

Children's participation in team sports should be fun, but in some cases, has been lost in the quest for victory.

than empty words. The age-old ideal that children's participation in team sports should be fun, contribute to physical development and help form social skills has been lost in the quest for victory. A recent study by the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission reported that 27%



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the official was knocked unconscious.
And on July 22, parents, fans and players brewed during an AAU National Invitational

Recommendations for Communities

developed through the

National Summit on **RAISING COMMUNITY STANDARDS** in Children's Sports

Examining the violent & abusive behavior plaguing youth sports

Presented in cooperation by



Letter from Carlos Ramirez

Former Mayor, City of El Paso
U.S. Commissioner for International Boundary
and Water Commission



INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION UNITED STATES AND MEXICO UNITED STATES SECTION

Dear Concerned Citizens:

During my tenure as the mayor for the City of El Paso, the 17th largest city in the country, I oversaw tremendous policy changes in the way our youth sports programs were conducted. There is no question that the actions taken by our recreation department, with the support of the city council, significantly curbed parental aggression at our youth athletic events.

If we, as respected community leaders, take active roles in ensuring that children are allowed to participate in environments that are free from violence and abuse, then we have taken significant steps toward helping them develop a healthy association with exercise and fitness. Statistics tell us that these youngsters will also be less likely to be involved in crime, violence, drugs and other unsafe activities – an outcome that makes all of our communities better places to work, live, play, and raise our families.

It is imperative that city officials and recreation staff unite - for children's sake - and work toward restoring order and civility in our sports programs. So, with that in mind, I urge you to give careful thought and consideration to the implementation of the *Recommendations for Communities*.

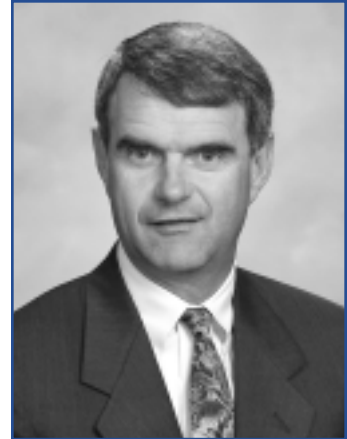
I firmly believe that the *Recommendations for Communities* that now rest in your hands represent viable solutions for resolving the many ills that encompass today's sports programs for children.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Ramirez, P.E.
Commissioner

Statement from Bob Bierscheid

Director of Parks and Recreation, City of Roseville (Minnesota)
Chairman of the Board, National Alliance For Youth Sports



For over 20 years I have been pleased to serve as the chairman of the board of the National Alliance For Youth Sports. On behalf of the Alliance and the millions of children who participate in programs across this country, I urge you to adopt the *Recommendations for Communities*.

The time has come to change the culture of children's sports in America. We are well aware that incidents of violence and negative behavior have risen steadily in recent years across the youth sports landscape.

Through the experience I've gained both as director of parks and recreation for the City of Roseville (Minnesota), and as a participant in the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports, I am confident that we can work together to push for positive reform in youth sports in our respective communities.

A youth sports program is not something we can trust to run well without our vigilant involvement — it requires aggressive action at all levels. The *Recommendations for Communities* that are before you are an important – and logical – first step on the path to returning youth sports to their rightful place.

As recreation leaders, community officials, parents and concerned citizens, we must be strongly motivated to implement these changes in order to reinstate fun and learning into the youth sports picture while eliminating violence and mean-spirited behavior.

Together we can make a difference.

Bob Bierscheid

Introduction

Organized youth sports programs are one of the greatest resources available for instilling valuable life skills in youngsters.

Today, more than 30 million children participate in a wide range of organized youth sports programs nationwide - and they deserve to enjoy a fun, safe and rewarding experience. Unfortunately, the climate surrounding many of today's programs has become less than ideal. Reports of physical altercations and verbal sparring among volunteer coaches, parents and officials have dramatically increased. This volatility that has emerged across the youth sports landscape has sent a disturbing message to countless youngsters, as well as diluted the many wonderful things youth sports participation can provide when conducted in an appropriate fashion.

The alarming nature of these problems, which have risen steadily in the last five years alone, led the National Alliance For Youth Sports to convene the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports. Recreation professionals from 34 states across the country gathered in Chicago, Illinois to examine the widespread problems affecting organized sports and to devise usable guidelines that can be implemented in any community.

Changing the culture of youth sports through:

- *Reform*
- *Education*
- *Accountability*

The *Recommendations for Communities* that appear in this document represent a consensus of what professionals in the youth sports field firmly believe need to be the course of action taken to return youth sports to their rightful place, and alter the failing atmosphere that looms over many programs. They address how communities can change the culture of youth sports and resurrect a fun and stress-free playing environment for youngsters by focusing on *reform*, *education* and *accountability*. These *Recommendations* outline aggressive steps that are aimed at mending a multitude of problems – such as over-aggressive parents, untrained league administrators and win-at-all-cost youth coaches – that are leaving an indelible mark on programs.

The guidelines are comprised of several main areas encompassing the entire spectrum of organized youth sports. A few significant aspects of the *Recommendations* are briefly introduced on the following page. They will be explained in greater detail later in the document, along with the remainder of the *Recommendations*, as well as how they can be implemented in any community with the tools and resources that are available.

Some of the key points are:



- All communities should have a trained professional youth sports administrator who is either appointed from within the community's existing staff or hired from outside to oversee children's sports.
- Volunteer Administrators who use public and private facilities should be educated on how to properly run their programs prior to being granted use of facilities and they should be held accountable for their actions.
- Parents who act as coaches should receive education on how to appropriately work with children in a sports setting, and be held to a strict code of behavior. All parents should also go through some type of orientation program before enrolling their child in youth sports.

This document begins with an overview of children's sports in this country. It examines the purpose of youth sports, takes a look at how they are structured in today's society, and explains the valuable role they play in a child's physical and psychological development.

Section II delves into the problems and issues affecting youth sports, what the primary factors are behind these problems, and what steps can be taken to change the culture of children's sports.

The document concludes with Section III, which covers the *Recommendations for Communities* and the procedures for implementing them in a community.

A model youth sports program should not be something that adults just hope turns out well, because there simply is too much at stake when children's emotional and physical well-being are involved. Changing the culture of children's sports won't be easy. In fact, most people will probably resent it at first. But restructuring youth sports programs is not as difficult as it may appear, because the resources and training programs exist – and now, so does a plan to implement them.

If the next generation is going to reap all the wonderful benefits that organized youth sports provide, it's imperative that what's laid out on the following pages is given full and careful consideration.

I. Structure of Youth Sports Programs

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

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

The youth sports landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years – and not all of it for the better. Generally speaking, typical sports seasons are being stretched longer and longer. Many parents are spending increased amounts of time shuttling children back and forth between two or three sports at a time. There's a proliferation of summer camps, travel teams, All-Star competitions and an endless string of practices. While there are far greater opportunities for children to participate in an organized setting than there were just a couple decades ago, this intricate structure that now exists has virtually eliminated any chance for youngsters to enjoy free time playing simple pick-up games with their friends.



An estimated 70% of all youth sports programs are operated by parent-interest groups; and each parent's motives and morals influence how the program is run.

In most communities, the local government has a park and recreation department that provides a majority of the youth sports programs and recreational activities which parents sign their children up for. On these public facilities, programs are either run by the public agency or volunteer, parent-run groups. An estimated 70 percent of all

youth sports programs are operated by parent-interest groups, which use public facilities that are provided through community tax dollars. Most of these parent-run groups utilize facilities that are conveniently accessible, including those that are owned by the public agency or the school system. A small number of these parent-run programs provide their own private facilities.

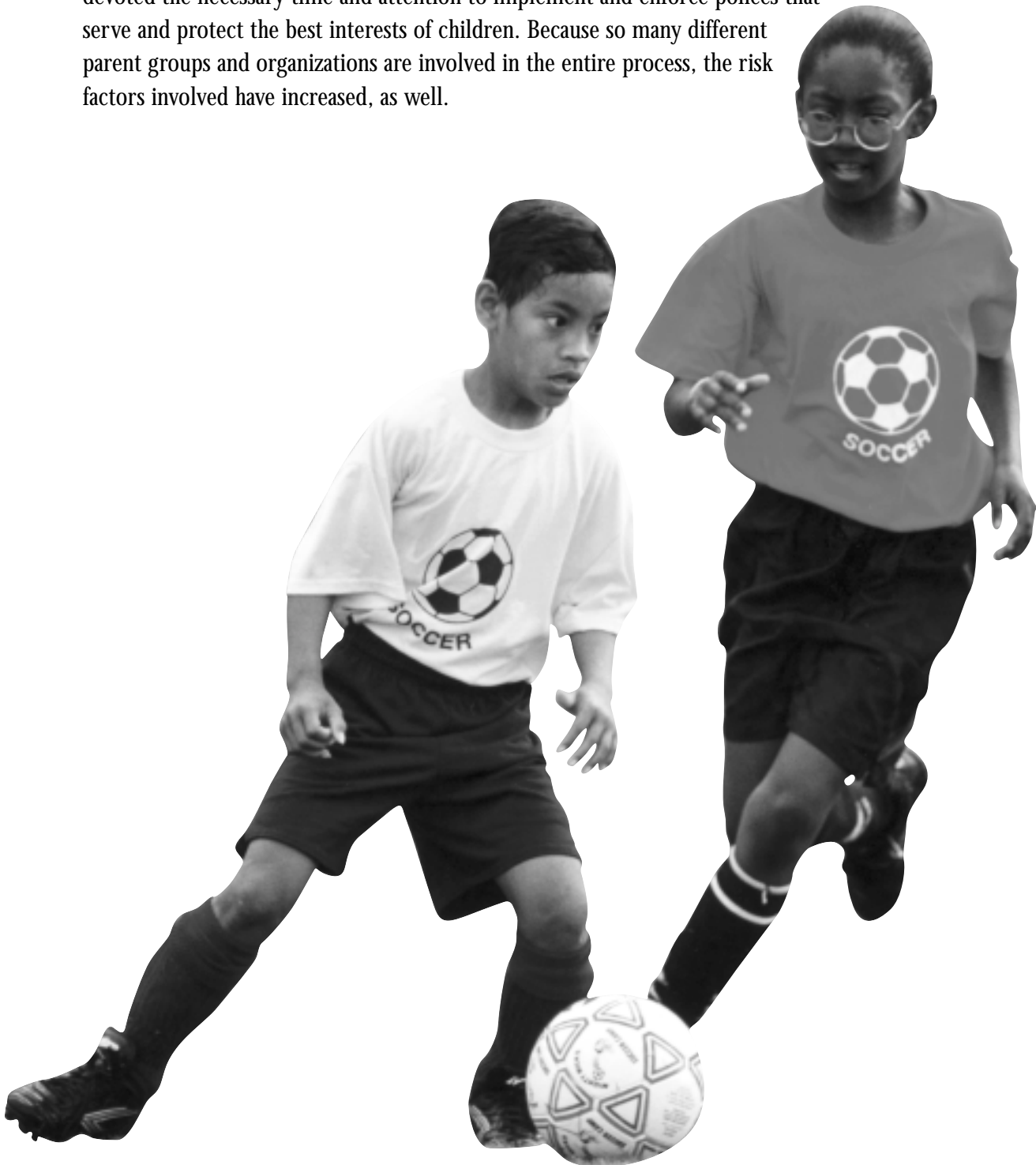
Organized sports programs are also held on private facilities, which are overseen by private groups and/or volunteer, parent-run groups. Community-based organizations, such as the Boys & Girls Club, YMCAs/YWCAs, Police Athletic Leagues and church recreation departments, also offer sports opportunities. Parents who are dissatisfied with the way the hierarchy is running the existing program often venture out and create their own programs so they can implement their own policies and rules. So the perception that parents using public facilities are in some way an extension of the local program is often incorrect.

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

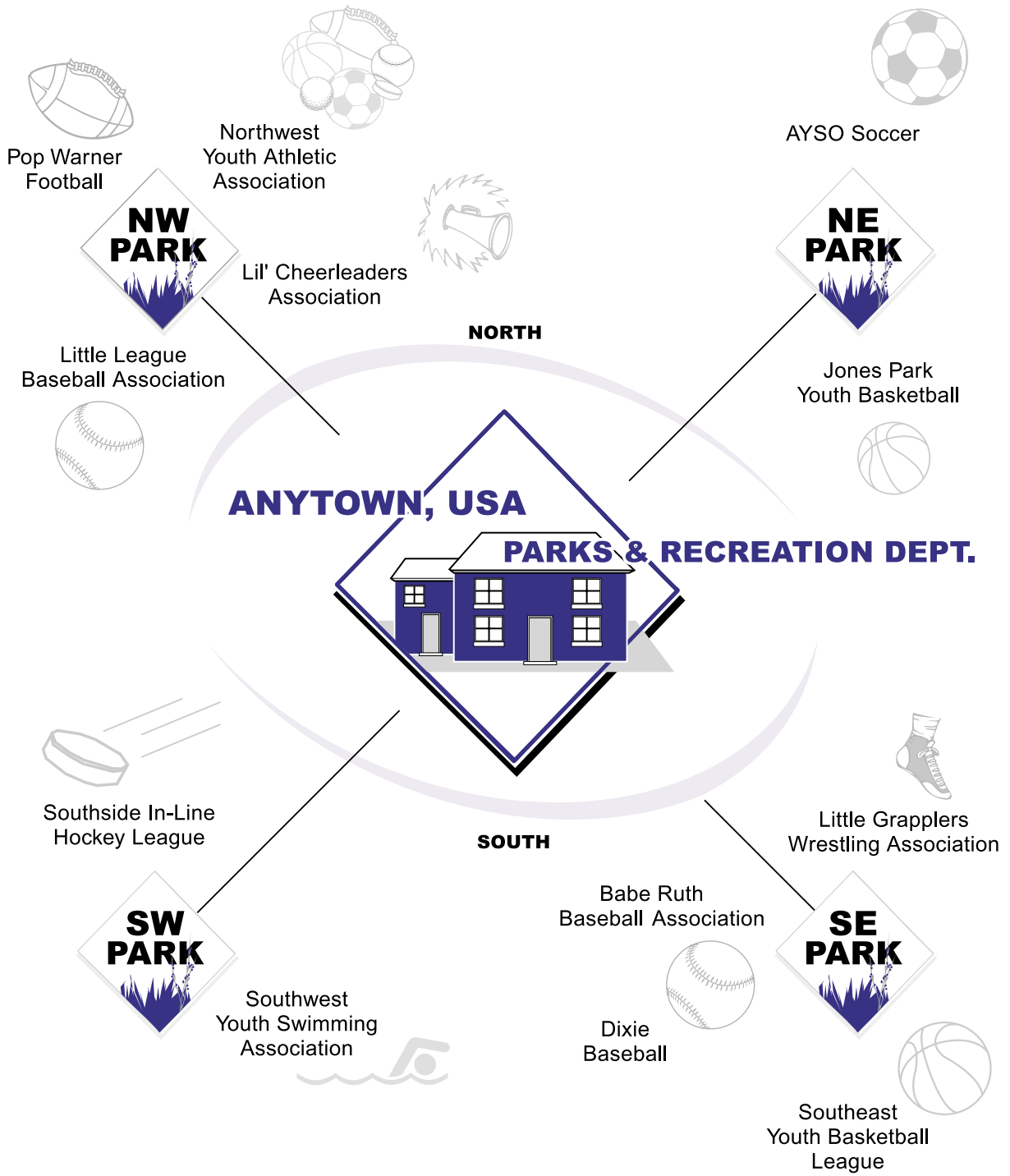
As more and more children are enrolled in organized sports programs, the competition for available facilities escalates, as well. In a model youth sports environment programs that embrace the concept of equal playing time for every child would take precedence over a program that operates similar to what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

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

The way youth sports programs are structured today across the country has opened the door for many wonderful opportunities for children. Unfortunately, that same structure is also a magnet for serious problems - both on and off the playing field - as most communities haven't devoted the necessary time and attention to implement and enforce policies that serve and protect the best interests of children. Because so many different parent groups and organizations are involved in the entire process, the risk factors involved have increased, as well.



Typical Youth Sports Structure



*Organized Youth Sports Administered by
Parent Interest Group on Public Facilities*

The Value of Sports

Sports are one of the greatest tools that exist in today's society to help children develop positive character traits and life values. Early adolescence is a time when children are looking for basic values that they can count on in their lives. Under the right conditions, many youth sports experiences can be enormously beneficial, teaching the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and hard work, among many other qualities. In spite of this enormous potential for good, many youth sports experiences, in which the focus on what's truly best for children strays, can be emotionally damaging – and that damage can last a lifetime.

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

Children learn a multitude of important lessons through sports that are basic to leading productive adult lives in our society. Sports provide an ideal forum to teach such valuable fundamentals as ethics, abiding by the rules, winning and losing with grace, coping with success and failure, respecting authority figures, always striving to do your best, etc. These traits provide the building blocks that help young citizens of our communities become well-balanced adults, and which translate into leading productive lives.

A study conducted by Hardiness Research of Wyoming found that by a 2:1 ratio for boys and a 3:1 ratio for girls, those who participate in sports perform better in school, do not drop out, and have a better chance to get through college. A survey done by the Women's Sports Foundation found that girls who participate in sports are 80 percent less likely to have unwanted pregnancies and 92 percent less likely to get involved with drugs than those who don't participate in sports.

The foundation for human development occurs during the early years of life. Individuals are exposed to many different learning situations that contribute to their potential for successful development in future endeavors. Activities at home, church, school and clubs, to name just a few, all play a big role in a child's growth and development. Organized sports are certainly at, or near the top, of that list.

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

Sports programs conducted under the right conditions are enormously beneficial for children.

In fact, research has shown that students who participate in interscholastic sports are less likely to be regular and heavy smokers. Students who play at least one sport are 40 percent less likely to be regular smokers and 50 percent less likely to be heavy smokers. Regular and heavy smoking decreases substantially with an increase in the number of sports played.

(Escobedo LG, Journal of the American Medical Association, 1993.)

These lower smoking rates for student athletes may be related to a number of factors: Greater self-confidence gained from sports participation; additional counseling from coaching staff about smoking; reduced peer influences about smoking; perceptions about reduced sports performance because of smoking; and greater awareness about the health consequences of smoking. *(Escobedo, 1993)*

Numerous studies also indicate that sports participation for girls directly correlates to the development of positive attributes. Girls who play sports have higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression than girls who do not play sports; girls who play sports have a more positive body image and experience higher states of psychological well being than girls and women who do not play sports; and girls who play sports learn about teamwork, goal-setting, the experience of success, the pursuit of excellence in performance, how to deal with failures, and other positive behaviors - all of which are important skills for the workplace and life. *(Edwards P, 1995)* In fact, 80 percent of women identified as key leaders in Fortune 500 companies participated in sports during their childhood. *(Linda Bunker, University of Virginia, 1988)*



Furthermore, children who participate in organized sports and have enjoyable experiences that pave the way for active lifestyles are less likely to battle overweight problems as adults. Currently, one out of every five children in the U.S. is overweight, and excess weight in childhood and adolescence has been found to predict being overweight as an adult (*American Obesity Association Fact Sheet, 1999*). Also, only about one-third of elementary school students have any type of daily physical education (*Ross and Pate, 1987, KidSource.com*).



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

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



In our educational system teachers who demean, ridicule or embarrass children would not be tolerated. So why when volunteer coaches exhibit the same type of behavior at a practice or game is it ignored and simply considered a part of the whole youth sports experience?

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

II. Problems & Issues in Children's Sports

The age-old notion that children's participation in organized sports should be fun, contribute to physical and emotional development, and enhance social skills has been swept aside in what's become an increasingly hostile environment that's ultra-competitive, high-pressured, and often encourages and rewards a do-anything-it-takes-to-win approach. Parents and volunteer coaches, the most important role models in a young athlete's life, pay lip service to the importance of good sportsmanship and simply doing the best they can. But it has become all too clear through their actions that what the scoreboard says at the conclusion of the game is what it is really all about. Adults, in their roles as coaches, league administrators and spectators, are often inflicting their misguided motives and ideals on youth sports and, in the process, depriving youngsters of what should be a fun-filled experience.

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

Recently the following incidents have taken place: Two women assaulted a mother following a youth baseball championship game in Utah that left her unconscious; a youth baseball coach for children ages 12 and 13 was taken into custody in Wisconsin on accusations that he grabbed and wrestled an umpire to the ground; a baseball coach in New Jersey was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to five days in the sheriff's work program for assaulting one of his 13-year-old players during a practice; more than 30 adults brawled at the conclusion of an under-14 soccer tournament game in Los Angeles that led to three parents being arrested; a youth league baseball coach in Cleveland was thrown out of a game following a profane outburst that led sheriff's deputies to cite him for disorderly conduct; in Tennessee a 16-year-old was charged with attempted second-degree murder after he used an aluminum bat to bash the head of a pitcher who struck him out during a youth baseball game; an umpire and parent were called into police headquarters after exchanging blows at a baseball game among grade schoolers in New Jersey; a soccer dad was arrested after taking a swing at the father of an opposing player at a game in Indiana; a parent was arrested in Florida on charges he hit a Little League umpire and cut one of his truck tires after a game; in Michigan a parent had a complaint filed against him by another parent accusing him of yelling obscenities and threatening a child on the opposing team; and in Ohio a youth soccer player fractured a goalie's cheekbone with a kick to the face at the end of a game that left the player unconscious, along with injuries to his eyes, nose, jaw and teeth.

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

A youth sports study conducted by the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) found that:

- 45.3% of the youngsters surveyed said they had been called names, yelled at, or insulted while participating in sports
- 21% said they had been pressured to play with an injury
- 17.5% said they had been hit, kicked or slapped while participating in sports
- 8.2% said they had been pressured to intentionally harm others while playing sports
- 8% said they had been called names with sexual connotations while participating in sports
- 3.4% said they had been pressured into sex or sexual touching

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

In an article entitled *Kids Speak Out: Violence in Youth Sports* that appeared in the August, 2001 issue of *Sports Illustrated For Kids*, 57 percent of the more than 3,000 responses said there was too much violence in youth sports; and 74 percent said they have seen out-of-control adults at their games. Thirty-six percent of the children cited embarrassment as the top emotion they

felt when witnessing bad adult behavior, followed by disappointment (25 percent), anger (23 percent) and fear (16 percent). In response to what kind of bad behavior they had seen, 37 percent said parents yelling at kids, 27 percent said parents yelling at coaches or officials, 25 percent said coaches yelling at officials or kids, and 4 percent said violence by adults. When children were asked what is the best way to get parents to behave, 48 percent said the kids should tell their parents to relax, 36 percent said parents should be banned from games if they can not control themselves, and 15 percent said they should have parents sign a code of conduct.



In May of 2001 Survey USA polled 500 parents in Indianapolis, Indiana on their views on violence in youth sports. The survey found that 55 percent of the parents polled said they have seen parents engage in verbal disputes at youth sporting events; 21 percent of the parents said they've witnessed a physical altercation between other parents at a youth sporting event; and 73 percent believe that parents who become physically or verbally abusive during games should be banned from youth sports. A similar study was conducted by Survey USA in a five-county region in South Florida in 1999 that found that 82 percent felt that parents are too aggressive in youth sports; 56 percent said they have seen aggressive parents in youth sports; and 72 percent believe aggressive parents should be banned from youth sports.

One of the primary weaknesses found in many organized youth sports programs is that no policies typically exist to deal with basic problems that often surface. In fact, even when policies are in place, they often are outdated or simply don't focus on the well-being of children, and consequently they end up fueling problems rather than alleviating them.

Furthermore, when a large number of adults are thrown together in a youth sports setting, they're each going to be bringing their own morals, attitudes and beliefs to the games. Consequently, the chances of conflict arising are quite high. The potential for these problems to surface is even greater when no type of program or training exists to inform coaches, parents, officials and administrators of their roles and responsibilities and what is expected behavior, as well as if no policies are in place to deal with basic issues that are sure to emerge at some point during the season.

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

What children are saying

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

- 57% of the respondents said there was too much violence in youth sports
- 74% said they have seen out-of-control adults at their games
- 36% cited embarrassment as the main emotion they felt while witnessing bad adult behavior
- 37% said they have witnessed parents yelling at kids
- 27% said they have seen parents yelling at coaches or officials
- 25% said they have seen coaches yelling at officials or kids
- 4% said they have seen violent behavior by adults

Changing the Culture in Your Community

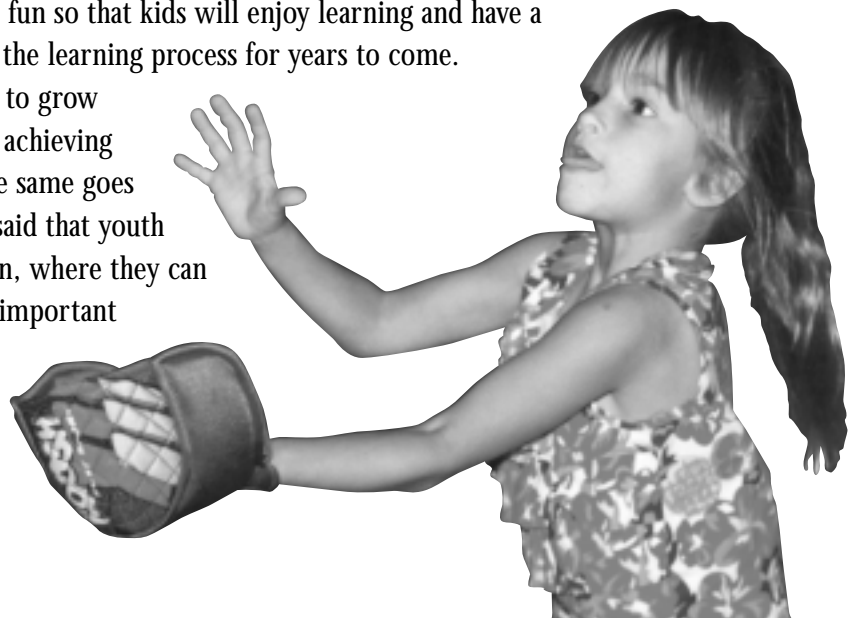
*T*hroughout the country approximately 2.5 million volunteers fill vital roles as coaches and administrators in youth sports. These individuals are well-meaning, and more often than not have the best of intentions when they assume these positions. Unfortunately, a large number have never been sufficiently trained in all of the key areas that encompass their responsibilities. This often leads to implementing policies and making decisions that don't serve the best interests of the children who are participating. Consequently, an abundance of youth sports programs currently exist that actually are exposing children to needless risks – both physically and emotionally.

Many of today's youth sports programs expose children to unnecessary risks.

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

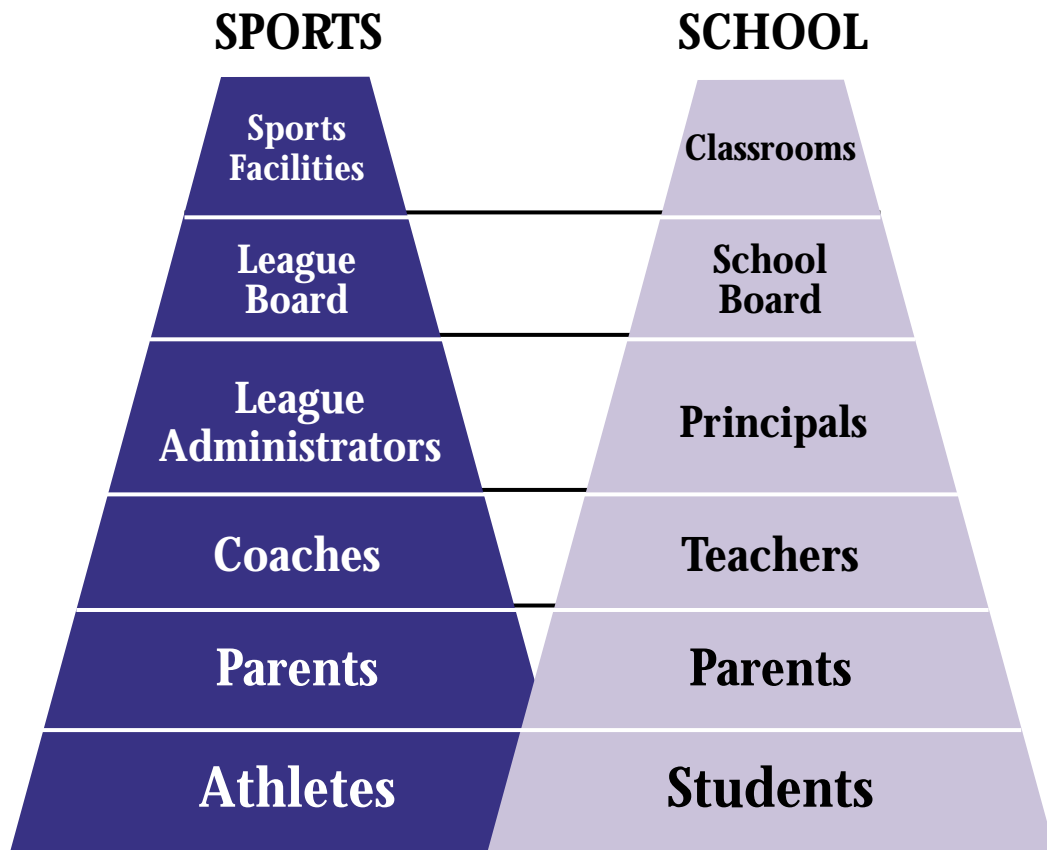
So how do leaders in the community go about getting all the adults involved in the program to bond together and work toward a common goal? As we mentioned earlier, if there's a firm belief entrenched throughout the community regarding the importance of positive sports in a child's life, then the framework is already in place to achieve top-quality programming.

The positive attributes that are often associated with sports include fun, fitness, skill building, teamwork, learning to follow rules, enhanced social skills, commitment, discipline, etc. Obviously, we expect children to gain these same benefits from attending school. Furthermore, when children go to school we want it to be fun so that kids will enjoy learning and have a deep-rooted interest in wanting to continue the learning process for years to come. The same goes for sports. We also want kids to grow self-confident and build their self-esteem by achieving varying levels of success in school. Again, the same goes for sports. It all fits. In fact, it can safely be said that youth sports is an extension of the child's education, where they can continue to learn and develop each of these important aspects basic to positive and productive human growth and development.



Youth Sports Programs and School Systems Feature Similar Structure and Goals

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



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

Changing the culture of children's sports is not as difficult as it may seem at first glance. There are several resources and educational tools readily available that can enhance a community's youth sports programming, and help redirect its focus to ensure that youngsters reap the many benefits that are available when programs are conducted with the best interests of children as the primary objective.

III. Implementing The Recommendations For Communities

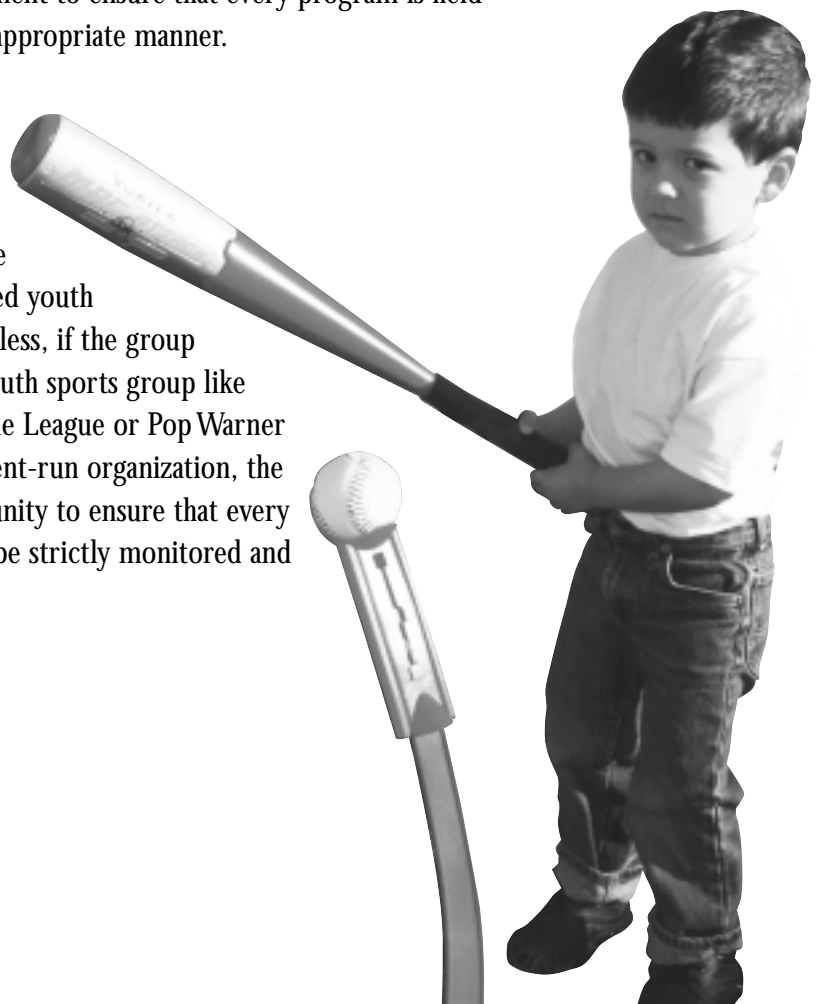
The following is the step-by-step plan that was developed by highly qualified recreation leaders around the country who attended the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports:

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

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

First, local leaders must adopt a resolution (see Appendix #1 for a Sample Resolution) that clearly states how youth sports should be operated in their community. The resolution should include guiding principles aimed at enhancing the overall youth sports structure, as well as reinforce the community's commitment to ensure that every program is held to the highest standard and conducted in the appropriate manner.

In order to ensure that this happens, every public entity or volunteer user group using the community's facilities must be required to meet the standards set forth in the resolution. As was mentioned earlier, organized youth sports are a highly complex structure. Regardless, if the group using the facility is a franchise of a national youth sports group like the American Youth Soccer Organization, Little League or Pop Warner football, for example; or is simply a local parent-run organization, the philosophy and rules laid down by the community to ensure that every child has a positive and safe experience must be strictly monitored and enforced equally for everyone.



Step 2 **APPOINTING A PROFESSIONAL YOUTH SPORTS ADMINISTRATOR TO ENSURE ADHERENCE TO THE PHILOSOPHY**

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

Along with overseeing their own programs, the professional youth sports administrator's role is to work closely with each group that applies to use the community's facilities to ensure that the rules and policies are clearly understood, and that deviating from them will not be tolerated in any way. The responsibilities of this position should also include providing information and resources to enhance the sports experience for not just children, but adults, in whatever their respective roles are. Every group that applies to use the community's facilities should be required to go through a brief educational program that addresses the importance of youth sports in a child's development, and what the behavior expectations are for the adults, regardless if they're a coach, official, or simply a spectator. A number of useful resources are at the professional youth sports administrator's disposal, including screening tools for conducting background checks; sportsmanship training programs for parents; and coaching orientation programs for volunteers, among others.

The professional youth sports administrator is a vital component of the youth sports structure. Again, every school system across the country functions at a higher level of efficiency with a superintendent of schools overseeing everything that takes place within his or her jurisdiction. The superintendent is also ultimately responsible for the quality of the education each child receives. So clearly, it is imperative that a qualified professional youth sports administrator is appointed to fulfill the same type of role that is needed for a community's youth sports programs. With a professional youth sports administrator in place, programs can be strictly monitored to ensure that they meet established standards; and problems that arise can be addressed in a more timely fashion with the person adhering to the established protocol for resolving issues before they escalate into something unmanageable. Please refer to Appendix #2 for a complete overview of the professional youth sports administrator's role, as well as the qualifications needed to fulfill the position.

Step 3 **HOLDING EVERYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR**

The professional youth sports administrator's role covers a broad range of territory. One of the greatest responsibilities associated with the position is to hold everyone associated with the youth sports program accountable for their behavior to help ensure high-quality programming. In order for this to be achieved, total understanding and awareness must exist throughout the community regarding what constitutes acceptable behavior, and what the established protocol is for policing and enforcing what is deemed unacceptable in the eyes of the professional youth sports administrator. Ideally, the professional youth sports administrator must be a trained and knowledgeable individual, and he or she must have complete authority in overseeing the youth sports programs to ensure total complicity with the policies and standards that have been set forth.



Through the professional youth sports administrator, leagues that use facilities can be monitored and regularly evaluated on their effectiveness. Those who fail to adhere to the policies prescribed through the professional youth sports administrator's office will risk the opportunity to use these public facilities in the future. The office also handles complaints, reviews programs on a continuing basis that lease the facilities to ensure that they are meeting the agreed upon standards laid out in the resolution, and serve as a resource for reporting volunteers that abuse the established code of behavior.

In order to effectively monitor all the youth sports programming, leagues or groups interested in using the public facilities for an organized youth sports program must be required to complete an application and fulfill the established requirements (See Appendix #3 for the Rationale and Requirements for Utilizing the Public Entity's Facilities). Furthermore, facility use will only be granted to those groups who abide by and enforce the written policies and procedures; who require screening, training and continuing education for its volunteer coaches; who require a preseason orientation program for all of its parents; and who provide pre-sports motor skill development programs for young children.

Conclusion

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

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

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

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



Appendix #1

Sample Resolution for Communities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, we believe young children must be given the opportunity to develop motor skills and sports specific knowledge with their parents in a structured program before they enter organized sports.

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

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS _____ day of _____, 20____

Signed: _____

Appendix #2

The Professional Youth Sports Administrator

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

- To raise the professionalism of youth sports administration.
- To oversee all youth sports in the community.
- To enforce the community's policies and procedures.
- To have someone who is accountable and educated about how youth sports should operate and who can act as a liaison between the recreation department and the community leaders and elected officials.
- To understand the needs of the community (keep a finger on the pulse).

Qualifications of the Professional Administrator

- College degree
- Specific training in youth sports administration
- Maintain professional administrators credential
- Excellent communication skills (verbal and written)
- Commitment to positive and safe sports for children
- Leadership skills essential
- Compensation commensurate with experience and training



Appendix #2 (continued)

Role and Responsibilities of the Professional Youth Sports Administrator

- The ultimate authority within the community as it relates to youth sports.
The professional youth sports administrator should oversee the entire youth sports community, making decisions that can positively affect all participants.
- Educate and inform community leaders and elected officials on a regular basis.
- Responsible for working with outside user groups and determining Facility Usage
– must ensure that all user groups understand the community’s philosophy with regards to youth sports and the requirements for utilizing the public entity’s facilities.
- Responsible to provide or oversee educational requirements for all volunteers, including:
Volunteer Administrators (Board of Directors)
Volunteer Coaches
Parents
- Develop relationship and communicate regularly with all youth sports groups that utilize the public entity’s facilities.
- Respond accordingly to all complaints and conflicts.
- Develop relationship with other community-based youth sports providers.
- Create a task force of community volunteers who are committed to making youth sports safe and positive.
- Quality commitment - Set example for community with own programs (high quality)
- Continuing education must be compulsory



Appendix # 3

Rationale and Requirements for Utilizing the Public Agency's Facilities



In most communities, sport opportunities for children are organized and administered by the local parks and recreation department's staff, as well as community-based, volunteer parent operated organizations that utilize the public facilities. Generally, these volunteer parent-run interest groups lease the public facilities for league competition (e.g. baseball, soccer, football, etc.) while in some cases also using school facilities and private facilities for practices.

To provide the greatest protection for children, the delegates at the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children's Sports recommend that all groups using public facilities must meet high standards. Public agencies (e.g. parks and recreation departments and school administrators) must build collaborative relationships with every organization that utilizes the public facilities to ensure that all children have a safe, positive and fun experience.

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



To ensure that the entire community adopts a philosophy that makes youth sports safe, positive and fun for children, every group that desires to use the public agency's facilities and fields must be required to demonstrate the following:

- 1.* Each youth sport league/program must provide proper documentation of insurance coverage that meets the minimum recommendations.
- 2.* Each youth sport league/program must agree to abide by the policies and procedures that are established by the public entity.
- 3.* All volunteer administrators, volunteer coaches and parents must successfully complete an orientation program that includes an understanding of the community's philosophy, policies and procedures, and specific knowledge required for each position.

Appendix # 3 (continued)

Education and Accountability Recommendations for Volunteers

● **Volunteer Administrators**/Board of Directors Orientation (for those volunteers who are responsible for the planning and implementation of out-of-school youth sports programs to help them set and maintain high standards for their league for the benefit of the children in their care)

– The following areas should be covered:

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

● **Volunteer Coach** Training (to “sensitize” coaches to their responsibilities when working with children in sports and hold them accountable to a Coaches’ Code of Behavior) – The following areas should be covered:

- Philosophy of Children's Sports
- Skills and Drills to Teach the Skills of the Sport
- Injury Prevention
- Practice Organization
- Game Rules
- Legal Liability
- Psychological, Physical and Social Needs of Children

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

- Philosophy of Children's Sports
- Program Goals
- Role of the Parent
- Role of the Coach
- Providing Positive Reinforcement
- Role Modeling
- Discussing Concerns
- Expected Parent Behavior

Appendix # 3 (continued)

Screening Process for Volunteers

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

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



Sample Youth Sports User Group Application

Name of Organization/Group/Program _____

Describe Program Scope (include number of children served) _____

Mailing Address _____

Primary Contact Person: _____

- Address _____
- Telephone _____
- Email _____

Secondary Contact Person _____

- Address _____
- Telephone _____
- Email _____

Requested Facility (physical location) _____

Duration of Program _____

- Start Date _____
- End Date _____

Required Attachments

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

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

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