The Study of Participation in Organized Youth Sports and Its Effect on Future Adult Life Success

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The Study of Participation in Organized Youth Sports and Its Effect on Future Adult Life Success

A Graduate Project

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Masters of Science Degree in Sports and Athletics Administration

Lynn University
Graduate School

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November 20, 2000

APPROVED BY
Dr. Richard A. Young
Table of Contents

Introduction 3
Statement of the problem 5
Statement of the purpose 5
Significance of the study 5
Theoretical framework 6
Statement of hypothesis 6
Definition of terms 7
Limitations 7
Assumptions 7
Review of the literature 8
Research Design Methodology 13
Results 15
Analysis and Interpretation of Data 16
Summary and Conclusions 22
Suggestions for Further Research 23
Appendix 24
Chapter I

Introduction

Organized sports began during the industrial revolution more than 150 years ago. Prior to this time there were few professional teams, limited physical education, and little chance to learn life's lessons through participation in organized sports. Sports have progressed over the last 80 years and have now taken on a greater emphasis in our ever-changing society. Participation in sports can and should be a positive learning experience both on the field and in learning life skills. Whether this goal is met, depends greatly on what kind of role model and adult support the child receives.

During the last century, organized sports have increased in popularity and now have become part of everyday life. The early twentieth century brought about the expanding industrial society. With the rapid growth in society, both community and school authorities believed that organized sports could build a society with better citizenship and moral attributes. This is how organized sports got its start in North America.

It is estimated that 30 million children under the age of 18 in North America participate in organized sports (Siegenthaler and Gonzdez, 1997). These youth enter organized sports for a variety of reasons - to have fun, to meet new friends, to learn skills, to feel excitement, to gain status, and to feel the challenges of competition. During this day and age, many children spend summer vacations at camps to improve their skills. It is the
number one priority in many families’ lives. Today organized sports play a significant role in the way people live.

Organized sports range from non-traditional sports like karate to traditional little league baseball. The sport can be team oriented or individual. Organized sports are conducted from local parks and recreation centers, YMCAs, high schools, colleges and pro level teams.

The main goal of this research is to see if organized sports lead people to have greater success in later life. Participation in organized sports and later occupational success present several similar traits. Both are learned the same way through practice, modeling, and demonstration (Comer, 1990). These skills transfer into other areas – for example, setting goals, solving problems, performing under pressure, meeting deadlines, and being able to handle both winning and losing.

To see if organized sports lead to success, we first need to take a look at who motivates these children for success. This can be coaches and parents. These conductors (coaches and parents) need to learn the correct principles so that the child can succeed in organized sports and in life. If the conductor is knowledgeable, the student will grow through gained leadership abilities, sportsmanship, maturity level, mental toughness, and the ability to set values and goals. The correct lessons need to be taught in organized sports so that they will be transferred into success in life.
Success will be measured by the individual's positive self-image, enthusiasm vs. apathy, and how closely achieved goals meet the desired goals.

Statement of the problem
Do organized sports for children lead to success later in life?

Statement of the purpose
The purpose of this study is to see if organized sports for children lead to success in later life. This paper will study what values and lessons in life are learned through organized sports, thereby, giving reasons as to why a child should get involved in organized sports for his or her future success.

Significance of the study
This study is important to the field of athletics and education. In today's society, organized sports have become part of people's lives. Organized sports play a significant role in the way people address each day. As organized sports grow, we need to do research on the subject to see if organized sports can produce tools that are useful later in life. Next, we need to find out the best ways to make organized sports part of positive events that make an individual consider himself a success. This can in turn help parents and coaches become better teachers in organized sports. As more people learn the correct
way to teach organized sports, the more success people will feel about themselves and the sport they play. This will allow them to stay in sports longer and learn gained tools from the sport. From these gained tools, people will be able to live a more successful life.

**Theoretical Framework**

Organized sports are believed to build character that leads to success (Sage, 1998). By playing sports, an individual learns integrity and sportsmanship. Sport teaches that the goal is not to win, but to become a better person through the lessons learned during the game. The organized sport experience can also bring about higher confidence, mental toughness, leadership abilities and a strong focus.

**Statement of hypothesis**

- Organized sports lead to success later in life
- The longer one competes in sports, the more success he or she will have in later life.
- Coaches and parents play an important role in the child’s success in organized sports.
- Children who play organized sports gain leadership, sportsmanship, higher maturity levels, mental toughness, and are able to set values and goals that will lead to success in life.
Definitions of terms

Organized Sports – Organized sports for this paper is viewed as serious leisure. It is organized and run by a group such as a school or a community. Each team is under the leadership and guidance of a responsible adult (coach).

Success – Success is defined in relationship to life satisfaction. It includes such aspects as positive self-image, enthusiasm vs. apathy, and how closely achieved goals meet desired goals.

Character – Character is made up of a set of attitudes, values and behaviors that form a person’s personality or make-up. Specifically, good character includes such traits as courage, self-discipline, perseverance, dedication, and teamwork.

Limitations

- Only people who are successful will answer the questions.
- People have different definitions on the word success.
- Respondents may be overly positive about job and life satisfaction.

Assumptions

- The first assumption is people will play organized sports.
- The second assumption is that as organized sports grow there are less qualified conductors (parents and coaches).
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

There are differing views as to how much benefit organized sports have on a child’s chance for future success. Some studies support the traditional view that organized sports contribute to a healthy lifestyle and good character development. James Comer (1990) in his article, “Appreciating Arts and Athletics”, feels a child learns much through his participation in sports. He/she learns to play by the rules, to strive for excellence, to compete, to respect both his efforts and others, to develop a sense of adequacy and confidence, to stimulate reasoning and problem solving, and to experience the benefits of cooperation (Comer, 1990). However, whether these benefits are realized or not depend on the attitudes, values, and behavior of the adults involved.

Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997) in their study of youth sports found both positive and negative outcomes to organized sport’s participation. On the positive side, participation in organized sports builds strong bodies and develops good character – such qualities as self-confidence, social skills, and sportsmanship. A team provides a sense of belonging and identification with a positive group. By being part of the group, the child builds confidence and this can carry over into all aspects of his/her life. For the inner-city child, particularly, sports offers a safe environment in which to play that might otherwise be spent “hanging-out” on the street or becoming involved with gangs. Sports provide an outlet for physical aggression in a safe environment.
On the negative side, organized sports may rob the child of spontaneous play, may cause stress, may teach wrong values (e.g. Winning is the most important thing), and may cause burn out and eventual loss of interest in sports. Problems develop when adults demand too much for the existing developmental stage of the child.

Most research done does agree that sports does build character but not always good character. The kind of character it builds depends on the conditions of the sporting experience. “Whatever attitudes, values, and beliefs that will be acquired by young athletes will be strongly related to the values, actions, and morality that is displayed, admired, and rewarded in the social environment in which sport participation takes place” (Sage, 1998, p.18).

Negative outcomes happen when coaches/parents treat the child as a “little adult” and put the main focus of the sport on winning. Sports should serve to promote good moral development by teaching participants to abide by the rules, but when winning becomes the main goal, the result is the opposite. Breaking or stretching the rules is all right if the individual does not get caught. When winning becomes the main goal, then only the skilled players get to play and develop. The poorer player, who needs the extra time and attention, often gets none and consequently, feels poorly about himself and drops out of the sport. By age 13, 75% of boys have dropped out of sports and by age 16, 80–90% have dropped out (Siegenthaler, Gonzalez, 1997, p.301). For those who continue in the sport, external pressures from coaches and parents can cause stress and make the child
feel he has lost control over his own life. The pressure to succeed may even cause some to take drugs (steroids, hormone growth drugs, etc.).

Several studies have been undertaken to see if participation in organized sports leads to success in later life. Elmer Spreitzer in his research found that, “Sports seems to make little difference. Athletes and non-athletes are comparable on various personality traits and value orientations” (Spreitzer, 1994, p.369). As far as the idea of sports developing good character, perhaps it is the case that organized sports merely attracts children that already have those values and characteristics that sports are suppose to develop (e.g. discipline, self-esteem, etc.).

The objective of Sprietzer’s study was to study and analyze the relationship between athletic participation as a high school student and how it relates to future psychological development. The sample used 12,000 high school students from 1,100 high schools. The instruments used were student questionnaires and information taken from student files (test scores, etc). In all areas of this study (future psychological well being, educational attainment, early marriage and family formation), no significant differences were found between athletes and non-athletes. Also, no major differences were found to suggest that minorities benefited to any greater degree by participating in sports. What the study did show was that those who begin and continue with high school sports tend to be from a more advantaged social background in terms of social class, level of cognitive ability, academic achievements, and level of self-esteem (Spreitzer, 1994). In conclusion, the
data found no clear link between athletic participation in high school and subsequent psychological well-being six years later.

George Sage in his study of the impact of sports on character development found that organized sports might be detrimental to moral development. He found that athletes scored lower on moral development questionnaires than did their non-athletic peers. He also found that in a study of 1,300 high school students that moral reasoning declined between the ninth and tenth grade for athletes but increased for non-athletes (Sage, 1998).

It is clear from these studies that organized sports do not necessarily bring about success in later life, but the potential is there for sports to have a positive effect. Steven Danish and Valerie Nellen have devised a program, GOAL, whereby life skills are taught through sports to at-risk children. They recognized the importance sports can have to inner-city children and that if used correctly, could make a positive difference. Their program promotes using sports to provide a setting for teaching life skills. The life skills that sports can teach are behavioral (e.g. being able to communicate with others), physical (e.g. being able to swing a golf club), and cognitive (e.g. making the right decisions) (Danish, Nellen, 1997, p.109). The GOAL program is a life skill program designed to teach adolescents a sense of personal control and confidence about their future so that they can make better decisions and become better citizens (Danish, Nellen, 1997, p.103). The idea behind GOAL is that how one participates is what is important, more than how well one performs. The goal becomes the learning of a skill, not the winning of a game.
Organized sports can be beneficial to a child’s future development but it is dependent on what kind of role model and adult support they receive. The key to a positive experience is making sure that the sports experience meets the needs of the child at his/her particular age level. One needs to look at the sport through the child’s eye. Parents and coaches need to enroll in programs that focus on the process (skills, etc.) instead of on the end result (winning).
Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Population and sample

In order to conduct this research, a random sampling of 100 people from Boca Raton FL. will be used. They will answer a survey concerning the effect organized sports have on their life. Each individual will answer a set of questions about whether sports helped them achieve success in their life. The survey will be analyzed as to which questions were answered most consistently during the interviews. This will tell us if sports lead the individual to success and if other research could be done on organized sports and success.

Instrument or tool used

In order to provide evidence to support the hypothesis that organized sports leads to success, interviews will be conducted over the telephone. Each individual will be asked a set of questions, which will help to answer the question; did the individual’s personal experience in sports participation lead to success in life. The survey will be conducted over the phone instead of by mail because this will allow for the greatest number of responses. Also, by doing the interview via phone, any questions that the participant does not understand can be answered by the interviewer. After all data is collected, responses will be scored and ranked to see if organized sports did lead people to greater success in life. See appendix A.
Procedure

When calling each participant, I will state my name, (Scott Register), explain that I attend Lynn University, and that I am working on my graduate project for my degree in sports management. The phone calls will be made in the early evening. I will ask the participant if they would like to answer a few questions on organized sports. The first question will ask if they participated in sports that had supervision and taught skills for adult life. Those who never participated in sports will also be used for this study, to see if they are just as successful with their lives, as those who did compete. The questions will be both structured and open-ended. The questions asked to the participants will indicate if organized sports led them to greater success in life. After each interview, I will thank them for their time in answering my questions.
Chapter IV

Results

One hundred people from the greater Boca Raton, FL area were given a telephone survey. Of the 100 participants randomly selected, 82% answered the survey. The survey was conducted between 7:00pm and 9:30pm. Twenty-four of the adults interviewed were female, 58 were male. The age of the participant’s ranged from 22 years to 62 years of age, with the average age of the participants being 36. Sixty-five or 79% of the people interviewed participated in organized sports. Seventeen or 21% did not play organized sports. Of the people that participated in organized sports, 94% viewed themselves as successful. This success rate went up to 100% with people who met the following three criteria - those who participated in sports for more than 5 years, those who ranked themselves 7 or higher as an athlete, and those who played more than one sport. Of the people who did not participate in organized sports, 90% viewed themselves as successful. This study did not show a significant difference between those who participated in organized sports and those who did not in how they view their success rate. The study did not support the view that organized sports by themselves have a great impact on life success.

* see charts p.19 - 21
Analysis and Interpretation of Data

To determine if organized sports for children lead to success in later life, a set of yes or no questions were asked the participants. Those who had participated in organized sports answered 14 questions, while those who did not participate answered 7. The total percentage of all positively answered question where added and then divided by the number of questions answered. This test showed how successful the individual viewed his / her life. Each question was also broken down to see what areas of organized sports brought the highest or least amount of success. The same was done for the group of people who did not participate in organized sports.

Test Answers

1. Did you compete in organized sports? 79% yes / 21% no
   These questions were answered by the 65 people that participated in organized sports
2. Do you believe that organized sport were a benefit to your life? 98% yes / 2% no
3. Did organized sports motivate you to do other activities? 88% yes / 12% no
4. During your sports experience, did you ever feel alienated? 12% yes / 88% no
5. Did organized sports cause you to lose friends? 3% yes / 97% no
6. Was their ever too much pressure on winning? 10% yes / 90% no
7. Were you ever encouraged to use or did you ever use steroids or other drugs to enhance your skills? 5% yes / 95% no
8. Did organized sports ever feel like work? 7% yes / 94% no
9. Are you happy with your present work? p95% yes / 5% no
10. Do you consider yourself mentally tough – able to take on adversity and not get discouraged? p98% yes / 2% no
11. Does the pressure of a deadline bother you? 3% yes / p97% no
12. Do you consider yourself a highly self-disciplined person, who gets a job done on his/her own without supervision from others? p98% yes / 2% no
13. Do you take on extra work and responsibilities that have not been assigned to you? p95% yes / 5% no
14. Do you participate in any activities outside of your work – for example, community service, church work, service clubs? p88% yes / 12% no
15. Do you feel you have good leadership qualities? p98% yes / 2% no

Total positive question answered 94.36%

These questions were answered by the 17 people who did not participate in organized sports
9. Are you happy with your present work? p88% yes / 12% no
10. Do you consider yourself mentally tough – able to take on adversity and not get discouraged? p94% yes / 6% no
11. Does the pressure of a deadline bother you? 12% yes / p88% no
12. Do you consider yourself a highly self-disciplined person, who gets a job done on his/her own without supervision from others? p94% yes / 6% no
13. Do you take on extra work and responsibilities that have not been assigned to you? p94% yes / 6% no
14. Do you participate in any activities outside of your work –
for example, community service, church work, service clubs?  

15. Do you feel you have good leadership qualities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total positive question answered</th>
<th>89.86%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“p” denotes positive response

This study was done to see if organized sports led children to a more successful life. The results of this research shows that people who participate in organized sports probably are more likely to achieve a slightly higher success rate in later life. This study also shows a greater success rate the longer the involvement in organized sports, the more sports played, and the higher the individual ranked himself as an athlete.
Effect of Participation in Organized Sports on Life Success

**Quality Measured**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participated in Organized Sports</th>
<th>Did Not Participate in Organized Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy with present work</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally tough</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handles pressure</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disciplined</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes extra responsibility</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in outside activities</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leadership qualities</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**

- □ Participated in Organized Sports
- □ Did Not Participate in Organized Sports
Success in Life / Number of Sports Played

- 0 sports: 90%
- 1 sport: 92%
- 2 or more sports: 100%
success in Life / Number of Years Involved in Organized Sports

Number of Years Involved in Organized Sports

0 1 2-4 5+

90% 92% 95% 100%
Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

No definite conclusion can be based on this research. Both groups were highly successful. Organized sports have both helped and hindered life success rate. On the whole, organized sports have been found to be beneficial in the qualities needed for success later in life. However, there are some problems associated with organized sports - winning at all cost, taking drugs to enhance playing ability, and having the sport become work due to excessive pressure from parents, coaches, etc.

As sports continue to grow in popularity and importance in our society, more children will become increasingly involved in organized sports. In towns across our country, children can participate in sporting activities through local parks and recreation, at the YMCA, and in public schools. It is essential for these programs to be taught by a qualified individual, a person who can advance the child in the sport and teach the lessons of life that are learn through the sport, and thus help the child to become more successful in life.
Suggestions for Further Research

This survey is limited. First, all participants came from one geographical location. In a future research, give the test to three different geographic locations. Second, over 90% of the people in the survey had graduated with some form of higher education. Give the test to a more diverse group of people – those who have never graduated high school and those who have received a college degree. Third, the majority of people interviewed made above average income. Give the test to three main income brackets. Fourth, the majority of people interviewed were highly motivated and had achieved the leadership qualities of a successful life. This also reflects the way they answered the questions in an up beat tone, without hesitation, and with total confidence. Future research must include a more diversified group in income, education, and geographic location. This will enable us to better understand if organized sports do lead children to success later in life.
Appendix A

Telephone Survey

Introduction.

Good evening. My name is Scott Register and I am a graduate student at Lynn University. Currently, I’m working on my graduate project for my degree in sports management. I would appreciate it if you would be willing to give me five minutes of your time to answer several questions regarding organized sports.

1. Did you ever compete in organized sports?  
   Yes  No  
   (If the answer is no, skip to the red highlighted questions 9-17)

2. Do you believe that organized sports were a benefit to your life?  
   Yes  No

3. Did organized sports motivate you to do other activities?  
   Yes  No

4. During your sports experience, did you ever feel alienated?  
   Yes  No

5. Did organized sports cause you to lose friends?  
   Yes  No

6. Was there ever too much pressure on winning?  
   Yes  No

7. Were you ever encouraged or did you ever use steroids or other drugs to enhance your skills?  
   Yes  No

8. Did organized sports ever feel like work?  
   Yes  No

9. Are you happy with your present work?  
   Yes  No

10. Do you consider yourself mentally tough – able to take on adversity and not get discouraged?  
    Yes  No

11. Does the pressure of a deadline bother you?  
    Yes  No
12. Do you consider yourself a highly self-disciplined person, who gets a job done on his/her own without supervision from others? Yes No

13. Do you take on extra work and responsibilities that have not been assigned to you? Yes No

14. Do you participate in any activities outside of your work – for example, community service, church work, service clubs? Yes No

15. Do you feel you have good leadership qualities? Yes No

16. Do you feel more comfortable working as part of a group rather than an individual? Yes No

17. How far did you go in school? (High School / College / Post Grad.)

18. How long did you participate in organized sports?

19. Why did you continue to participate in sports?

20. Did you play more than one sport?

21. How do you rate yourself as an athlete? (on a scale 1-10, 10 being a star athlete)

22. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how you feel organized sports could be improved.

I’d like to thank you for your time. I certainly appreciate you participating in this survey.
References

Comer, J. (1990, Mar.). Appreciating arts and athletic sports and arts programs teach youngsters skill that reinforce academic learning. *Parents*, Vol.65 No. 3 pp.191


