented athletes make it to this level, so all former athletes are left on the sidelines as spectators.
2. Business – at this level, sport has become a business and the best example of this is athlete salaries. Athletes get paid to play a sport. The money to pay them comes from entertainment function of sport

3. Fun – athletes at the professional level still play because it is fun. When professional athletes retire, one of the major reasons they cite is that the sport is no longer fun and enjoyable. When a sport reaches this point, it is time for the athlete to hang up his shoes.
4. Winning – in this case, team wins and losses matter. There is no level above this, so perfection in the sport is demanded. Perfection results in wins and coaches and players are hired and fired based on their ability to win.

Success

Success is a term that is thrown around sports at all levels. The term has multiple meanings and interpretations. The Oxford American Dictionary defines success as a favorable outcome, doing what was desired or attempted. Many people equate success with winning. Winning has become a desirable outcome at all levels of sport, so much that coaches are hired and fired based on their winning percentage (how often they are successful) and players are traded or cut from teams because a coach or management does not think they can help the team win or be successful.

Success as an Athlete

As a youth involved in athletics the term success should not include wins and losses. Success at this level should be measured by the attainment of goals. Realistic goals need to be set for this age of athlete so they can acquire a sense of accomplishment and success and they can start to build a strong self-image. As the athlete matures, success needs to be measured as the athlete refines and fine tunes his/her skills in life and in the sport. An athlete is successful at this age if they effectively manage their sport with other aspects of life (academics, for example) and perform a skill they previously could not.

At the collegiate and professional level, success is measure more by wins and losses, but not necessarily as a team. Pitchers in baseball are measured by their wins and losses, while taking in to account run support from their team. Professional athletes are traded often because of their personal ability to win and be successful.

Success as a Coach

Just as an athlete, success for a coach varies depending on the level at which the coach is involved. At the youth and high school level, coaches are more involved with skill and player development. Team wins and losses do not matter, even at the varsity level, as long as players develop the skills necessary to be individually successful. Within the high school level, success is measured differently for a freshmen, junior varsity, and varsity coach. The freshmen and junior varsity coach are measured by the success of them teaching the athletes the fundamentals, skills, and strategy of the sport. They are responsible for preparing the athletes for the varsity level. At the varsity level, a coach's success should still be measured by the individual progress of the athletes rather than the team, but in most communities they are measured by team wins and losses.

Gender Equity

Title IX and Sport

In recent decades gender equity has become a highly debated topic. Title IX (1972) does not allow for gender discrimination in academic programs at educational settings that receive federal funding. This relates to athletics because they are considered extracurricular activities, so schools

must allow equal opportunities for males and females. Therefore, according to federal law men and women should receive the same opportunities to participate in sport. Unfortunately, K-12 schools find loopholes in the federal legislation to keep women from playing certain sports (football, for example).

If females and males want to participate in sports that are traditionally male dominated, they should not be told they cannot. One major concern against allowing females to play male dominated sports is the risk of injury. If a female is explained the risks and the female athlete and her parents accept them, then she cannot be denied. Many schools fail to comply with Title IX by not providing the female athletes with equitable funding. While schools do not have to spend the same dollar amount on each male and female athlete, they need to be provided with equitable quality of goods and services (Women's, 2008).

Gender Testing

Another gender equity issue was brought to light by Caster Semenya, the female sprinter that was forced to take a gender test. While Semenya is a professional athlete and the International Association of Athletics Federations governs her sport and determined they could force her to take a gender test, the same gender issues exist at the high school level where sports are governed by state athletic federations. This issue naturally raises the question of whether high school athletes could be forced to take gender tests. At the high school level gender tests should not be permitted. At this young of an age the body is still developing and the athlete should be allowed to participate with the gender they identify with, regardless of their physical appearance.

Cross Gender Coaching

As more women starting participating in interscholastic sports across America, numerous questions were raised. One of those questions was, who should coach a women's team, a woman or a man? Before Title IX was passed a majority of the coaches of female teams were women. Ironically, when the legislation was passed it also opened avenues for men to cross over and coach women's teams. Today, a majority of coaches of female teams are males (Robertson, 2006). Male and female coaches should be hired based on their credentials, including success rate, ability to teach the sport, ability to teach skills (sport and non-sport specific), community involvement, and focus on academics (if job is at a school). Coaches should not be hired based on their gender. While it may be easier for a coach to relate to players of their same gender, that does not guarantee success.

Racial Equity

Federal law dictates that public entities (those that receive federal funding) are not allowed to discriminate based on race, creed, or national origin. This applies to sports that are associated with public schools. No individual should be denied the right to play a sport based on his/her race. They should be measured by their skill and successes. If an individual does not meet the standards set forth by the school, then they can be denied, but not based on their race, creed, or national origin.

Cutting Players

Unfortunately, one aspect of sport is that not all individuals that try out for a team can be on the team, they have to be cut. There are several reasons why a player should be cut from a team, including risk of severe injury, lack of sufficient sport specific skills, lack of dedication and responsibility, and when personalities do not align with team goals and expectations.

Risk of Injury

If an individual is at risk of injury in a particular sport s/he should be cut from the team.

Individuals might be at risk of injury because they have not developed at the same rate as their chronologic peers, they do not possess the motor skills necessary for the sport, or they have a pre-existing health issue or injury. If a player is being cut for this reason, the coach needs to be specific about why the individual is being cut. Specificity will allow the player to make improvements if necessary.

Lack of Skills

Individuals should be cut if they do not possess the sport specific skills needed to succeed in the sport. One of the functions of sport is to build self-confidence and self-esteem. If the individual is kept on the team and does not succeed, this may have negative impact on the athlete and result in low self-confidence and a poor self-image.

Lack of Dedication and Responsibility

All sports require dedication and responsibility. Some individuals enjoy playing the sport, but lack the dedication and responsibility to be successful in the sport. These players will be poor role models for other athletes on the team and must be let go.

Not Aligning with Team Goals and Expectations

Prior to the start of tryouts, coaches need to make all individuals trying out for the team aware of what the goals and expectations are. If an individual demonstrates that his/her goals and expectations do not align with the team, they must be cut. If this individual is made a part of the team, it will result in arguments and frustration throughout the season. One expectation that all schools have is that athletes maintain a certain grade point average and pass a certain number of courses. If an individual cannot meet these expectations, they need to be cut so that they can focus on their education.

Pay to Play

A controversial topic entering sports today is whether or not athletes should have to pay to play their sport. Paying to play and not having to pay to play have their advantages and disadvantages.

Pros to Paying to Play

A lot of school districts are facing budget cuts today and one of the first areas to receive less funding is extracurricular activities, which includes sports. Since the school district can no longer afford to pay the cost of the sport, athletes have to step up and cover the costs. Having the athletes pay to play raises the level of commitment the athlete has for the sport. Without paying to play, there is no financial obligation to play and many athletes may back out of their commitment as a result. Paying to play also ensures that the sport is available to all students, even those that receive free and reduced meals and would not usually be able to afford the sport. Paying to play covers the costs of transportation, uniforms, equipment, and field maintenance.

Cons to Paying to Play

Unfortunately, paying to play excludes some individuals from participation in sport. Some families can barely afford the necessary equipment and then they are forced to pay to play. One function of sport is that it is supposed to be fun for the athlete. Forcing the athlete to pay excludes some individuals from having that fun and learning how to live a healthy lifestyle. Paying to play risks sports becoming dominated by the wealthiest of people, the most advantaged. Paying also raises a number of issues that parents may have with the sport. Parents might argue that since they have to pay for uniform costs they should have say in what uniform is selected. They may argue that since they paid to play, their child should not sit on the bench (Hoff & Mitchell, 2006). While paying to play raises a number of issues, school districts are finding that it is necessary with state and federal budget cuts to education.

Personal Ethics and Sportsmanship

There are a variety of topics and issues today that force a coach to reflect on his/her personal ethics and their interpretation of sportsmanship.

Supplements in Sport

In recent years, baseball has been in the spotlight for the use of illegal/banned substances. Baseball players like Mark McGuire, Roger Clemens, and most recently Barry Bonds have provided great examples for young athletes on the importance of educating yourself about supplements.

In general, a supplement is anything you put in to your body that is neither naturally produced by your body or a part of a healthy diet. Examples of supplements include, but are not limited to, multivitamins, single-nutrient supplements, mineral supplements, and ergogenic aids.

- **Multivitamin, single-nutrient, and mineral supplements** – Have NOT been scientifically proven to enhance performance unless a vitamin deficiency exists
- **Ergogenic supplements** – Have been scientifically proven to improve and enhance athletic performance, however there are risks

It is important to note that no supplements are needed if the athlete consumes a healthy, well-balanced diet. If any supplements are to be consumed, it should be in the form of a multivitamin to compensate for an unbalanced diet. Athletes should also use supplements if directed to do so by a doctor (Australian Supplement, 2010).

Assistant Coaches

Every head coach at any level is responsible for creating a coaching staff. The head coach needs to hire assistant coaches that have the same philosophies, strategies, and lifestyle that meet program standards. If an assistant coach does not meet the expectations of the program s/he should be fired. Head coaches need to hold assistant coaches to the same standards that they hold themselves. One important aspect of the relationship between head and assistant coaches is communication. Failure to properly communicate can result in unwanted situations. If an assistant coach acts in a manner that is unethical and is outside the standards set by the head coach, s/he should be fired.

Recruiting in High School Sports

High school sports in the past couple decades have become more and more competitive, examples of this include the numerous physical and verbal altercations between fans, players, parents, and coaches. This is a result of how success is measured. Too many people today measure success by the number of team wins and losses and not by the individual victories each player achieves when s/he accomplishes a task that was previously unreachable. The drive to earn team victories has led to recruiting in high school sports.

High schools recruiting from other high schools and from middle schools should be strictly enforced. There is nothing wrong with high schools inviting athletes to camps, but many coaches cross this line and actively try to influence an individual's decision of which high school to attend. Recruiting of this level misses the whole purpose of high school, to get an education.

Conclusion

Coaching is an amazing opportunity to work in a sport you love. It allows a coach to teach the fundamentals and strategies of a sport to eager athletes ready to prove their worth. It also allows a coach to help athletes develop social, personal, and professional skills that will benefit throughout their lives. Coaching allows teachers to mold the athletes of tomorrow.

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