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TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL  
THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

**Tackling the Declining Number of Participants in Youth Tackle Football Through the  
Creation of an Awareness Website**

By

Kristina M. Shahin, MBA, M.Ed

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Department of Education

Lynn University

May 2021

# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

## ABSTRACT

There are many benefits to youth who participate in tackle football. Unfortunately, there has been a decline in participation over the years. Fear surrounding concussions and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) has been mostly to blame for the dramatic decrease. Research has shown that there are many physical, social, emotional and health benefits associated with those who do participate.

The researcher used statistical data from many varying studies and multiple other resources to create an awareness website. The awareness website is a tool that would benefit those who are undecided about allowing their child to participate in youth tackle football.

Through qualitative research, the researcher created an online survey using both Likert scale and open-ended questions. The data collected from these surveys was used two fold. First, it was used to validate that the information provided on the website was accurate and perceived to be helpful for those who may be researching more about the sport. Secondly, the feedback provided by way of the open-ended questions will be used to continuously enhance the website for future use.

After analyzing survey results, the researcher was able to gather enough input to research ways to enhance the website for future use.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Joe Melita, who continuously reminded me to save many of my grand ideas for future dissertations. His expertise was invaluable! He provided me with great feedback and suggestions for provisions in an effort to create a tool that would benefit the youth within communities. His personal knowledge and experience with the sport of football was truly encouraging and kept me driven to remain on track and focused on the goal.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jennifer Lesh and Dr. Michele Douglas from my dissertation committee. Their support and encouragement kept me calm and confident throughout this process. Thank you to my Cohort 16 for the years of support and encouragement. We built friendships, had some fun times, good laughs and learned so much about one another.

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The completion of this program and dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my amazing husband Steve. He truly stepped in to help get things done so that I could stay committed to attending weekend classes and working on my dissertation. We eventually had a running joke going throughout the house about always being unable to do the simplest and smallest things because I was working on my dissertation. Your constant encouragement and loving words truly kept me motivated. You are truly my number one cheer dude!

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my three determined, whitty, smart, and patient children Zachary, Riley, and Corey for keeping me encouraged and cheering me on throughout the process. To my beautiful daughter Riley, thank you for helping to stimulate exciting word choices throughout some of the sections of my paper. You were very much a part

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of the writing process. My hope from completing this research is that you know you can achieve anything that you put your mind to. There is no schedule too busy or tasks too difficult. I love you all!

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the coaches who sacrifice their personal time for the love of children and the game. Your hard work and dedication to educating our youth should never go unnoticed. Your life lessons and influences can be echoed through your players for generations to come. Thank you to those who choose to put in the time to inspire those who may not be their own children by blood, but are family. Football is family!

*“The greatest gift you can give someone is your time. To allow them into your world, to be present for them while they're there, and to allow them to love that experience in their own way.”*

-John Mulhall

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## CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM

### INTRODUCTION

Football is a popular recreational sport in the United States - for adults, adolescents, and children alike. Played with the same rules as professional football, children can start playing tackle football around the age of five. Football teaches players discipline, work ethic, time management, camaraderie, teamwork, physical and mental toughness, social skills, logic and reasoning skills, leadership skills, and how to deal with adversity. In addition to these necessary life skills, many players are afforded opportunities to earn full or partial scholarships which for some is the only possible opportunity to earn a college education. There is a special prestige that goes hand-in-hand with football players. They earn the respect of most of their peers, gain fans, and represent their communities.

Benefits of youth participation in organized athletic programs have been studied by various researchers over the decades. “When given the choice, few individuals elect to participate in sport on their own and prefer organized team sports” (Stanford, 2021). Inherent in organized physical activities are social settings and interpersonal interactions (Allen, 2003). “Football has a profound positive impact on players' lives” (Thoman, 2020). The greatest American sport, in addition to many physical and emotional health benefits, can be linked to having influence on students' academic success. Organized sports activities contribute to the overall development of children and improves cognitive skills, according to a study that tracked kids ages 5 through 10 (Piche, 2014).

Physical activity in general is associated with improved academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores. Further, such activity can affect attitudes and academic

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behavior, including enhanced concentration, attention, and improved classroom behavior (GAO, 2012).

Participation in organized youth sports yields many health benefits for growing adolescents. According to the Aspen Institute Project Play, adolescents who play sports are eight times as likely to be active at the age of 24 than those who do not play sports (2015). The American Academy of Pediatrics produced an article in 2018 stating that 41.5% of teens not involved in youth sports are obese by the ages 16-19 years old. In addition, a study conducted in 2018 by Nationwide Children's Hospital showed that only 5% of youth between the ages of 5-18 reported meeting the federally recommended amount of exercise which is 60 minutes per day (Aspen Institute, 2018).

Studies have, in fact, shown that high school athletes receive better grades (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Silliker & Quirk, 1997), have higher educational and occupational aspirations (Darling et al., 2005; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Sabo, Melnick, & Vanfossen, 1993), spend more time doing homework (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002), and have a more positive attitude towards school (Darling et al., 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999) than non-athletes.

Over the past few years, there has been a decline in the number of people participating in tackle football. The number of people over the age of six participating in tackle football in the United States amounted to approximately 5.16 million in 2018 (Lock, 2020). While this may seem like a substantial number, when comparing the year 2006 where the number of participants was 8.4 million to 2012 with 5.99 million participants, it is evident that there has been a steady decrease in participation for well over a decade. However, there is a crisis that if there is no

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intervention, we are at risk of our favorite sport diminishing potentially to nothing more than a faint distant memory.

### **BACKGROUND**

November 6, 1869 Rutgers vs. New Jersey was the first recorded football contest to ever go on record. Although it was considered more of a rugby style, it wasn't until several rule changes in the 1880's that the sport evolved into what has been known as American Football. Football more properly called "Gridiron Football" is closely related to two English sports- soccer and rugby. Football as we know today can be credited to its creator Walter Camp, also known as "The Father of Football" (History Staff, 2013).

Football remains the most popular sport in the United States. According to the National Federation of High School Football (NFHS), in 2017 more than one million youth participated in football. However, from a deeper statistical standpoint, the truth and reality are that the number of participants in tackle football has been on a steady decline for the last decade. For the first time in 30 years, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS, USA) reported a decline in the number of high school students participating in school-sanctioned sports; in 2018–19, there were 43,495 fewer high school student-athletes compared with the year prior (NFHS, 2019). These intangible benefits of playing tackle football set players up for success in life. So why the bad rap?

It is estimated that 3.8 Million concussions occur in the United States per year during competitive and recreational sports activities. However, as many as 50% of concussions go unreported (Harmon, 2013). In 2015, 10% of high school football players sustained concussions during their tackle season across the United States (Harmon, 2013). Sports and recreation-related

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concussions are a leading cause of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) related emergency department (ED) visits among children and teens (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

Public concerns over the long-term effects of Traumatic Brain Injuries have caused a dramatic decrease of youth and adolescent participation in contact team sports. Tackle football has been the most negatively impacted. In fact, in some states there has been a push to ban youth and adolescent football programs. In January of 2018, New York State Assemblyman, Michael Benedetto filed a bill that would ban youth tackle football to those under the age of 12 (Dunphy, 2019). Lawmakers in the state of California sponsored the “Safe Youth Football Act”. Though it received pushback, its sentiment can be echoed across multiple states such as Maryland, Illinois, and New Jersey to name a few.

Over the last decade, discussion of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and the sport of American football have become inseparable. The presumed risk of CTE and resultant neurodegenerative changes from contact sport participation has been propelled into the minds of concerned parents and players at all levels. Currently, the literature is mixed on whether contact sport participation is associated with adverse long-term neurologic outcomes, including neurobehavioral changes such as depression and a range of neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease (Zuckerman, Yengo-Khan, Bret, Kuhn, Wolfson, & Kerr, 2020).

There are many prominent individuals today who attribute their current success to their experiences playing youth football. The Honorable Judge Dwayne D. Woodruff is currently a Judge on the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania presides primarily over Juvenile cases. In addition to being a successful and well-respected Judge, he is a former professional American football player who played for the Pittsburgh Steelers for twelve seasons.

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Other people in prominent positions who benefitted from playing football include Heath Shuler, who became the U.S. Representative for North Carolina's 11th Congressional District after a short career in the National Football League. John Runyan Sr., U.S. Representative for New Jersey's Congressional District played fourteen seasons in the National Football League.

In addition, there have been many collegiate level football players who have claimed that youth football saved their lives. Former Louisiana State University football player Leonard Fournette who is currently playing in the National Football League for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, shared in a 2017 NBC ProFootballTalk interview that youth football helped him stay on a straight path, while others around him veered off track. "I could've been like any knucklehead out here, selling drugs, a criminal, or doing whatever it may be," Fournette said. "But no, I was on the football field 24/7 (Smith, 2017).

San Diego State University football player, Malik Smith states confidently, "Football Saved my Life." Malik began playing football during his elementary school years in the Pop Warner Football League. Pop Warner is a Nationally recognized travel football league that has been in existence since 1929 known for its support of scholastics, safety, competition, and overall leadership building for all its participants. According to their website, Pop Warner exists to use football, cheerleading, dance, and a respect for education to develop strong, smart, responsible, healthy young men and women. We give them experiences that build their appreciation for and understanding of leadership, teamwork, and discipline (Pop Warner Little Scholars, 2020).

Smith was raised in Compton, one of Los Angeles' most violent, gang-infested cities. As a child, he walked off his front porch to see Crips gang members standing on the corner. Kids in elementary school boasted of their gang ties (Leanord, 2015). He spent his days after school and

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on weekends at football practice which not only kept him busy, but where he could surround himself with father figures (coaches) since he grew up in a house with no male role models.

Coaches contribute to and play an integral part in the positive development of youth. Most football coaches teach not only the mechanics of the game itself, but life skills as well. Coaches can assist youth in the following categories of development; physical development, psychological/emotional development, social development, and intellectual development (Frasser-Thomas et al., 2005).

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Public concerns due to the inflation of media presence instilling fear over safety, especially the long-term effects of Traumatic Brain Injuries, has caused a dramatic decrease of youth and adolescent participation in contact team sports. Tackle football has been the most negatively impacted. In some states, there has been a push to ban youth and adolescent football programs. In January of 2018, New York State Assemblyman, Michael Benedetto filed a bill that would ban youth tackle football to those under the age of 12 (Dunphy, 2019). Lawmakers in the state of California sponsored the “Safe Youth Football Act.” Though it received pushback, its sentiment can be echoed across multiple states such as Maryland, Illinois, and New Jersey to name a few.

Over the last decade, discussion of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and the sport of American football have become inseparable. The presumed risk of CTE and resultant neurodegenerative changes from contact sport participation has been propelled into the minds of concerned parents and players at all levels. Due to the heightened awareness surrounding concussions, especially CTE, the number of football participants continues to decline.

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Extraordinarily little has been discovered to support that the causes of these instances were all due solely to the sport of football. Furthermore, little information has been provided to educate the community to overcome barriers surrounding the fear associated with youth football. The game of football surrounding its safety has evolved dramatically over the last decade, yet little information has been provided to communities to help educate them.

In January of 2020, IPSOS, a global research company, released results from an online survey that yielded 20,069 responses requesting data between the period of 2006-2018 for the number of participants in youth football. The data collected shows a steady decline in the number of participants in youth tackle football each year. In 2006, 8.4 million youth over the age of 6 participated in tackle football. by 2007, that number decreased to 7.9 million participants. The second lowest participation was recorded in 2011 with only 5.9 million. By the conclusion of the season in 2018, only 5.16 million youth participated in tackle football across the United States (Lock, 2020).

Throughout the country, youth tackle football leagues encompass children from the ages of 5-15. Most youth football leagues rely on parent volunteers and other members of the community to run their Board of Directors and coach players. Extraordinarily little effort or time has been put into bringing awareness to the communities to share information on how the game has evolved into a much safer sport. Attempts to research questions such as, “Should I allow my child to play football” only yield negative media stories on concussions. Currently, there has been little effort to provide information to parents in support of the positive psychological, educational, and health benefits associated with youth participation in football programs. In 2019, University of Washington School of Medicine researchers released a survey of 1,025 (55 percent of them mothers, 45 percent fathers) nationwide and found that 61 percent of parents

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supported bans on youth tackle football citing fear of concussions (Cook, 2019). Youth participation in tackle football is on a steady decline and if its dwindling pipeline continues, its rippling effects will negatively impact each program at the preceding levels for years to come.

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study will be to create an informational website that will bring awareness to the benefits of youth participation in football. This online resource center will provide safety videos, articles, and testimonials that will address many of the concerns and rebut common misconceptions that are contributing to the decline in participation. The online system may bridge parents, community, and coaches together to promote the safety and benefits of youth football programs.

### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Public concerns, as well as a surge in news stories from various social media outlets over the long-term effects of Traumatic Brain Injuries has contributed to the dramatic decrease of youth and adolescent participation in contact team sports. Tackle football has been the most negatively impacted. In 2013, U.S. President Barack Obama told the New Republic: “If I had a son, I'd have to think long and hard before I let him play football” (Boren, 2019). It is no secret that football receives its fair amount of negative publicity. However, since the introduction of USA's Heads Up Football Program in 2013, football programs that have implemented its full system have shown a dramatic decline in injuries within their programs. It is imperative to intervene at the youth level by raising awareness about the benefits associated with participation in football. Educating the families of the next generation of football players with valuable information to include new safety techniques and positive success stories about its benefits will in time increase participation in tackle football once again.

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the components needed in an informative website to contribute to raising awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football?
2. How do the components provided in the informational website target misconceptions of participation in youth football?
3. Who qualifies as appropriate individuals to evaluate the adequacy of the information provided on the website?
4. How do the responses from the evaluation groups contribute to making the informational website an effective information model?

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

According to the Mayo Clinic, concussions, minor traumatic brain injuries, are caused when the head sustains a hard hit that causes the brain to shake within the skull. (2017) The sudden movement of the brain within the skull can cause it to bounce or even twist. This causes chemical changes within the brain resulting in brain cell damage. Most concussions are mild and are not life-threatening. They also define Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), as a head injury that usually results from a violent blow or jolt to the head or body. An object that penetrates brain tissue, such as a bullet or shattered piece of skull, also can cause traumatic brain injury. (2017) It is important to understand that while all concussions are traumatic brain injuries, not all traumatic brain injuries are concussions. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) is a brain condition associated with repeated blows or injuries to the head and has been linked to the development of dementia.

The National Athletic Trainer Association describes the role of an Athletic Trainer (AT), as a highly qualified, multi-skilled health care professional who renders service or treatment,

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under the direction of or in collaboration with a physician, in accordance with their education, training and the state's statutes, rules and regulations. Athletic trainers provide services such as primary care, injury and illness prevention, wellness promotion and education, emergent care, examination, and clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions.

Return-To-Play (RTP) is the process of deciding when an injured or ill athlete may safely return to practice or competition. The goal is to return an injured or ill athlete to practice or competition without putting the individual or others at undue risk for injury or illness. To accomplish this goal, the team physician should have knowledge of and be involved with: • Establishing a Return-To-Play process • Evaluating injured or ill athletes • Treating injured or ill athletes • Rehabilitating injured or ill athletes • Returning an injured or ill athlete to play (American College of Sports Medicine).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC (Centers for Disease Control)) according to their website, is one of the major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services. Their mission is to protect America from health, safety, and security threats, both foreign and in the U.S. whether diseases start at home or abroad, are chronic or acute, curable, or preventable, human error or deliberate attack, CDC fights disease and supports communities and citizens to do the same.

A Sports-Related Concussion (SRC) is a traumatic brain injury that is defined as a complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain, induced by biomechanical forces with several common features that help define its nature. (McCrory P, Feddermann-Demont N, Dvořák J, *et al*, 2017).

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A Player Safety Coach (PSC) is a designated individual within a football organization whose primary role is to enforce the rules and responsibilities outlined within the USA Heads Up Football (HUF) Program. They are responsible for overseeing that the leagues are carrying out all safety measures.

Heads up Football (HUF) is a comprehensive program developed by USA Football to advance player safety in the game of football (NFL Foundation, 2020).

The Zurich guidelines were the first set of guidelines established by the National Football League (NFL) on return- to-play protocol following a diagnosed concussion.

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## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This Literature Review examines the research that supports the benefits to youth who participate in organized football activities. The researcher identifies common barriers and misconceptions by parents contributing to the decline in participation in youth football. This study reviewed the most current research that included stories about firsthand experiences of those who are in public, private, and professional settings who have benefitted from participating in football. Additionally, the researcher explored the most recent statistical data proving the correlation of improved academics and behavior of youth of those who participate in organized sports with those who do not. Finally, the researcher explored current safety and informational programs that are available to youth football leagues across the United States.

### BACKGROUND

American football boasts a rich history in the United States. There is a special prestige that goes together with football players from the earliest years. Young football players try to emulate college and professional players that they have come to idolize. Young players request jersey numbers from their youth and even high school coaches for their uniforms so that they can represent their idols. Football down to its very core is a rich part of the American Culture.

While exact numbers of how many youths participate in organized youth sports leagues and/or clubs is difficult, fair estimates can be found from previous surveys and studies. For starters, the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), which employs tens of thousands of online interviews, tallied how many kids between 6 and 17 are regular/frequent (or what it calls "core") players of different sports (Kelley & Carchia, 2013). According to SFIA, 21.47 million kids across the United States participate in youth organized sports each year. Furthermore, 40%

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of that figure encompasses enrollment in youth tackle football. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation breaks that figure down even further by identifying the participation numbers by community types. Living in poor corners of cities draws even more kids specifically to the sport of football. This information is based on football being the lowest cost to participate when compared to other organized sports. Urban settings yield female participation 28% and male 39%, suburban areas yield 39% female and 52% male and finally rural areas with the highest numbers of participation with 50% females and 63% males (Kelley & Carchia, 2013).

While football is still statistically the most popular sport of choice among young athletes, the reality is that the number of participants in football has dramatically decreased over the last decade. In 2006, 8.4 million youth between the ages of 5 and 18 participated in tackle football. By 2015, only 5.22 million participated. With numbers on a steady decline, football may be nothing more than a distant piece of our American History and Culture.

### **POSITIVE EFFECTS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL**

Every year, millions of children ages 6 to 14 take to football fields across America to play the game they love. They may not realize it, but these young athletes are enjoying the benefits of physical exercise while learning life lessons through the sport (Celic, 2018). Studies support that being physically active through football lowers body fats, strengthens muscles, and increases the likelihood of continuing good health habits later in life. Additionally, football introduces young players to new social groups and to a set of coaches who serve as role models (Alic, 2018).

Research has supported that athletes who participated in football for their early years tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Alic, 2018). Participation in football, and team sports in general, has major benefits for fitness and character building. Participation in sports counters the major public health issues of obesity and, more importantly,

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the “disengagement” that is observed in younger people. Every parent of a teen, and even young children, realizes that a “virtual” world has often replaced the real, live interactions kids used to regularly experience. Participation in team sports has a major positive influence on youth, and society should not discount the positive impact of this aspect of football. If a child is passionate about football and no other sport or activity, they are certainly better off playing football than being inactive and alone (Proctor, 2016).

In Sociologist James Coleman’s (2006) research, he found adolescents pay little attention to scholastic achievement in relation to a questionnaire and their responses. He asked students, —If you could be remembered here at school for one of the three things below, which one would you want it to be: brilliant student, star athlete or most popular? (p. 2). Forty percent of boys responded that they would want to be remembered as a star athlete and less than thirty percent wanted to be remembered as a brilliant student. When inquired about the results, Coleman related that in institutional contexts, the group holds down all students to a —level which can be maintained by all (Coleman p. 3).

Researchers Snyder and Spreitzer (1992) found a positive relationship between participation in athletic and academic achievement, self-esteem, locus of control, and involvement in school activities. The findings also suggested that students who were involved in multiple school activities had more positive social and psychological characteristics than students who participated in fewer or no activities. From the perspective of the participants, they believed that athletic participation —builds character, discipline, self-esteem, and other achievement related qualities and results in deferred gratification (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992, p. 520). Holland and Andre (1987) found that students who experienced enhanced exposure while

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involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., a starter on a team) had higher self-esteem scores than non-starters and nonathletes (Kelepolo, 2011).

Research on the positive effects of youth sports participation was the focus of Donna L Merkel's study of Youth Sport: positive and negative impact on young athletes by study. The perceived and objective benefits of participation in sports for children and adolescents are numerous and span multiple domains, including physical, physiological, and social development. Primarily, participation in sports fosters vigorous physical activity and energy expenditure.

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control reported that only 50% of youth engaged in regular exercise, illustrating the need for school and community organizations to promote and facilitate physical activity. In a more recent study by Troiano et al, only 42% of elementary school children undertook the recommended daily amount of physical activity, and only 8% of adolescents met this goal (2008).

Research has shown that childhood obesity is a good predictor of adult obesity, and it is estimated that one third of children born in the years 2000 and beyond will encounter diabetes at some point in their lives (Merkel, 2013). Organized sports have been shown to assist in breaking the vicious cycle of inactivity and unhealthy lifestyle by improving caloric expenditure, increasing time spent away from entertainment media, and minimizing unnecessary snacking (Letsmove.org, 2013). The chaotic lifestyles of working parents have been a large part of the inability to get children to evening practices.

In addition to some of the health benefits of youth football, it also provides mental and physical benefits too. Physical benefits include weight control, strength and conditioning, and cardiovascular strength. Mentally, children learn about problem-solving, collaboration, accountability, responsibility, and leadership. Football teammates learn to work together toward

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meeting a common goal. In turn, friendships are formed that are built on trust, and in many instances carry on into adult years. The development of a strong work ethic can be traced back to youth who participated on football teams. Skills that are acquired during participation in youth football are the foundational blocks that translate into life skills later in life.

Football brings families together. Whether it is attending a youth game to support your child or a home game to support your local high school football team, the fact is that football brings communities together right at the root of building family tradition. Community bonds, tailgating, socialization, pep rally, homecoming, rivalry's, and younger children watching enviously excited for the day they are old enough to participate. These are the reasons Americans love football.

Participation in athletics bridges children together from all facets of life. Children who actively participate in organized sports clubs are less likely to engage in negative and/or criminal behaviors. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (2010), Students who compete in high school activity programs have better educational outcomes, including higher grades, higher achievement test scores, and higher educational expectations beyond high school (National Federation of High School, 2021).

A study identified higher academic performance in younger students who participated in sports in core subject areas by 10% in comparison to those who did not. Identified sports within the study included organized sports like soccer, football, or basketball. (Coe et al., 2006). Students who participate in school sponsored activities had higher math achievement test scores and expectations for attending college. The data also supports the relationship between these outcomes and extracurricular activities held for students in the 1990's Generation X and the early 2000's Millennial Generation (Dumais, 2009).

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The National Federation of High School Athletic Association's (NFHSAA) website lists studies that have identified the academic benefits of students who participate in organized sports from young ages. A study of 140,000 Kansas high school students, examining data from the Kansas High School Athletic Association and the Kansas State Department of Education, revealed that "athletes earned higher grades, graduated at a higher rate, dropped out of school less frequently, and scored higher on state assessments than did non-athletes." Student-athletes of color contributed to these overall results having much higher-grade point averages, much higher graduation rates, and much lower dropout rates than non-athlete students of color (Lumpkin & Favo, 2012).

Additionally, The NFHSAA cited that sports participation promotes identification with school and school related values, such as doing well academically; pro-educational social norms among teammates and coaches; and academic requirements for participation. "For adolescent students, in particular, sports team participation may be the major route by which they are physically active, and multiple studies suggest that participation on sports teams is also associated with better academic outcomes." (Fox et al., 2010). Participation in school-sponsored athletics "is associated with a 2 percent increase in math and science test scores", school-sponsored "club participation is associated with a 1 percent increase in math test scores," and "involvement in either in sports or clubs is associated with a 5 percent increase in bachelor's degree attainment expectations," according to an investigation of National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data. High school test scores and degree attainment expectations, are "strongly related to educational attainment and future wages," and that "society ought to have a better understanding of the benefits these activities [school-sponsored clubs and sports] afford." (Lipscomb, 2007).

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Authors Marsh and Kletman, noted that extracurricular school activities “benefited socioeconomically disadvantaged students as much or more than advantaged students.” (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). A Minnesota State High School League reported that of 300 Minnesota High Schools surveyed, the average GPA (Grade Point Average) of student-athletes was 2.84, compared to non-athletes who fell at 2.68. Student-athletes missed an average of only 7.4 days of school each year, compared with 8.8 for the non-participating students. (Born, 2007).

Attendance rates are also found to be higher among student-athletes. The North Carolina High School Athletic Association found significant differences between North Carolina high school students who were athletes and those who were not. Athletes missed an average of 6.3 days in comparison to non-athletes who missed an average of 11.9 days (about 1 week 5 days) of school per school year. The same study found that non-athletes also received a higher rate of discipline referrals at 41.8% compared to student-athletes at 33.3%. Finally, graduation rates for athletes were at 99.4% and only 93.5% for non-athletes. (Overton, 2001).

Twenty-seven studies focused on the relationship among physical fitness and academic achievement. Most of the studies evaluated both linear and nonlinear associations of PA and aerobic fitness with children's academic achievement among 687 2nd and 3rd grade students and showed that fitness had a significant quadratic association with both spelling and mathematics achievement. (Overton, 2001)

### **BARRIERS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION**

Public concerns over the long-term effects of Traumatic Brain Injuries have caused a dramatic decrease of youth and adolescent participation in contact team sports. Tackle football has been the most negatively impacted. In fact, in some states there has been a push to ban youth and adolescent football programs. In January of 2018, New York State Assemblyman, Michael

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Benedetto filed a bill that would ban youth tackle football to those under the age of 12 (Dunphy, 2019). Lawmakers in the state of California sponsored the “Safe Youth Football Act.” Though it received pushback, its sentiment can be echoed across multiple states such as Maryland, Illinois, and New Jersey to name a few.

In a 2017 Harris Poll conducted on the behalf of the Osteopathic Association, 1,000 parents were asked if they would allow their children to play sports given the surge in media hype surrounding concussions. Fifty one percent of parents said yes to athletics and forty nine percent said no. Of the parents who said yes, only 19% said they would allow their child to participate in football. Ironically, those parents supported other contact or risky sports such as soccer, gymnastics, and cheerleading. A misconception was that most of the parents surveyed perceived sports that require protective equipment such as football, hockey, and lacrosse to be riskier for concussions. The survey supports that parents are making decisions about sports based on concussion concerns however still have misconceptions about risks that are associated with sports without protective gear (Marcus, 2017).

According to the Mayo Clinic, concussions, minor traumatic brain injuries, are caused when the head sustains a hard hit that causes the brain to shake within the skull causing chemical changes within the brain. Most concussions are mild and are not life-threatening. Mild concussions can be treated at home through complete rest from mental and physical activities and do not cause long term damage (2017).

Over the last decade, discussion of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and the sport of American football have become inseparable. The presumed risk of CTE and resultant neurodegenerative changes from contact sport participation has been propelled into the minds of concerned parents and players at all levels. Currently, the literature is mixed on whether contact

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sport participation is associated with adverse long-term neurologic outcomes, including neurobehavioral changes such as depression and a range of neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease (Zuckerman, Yengo-Khan, Bret, Kuhn, Wolfson, & Kerr, 2020).

Other misconceptions that discourage parents from signing their children up to play football and other team sports are parents' beliefs that team sports discourage families from being active together, have a high rate of injury, encourage a competitive culture, are non-inclusive, and do not keep their kids active for life (Backwoods Mama, 2017).

In the book, *Until it hurts: America's obsession with youth sports and how it harms our kids*, the author uncovers some of the fear's parents have surrounding their concerns about letting their children play youth sports. One of the biggest concerns of parents of both youth and adolescent aged athletes is a fear of negative psychological effects from allowing children to play in competitive sports. Parents are consumed with worry about the psychological damage intense sports may have on their children. They claim that competitive sports are "too" competitive in nature and that it can damage a child's chance at a positive self-image. They do not place value on healthy competition and are responsible for the belief that everyone should get a participation trophy.

Finally, with increased pressures for demand of high academic achievement, parents fear that time spent at a sport can be detrimental to students' academic responsibilities. Though academic achievement may not be improved through extracurricular participation, there is evidence that participation does not hinder academic achievement. Students who had participated in numerous after-school activities had higher levels of academic achievement than students who participated in one or less activities (Stegman and Stephens, 2002).

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### **CURRENT RESOURCES TO AID IN SAFETY AND EDUCATION**

Currently there is a safety program available to youth football leagues nationally. In April 2013, USA Football launched the Heads-Up Football (HUF) program. The program is supported by a \$45 million dollar grant from the NFL Foundation. The program provides education and certification to players and coaches on safety, proper tackling techniques, proper equipment fitting, and the recognition and response protocols for heat and concussion related emergencies. The NFL Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of those touched by the game of football. The NFL Foundation- in conjunction with the NFL's 32 clubs- supports the health, safety, and wellness of athletes across all levels, including youth football and the communities that support the game (NFL Player Health and Safety, 2020).

The purpose of this program is to decrease the rates of concussions within football leagues. The USA Football's *Heads Up Football* System has had positive results in decreasing the number of concussions in youth football since its introduction. Information on the program is available by leagues who have adopted the system, however there is little information provided to those in the community who have not made the commitment to allow their children to participate. This information being made available in conjunction with additional safety information, tips, and stories can be beneficial to parents who are still undecided on allowing their children to participate.

Additionally, there have been a few books published by former NFL players who discuss the many benefits of youth participation in football. In the book, *Learning culture through sports: perspectives on society and organized sports*, the author covers key areas in the sociological influences of sports such as in youth sports, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, sports and the media, international participation in sports, and big business in sports. Each

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section identifies the major positive and negative influences in the sports world and how it directly impacts the lives of athletes. The authors make the reader aware through use of essays to discuss issues and controversies that surround sports as related to the topic being discussed. The section on youth football discusses the social class and gender influences in participation of middle school sports.

In the book, *Brainwashed: The Bad Science behind CTE and the Plot to Destroy Football*, authors Hodge and Cummings discuss the fear surrounding Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy and its relation to the sport of football. Football is widely known as being a violent sport, but with it comes a special prestige of being a tough guy. In past years, little was known about the dangers of concussions. Once the first story broke, the media ran with the headlines about the dangers of the sport. One of the first cases to be exploited was that of Mike Weber, an x-NFL teammate of Cummings. The authors point out the biases as more is learned about the truth behind CTE. The purpose of their book is to save the face of youth football as more families are preventing their children from participating in the greatest American sport.

## **TACKLE FOOTBALL: SAFER THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN**

According to USA Football, as of 2019, 70% of youth football organizations and high schools have become *Heads Up* Certified programs. The mission of USA Football is to make the game safer than it has ever been before by “taking the head out of the game.” This program focuses on educating coaches through a multitude of series resulting in the knowledge and benefits associated with being a certified Heads-up Coach. The program educates in key component areas such as concussion recognition and response, heat preparedness and hydration, sudden cardiac arrest, proper equipment fitting, shoulder tackling techniques and safer blocking

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all which increase player safety. Their mission is to advance, unify, and grow the sport of football.

By 2015, The USA Football Heads Up Football (HUF) program, which is endorsed by many leading medical organizations, released new youth football practice guidelines. The three-step game plan program provides training and certification to new and veteran coaches, as well as assistant coaches, at both the youth and adolescence levels. Due to the heightened awareness surrounding concussions, youth football leagues have reported a steady decrease in participation over the last few years. Proper tackling technique is a generous portion of the curriculum for The Heads-Up *Football* program. Blocking fundamentals are also taught. Enhancing the fundamentals of football will increase the safety among players. Injury is present in all sports.

In 2011, a study was conducted by the Center for Injury Biomechanics to investigate the head impact exposure in youth football. This study was conducted using a youth football team consisting of players ages 6 to 9 years old and involved the use of instrumenting player helmets with head acceleration measurement devices. The study concluded that impacts to the sides of helmets accounted for 36% of all impacts with 31% of the impacts landing on the front of the helmet, 18% of the top, and 14% on the rear. The study was used to determine the importance of proper helmet fittings and designs, but also shows the areas of the head that are most exposed and prone to injury in football. Hence, the need to take the head out of the game of play to reduce the number of direct hits or collisions to the heads of players.

In the article, *Heads Up Football Training Decreases Concussion Rates in High School Football Players*, published in the Orthopedic Journal of Sports Medicine, Doctors evaluated the effects of the Heads-Up Program. The purpose of their study was to compare concussion rates

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between HU trained programs and NHU football programs at the high school level in South Carolina. They monitored 2,514 football players during the 2015 season. Fourteen of the schools had at least one HU certified coach, while the remaining 10 schools were NHU. They observed 117 total reported concussion injuries. The results of the study supported the effectiveness of implementing the USA Football Heads Up program to reduce the rate of concussions in football players.

USA Football reported that the Heads-up system reduced concussions by 28% in its first year. According to a study published in 2017, the American Medical Association reported positive effects of reduced rates of concussion in high school football players whose coaches implemented the program. (Mishra, 2017) In 2017, orthopedic surgeon Dr. John Tokish, studied high school football teams in South Carolina. He tracked both programs that did and did not implement the new system. He reported that the programs that implemented Heads Up, had 4.1% concussion rate versus the groups who did not implement the program resulting in a rate of 6% concussions reported. In addition to this study, he reported that the group who received Heads Up training, recovered 27% faster from their concussions. (Football Under Assault, 2017) Also reported by USA Football, approximately 1,000 high schools in Indiana reported a decline in concussions by 40% during their 2014-2015 season. The school had only had the program in place for one year.

In 2016, The Fairfax County Public School District in Virginia, reported significant declines in football related concussions by 43% during the 2013-2014 school year. (Goldwin, 2016) The district instituted complete training of all coaches and their assistants, making it mandatory to be Heads Up Certified. Additionally, they limited the number of contact hours during practice per week.

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The National Football League reported concussions dropped 29% during the 2018 NFL football season. (USA Today, 2019) In the professional league, there were 135 documented concussions. This is the lowest number reported since 2014 when 206 cases were reported. The league also asserts that they used 4 different screenings for each reported concussion resulting in 75% of the cases being deemed negative.

The University of Pittsburgh and Cornell University participated in research of 468 athletes from 4 youth football leagues in Pennsylvania. The athletes ranged from 8-12 years old. Their findings suggested that within leagues that did not implement the Heads-Up program, older players between the ages of 11-12 sustained concussions at a rate 3 times higher than those 8-10 years old. Forty-five percent of those concussions involved head-to-head contact, 5% were head-to-ground, 5% were head-to-body, and 45 % were unknown injuries mechanisms. The study gathered data to compare concussion rates of NHU programs during practice and game related head injuries.

Football brings about an immense number of intangible benefits that prepare youth for life. With proper preventatives in place, we can make the game safer than it has ever been before. Accessibility to information, testimonials, latest trends, and methods and supporting literature, misconceptions can be dispelled, and barriers can be broken down.

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## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

Football brings about an immense number of intangible benefits that prepare youth for life. The purpose of this dissertation is to create an informative website that delivers awareness to prospective youth football families by addressing misconceptions contributing to the decline of participation. The goal of the program is to bridge parents, community, and coaches together to promote the safety and benefits of participation.

### ***YOUTH FOOTBALL CENTRAL (YFC) (WEBSITE)***

*Youth Football Central (YFC)*, is a website created to promote awareness to the community about the benefits of youth participation in football (Appendix A). It will assist parents who are considering the sport of football as an option for their children. Its purpose is to educate and assist families with overcoming some of the fears, barriers, and misconceptions that they might have. The researcher's intent is to bridge coaches, parents, and community members together. It includes facts supported by statistical evidence on the benefits of youth participation in football. In addition, it provides research-based studies, educational videos, informative articles, and testimonials. Additionally, it includes supporting links offering easy access to the newest safety programs and additional outside resources. The site provides guidance for parents to include recommendations and answers to commonly asked questions. This information will assist parents researching potential football leagues for their children to participate in. *YFC* is designed to conveniently combine information from a variety of resources into one easily accessible area.

### METHOD PURPOSE

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The researcher will use a mixed approach via purposeful sampling and a case study design to explore two categories that support the research on the benefits of youth participation in football. First, the researcher created a website based on research throughout this dissertation. The researcher used content based on the literature review to determine which key components should be included to best educate parents exploring the sport of football as an option for their children. Next, the researcher will seek to find participants qualified to be a part of an expert panel. The expert panel will be composed of individuals who are qualified to review the published information on the website. Finally, the researcher will seek to determine the usefulness of information provided on the website.

Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Sampling methods are intended to maximize efficiency and validity in a grounded theory study (Palinkas et. al, 2015). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Case studies can bring a product to fruition. A case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. Case studies are commonly used in social, education, clinical, and business research. Case studies are good for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding various aspects of a research problem (McComes, 2020). Data gathered from case studies can be used to develop policy or examine programs (Johnston, 2013).

The researcher will target those individuals within communities who have experience working with youth football athletes. The focus group will include youth football coaches,

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athletic directors, athletic trainers. The researcher will use a survey format consisting of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The first set of data collected will be used to identify each of the participants' qualifications. The second set of questions investigated will be specific to the information posted in the created product, the YFC Website. The data collected will be used by the researcher to maximize the validity of the website. The researcher anticipates receiving 50 participants.

Using a cases study design approach will assist the researcher with gathering answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the components needed in the informative website to contribute to raising awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football?
2. How do the components provided in the informational website target misconceptions of participation in youth football?
3. Who qualifies as appropriate individuals to evaluate the adequacy of the information provided on the website?
4. How do the responses from the evaluation groups contribute to making the informational website an effective information model?

### **POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The research study will be conducted using an expert panel, focusing on those who have been and/or who are involved in the sport of football or with football athletes. The expert panel will include youth football coaches, athletic directors, athletic trainers, parents, and teachers. The researcher will use a purposive sample, focusing on individuals who have knowledge and experience working with young football athletes and who have witnessed their growth physically, mentally, and emotionally due to the many benefits associated with participation in

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the sport of football. Assembling the experiences and perspectives from each subgroup who have direct knowledge from working with young athletes will provide the most pertinent data to veritably answer each of the research questions.

### **INCLUSION CRITERIA**

Youth Coaches bring a wealth of knowledge through their own experiences on the positive impact football has on youth players both on and off the field. Athletic Directors are experts in their field, responsible for overseeing all aspects of athletics ranging from fan experience to the safety and well-being of each one of their student athletes and coaches. Athletic Trainers are multi-skilled health care professionals responsible for rendering treatment as needed to athletes. They are on site at every football practice and game. Classroom teachers can speak on their experiences observing the academic benefits of sports student-athletes have displayed in the classroom. Parents can speak through personal experience on the many ways football has positively impacted the lives of their children.

For the informational website, Youth Football Central to reach the intended audience of parents who have not yet made the decision on allowing their child to participate in youth football, the researcher intends to circulate the information about the website through local youth tackle and flag football leagues, local news outlets, social media, and local town newspapers throughout South Florida.

### **PROCEDURES**

Since the goal of this research is to gain insight into a select group of experts experienced in the sport of football and/or working with football athletes to gauge the effectiveness of the resource website to be provided to the public, a case study format is appropriate. The researcher

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will employ a case study design by utilizing a survey approach using a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

First, the researcher will seek permission from the Internal Review Board at Lynn University. Upon approval from Lynn University, the researcher will circulate via social media outlets Facebook and Twitter, a flyer for the study (Appendix B). The flyer will consist of two direct links. One will direct the volunteers to the YFC website. The other will direct the volunteers to the survey. When the volunteers select the survey link, the first screen will provide information about the study and require consent to continue. (Appendix C). Once consent is obtained, the participant will continue using the online survey tool (Google Form) that will consist of a brief demographic survey. At completion of the survey questions the participant will select the command to continue and will have access to the direct link to the Youth Football Central (YFC) Website (Appendix A) with instructions to spend time reviewing. At the conclusion of the review of the website, participants will complete a survey that will include a series of multiple choice, Likert scale and open- ended questions (Appendix D). Upon submission, the participants' responses will be emailed directly to the researcher.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection will include information gathered from both sections of the survey completed by the participants. The first section of data sampling will include demographic information and the second will include data collected after review of the website.

Demographic questions will include.

1. What is your role in football?
2. How many years have you served in this position?

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Responses to questions regarding ease of use of the website and evaluation of its content will be collected using a five-point Likert response system using the following scale: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and undecided. Responses to open-ended questions will also offer participants an opportunity to share experiences, provide additional resources or information, and provide feedback and suggestions. The survey tool will sort each respondents' responses. The researcher will be using required responses features which will not allow a respondent to move on until all questions are answered.

The open-ended questions will include which information participants found most relevant, suggestions, and additional resources and are as follows:

3. In your experience, what resource of support on the website might be most impactful for parents unsure about allowing their child to participate in youth tackle football?
4. What else might be beneficial to include in the *Youth Football Center* (YFC) Website?
5. Do you have literature or videos that you would like to contribute to the website to help ease some of the fears or misconceptions that parents have about football?

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The qualitative and quantitative data will be analyzed separately using a survey approach. Qualitative research will be conducted in this study. Qualitative data is defined as the data that approximates and characterizes. It is non-numerical data in nature and is collected through methods of observations, one-to-one interviews, conducting focus groups and similar methods (Question Pro, 2021). Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research (Bhandari, 2020).

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Using a survey tool and through use of open-ended questions, data will be collected, sorted, and interpreted systematically and data themes will be interpreted. The first three questions will help to gather demographic information to assist with categorizing responses based on various sources.

Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. It can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, and generalize results to wider populations (Bhandari, 2021). Through use of a survey model, the researcher will gather numerical data based on Likert scale responses. The researcher will tally the survey questions based on the point value they are assigned. The information will be used by the researcher to compare the data to determine the validity of the information provided on the Youth Football Central Website. The data collected will provide insight into the product and offer the researcher feedback that will assist with drawing conclusions based on the final statistics.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All participants will electronically sign an informed consent before participating in the study. The researcher will collect both qualitative and quantitative data using a mixed-methods approach. The information collected from the surveys will remain anonymous. Information gathered will be used for analysis however will not be linked to any individuals. The participants will remain anonymous throughout the study. The desired collection of responses is at least 50 and will be from individuals who are involved in the sport of football such as coaches, athletic trainers, and athletic directors.

Assuring the privacy of participants' responses will be paramount to the success of the study. The researcher will be using Google Forms for data collection from this study. Participants will read a statement that assures that at no time can the researcher gain access to a particular

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participant's response nor the participants identifying information. The responses of the demographic data and responses from the post survey will be kept on a password protected computer and will be deleted after three years. Volunteers who consent to participate in the interview process will only be featured in the video should consent be obtained. There are no risks involved for participation.

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## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

### **Overview**

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify some of the barriers that are contributing to the decline in participation in youth tackle football. Through research, data was used to create and publish a website that would allow visitors to examine the most current literature, statistics, and safety programs to support the benefits of youth participation in tackle football. The website, Youth Football Central, debunks some of the myths and misconceptions associated with the sport.

This case study solicited feedback about the details on the website from coaches, athletic trainers, athletic directors, parents and teachers. The first part of the survey consisted of demographic questions aimed at gauging their title and years of experience with the sport of football followed by a question to gauge their feeling on whether they supported youth participating in tackle football. The second part of the survey consisted of both Likert scale (quantitative) and open ended (qualitative) questions. The participants were asked to consent to the study. Participants were then required to review the website, “Youth Football Central” prior to answering the series of questions.

### **Survey Results: Demographic Profile**

The demographic questions were utilized to identify the role that participants play in relation to the sport of football, as well as the years of professional experience in that role. Of the 65 participants, 41.5% responded that they were coaches, 18.9% responded that they were Athletic Trainers, 23.8% responded that they were Athletic Directors, 9.2% responded they were

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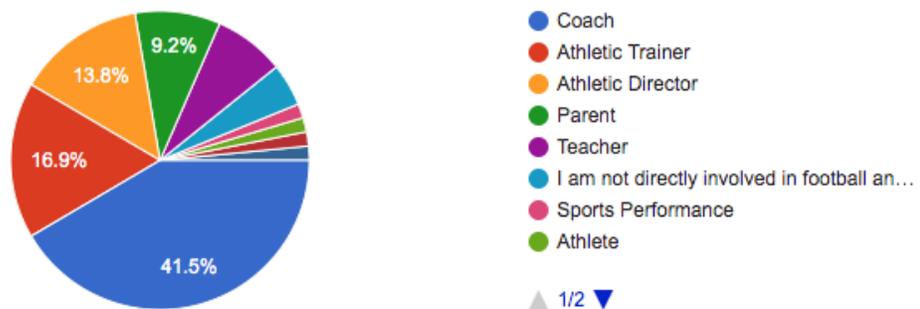
parents, and the remaining were classified as other. Figure 1 illustrates the participants' roles in relation to football.

**Figure 1.**

*Demographic Role in Relation to Football*

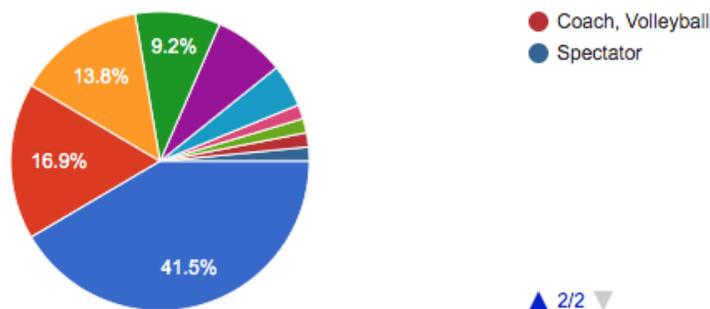
What is your role in relation to football?

65 responses



What is your role in relation to football?

65 responses



In addition to identifying their roles in relation to football, participants were asked to select their number of years of professional experience in their selected role. The results yielded that the largest percentage of respondents, 16.9%, identified as having between 8-9 years of

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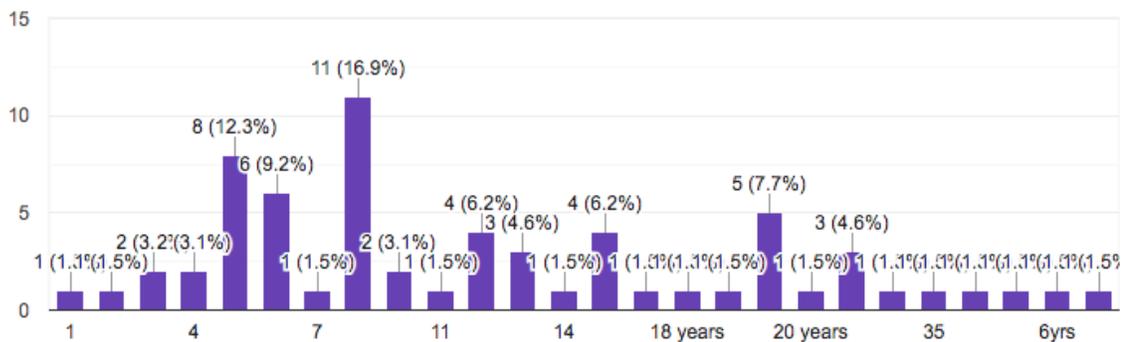
experience in their role followed by 12.3% who have worked in their role averaging 5 years of experience. Figure 2 illustrates these results.

**Figure 2.**

### *Participants' Experience*

How many years have you served in this role?

65 responses



In addition to identifying their roles in relation to football and their years of experience in that role, participants were polled to gauge their personal feelings on whether participation in youth tackle football should be permitted for children between the ages 5-15 years. The largest percentage of respondents, 69.2%, indicated that they strongly agree that youth between the ages of 5-15 should be permitted to participate in youth tackle football, followed by 26.2% who indicated that they agree that children between the ages of 5-15 should be permitted to participate in youth tackle football. The remaining 4% of respondents declared themselves as undecided followed by one respondent who indicated that they disagreed. Figure 3 illustrates these results.

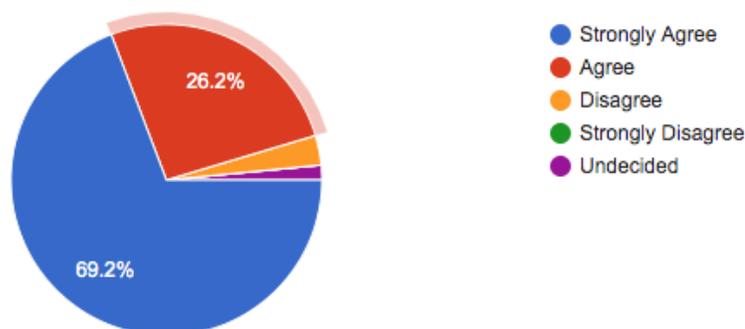
## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

**Figure 3.**

*Participants' Feelings on Permitting Youth Participation in Football*

Children between the ages of 5-15 should be permitted to participate in tackle football?

65 responses



### **Summary of Results: Quantitative Data Results**

The next series of questions required participants to access and spend time exploring the Youth Football Central website. Upon completion of the demographic questions and content to participate, the participants were instructed to click the link that granted direct access to the website for their review along with directions to ensure a thorough review of each section of the website. Upon completion of the review of the website, participants were asked to complete a series of a mix of Likert scale and open-ended questions. The Likert scale questions were aimed to gain perspective on the ease of use to navigate the website, as well as the reviewers perspective on the information provided in the website in relation to their professional knowledge. The open-ended questions were used to gather information that could help to enhance the website for future use. Survey question four requested feedback on the ease of use with regards to navigating the website. The survey revealed that 89.2% strongly agree and 10.8% agree that the Youth Football Website is easy to navigate. Figure four shows the responses.

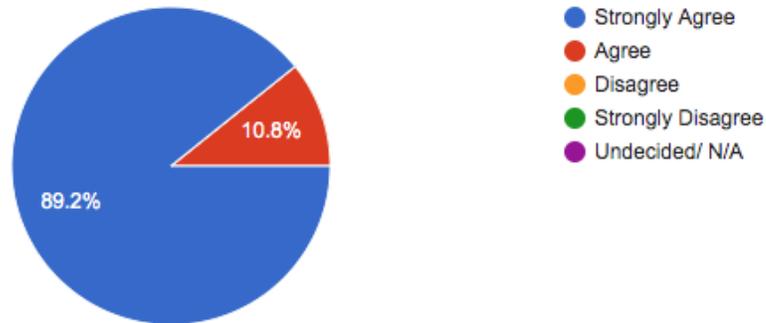
# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

**Figure 4.**

## *Youth Football Central Website Navigation*

The Youth Football Central (YFC) website was easy to navigate

65 responses



Survey question 5 asked respondents to rate how easily the posted safety information was to understand. The results of the survey revealed that 87.7% strongly agreed that the safety information was easy to understand with the remaining 12.3 % selecting that they agree. Figure 5 displays these results.

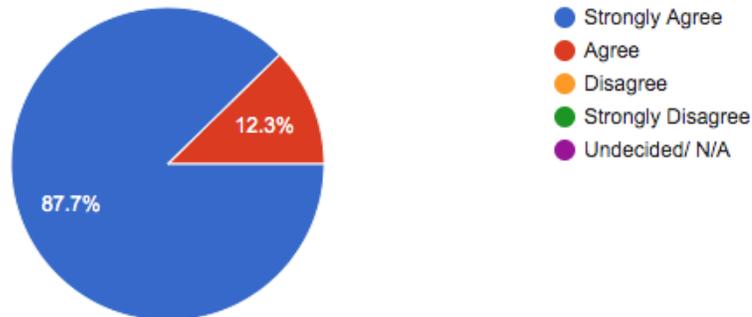
**Figure 5.**

## *Youth Football Central Website Safety Information*

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The posted safety information was easy to understand

65 responses



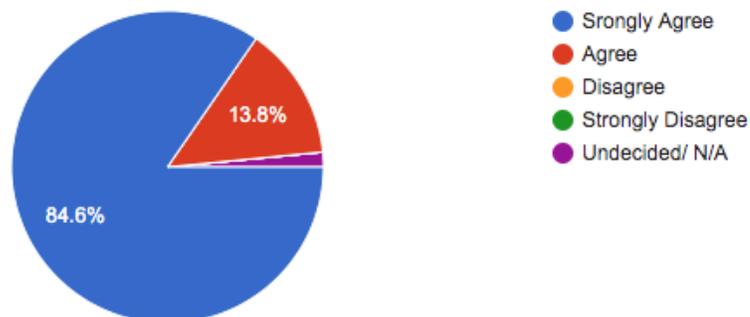
Following on, question 6 required participants to rate the accuracy of the safety videos posted on the website. The results revealed that 84.8% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement and 13.8% agreed. Figure 6 depicts the results.

**Figure 6.**

*Youth Football Central Website Instructional Videos*

The instructional videos posted on the website were accurate and easy to understand?

65 responses



The Youth Football Central website is divided into three main sections; *In the Locker Room*, *On the Field*, and *In the Huddle*. Each of the three sections contains information relevant

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

to the section. The *In the Locker Room* section consists of articles and studies surrounding all of the benefits of children participating in youth tackle football. The *On the Field* section consists of safety techniques and programs in place to make the game safer. Finally, the *In the Huddle* section, contains information to bridge the community together through programs and workshops available to assist with educating families.

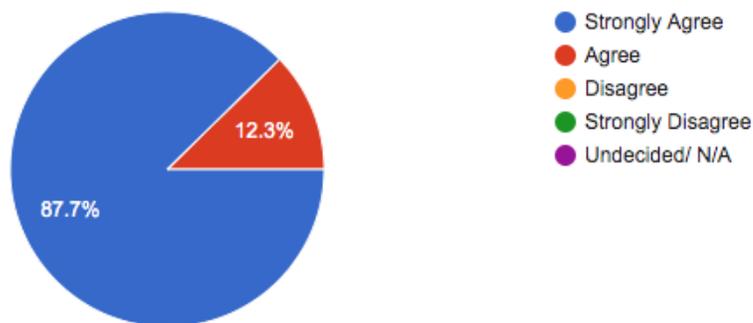
Question 7 surveyed participants to determine how well they supported that the information about the benefits of playing youth tackle football posted on the website was accurate. The results revealed that 87.7% strongly agreed with this statement followed by 12.3% stating that they agree. Figure 7 represents these results.

**Figure 7.**

### Youth Football Central Website Benefits of Participation

The information about the benefits of playing football posted on the website was accurate

65 responses



The next question asked participants to determine if the overall information on the website would be helpful to assist families who may be unsure about allowing their child to participate in tackle football. All participants answered this question with a response of agree and

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

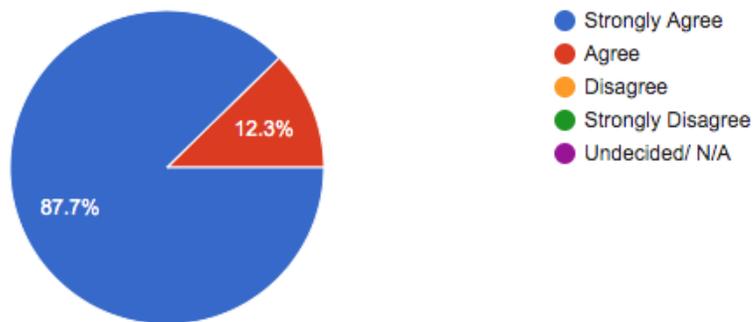
strongly agree. An impressive 87.7% of the respondents strongly agreed. The graph in figure 8 shows this data.

### Figure 8.

Youth Football Central Website helpful information

The website contained helpful information to assist families with making a decision on whether to allow their children to play football

65 responses



It is important to provide feedback shared by those who have first hand experience. The next question was to determine if the participants found the testimonials provided by those with experience helpful enough to encourage them to explore more about youth tackle football. An overwhelming majority of responses yielded data supporting that they agreed with this statement. 76.95 strongly agreed and 21.5% agreed. The collected data is represented in the chart Figure 9.

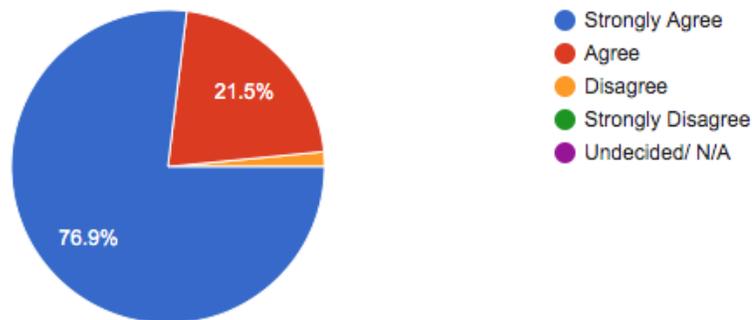
### Figure 9.

Youth Football Central Website Intent to Explore More Information

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The testimonials posted on the website encouraged you to explore more about the sport

65 responses



It is important to acknowledge educational resources provided by individuals who have knowledge about the information the researcher is studying. Many of the resources provided in the website were made available by USA Football. The next question asked participants if they found the information provided by them to be valuable. An astonishing 100% of the 65 respondents declared they agreed (35.4%) with the remaining stating that they strongly agreed (64.6%). Figure10 supports this data.

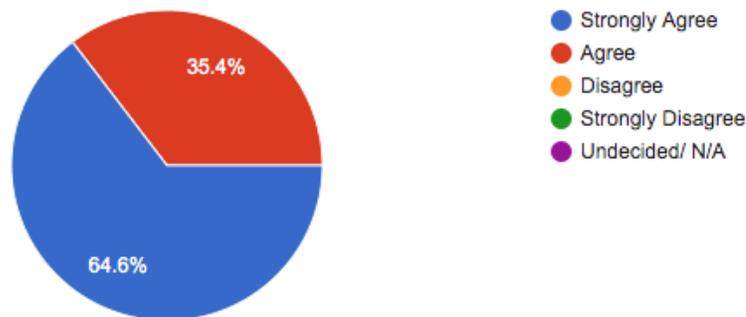
### **Figure 10.**

Youth Football Central Website Top-Ranked Program Resources

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The website's Top-Ranked Programs Section included companies that offer valuable resources

65 responses



Literature supports the mental, physical, and academic benefits seen in those who participate in youth football. Providing this research-based information, along with other pertinent safety information in a website was the goal of the researcher in an attempt to debunk myths and misconceptions surrounding tackle football to those who are unsure about allowing their child to participate. The next question was to poll participants to see if the quality of information provided in the website by the researcher was substantial enough for them to recommend the website to the intended audience. Astonishingly, 89.2% of the respondents answered they strongly agree that they would recommend the Youth Central Football website followed by 10.6% declaring that they agree. Figure 11 supports this data.

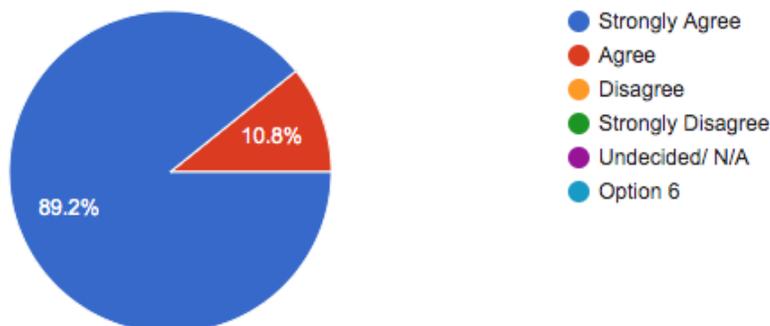
**Figure 11.**

*Youth Football Central Website Recommendation to Others*

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

I would recommend the Youth Football Central (YFC) website to individuals who are unsure about allowing their child to play tackle football

65 responses



The researcher used open ended quotes for remaining questions twelve through sixteen. Question twelve asked participants to identify which resource on the website might be most impactful for parents who are unsure about allowing their child to participate in youth tackle football. One participant said, “information on free clinics that offer parents a chance to try it hands on”. Another responded, “videos were so helpful, loved the videos too”. The overwhelming majority responded positively with regard to the videos, with one participant adding, “ I am a visual learner”. Some cited their support of the USA Heads Up information and videos and others commented on the safety articles to include proper equipment fitting. Individual responses can be reviewed in Figure 12

### **Figure 12.**

*Youth Football Central: Most impactful resource*

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

In your experience, what resource of support on the website might be most impactful for parents unsure about allowing their child to participate in youth tackle football?

35 responses

Information on free clinics that offer parents a chance to try it hands on

videos were so helpful. loved the articles too.

The vides were fantastic and easy to understand. I am a visual learner

What is Heads Up Football

safety information

Head injury information

Testimonials

Seahawk tackling

The continued support of heads up tackling and the coaches being coached the correct way.

Parent testimonials

The statistics about injury prevention data

none

The Heads Up program

Medical Information

Videos

The safety in regards to tackling

Videos are always easiest for families to understand. Unfortunately, many don't take time to read articles. Great idea using videos to demonstrate!

videos to give a visual

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The videos would be the most helpful.

The way the game has evolved. New safer tackling techniques as well as the heightened awareness about concussions and more importantly the education that coaches receive in reputable leagues now

Videos showcasing techniques

Safer tackling techniques, "taking the head out of the game"

I think that the website covered several areas that were important to parents in helping them decide on participating in tackle football.

I really enjoyed the videos and found them to be informative.

the videos about the new ways to tackle and how to take the head out of the game

The safety videos showing demonstrations using actual youth players is a nice touch.

New safety techniques

Blogs help

Videos

the proper fitting of equipment

Verified testimonials

If the school or program has athletic trainer staff on hand then I agree it is safe to run

THE WEBSITE

Continuing to add videos showing players performing the drills.

The new methods in tackling

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The videos would be the most helpful.

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I really enjoyed the videos and found them to be informative.

the videos about the new ways to tackle and how to take the head out of the game

The safety videos showing demonstrations using actual youth players is a nice touch.

Teachers see a difference in behavior and motivation when the season is over. They really look forward to their sport.

The next question asks participants to identify any additional resources that might be beneficial to the website. A few of the responses include a suggestion by a respondent that said, "for lists of participating clinics or parent workshops". One respondent suggested "provide a quick list of what to look for in a league". Another suggested, "a place to post questions". Figure 13 displays all of the respondents' responses.

### **Figure 13.**

*Youth Football Central: What additional resources should be added*

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

What additional information might be beneficial to include in the Youth Football Central (YFC) Website?

32 responses

N/A

statistics on the concussions between the various sports. There is such a stigma that football is the worst sport when it simply is not the case.

to update it as new parent workshops and trainings come out. Maybe a list of what to look for in a league

Deep discussion about the evolution of football rule changes that have legislated a significant portion of the violence out of the game.

Leagues that are certified by state

Nothing additional.

Inner city youth fb is terrible. How can they gain interest in what youre doing here.

Video of maybe players at all levels doing things the correct way. I think people relate more when you see someone or something that resembles themselves

Historically how football tackling has advanced through the years

none

More info on concussions so parents know signs and symptoms and treatment options

The Seattle Seahawks developed a tackling system after an extensive study of rugby tackling. The Seahawks tackling system has been chosen as one of the main sources of teaching kids how to tackle all around the country.

Provide a quick list of what to look for when searching for a league.

where to find free parent clinics so they can plan to attend to get some hands on instruction as parents

Place to post questions

Videos of kids

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

NA
Most injuries to children in football
I found enough.
links to workshops for parents. Where to find the information
include more from USA football
None
Parent blog that is live
Studies of head injuries and how they impact athletes over time -vs- Head injuries using HUP.
Testimonials
Maybe a question answer blog to go along with the website.
looks great. possibly more about heat related emergencies and how they are handled. It is also a top priority in coaches trainings
All looks great. Possibly some youth league options by state. Or what to look for in a youth football league.
A place for parents to submit questions.

The next open-ended question offered an opportunity for respondents to suggest additional information that might be beneficial to raise awareness about the benefits of participation in youth football. A few left comments such as, “You did a thorough job”. Another respondent commented that when football season was over, “there is a noticeable difference in the behaviours of my student-athletes. It is as if they don’t have that time to look forward to and actually become a little lackluster”. Another stated, “keep testimonials and articles on going”. Another respondent suggested, “I think the most important areas were covered. Perhaps a questions and answer area in which parents could communicate with one another and ask their advice from their own experiences”. Figure 14 displays all of the responses to this question.

TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

Figure 14.

*Youth Football Central: What additional information should be added?*

What additional key components should be provided on the website to raise awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football?

27 responses

None
N/A
none
Keeping kids out of trouble and teaching respect. Kids need to be away from the electronics but not necessarily roaming the streets aimlessly either. They need structure and football provides that in additions to keeping in shape, making good choices, and creating a brotherhood
Everything looked great. very informative
I think it was very informative as is
Nothing more
links to coaches that are committed to implementing the techniques and bout into this process.

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

How it aids in the development of life. Teaching young boys teamwork along with everything else that goes into the game

Add some information on comparing head injuries to other sports. There are other sports that have higher incidences of head injury but unfortunately football gets the bad rep.

The option to use football to help pay and get into college.

Did a great job informing the benefits

anytime a new article is written continue to update the website

NA

social life and the bonds that are formed

ALL GOOD

Keep updated testimonials and articles as they come out

possibly a place to post questions.

Blog, maybe some more testimonials by parents of football players

How age, size and weight are all relevant. Go for a league that has limits in age and weight.

I think the most important areas were covered. Perhaps a question answer area on which parents could communicate with one another and ask their advice from their own experience.

You included great facts

Looks great!

Looks great. Keep adding videos

The final open-ended question sought feedback from the respondents on what additional components could enhance the website. A few left comments included, “nothing more” and some responded, “great job”. One respondent suggested, “clearing the misconception of how people really get CTE”. Another respondent said, “the amount of concussions caused by other

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

sports such as soccer”. Another wrote, “the rate of concussions on other sports”. One respondent commented, “I think it is very informative as is”. Another complimented the interview “Great interview! You hit the nail on the head about being a nervous mom but once you were there and had a chance to learn the technique hands on yourself you realized that there is an actual technique taught at each position. Also, an excellent point is that the opponents size and age are all comparable to your own child participating. Figure 15 displays all of the responses to this question. Another complemented by stating, “I must say that I enjoyed watching the video of the interview. I especially loved how Kristina said that she too was one of those nervous parents. This I feel was helpful as she is approachable and also helps other parents identify with her”. The responses can be seen in Figure 15.

### **Figure 15.**

*Youth Football Central: What additional components could enhance the website?*

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

What additional key components should be provided on the website that could assist with clearing misconceptions about youth tackle football?

28 responses

none

None

N/A

N/a

the rates of concussions in other sports

I think it was very informative as is

Nothing more

correcting the misconception of how people get "CTE". which is all parents are scared about.

The amount of concussions cause by other sports like soccer.

Common injuries related to football?

I think for me personally age is a factor. I don't recommend children participating in tackle football until the 7th or 8th grade. I think prior to that it should be all about learning the fundamentals through flag football. No need for violent actions so young. Contact sports for elementary age children just isn't necessary, but your information is accurate and helpful for adults to make decisions for their own families. Great job!

Compare the number of injuries that actually occur in youth football to the total amount of kids playing youth football.

None

NA

n/a you hit all key components

SUBERB

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

Great interview! You hit the nail on the head about being nervous mom but once you were there and had a chance to learn the technique hands on yourself you realized that there is an actual technique taught at each position. Also, excellent point that the opponents size and age are all comparable to your own child participating.

Your choices were great!

n/a

Blog

I must say that I enjoyed watching the video of the interview. I especially loved how Kristina said that she too was one of those nervous parents. This I feel was helpful as she is approachable and also helps other parents identify with her.

more vidoes of camps being held to remind them to take advantage as parent to learn hands on themselves

Keep loading it with videos as you find them.

continue to populate with articles and videos as they come out

Both the Likert Scale and the open-ended questions were triangulated to gauge a better understanding of the participants' responses to assist the researcher with information to both validate the information currently included and enhance the information provided in the informational website. According to the results, 41.5% of the respondents to open-ended question 1 asking which resource of support might be most impactful for parents unsure about allowing their child to participate in football, were coaches. Of those coaches, 35% of them commented that the videos were the most impactful. Most further commented that the videos showcased the safer tackling techniques making it easier for parents to see it in action.

Thirty-two respondents answered the question what additional information might be beneficial to include in the Youth Football Central Website and of those responses, 5 were posted by parents. Their suggestion was to include a live blog that would be beneficial as it would allow parents to ask questions and interact live with coaches.

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

Finally, from the question asking what additional key components should be provided on the website that could assist with clearing misconceptions about youth tackle football, the researcher was able to conclude that of 37 respondents, 7 were categorized as coaches all suggested including information about the rates of concussions and other injuries sustained in many other sports.

In conclusion, the researcher can conclude that the information provided in the Youth Football Central website was substantial and accurate. This feedback supports the goal of the researcher to bridge the community together and provide information to debunk the myth and misconceptions that surround youth tackle football. The researcher can use this data to determine that the website will act as a beneficial tool for educating others about the benefits of youth participation in tackle football.

# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

### INTRODUCTION

The researcher investigated the problem of the rapidly declining number of participants in youth tackle football. The study focused on all of the benefits that go hand in hand with youth participants of one of America's most popular sports. The researcher utilized a website to share data to support those benefits, as well as provided safety information to debunk myths and misconceptions about the safety of the sports. Based on the compilation of materials provided on the *Youth Football Central* website, and the data to show support by participants of the information provided, the researcher could draw conclusions and make interpretations to continue to provide information to parents who are investigating the sport of youth tackle football through the use of the website. Over the course of one week, sixty-five participants reviewed the website and completed the survey questions that followed. This allowed the researcher to also gather information that may be used to enhance the website moving forward.

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The survey included both Likert scale and open-ended questions. Through the data collected, the researcher can conclude that the interview and information provided support the benefits associated with participation in the sport, as well as the safety information provided for the purpose of debunking misconceptions surrounding the safety of the sport. Questions 1 through 3 were used for the purpose of gathering demographic information and years of experience with the sport of football. Based on the results, almost half of the participants were coaches of the sport followed by Athletic Trainers. The average years of experience ranged from

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

1-10 with the average being 8 years. Of the 65 participants, the majority strongly agreed that children ages 5-15 should be permitted to participate in youth tackle football.

With the data collected from the Likert scale questions 4-11, the researcher was able to conclude that the website was easy to navigate and the information posted was pertinent to its purpose which was to insure that the safety information and statistical evidence provided to support the benefits of playing were easy to understand. The overwhelming majority (100 percent) of the respondents supported that they did support all of the information provided in the website and concurred that the information was valuable. The results from the remaining open-ended questions 12-15 provided valuable feedback in support of the information provided.

In conclusion, the feedback gathered was resourceful. The researcher gained insight as to what tools and additional information could be included to enhance the website in the future.

### ***Research Questions Number One***

What are the components needed in an informative website to contribute to raising awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football?

From the research conducted by the researcher, the researcher was able to construct a website into informational sections. The Youth Football Central website is divided into three main sections; *In the Locker Room*, *On the Field*, and *In the Huddle*. Each of the three sections contains information relevant to the section. The *In the Locker Room* section consists of articles and studies surrounding all of the benefits of children participating in youth tackle football. The *On the Field* section consists of safety techniques and programs in place to make the game safer. Finally, the *In the Huddle* section, contains information to bridge the community together through programs and workshops available to assist with educating families. Of the data

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

collected from the survey questions, an astonishing 90% of the respondents strongly agreed that the components provided in the website contributed to raising awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football and the remaining 10% agreed.

### ***Research Questions Number Two***

How do the components provided in the informational website target misconceptions of participation in youth football?

Based on the survey, the data collected supports that the information on the website targets misconceptions of participation in youth football. An overwhelming 87.7% strongly agree and the remaining 12.3% agree that the information was easy to understand. In addition, 84.6% strongly agreed that the instructional videos posted on the website were accurate and easy to understand while the remaining 13.8% of respondents agreed. Overall, 87.7% of participants strongly agreed while the remaining 12.3% agreed that the website contained important information to assist families with making a decision on whether to allow their children to play football.

### ***Research Questions Number Three***

Who qualifies as appropriate individuals to evaluate the adequacy of the information provided on the website?

Of the respondents that participated in the survey, all of them were a part of a football program in some capacity whether professionally or personally. The majority of those who responded were professionally involved in football including coaches, Athletic Trainers, Athletic Director, and teachers. The remaining participants were personally involved through personal means such as parents or former athletes. All 65 participants supported the adequacy of the information provided on the website.

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## *Research Questions Number Four*

How do the responses from the evaluation groups contribute to making the informational website an effective information model?

The researcher concluded that the feedback provided by all of the evaluation groups not only were in support of the information on the website, but provided recommendations as to what information might enhance the website as it grows moving forward. The participants used questions 12-15 to provide suggestions as to what might be great additions to the website in all areas to include safety, as well as interaction with the public seeking answers to questions.

In conclusion, the research gained valuable insight as to what additional resources may contribute to the continuation of education surrounding the sport of youth tackle football. The researcher can conclude from the feedback that the research conducted and provided in the website will serve as a viable tool to assist families who are researching the benefits of participation in the sport of football, as well as debunk some of the myths that have been contributing to the decline in participants over the years.

## **LIMITATIONS**

A limitation to the study was that the participants who chose to answer the survey questions are only those who are or were at some point involved in the sport of football. Therefore, the experiences of the surveyed population may not represent all coaches, all teachers, all Athletic Trainers, all Athletic Directors, all teachers or all parents.

An additional limitation to the study was that the questionnaire circulated online. Therefore, the researcher does not know if the participants are true to their declared professions or years of experience in stated position.

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

Another limitation is the inability to distinguish areas of the region where participants were from. The survey did not include this demographic question. The region as to where the participants are from may have an influence on the participants personal feelings toward the sport.

A final limitation is that open-ended questions were not a requirement for responses. Of the 65 participants, most chose to provide written feedback on questions 11-15. The least number of responses was on question 14 which yielded 27 responses.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the research concluded that the Youth Football Central website can continuously evolve as new research and trends are discovered. Future research can be conducted and more specifically, can be conducted as special needs arise or evolve over time.

In addition, the researcher will circulate details on how to access the website via youth football leagues. The researcher intends on contacting members of multiple Boards of Directors for Youth Tackle Football Leagues to provide the website link directly on their websites. The researcher can also potentially reach an audience of undecided families by providing the link to the website to leagues to host flag football (non contact) football teams.

The researcher can potentially look into adding a live blog section to the website to offer an opportunity for families to ask questions and interact with other members of the community. Additionally, the researcher will continue to provide updated interviews and safety videos.

### **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this study was to create an informational website that would bring awareness to the benefits of youth participation in football. This online resource center provided safety videos, articles, and testimonials that addressed many of the concerns and refuted common

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misconceptions that are contributing to the decline in participation. The intent of the online system is to bridge parents, community, and coaches together to promote the safety and benefits of youth football programs.

The game of football surrounding its safety has evolved dramatically over the last decade, yet little information has been provided to communities to help educate them. The purpose of this dissertation was to identify some of the barriers that are contributing to the decline in participation in youth tackle football. Through research, data was used to create and publish a website that would allow visitors to examine the most current literature, statistics, and safety programs to support the benefits of youth participation in tackle football. The website, Youth Football Central, debunks some of the myths and misconceptions associated with the sport.

Through the research process, this case study solicited feedback about the details on the website from coaches, athletic trainers, athletic directors, parents and teachers. The research provided in the website was proven to provide valuable information to assist families who are unsure about allowing their children to participate in youth tackle football by providing pertinent data to support the benefits of participation, as well as the latest in safety programs that have proven to make the game safer than it has ever been before. With continuous updates to the website, this education tool can provide data on additional studies and educational information for future generations to come.

# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

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# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

## Appendix A



- HOME
- ABOUT
- IN THE LOCKER ROOM
- ON THE FIELD
- IN THE HUDDLE
- SEARCH
- THE VIDEO WALL



### IN THE LOCKER ROOM

Explore the many benefits of playing youth football and how it brings families and communities together while developing invaluable life skills.



### ON THE FIELD

Learn about how Heads Up Football has revolutionized the game. Watch skills in action. Check out the latest in technique and transform your game.



### IN THE HUDDLE

From research to results, you can find it all right here. What to look for when choosing a league and more. Football is the safest it has ever been!



"Fundamentals are great for the success of young players and great for the future of our sport: coming out of your hips, using your hands properly, taking your head out of your work, eyes up, see what you hit"



**Ed Orgeron**  
Head Coach, Louisiana State University



"The last thing we want to do is have a kid come out being excited about playing football and then going out there in an 11-on-11 environment with pads on and being overwhelmed and not wanting to come back."



**Joe Thomas**  
Former NFL Offensive Lineman



"The more athletic you can become by playing different positions...you develop as an athlete and it's not just one set of muscles. Especially at a young age, you find your coordination, you continue to train your body to become a better athlete."



**Bruce Arians**  
Head Coach, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL  
THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

Appendix B

Flyer for the Study

A flyer with a black background and red and white text. At the top, it lists target audiences: Coaches, Athletic Directors, Athletic Trainers, Parents, and Teachers. The main headline is 'Volunteers Needed' in large white font, followed by 'To participate in a survey reviewing a Football Awareness Website'. Below this is the subtitle 'Tackling the Declining Number of Participants in Youth Football Through the Creation of an Awareness Website'. At the bottom, there are two call-to-action links: 'Click here To access the Website' and 'Click here To access the survey'. A note at the bottom left says '(Please review the website before completing survey)'. At the bottom right, it says 'Questions: Kshahin@email.lvnp.edu'. The flyer is decorated with red football icons on the sides and a grey bar with vertical bars at the bottom.

**Att: Coaches, Athletic Directors, Athletic Trainers  
Parents and Teachers**

# Volunteers Needed

To participate in a survey reviewing a  
**Football Awareness Website**

*Tackling the Declining Number of Participants in Youth Football  
Through the Creation of an Awareness Website*

[Click here](#)  
To access the Website  
(Please review the website before completing survey)

[Click here](#)  
To access the survey

Questions: Kshahin@email.lvnp.edu

# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a web-based, online survey evaluation of the *Youth Football Central* (YFC) website. The purpose of this study will be evaluating an informational website that was designed to bring awareness to the benefits of youth participation in football. This online resource center will provide safety videos, articles, and testimonials that will address many of the concerns and rebut common misconceptions that are contributing to the decline in participation. The online system will bridge parents, community, and coaches together to promote the safety and benefits of youth football programs.

This is a research-based project being conducted by Kristina Shahin, doctoral candidate student at Lynn University. It should take 5-15 minutes to complete the survey evaluation once the website is reviewed.

#### **Procedure:**

Once you select yes to participating in the study, you will continue to hit next after following the listed directions or answering the series of questions on each screen.

#### **Participation:**

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any questions you are not comfortable with for any reason.

**Benefits:** Your responses to the survey, as well as support just by participating, can benefit youth football participation enrollment.

#### **Risks:**

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating.

### **Confidentiality:**

Your survey answers will be sent to my email address where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Google Forms does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answer, and no one will know whether you participated in the study.

### **Contact:**

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me, via email at [Kshahin@email.lynn.edu](mailto:Kshahin@email.lynn.edu).

**Electronic Consent:** Please click “Agree” if you wish to participate. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. By responding to this email that you” Agree” indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.

TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL  
THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

**Appendix D**

**Survey Questions**

What is your role in relation to football? \*

- Coach
- Athletic Trainer
- Athletic Director
- Parent
- Teacher
- I am not directly involved in football and do not fit into any of the categories listed above
- Other...

How many years have you served in this role? \* 

Short answer text  
.....

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

...

Children between the ages of 5-15 should be permitted to participate in tackle football? \*

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Undecided

The Youth Football Central (YFC) website was easy to navigate \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

# TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

...

The posted safety information was easy to understand \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

The instructional videos posted on the website were accurate and easy to understand? \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

The information about the benefits of playing football posted on the website was accurate \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The website contained helpful information to assist families with making a decision on whether to allow their children to play football \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

The testimonials posted on the website encouraged you to explore more about the sport \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

The website's Top-Ranked Programs Section included companies that offer valuable resources \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A

I would recommend the Youth Football Central (YFC) website to individuals who are unsure about allowing their child to play tackle football \*

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Undecided/ N/A
6. Option 6

## TACKLING THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH TACKLE FOOTBALL THROUGH THE CREATION OF AN AWARENESS WEBSITE

In your experience, what resource of support on the website might be most impactful for parents unsure about allowing their child to participate in youth tackle football?

Long answer text

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What additional information might be beneficial to include in the Youth Football Central (YFC) Website?

Long answer text

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Do you have literature or videos that you would like to contribute to the website to help ease some of the fears or misconceptions that parents have about football?

Long answer text

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What additional key components should be provided on the website to raise awareness of the benefits of youth participation in football?

Long answer text

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What additional key components should be provided on the website that could assist with clearing misconceptions about youth tackle football?

Long answer text

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