A Framework for Planning Youth Sport Programs That Foster Psychosocial Development

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Although there is considerable interest in the use of sport as a vehicle to promote psychosocial development in youth, little is known about the specific content or implementation strategies that are likely to account for positive outcomes. In this article, a brief review of current literature and a working definition of youth development through sport are provided to lay a foundation for a framework for planning youth sport programs that are structured to promote psychosocial development in participants. The components of the framework are outlined and suggestions for research, evaluation, and program development are offered.

During the last decade, numerous programs designed to enhance youth development through sport have been developed. Many of these programs are based on the belief that sport participation provides fertile ground for youth to develop skills and attitudes that have considerable value in adult life. Although the value of sport participation has garnered some empirical support, there is evidence that athletic involvement can also have a deleterious effect on children and adolescents (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1990, 1993). The difference between whether sports build character or character disorders has less to do with the playing of the sport and more to do with the philosophy of the sport organization, quality of coaching, nature of parental involvement, and participants' individual experiences and resources (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000; Smith & Smoll, 2002). As such, organizations or programs that attempt to use sport as a vehicle to enhance the psychosocial or educational development of youth must plan carefully and consider a large number of factors.

The purpose of this article is to provide information to assist professionals in designing and implementing programs that promote psychosocial development through sport. The framework is comprehensive in scope, but compartmentalized

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to allow for portability to different settings and to invite empirical investigations of the efficacy of individual components. In particular, (a) a brief review of current literature on youth psychosocial development through sport is provided, (b) a working definition of youth development through sport programming is offered, (c) a theoretically based framework for planning programs is presented, and (d) suggestions for implementing and evaluating youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development are outlined.

Enhancing Psychosocial and Personal Development Through Sport

With over 40 million young people between the ages of 6 to 18 participating in organized sport in the United States alone, it is not surprising that many people believe that sport participation teaches skills and attitudes that are important for adult life (Smith & Smoll, 2002). Historically, the belief that sports provides training for life can be traced to early Greek and Mayan cultures and also formed the primary argument in proposals to include athletics and physical education in United States school curricula in the early 1900s (Danish et al., 1990). It was not until the 1970s that this belief began to be called into question with some regularity by psychologists and sport scientists who suggested that the emphasis on winning at all costs was having a detrimental effect on young participants' psychosocial development (Martens, 1987; Ogilivie & Tutko, 1971; Orlick & Botterill, 1975). Questions were raised about overbearing parents, questionable coaching tactics, losses in self-esteem, and high youth sport dropout rates, to name just four areas of concern (Danish et al., 1990). The brewing controversy over the value of sport participation led eventually to a body of literature about these issues.

Unfortunately, reviews of research concerning the relationship between sport participation and the acquisition of life skills and positive characteristics revealed inconsistent findings and, at best, can only provide lukewarm support for the value of sport in youth development (e.g., Bloom, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002). The inconsistent results may be due to the small number of programs that teach life and sport skills in a systematic manner and because the vast majority of adults who facilitate youth sport programs have no formal training in coach education or youth development (Ewing, Seefeldt, & Brown, 1996). Furthermore, most studies in the area are limited by their use of correlational designs and fail to address the possibility that students who mature at a faster rate physically or who have higher levels of motivation to succeed may select sport as a natural proving ground of their abilities. For example, a Carnegie Council report (1995) indicated that students with more parental support and higher levels of ability and socio-economic status were most likely to participate in after-school sport programs. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the amount of benefit that can be attributed exclusively to the value of sport participation without pre-activity baseline data or random selection procedures (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In fact, when pre-activity differences are controlled, relationships between sport participation and positive developmental outcomes are either reduced or disappear altogether (Larson, 2000; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003).

Although research on the effects of sport participation on youth development is not conclusive, there is considerable empirical support for the type of learning environment that is most conducive to fostering self-esteem, persistence, and skill

development in young athletes (e.g., Duda, 1992; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997). Coaches and parents who place primary emphasis on external motivations such as winning, social comparisons, and public recognition, can create an ego-oriented or performance-focused environment. Coaches and parents who focus on effort, self-improvements, and intrinsic motivation create a task-oriented or mastery climate. There is considerable support for the notion that youth sport participants in task-oriented or mastery climates are most likely to display a strong work ethic, persist in the face of failures or disappointments, and commit the time and effort necessary to foster intrinsic motivation and the development of positive life skills (e.g., Czikszentmihalyi, 1996; Fry & Newton, 2003; Larson, 2000).

In conclusion, there are very few programs that teach life and sport skills in a systematic manner. Nonetheless, a growing body of research has identified specific factors that create a mastery climate in which young people are most likely to develop skills and attitudes that will facilitate a positive transition into adult life.

Toward a Definition of Youth Development Through Sport

In order to develop a working definition of youth development through sport, it is important to differentiate between the terms development, intervention, and prevention. To understand these differences, it is helpful to consider the activities' primary foci and goals. Developmental activities focus on growth and skill acquisition. Intervention programs are designed to stop or reduce negative behaviors. Prevention programs introduce participants to activities that strive to keep them from experimenting with negative behaviors. The vast majority of youth sport programs are designed to introduce participants to a specific sport or structured recreational activity that satisfies the desire for belonging, physical fitness, and fun. Although these types of programs may espouse specific values or characteristics, it has been estimated that 90% of youth sport coaches in the United States do not have formal training in coach education or youth development (Ewing et al., 1996). Without trained leadership, it is doubtful that life skills and other positive characteristics are taught in a systematic way. Examples of youth programs in this category include Little League Baseball, Pop Warner Football and Cheerleading, and community-based youth sport programs in softball, basketball, soccer, and other sports.

In contrast to youth sport programs that have sport skill development as their primary focus, there are a number of youth programs that use the sport experience to stop or reduce negative or health compromising behaviors (interventions) or those that try to get young people addicted to sport rather than other potentially harmful activities (prevention). Although these programs may include training in both sport and life skills, this training is less important than providing participants with positive activities within a safe environment. Youth activities that would be classified as prevention programs would include midnight basketball (Hartmann & Wheelock, 2002) and Tobacco Free Sports Program (Center for Disease Control, nd). Intervention programs would include sport-related activities that are offered to individuals who have already been identified as having behavioral, substance abuse, or other problems. Intervention programs are typically offered in settings like alternative schools, drug rehabilitation clinics, or correctional facilities and

strive to provide participants with a sport based physical activity, a healthy outlet for their emotions, and a positive forum for interactions with adult mentors. Howard and Peniston (2002) provided numerous examples of sport-related intervention programs, including Project Payoff in Buchanan County, MO; the Community Intensive Supervision Project (CISP) in Pittsburgh, PA; and the Success Through Academic and Recreational Support (STARS Objective) in Ft. Myers, FL.

Quite different from programs that have a primary focus on teaching sport skills or that strive to intervene with or prevent health endangering behaviors are those youth sport programs that are designed to make a direct connection between the skills and attitudes that can be learned through sport and academic, personal, or career development. These youth sport programs make an effort to teach sport skills and life skills concurrently and they contain clear expectations for achievement and learning. Although relatively few in number, these programs promote academic, social, and personal development as their primary focus and not only teach sport and life skills directly, but also engage participants in non-sport roles or other activities through which they can test out their skills in different domains. The First Tee (Petlichkoff, 2004), Play It Smart (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004), Personal-Social Responsibility Model (Hellison & Walsh, 2002), and SUPER (Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002) are examples of youth sport programs that fit this description.

In general, programs across the entire spectrum of youth sport involvement provide important activities and experiences for participants. Whether simply for fun and exercise or part of a systematic strategy to help young people acquire important skills for use in adult life, sport is an important element in the lives of millions of young people throughout the world. Some youth sport programs are designed to help participants develop assets and skills that enable them to function effectively in sport and/or other life domains. There are also programs that are structured to use sport participation as a vehicle to prevent or remediate health-compromising behaviors. A visual representation of the spectrum of youth sport programming can be seen in Figure 1.

Youth sport programs that promote psychosocial development are those that use sport as a vehicle to provide experiences that promote self-discovery and teach participants life skills in an intentional and systematic manner. In addition, these programs have clearly defined goals and strategies to enhance the generalizability and transfer of life skills to other important life domains. This definition serves as the cornerstone of our youth development through sport framework.

A Framework for Planning Youth Sport Programs That Foster Psychosocial Development

Our proposed framework, summarized in the Appendix, is grounded in relevant research findings and recommendations from leaders in the field of youth development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Larson, 2000; Pittman, 1991; Smith & Smoll, 2002) and is organized according to four critical areas. Based on an examination of the best practices identified by youth development experts, positive psychosocial growth is most likely to occur when young people are (a) engaged in a desired activity within an appropriate environment (context), (b) are surrounded by caring adult mentors and a positive group or community (external assets), (c) learn or acquire
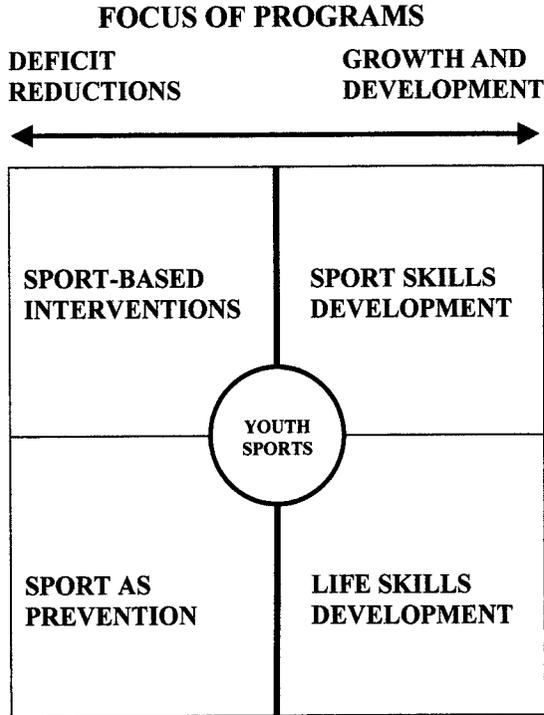
FOCUS OF PROGRAMS

DEFICIT
REDUCTIONS

GROWTH AND
DEVELOPMENT

SPORT-BASED
INTERVENTIONS

SPORT SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT

YOUTH
SPORTS

SPORT AS
PREVENTION

LIFE SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 — The spectrum of youth sport programming.

skills (internal assets) that are important for managing life situations, and (d) benefit from the findings of a comprehensive system of evaluation and research (Petitpas et al., 2004).

Context

Adolescence is a time when young people should be trying out different experiences, establishing a sense of industry, and planning for the future (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1966). Unfortunately, instead of being energized by new experiences and the excitement of developing skills necessary for prospective careers, the majority of youth remain focused on the present and report that they are generally bored and disconnected, particularly at school (Larson & Richards, 1991). Video games and the Internet are filling time once reserved for homework and family activities, and most adolescents go to school and do homework because they *have to*, not because they *want to*. Therefore, a major challenge facing youth development professionals is to create an environment or context where young people can develop a sense of initiative. As described by Larson (2000), initiative is closely aligned with agency and freely chosen action, and it provides the internal motivation necessary to push oneself persistently in efforts to achieve challenging goals. Initiative is also a key ingredient in other positive attributes such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement (Larson, 2000). To develop initiative, individuals must engage in

activities that they find intrinsically motivating, challenging, and important enough to warrant the expenditure of considerable time and effort (Czikszentmihalyi, Rathune, & Whalen, 1993; Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). Ironically, it appears that the activities that are most vulnerable to being eliminated during school budget cuts, such as sport, arts, and music, are the school-based activities that are most likely to satisfy each of these criteria (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000).

A second element in creating the right context for positive development is finding a valued role within an important group (Carnegie Council, 1995; Eccles & Barber, 1999). Adolescents have a clear need to belong and many of them join organized groups in order to gain peer acceptance and a sense of identity (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). As such, participation in organized sport would seem to provide a positive alternative to the lure of street gangs and other groups engaged in various forms of health endangering behaviors. Sports may provide individuals with a place where they can develop their skills and sense of initiative, but may also provide them a status that satisfies their need to have a defined place within a group that is highly valued by their peers (Poinsett, 1996). Participation in sport is a desirable activity among young people, particularly in the United States, and for decades, athletic achievement has been shown to be more highly valued than academic achievement among the vast majority of young people (Coleman, 1961; Eitzen, 1975; Weiss, 1995). In fact, being a successful athlete is the most desired status among junior and senior high school students (Weiss, 1995).

A third consideration in creating the optimal context for positive youth development is engagement in an activity that is voluntary; contains clear rules, goals, and incentives; and requires persistence and concerted effort over time (Larson, 2000). Participation in sport provides young people with a wonderful forum in which to test and develop their skills, to learn how to overcome setbacks and roadblocks to goal attainment, and to gain immediate feedback concerning their progress toward achieving identified outcomes (Danish et al., 1993). Learning to conform to set rules and boundaries, to manage one's emotions, to handle personal wins and losses, and to persevere in the face of adversity are all important psychosocial skills.

In addition, the right kind of sport experience can provide a psychologically safe environment where people are willing to take risks and to learn from their mistakes (Danish et al., 1993). In planning youth sport programs, professionals should become familiar with research on various psychological processes and motivational climates conducive to fostering psychosocial growth. Knowledge of constructs such as self-regulation, observational learning, sources of feedback, and developmental readiness (e.g., Smoll & Smith, 2002; Weiss, 2004) will ensure that the environment and activities involved in youth sport are appropriate for the age and sport experience of the participants. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to address these constructs in detail, youth sport program planners should strive to create and maintain a mastery learning climate (e.g., Duda, 1992; Eccles et al., 1998) or provide alternatives to traditional competitive sports, such as Orlick's (2002) "cooperative games" initiative. This is particularly true for young and inexperienced participants who are apt to benefit most from an environment that emphasizes fun and provides opportunities for individual mastery within a positive supervisory climate (Orlick, 2002).

Sport is also one of the few activities in which individuals will consciously seek out and test their abilities against what they perceive as more challenging

competition. Although they risk failure, it is not unusual for young athletes to travel to different places to challenge themselves against better competition in efforts to maximize their capabilities. Nonetheless, unless young athletes are in the right context, it is doubtful that the majority of them will experience the positive psychosocial benefits expected.

External Assets

Although having the right context is central to youth psychosocial development through sport, positive growth is not likely to occur unless individuals are surrounded with external supports and a caring community system (Benard, 1997; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Perkins, 1997). The key characteristic of these external supports is a shift from a system that is focused on attempts to remediate problem behaviors to one that supports and promotes individuals' successes and provides them with opportunities to gain confidence in their abilities to use their transferable skills in nonsport domains (Danish et al., 1993). Therefore, while community programs can serve as protective factors that may buffer the effects of some negative life events (Winfield, 1991), it is the quality and density of the social interactions and relationships formed with caring adult mentors that is mostly likely to lead to the development of positive assets and characteristics (Benard, 1997; Petitpas, Danish, & Giges, 1999).

Youth psychosocial development is an ongoing process that often requires the support of adults and older peers who are not afraid to challenge and demand excellence from young people. Effective caring adult mentors are individuals who hold high and positive expectations for youth and who are willing and able to maintain regular involvement over time (Benard, 1997). Relationships between adults and youth cannot be forced and they usually require consistent contact over an extended time period while the youth are engaged in structured and goal-focused activities that they view as intrinsically rewarding (Benard, 1997). In fact, data from an extensive investigation of youth development initiatives indicated that 80% of programs that were deemed as effective maintained involvement with youth for a period of at least nine months and none of the effective programs had less than 10 activity sessions (Catalano et al., 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers and coaches are the two groups of people who are most frequently identified by youth as having the strongest nonparental influence on their actions and beliefs (LeUnes & Nation, 1983; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Winfield, 1991).

In addition, positive outcomes are not so much a factor of programmatic approaches, but evolve from the quality of the relationships, behaviors, and expectations of adults and mentors who interact in a consistent way with community youth (Benard, 1997; Petitpas et al., 1999). For example, Smith and Smoll's Coaching Effectiveness Training Model (e.g., 1990, 1997) provides a framework for coach education that has been shown to reduce stress and enhance self-esteem for youth sport participants. Programs that rely on "canned" content without considering who is facilitating the program or how the materials will be delivered are not likely to have success, particularly in inner city locations (Murray, 1997).

Parental monitoring and involvement is another external asset that can have clear benefits in youth development programs (Perkins, 1997). Many families lack credible information about child development or the skills and strategies necessary to manage families effectively (Hawkins & Catalano, 1990); nonetheless, parents

and guardians, who become involved in their children's activities and demonstrate a clear interests on a day-by-day basis without being intrusive, are in the best position to reinforce appropriate behaviors and attitudes at home and provide a strong buffer against health-endangering activities (McLoyd, 1998).

Beyond caring adult mentors and parenting figures, the community can also be an important external asset. Although there is considerable support for the belief that the quality of the relationships established between caring adult mentors and youth participants is more important than the specific content of a particular youth development program, it is unlikely that individuals will internalize desired skills and qualities unless they are able to try out their skills in different settings. Research supports that when young athletes are provided opportunities to teach or lead younger individuals, they show significant gains in their self-confidence and career self-efficacy (Danish, Nellen, & Owens, 1996). Therefore, another important component of a strong external asset system is the availability of a community environment that encourages activities in which athletes can give back to their own neighborhoods. Planned and structured community service activities, particularly those that enable athletes to assume leadership roles with other youth, foster a sense of pride in one's community and enable participants to become external assets for others.

Internal Assets

Consistent with our definition of youth development through sport, effective programs should strive to teach important life skills in a systematic manner and contain clear strategies to foster generalizability of these skills to other domains. Historically, positive youth development is based on the fundamental position that being free of problems does not mean that individuals are prepared for the future (Pittman, 1991). As such, the emphasis on the teaching and acquisition of life skills has been the core element of most youth development programs, including general (e.g., Resilience Training; Winfield, 1994) and sport-focused (e.g., SUPER; Danish et al., 2002) initiatives. In addition, several studies have shown a strong inverse relationship between the acquisition of assets (i.e., life skills) and involvement in high-risk behaviors (e.g., Keith & Perkins, 1995; Rutter, 1987). It appears that the broader the range of assets acquired, the lower the incidents of a wide range of youth problems (Catalano et al., 2002).

It takes time for individuals to adopt and internalize new behaviors, and for this process to occur, program participants must experience the benefits of the new behavior through multiple trials over an extended period of time (Meichenbaum & Turk, 1987). Therefore, the effectiveness of youth development programs is likely to be dependent on their ability to teach a broad range of social, planning, and problem-solving competencies over a time period of enough duration to allow participants to internalize these skills as their normal approach to life situations. In addition, several program developers have argued that the best way to foster skill acquisition is to integrate sport and life skill instruction seamlessly rather than attempt to teach these topics separately (Hellison & Walsh, 2002; Petlichkoff, 2004).

While it is important to develop life skills, there are other internal assets that are also essential in promoting positive youth development. In general, youth are faced with many developmental tasks as they proceed from latency through adolescence (Erikson, 1959). During this time period, individuals are required to begin the process of establishing a clear and positive sense of personal identity and an allegiance to a valued social or cultural subgroup (Catalano et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, this developmental process is complex, affected by a number of factors including gender, race, culture, and sexual orientation, and can be anxiety provoking for many adolescents (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993).

Sport participation provides individuals with opportunities to be important figures in their social world and allows them to accrue success experiences and a sense of personal identity (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Therefore, active participation in sport programs can enable individuals to connect with a constructive and goal-oriented group that encourages self-exploration of personal values, needs, interests, and skills and offers experiences that help youth make important decisions about their personal identities (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). In particular, programs that include goal-setting, self-appraisal, and future planning activities while promoting a sense of purpose and a hopefulness about the future are most likely to assist participants in developing a cogent identity (Catalano et al., 2002).

Even though there is widespread belief that sport participation teaches skills that have considerable value in adult life, there is evidence that life skills do not transfer automatically from one domain to another (Caplan, Bennetto, & Weissberg, 1991; Danish et al., 2002; Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986; Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992). It appears that young people rarely understand that the skills they are acquiring through sport have value in other domains. Even if they do understand the broad applicability of these skills, they typically have little confidence in their abilities to use the skills effectively (Danish et al., 1993; Petitpas et al., 1992). Therefore, to be effective, youth development programs should assist participants in identifying their transferable skills, create opportunities for them to use these skills in different contexts, and provide them with the support and encouragement necessary to enable them to gain confidence in their ability to use their skills effectively in various situations. Involvement in community service activities or leadership roles (e.g., coaching, teaching, peer-mentoring) outside of their primary sport provides individuals with opportunities to use their transferable skills and to also learn about themselves. Through this type of involvement, young people learn to interact effectively with peers and adults, and often gain confidence in their abilities to be successful in the classroom and in their communities (Danish et al., 1996; Dryfoos, 1990).

Research and Evaluation

Programs focused on the positive psychosocial development of youth need to document the efficacy of their interventions quite carefully. Evaluation protocols, at a minimum, need to assess if programs accomplish the outcome goals that are the focus of their intervention strategies. As many programs have multiple foci (e.g., the development of many different internal assets), the evaluations often need to be multidimensional in nature so that each internal asset is adequately assessed. As much as possible, these assessments should use standardized instruments and methods so comparisons can be made across programs. For example, if increasing self-concept is a goal of a youth sport program, an instrument such as the Self-Descriptive Questionnaire–II (Marsh, 1990) could be used. Results from this assessment could then be compared to normative data for this instrument, as well as to other evaluations of youth development programs that have used this assessment method. Additionally, a comprehensive evaluation plan should include measures of increases in positive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., greater self-confidence, better goal-setting skills) as well as reductions in problem behaviors (e.g., less risky

behavior, less drug use) to capture adequately the total effect of the program on the youth involved.

Experimental designs with valid and reliable measures and the possibility of making cause and effect conclusions are certainly desirable, but often they are not feasible for evaluating youth development programs (Greene, 2000). Case studies are a viable alternative to traditional research methodologies. Hellison and Walsh (2002), in their review of the effectiveness of the Responsibility Model of teaching physical activity, identified several benefits of the case study approach to evaluation: (a) an exploration of process and outcome together; (b) treatment of each program or site as a unique case with particular qualities, such as implementation challenges, special populations, and environmental influences; (c) triangulation of different types of data from multiple sources, such as interviews, focus groups, archived data, and custom designed questionnaires; and (d) the identification of unintended outcomes, both positive and negative. Case study methodology should be considered when designing and implementing youth development through sport programs so that the programs can evolve to best meet the needs of the participants.

An additional consideration is the longevity of the effect of the program. Catalano et al. (2002) stated that the vast majority of programs lack adequate evaluation plans and, of those that have plans, few evaluated outcomes beyond the conclusion of the program. Longitudinal evaluations are needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs in preparing participants to cope effectively with subsequent life transitions. For example, a high school based sports program may want to track its participants several years beyond high school to examine how participation in the program affected their long-term development.

To better understand the how and why of the effectiveness of positive youth development programs, process issues need to be examined. Process research examines the procedure of change that is related to specific program components, e.g., what particular components of the program are related to specific outcome variables. Such analysis might also include potential moderating and mediating variables such as gender, SES, self-esteem, and a variety of psychological variables that may be related to behavior change. It is also important to examine program implementation variables (e.g., staff training, consistency of program delivery) that may affect the impact of the program. Analyses of implementation quality have become particularly important considerations in multiyear and multisite interventions (Pentz et al., 1990), and these factors must be explored in any thorough assessment of youth development programs. Only by understanding how programs affect youth development, through both their design and implementation, can these programs evolve to effectively meet their goals. Guidelines for evaluating youth programs are offered in *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide* (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Issues regarding evaluation and research of sport-based youth development programs are covered in more detail in the last section of this paper.

Suggestions for Implementing and Evaluating Youth Development Through Sport Programs

The framework for planning youth sport programs that enhance participants' psychosocial development proposed in this article not only outlines suggestions for program design and implementation, but also for conducting research and

evaluation. Each facet of the framework is derived from recent research findings, but there are still many unanswered questions about the specific strategies that are likely to be most effective with different populations under different conditions. This section provides a discussion of several of the challenges that face professionals in implementing sport programs that aim to develop youth's psychosocial development and outlines some of the key issues involved in conducting research and evaluation within the context of the framework.

Implementation Concerns

Site Selection.   One of the first challenges facing individuals who want to operate sport-based youth development programs is selecting appropriate sites and developing relationships with all key stakeholders. As discussed previously, it is important to select sites that have personnel in place that are eager to collaborate with program personnel; nonetheless, care must be taken to introduce the program in a manner that fosters buy-in and ownership at the site level.

The site selection process should begin with an initial screening that requires potential sites to submit materials, baseline data, and a history of previous intervention efforts. Sites that are unable or unwilling to comply with this request for information are likely poor candidates for inclusion, particularly in start-up or pilot program situations where this information is critical for evaluation. In addition, it is helpful to conduct an entry analysis and observe the operations of the site or organizations before you try to initiate the program. Many of the site personnel are likely to have been in their positions for a number of years and have considerable insight into how things get done or what issues could create roadblocks to goal attainment. Success in implementing the program is likely to be enhanced by gaining support from everyone who is in a position to influence the operations of the program, from site administrative personnel to the security guards and custodians who have the keys to locked activity rooms. The goal is to build allies and not adversaries. As such, care must be taken to avoid stepping on any toes that could result from rushing forward with strategies before understanding what things have been attempted in the past, what support programs are already in existence, or what suggestions individuals might have for making the program most effective. A good philosophy is to treat everyone with whom you interact as the expert on what they do and on their local situation. Seeking feedback on program ideas from local personnel, incorporating their suggestions, allowing them to implement some of their strategies, and collaborating on new initiatives are all ways to foster ownership and commitment to the new program.

Recruitment and Training.   Another important area in planning sport-based youth development programs is the recruitment and training of the individuals who deliver the program to the participants. Whether it is parents of participants, youth sport coaches in a program like Coach Effectiveness Training (Smith & Smoll, 2002), or academic coaches in the Play It Smart (Petitpas et al., 2004) program, individuals who work directly with young people in sport-based activities are likely the key factor in achieving the youth development goals of the program (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). Therefore, beyond the criminal checks and other regulations mandated by various state and federal agencies, individuals selected to provide services should be screened carefully, indoctrinated with the program philosophy, and trained in both the content of the program and strategies to deliver it (for an example see The First Tee Coach: Program Overview and Requirements, 2004).

At a minimum, service providers should have a baseline understanding of sport and possess appropriate interpersonal and communication skills.

 Supervision and Continuing Education. Allocating sufficient time and resources to selection and training can go a long way to ensure that the program will be delivered as intended, but it is unrealistic to assume that service providers will be able to implement program goals unless there is a system of supervision and support in place to help them deal with day-to-day issues and their own concerns. This assumption is particularly relevant for national multisite programs that maintain involvement with participants for at least the nine months (Catalano et al., 2002). Program planners need to consider strategies to ensure regular communication with service providers and develop the supervisory infrastructure necessary to provide sufficient support, troubleshooting, evaluation, and continuing education to service providers.

Research and Evaluation

The framework for planning youth sport programs presented in this article provides a roadmap for researchers and those interested in evaluation of youth development programs. Each component of the framework provides guidelines for research questions and evaluation concerns.

 Implementation Research. According to the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), the first step in the evaluation process is to examine how programs are implemented. This step is critical because in many situations, what is intended to occur in a youth development program may differ considerably from what is actually delivered (Catalano et al., 2002). It is important to describe in detail the specific elements of a program and how they were delivered in order to understand and interpret the results of any outcome analysis. In addition, the quality of implementation is also often associated with the quality of program outcomes (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; Durlak, 1998). Unfortunately, many programs lack sufficient time and financial resources to assess factors related to program implementation, which include staff training, ongoing supervision, as well as explicit program elements.

 Implementation assessments can be conducted qualitatively through focus groups, interviews, and observational studies and/or by quantitative means through questionnaires and surveys. These types of data help determine if the participants received the intended treatment and how any variation in program elements relates to outcomes. Only after such assessments have been completed and the true nature of the program as experienced by the participants is known can any outcome evaluation be conducted and meaningfully interpreted. In terms of the framework, these investigations address how closely the context and the external assets that were intended to be a part of the program were actually implemented.

 Outcome Evaluation. At a minimum, programs that endeavor to assist the development of youth through sport should have clearly defined objectives. These are necessary to determine if they are achieving their stated goals (Danish et al., 2002). For example, if a program is designed to use sport as a vehicle for teaching leadership skills, then some assessment of leadership skills is needed to judge the success or failure of the program. Basic evaluation assesses whether program participants are developing the internal assets that are described in the proposed framework. These assets can be measured through standardized questionnaires, observational data, interviews, or combinations of these and other assessment

techniques. These assets also can be measured directly or indirectly. A direct measure would assess the asset itself, and an indirect measure would assess some outcome that would be a result of having acquired the asset. For example, if a program had the development of study skills as one of its stated objectives, these skills could be measured directly through standardized study skills assessments (e.g., Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, MSLQ; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991). These skills also could be measured indirectly by examining indicators of changed study skills, such as improved grades.

Youth development programs may have wide reaching effects on participants that extend far beyond their intended outcomes. For example, an after school sports program may be focused on helping individuals develop communication and teamwork skills, but participants also may increase their levels of self-esteem or improve their leadership abilities as a results of their experiences. This broader effect of the program can be evaluated through impact evaluation strategies (Trochim, 2002). Examination of these potential, though unplanned, outcomes of a program can be based on a thorough knowledge of related literature and through qualitative assessments of participants. These unintended outcomes then can be assessed formally through qualitative and quantitative methods. Evaluators should be cautious not to restrict themselves to measuring only positive outcomes, because unintended negative outcomes of a program may also occur. For example, a program that strives to build confidence and assertiveness in participants may have the unintended effect of promoting aggressive behavior. Unintended or unplanned outcomes would still fall under the category of internal assets in the framework described in this article

Process Research. Process research identifies and examines the specific program features that are related to program outcomes. In terms of the framework, this research identifies the particular external assets and features of the context that are related to the development of specific internal assets. This research is essential for programs that are evolving or are being implemented at multiple sites. As programs change over time, it is necessary to know which external assets are directly related to program success and which components can be discarded or modified without any significant impact on outcome. When implementing programs at multiple sites, it is important to know which aspects of the context can be modified to fit local needs and which aspects need to be kept consistent to effectively implement the program. Decisions concerning program change or expansion should be made based on an understanding of the relationships between context, external assets, and internal assets. For example, a program that promoted citizenship skills (internal asset) through sport would need to examine if it is the activity itself (context), the leadership of the program (external asset), the social experience of participating in the program (context), or other aspects of program participation that is most directly related to positive outcomes. By understanding which of these factors is most important, the program can be effectively modified or implemented at multiple sites without losing the key ingredients to success. These types of evaluation are best conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) to capitalize on the strengths of both these methodologies.

Basic Research. Basic research questions could be asked of all components of the framework, from investigating appropriate contexts to validating customized methodologies to evaluate programs. These questions are likely to be independent

of any particular youth development program. However, answers to these questions form the foundation for designing and implementing these programs. Basic research on mentoring (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002), successful youth development programming (Catalano et al., 2002), and effects of sports participation (Gatz, Messner, & Ball-Rokeach, 2002) all provide foundations on which youth development through sport programs should be based.

Summary and Conclusions

Sport can provide a wonderful forum for youth to learn about themselves and to acquire skills that can assist them throughout life, or it can create a negative environment that may have a detrimental effect on participants' self-esteem, confidence, and physical self-efficacy. The goal of this article was to examine the factors that are likely to facilitate psychosocial development in youth involved in sport-based activities and to provide a framework that would invite empirical scrutiny and assist professionals in planning comprehensive programs. Based on this framework, value acquisition and positive youth development are most likely to occur when young people are (a) in an appropriate context for self-discovery, (b) are surrounded by positive external assets, (c) acquire internal assets, and (d) benefit from the findings of an on-going evaluation system.

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Appendix

A Framework for Planning Youth Sport Programs That Promote Psychosocial Development in Participants

Context

- Intrinsically motivating activity
- Valued role within an important group
- Activity that is voluntary; has clear rules, goals, and incentives; and happens over time
- Psychologically safe environment

External Assets

- Close relationships with caring adult mentors
- Parental monitoring
- Community service opportunities

Internal Assets

- Goal-setting, social, and problem-solving skills
- A sense of identity and purpose (hope and planning for the future)
- Confidence in abilities to use skills in contexts other than sport

Research and Evaluation

- Multidimensional evaluation of changes in positive and negative behaviors with standardized methodologies and measures
- Long-term longitudinal evaluation of program outcomes
- Assessment of outcomes, processes, and program implementation variables