

Life Skills: The Benefits of Sports Participation in a Global Context

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Thank You



THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (ICSDP)

"Sport Advanced into Sport for Development and Peace: Challenges for
Global Sport"

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



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Institute for the Study of Youth Sports

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College of Education Kinesiology Department



Institute for the Study of Youth Sports

Mission Objectives

1. To scientifically study the beneficial and detrimental physical, psychological and social effects of sport participation for children and youth.
2. Disseminate knowledge that maximizes the beneficial effects of sport for children and youth.

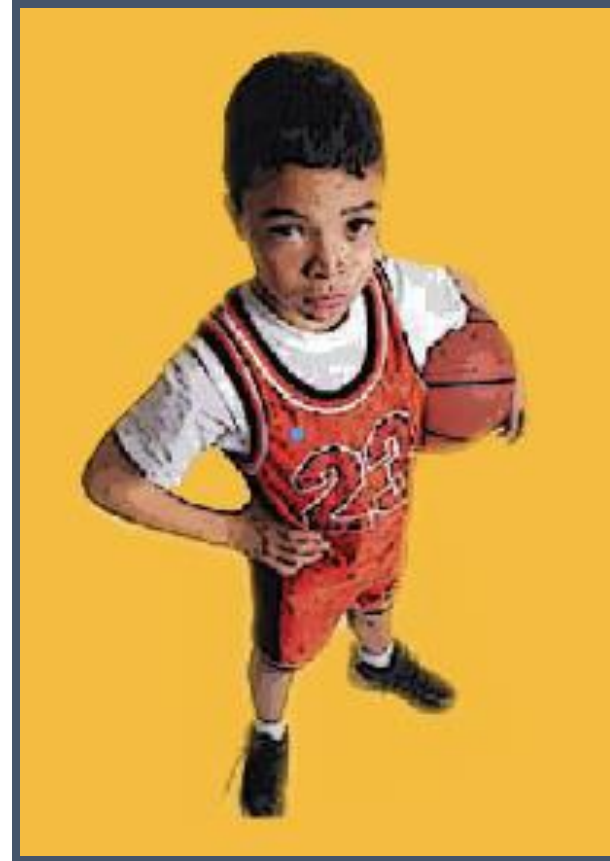


Advancing Knowledge Transforming Young Lives!



Today's Topic

*Promoting Positive
Youth and Life Skills
Development
Through Sport*

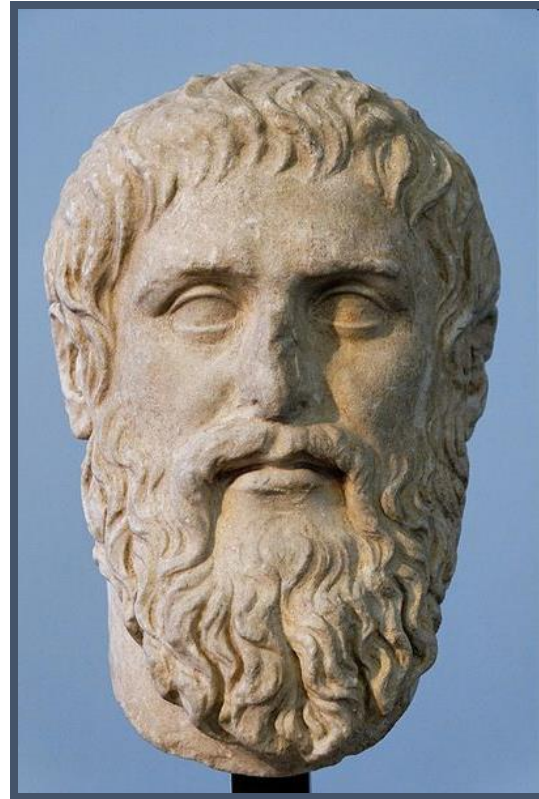


Why Develop Life Skills?



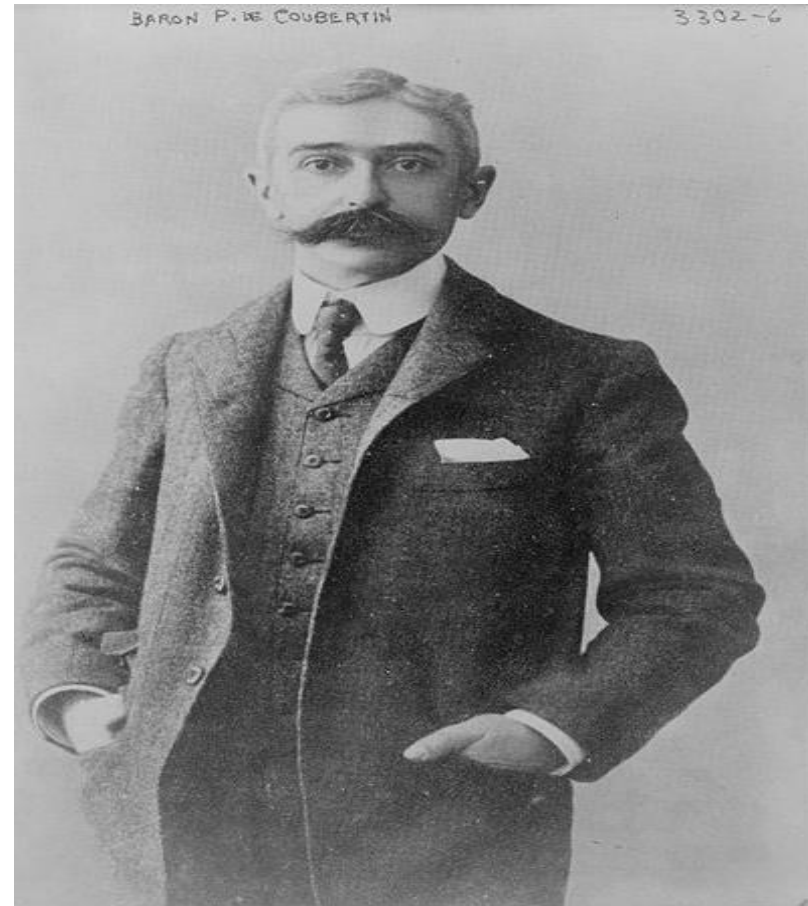
Plato

The moral value of exercises and sports far outweigh the physical value."



Pierre de Coubertin

- *“For each individual, sport is a possible source for inner improvement.”*
- *“Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of a good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”*



The Need to Help Underserved Youth: The Detroit Police (Youth) Athletic League

- 40% of Detroit's youth will not graduate from high school.
- 35% of those youth who do not graduate from high school will be incarcerated by age 35.



Wasted Top Sport Talent as a Result of Poor Life Skills



Defining Life Skills

- **Life Skills:** those mental, emotional, social attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that athletes develop or refine through sports participation and have the potential to transfer for use in other life situations (Gould & Carson, 2008).
- **Example Life Skills:** ability to set and achieve goals, confidence, leadership, discipline, emotional control, teamwork and moral reasoning.



Other Terms Related to Life Skills

- **Psychosocial Attributes and Characteristics**
- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** – “the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks” (Zin et al, 2007).
- **SEL Components:** able to recognize and manage their emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, meet personal and social needs, and make responsible and ethical decisions (Elias et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2000).



Life Skills Through Sport Settings

- Physical Activity/Out-of-School Club/Open-Gym Recreational Programs (e.g., UNC Greensboro Project Effort)
– *the program primarily exists for life skills development*
- Competitive Sport Programs Specifically Designed to Develop Life Skills (e.g., The First Tee Golf Program, Girls on the Run)
- Traditional Competitive Sport Programs with Multiple Goals Like Winning, Fitness, Life Skills (e.g., High School Sports)



What the Research Says About Life Skills Development Through Sport

- Major Reviews of the Literature (Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Eime et al., 2013; Gould et al., 2014; Holt et al, 2016)
- Typical Conclusion (Eime et al., 2013)
 - *40 psychosocial outcomes associated with youth sport participation*
 - *While some negative outcomes like increased stress and burnout have been identified in the literature positive outcomes are more likely to occur*



Exercise: What Life Skills Did You Develop As An Athlete?



Defining Life Skills: Life Skills Transfer

■ *Life Skills Transfer*: the ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a personal asset (e.g., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construct, transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned.

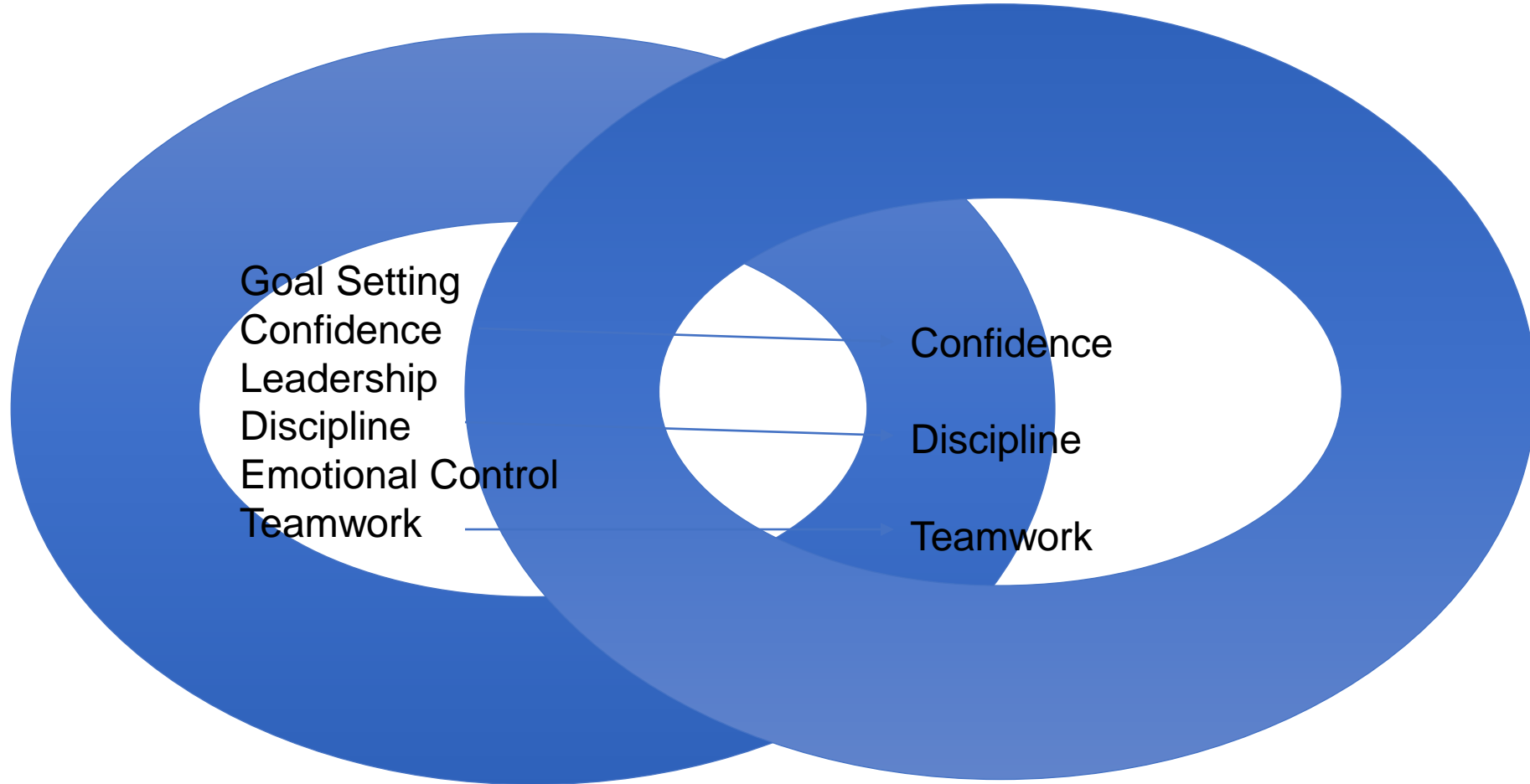
Pierce, Gould & Camire (2017)



Defining Life Skills

Instrumental Psych
Skills for Perf. Enhancement

Life Skills



Defining Life Skills

- **Instrumental** Psychological Skills for Enhancing Performance Can Be Life Skills, But Are Not Always
- For an Instrumental Psychological Skill for Enhancing Performance to Be A Life Skill **It Must be Transferred and Used** in Other Aspects of an Athletes Life



How Are Life Skills Developed Through Sport?



How Do We Develop These Psychological Competencies and Skills?

(Gould, 2002; Gould, Cowburn & Wright, in press)

- Family Socialization
- Via Experience and Trial and Error
- Modeling Others
- From Coaches
- Psychological Skills Training/SEL Curriculums
- Good Genetics

Athletes Develop Their Psychological Skills and Competencies:

- **Implicitly** (catch it or pick it up on one's own) and
- **Explicitly** (they are taught or purposefully fostered)

Implicit or Explicit Life Skills Development?

- Some support for both approaches
- Most experts feel that more consistent life skills effects are associated with the explicit approach and recommend that approach be taken.



Why Instrumental Psychological Skills Developed in Sport Do Not Always Transfer Beyond Sport?

- The athlete does not develop the instrumental psychological skill
- The athlete develops the instrumental psychological skill but does not recognize that it can be transferred beyond sport
- The athlete is not motivated to transfer the skill beyond sport
- The transfer context is not conducive to supporting the use of the instrumental psychological/life skill



Exercise: Which of My Life Skills Transferred Beyond Sport to Other Aspects of My Life?



Challenges to Coaching Life Skills Through Traditional Sports

- The great sport evangelist myth (Coakley, 2011)
- Some coaches do not make life skills development a priority
- Some athletes are so focused on performance they are not interested in life skills development
- Some athletes are not aware that they developed life skills that can be transferred beyond sport
- Coaches and other adults involved in sport don't know how to develop life skills



What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport?



Types of Life Skills Development Through Sport Research Designs

- Quantitative Surveys (e.g., Gould & Carson, 2011)
 - *Most typically cross-sectional surveys*
 - *Some pre- versus post-season assessments*
- Qualitative Interview Studies
 - *Participants: athletes and coaches*
 - *One-time interviews (e.g., Chinkov and Holt, 2016)*
 - *Longitudinal interviews (e.g., Gould, Walker & Ault, 2020)*
- Mixed Method Studies and Program Evaluations (e.g., Weiss et al., 2013)



Coaching Behavior-Life Skills Development Relationship Studies



Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

Purpose: Examine the relationship between life skills development in youth and the kinds of coaching behaviors they perceive their coaches emit.

Sample: 200-300 young athletes, ages 13-18.



Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

Method: Cross Sectional Survey Studies

Measures:

- *Youth Experiences Scale [Hansen & Larson, 2005].*
- *Coaching Behavior Scale for Sport (e.g., rapport, goal setting) (Cote et al., 1999)*
- *Coaching Items based on Gould et al. (2007) qualitative study of hs coaches*

Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport: Results

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- Specific coaching behaviors are associated with greater developmental of life skills gains



Developmental Gains Reported

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- Emotional Regulation
- Feedback
- Positive Social Norms
- Linkages to the Community



Specific Coaching Behaviors Reported

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- *Establishing rapport (positive versus negative)*
- *Helping athletes work on mental preparation*
- *Helping athletes set goals*
- *Helping athletes develop competition strategies*
- *Motivated athletes to work hard on one's own*



Specific Coaching Behaviors Reported

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- *Creating a mastery oriented coaching climate where the focus was on self improvement versus competitive results*
- *Creating a caring and welcoming climate*
- *Talked more about how sport related to life*





Leadership Experiences of High School Captains



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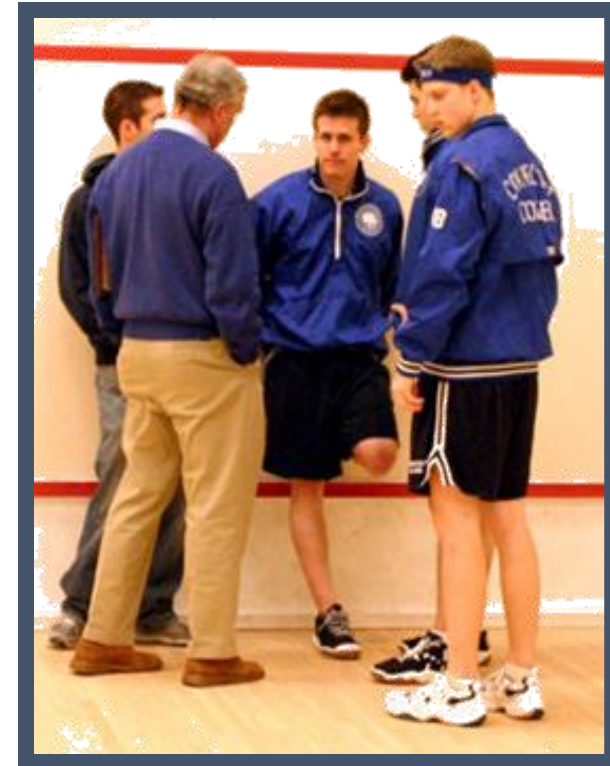
PURPOSE

- Gain an in depth understanding of high school sport leadership experiences
- Identify...
 - Roles and duties
 - Ways their leadership ability was developed
 - Attitudes towards sport leadership development programs

RESULTS

Coaching Actions Used to Develop Captains

- **Little or No Training**
- *11/13 Captains*
- **When Provided
Training Was
Indirect or Implied**



Results: Coaching Actions Used to Train Captains

“I just think it was kind of implied. Cause I mean we were both freshman (Grade 9) and we both came up 4 years seeing both bad and good captains... [Coach] just assumed that we could take it from there...I wouldn't say that he taught directly, I would say he taught like indirectly. You know where you take it from him.” – Captain 9



Roles, Responsibilities, and Behavioral Factors Associated With Youth Leadership in Sport

Voelker, Gould & Crawford (2011)

■ Most frequently cited roles & duties:

- ☐ To Organize
- ☐ To Set An Example
- ☐ To Mentally Prepare Teammates
- ☐ To Motivate & Encourage
- ☐ To Provide Feedback
- ☐ To Provide Support & Mentorship
- ☐ To Enforce & Confront
- ☐ To Facilitate Relationships
- ☐ To Be Vocal



How Great Coaches Develop Youth Leaders as Team Captains

Gould, Voelker, & Griffes (2013)

■ **Purpose:** Gain an in depth understanding of how high school coaches mentor their captains in effective leadership practices

■ **Specifically:**

- ☐ Leadership Philosophy
- ☐ Training Methods
- ☐ Biggest Mistakes

■ **Qualitative Single Group Design:** Interviewed 10 Current High School Coaches

- ☐ Known for developing leadership



How Great Coaches Develop Youth Leaders as Team Captains

Gould, Voelker, & Griffes (2013)

PROACTIVE METHODS

- Develop Good Communication
- Provide Feedback & Reinforcement
- Hold Coach-Captain Meetings
- Encourage/Conduct Formal Training
- Teach/Educate
- Provide Good Examples of Leadership
- Provide Autonomy
- Assign/Share Readings
- Provide Follow-up



How Great Coaches Develop Youth Leaders as Team Captains

Gould, Voelker, & Griffes (2013)

PROACTIVE METHODS

*“We run a 10-week leadership class with my seniors the year before. Part of what we use is Jeff Janssen’s book on team captains. Every week we go through a chapter... Sometimes I’ll teach it...and sometimes I’ll make them teach a part of it to the rest of the seniors...And that really tells them exactly what a leader is, what their roles are...” - **Coach 1***



How Great Coaches Develop Youth Leaders as Team Captains

Gould, Voelker, & Griffes (2013)

BIGGEST MISTAKES

- Giving Too Much Responsibility
- Not Giving Enough Responsibility
- Using Poor Selection Practices
- Not Communicating
- Failing to Reinforce/Educate
- Having Inappropriate/Poor Relationships
- Making Assumptions



Former High School Athletes Memories of Their Most Meaningful Scholastic Sport Experiences and Perceptions of Life Skills Learned: A 50 Year Retrospective Study

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What Great Coaches Say



- When asked if they had a successful season two legendary coaches (John Wooden, Amos Alanzo Stag) independently responded:

“I need to wait 30 years to find out”



- These two coaches’ responses implies that they would need to wait to judge their success of their players by evaluating the character and accomplishments as adults



Purposes

- To chronicle the most meaningful memories former scholastic athletes maintained across 5 decades of life.
- To identify if, and if so, what life skills and psychosocial characteristics these athletes derived from their scholastic sport experiences as well as their participation in other extra-curricular activities.
- To identify any negative effects of participation and how these influenced the former athletes across time.



Participants

- 1969-70 graduates of small-town high school in up-State New York
- 9 Former Athlete Participants
M Age = 68.2 (Range 67-69): All Married
M Sports Played = 2.1 (Range 1 to 3)
- Careers: 3 business/sales/management, 1 electrician, 2 teachers, 1 dentist, 1 engineer, 1 social work
- 2 Former Coaches (Varsity Football and Wrestling, Varsity Baseball)
M Age = 81 (Range 80-82)



Results: **Positive** Psychosocial Characteristics Reported Associated with Sport Participation

80 meaning units coalesced into 6 general dimensions

- *Group/team understanding & interpersonal skills development*
- *Individual achievement skills*
- *Positive identity*
- *Social Capital and friendships*
- *Development of Educ./Career Aspirations*
- *Misc.*



Results: Life Skills Transfer Reported

- *Teamwork/how be be a team player*
- *Interpersonal/Social Skills*
- *How to coach/teach*
- *Instrumental achievement skills*
- *Character*



Major Conclusions/Discussion Points

- Key moments and coaching actions are remembered decades after the scholastic sport experience and coaches do not often recognize which particular of their actions influenced that young person.
- Not enough attention is paid to the experiences and psychosocial development young people bring to the scholastic sport context. Often sport may not teach life skills per se, but amplify, enhance and allow what has already started to grow or allow for a fertile area for them to be experienced and bloom.



Major Conclusions/Discussion Points

- Positive coaching relationships maximize life skills development.
- Youth can also learn important lessons from inappropriate or less than optimal coaches.
- Some powerful life lessons can be learned from young athletes who remain on teams but do not receive a great deal of playing time.



Major Conclusions/Discussion Points

- Young people will differ in their openness for life skill learning and development.
- The ability to reflect on one's sport experiences seems critical in determining how much development takes place.
- Consideration should also be given to how much agency youth possess and how the school, sport and team climates interact to foster life skills development.



Major Conclusions/Discussion Points

- The life skills transfer process often operates subconsciously where individuals draw on their experiences they have had in sport and apply them to new situations they encounter in their lives.
- Life skill lessons may lay dormant until something in one's life triggers it use (subconsciously or consciously).



Limitations

- All athletes came from functional “good” family environments and felt their parents taught them a number of values they brought to sport.
- Participants were all Caucasian males
- Context: All grew up in a small homogenous city



General Conclusions: What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport



Characteristics of Programs That Have Positive Effects

(National Research Council, 2002)

- A physically and psychologically safe environment
- Consistent and clear structure accompanied by adult supervision
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities to belong
- Positive social norms
- Efficacy for mattering
- Skill building opportunities
- Integration of family, school and community efforts

General Conclusions: What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport

- Life skills are more than psychological skills and strategies (Gould, Wright & Pierce, in prep)
 - *they can be dispositional and comprise mindsets and world views*
 - *they can be instrumental and moral*
- Life skills can be fostered via sport participation (Gould & Westfall, 2014)
- Coaches must be careful not to buy into the “sport evangelist” myth that sport is automatically good for people (Coakley, 2011)



General Conclusions: What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport

- Athletes don't enter sport as blank slates – they arrive with life skills and sport amplifies, enhances and allows what has already started to grow or provides a fertile area for them to be experienced and bloom. *e.g., sport reinforces existing family values or athletes arrive with life skills deficits.* (Gould, Wright & Pierce, in prep)
- Explicitly teaching life skills might involve:
 - *formal coaching*
 - *holding discussions with players*
 - *constructing experiential learning environments*
 - *recognizing teaching or coachable moments*



General Conclusions: What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport

- Life skill lessons may lay dormant until something in one's life triggers it use (subconsciously or consciously). Not all psychosocial competencies developed in sport transfer beyond sport – transfer is not automatic (Pierce, Gould and Camire, 2016)
- Key amplifiers of life skills development through sport are:
 - *Coaches with a philosophy that supports life skills development*
 - *Strong coach athlete-relationships*
 - *Peers who value and demonstrate life skills*
 - *Level of athlete engagement*



General Conclusions: What Has the Research Taught Us About Life Skills Development Through Sport

- Many life skills are fostered from experiencing adversity and failure
- Some powerful life lessons can be learned from young athletes who remain on teams but do not receive a great deal of playing time.

(Gould & Westfall, 2014; Gould, Wright & Pierce, in prep)



Steps to Teaching/Coaching Life Skills Through Sport



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 1: Assess the athlete's current level of life skills development
 - What life skills do their families emphasize (Gould, Pierce & Wright, in prep)
 - What have the learned from previous sport experiences
 - What have the learned from other experiences (extracurricular activities/work)



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 2: Assess the athlete's openness to further developing life skills.
 - Awareness/Openness (Pierce, Gould, Cowburn & Driska, 2016)
 - Reflective Ability (Pierce, Gould, Cowburn & Driska, 2016)
 - Family Instilled Values and Orientations (Gould, Pierce & Wright (in preparation))



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 3: Create a conducive environment for life skills development.
 - *Mastery/Task (Self-referenced) Oriented Motivational Climate*
 - *Create a Caring Climate* (Walling, 2021)
 - *Peer support* (Chinkov & Holt, 2016)
 -



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 4: Use intentional strategies for teaching and fostering of life skills
 - *Life skills are taught more than they are caught via sport participation* (Gould, Voelker & Griffes, 2013)



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 5: Selecting coaches with the right philosophy and coaching competencies (Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009 ; Gould, Pierce, Cowburn & Driska, 2017)
 - *Place primary importance on life skills*
 - *Have key values they emphasize consistently*
 - *Emphasize winning but not at the price of sacrifice life skills development*



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 6: Fostering strong coach-athlete relationships
 - *Close coach-athlete relationship* (Gould, Flett & Lauer, 2012)
 - *Caring coaching climate* (Gould, Flett & Lauer, 2012)

Note: This can be done in different ways (e.g., High School Football Coach examples)



Steps to Coaching/Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 7: Coordinate life skills development efforts with other individuals and agencies in athletes lives
 - *Parents*
 - *School*
 - *Religious Organizations*



Steps to Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 8: Emphasize the use of reflection on the part of athletes (Pierce, Gould, Cowburn & Driska, 2016)
 - *Reflection logs*
 - *Discussions/Presentations*



Steps to Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 9: Teach for transfer (Pierce, under review, Pierce, Gould & Camire, 2028)
 - *Discuss transfer*
 - *Consider transfer context (similarity)*
 - *Reinforcement for transfer*



Steps to Teaching Life Skills Through Sport

- Step 10: Assess Life Skill Development and Transfer
 - *Simple surveys (athletes, parents)*
 - *Exit interviews*

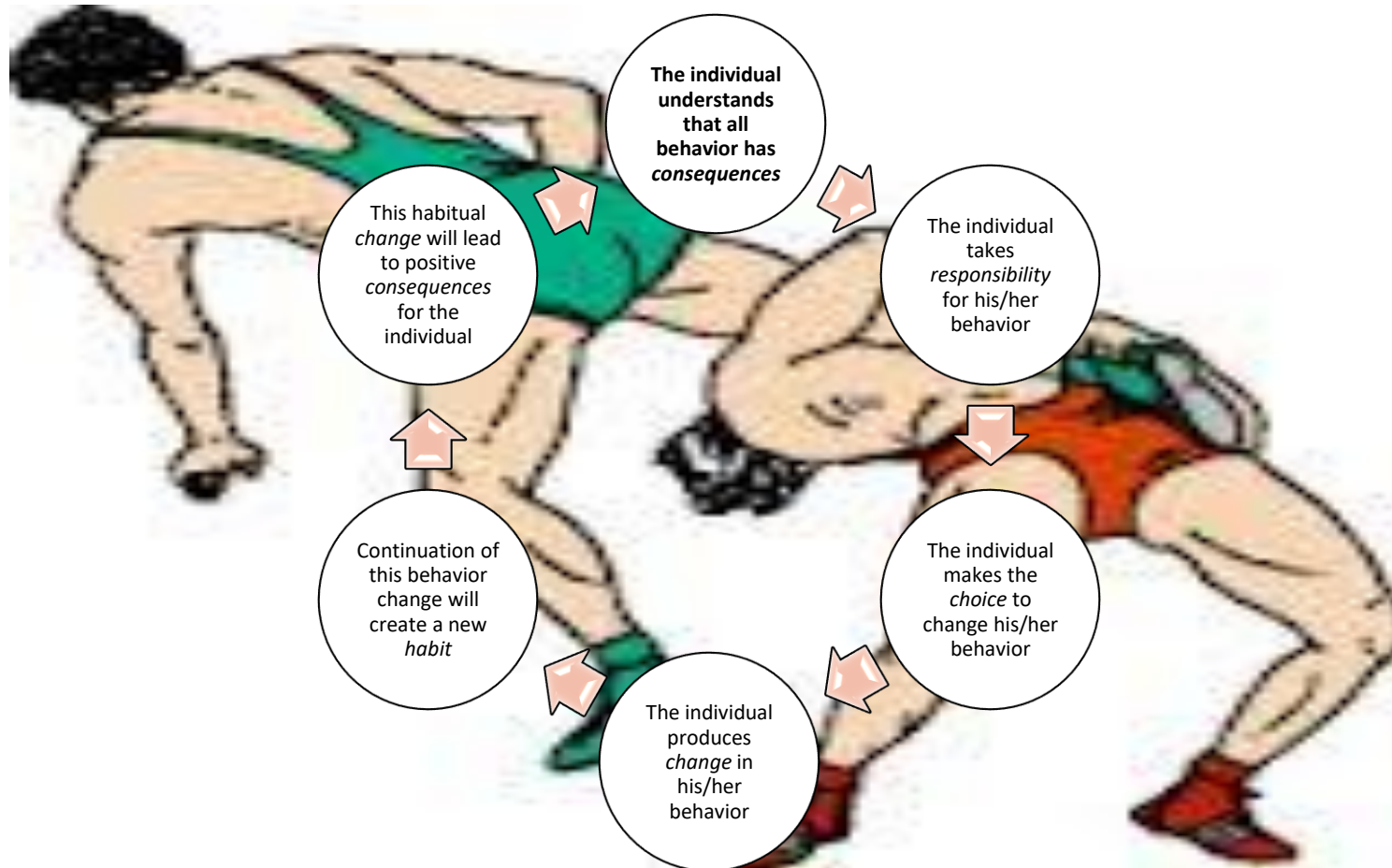


Future Directions

- Identify “Under What Conditions”, “How” and “Why” Athletes Learn Life Skills
 - *Individual differences in receptiveness*
- Identify Explanations for the Life Skills Development Process Badly Needed



Life Skills Development Process



Future Directions

- **Identify the Limits of Competitive Sport as a Life Skills Teaching Vehicle**

- 1. Is Sport Too Adult Dominated to Teach Life Skills*

- 2. Does the Nature of the Sport Influence the Types of Life Skills Taught*

- Wrestling especially good at teaching hard work
- Golf especially good at teach patience
- Tennis especially good at teaching independence



Future Directions

- **What Role Does Winning Play in the Teaching of Life Skills**

1. *Motivational Orientation Superiority of Ego Goal Findings*

2. *NFL Study Finding: Coaches Won 77% of Games*

3. *Martens (1978) Dual Role of Winning Hypothesis*

4. *Flett et. al (2012) University Coach Study*





Summary & Conclusions

Questions



Thank You For Your Attention!

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