



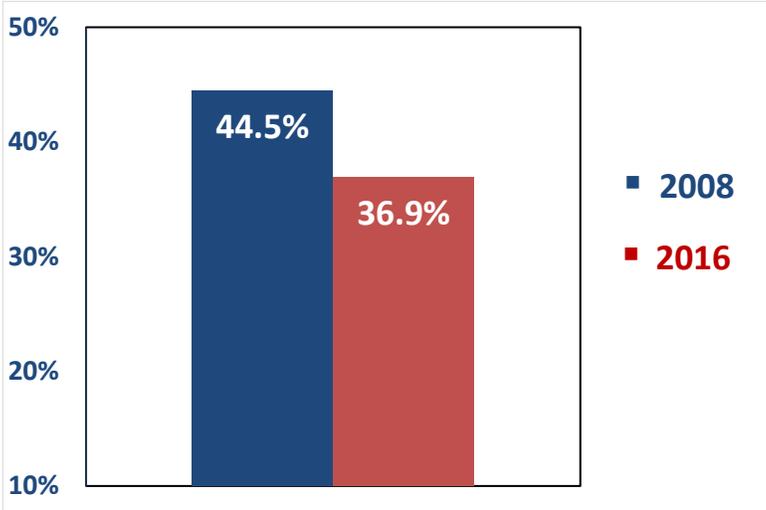
Even Field® “Sounding the Alarm Fact Book”

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▪ **Fewer Children are Playing Organized Sports on a Regular Basis**

- Based on the latest research findings by the well-respected Aspen Institute, 17% fewer children, ages 6-12, played a team sport on a regular basis in 2016, compared to 2008. ¹
- 2-million fewer kids, aged 6-12, played basketball, soccer or baseball on a regular basis in 2016, vs. 2008. Regular participation in individual sports also declined, but not by as much.¹

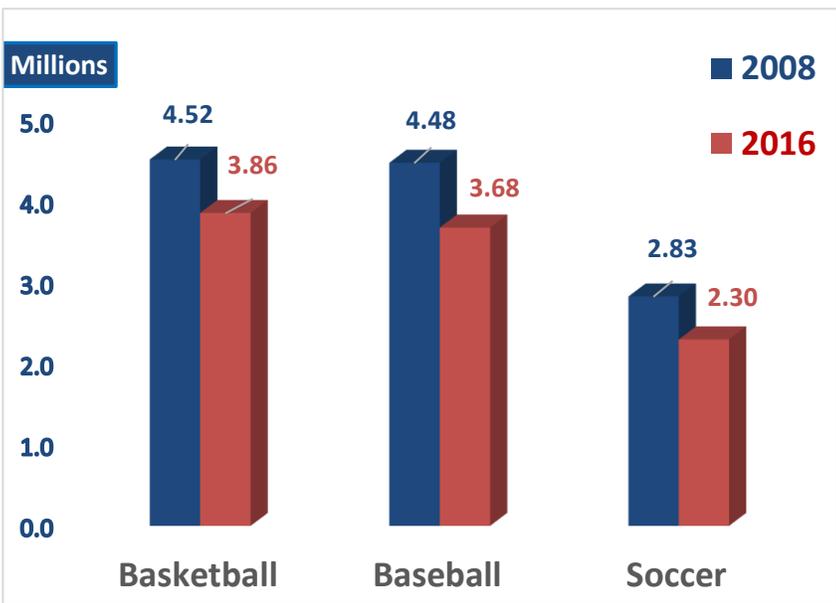
Percent of U.S. Kids, Aged 6-12, Playing a Team Sport on a Regular Basis



17% Decline in Percentage of Children Playing a Team Sport on a Regular Basis

Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) & Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) for the Aspen Institute; 2017

Declines in Seasonal Play, Ages 6-12, in the 3-Most Popular Team Sports



2-Million Fewer Children Played These Sports in 2016

Basketball: -666,000 (-15%)
Baseball: -806,000 (-18%)
Soccer: -523,000 (-19%)

Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) & Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) for the Aspen Institute; 2017

■ Why Children Play Organized Sports, and Why They Leave

The *Aspen Institute's Project Play* (www.aspenprojectplay.org) is leading a national effort to develop policies, strategies, and programs to “help all children in America become active through sports.”⁴⁰ We see *Project Play* as a transformative initiative and want to help it succeed.

Eliminating barriers to participation is vital to the long-term health and well-being of children, teens and communities. As is improving the experience for young athletes, so that more of them want to continue playing.

**1-in-3 Kids
Drop out of
Organized Youth Sports
Each Year**²

**About 70% of Children:
Quit Playing
Organized Sports
by Middle School**^{2, 3}

The #1 reason children give for voluntarily quitting organized sports is that they've lost interest. Drilled down to the root causes, three primary factors emerge. Each of them is adult-driven.

- They aren't having enough fun
- They don't see themselves getting better
- There is too much pressure to perform/win

In a 2014 George Washington University study of youth soccer participants, 9 of 10 kids said “fun” is the main reason they play sports. Asked to define actions and behaviors that made it fun, participants identified 81 of them.⁴ Winning was far down the list.

Of the **81-Factors** that **Make Playing Sports, Fun for Kids**

Winning: Ranked **48th**

Playing in Tournaments: Ranked **63rd**

Earning Medals or Trophies: Ranked **67th**

Visek, Amanda J. et al., “Fun Integration Theory: Towards Sustaining Children and Adolescents Sport Participation,” *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*, 2014

“(behaviors associated with)

**Being a Good Sport, Trying Hard and Positive Coaching
came in as the **top three most important factors to having fun**”.**

Research team leader Amanda J. Visek, PhD

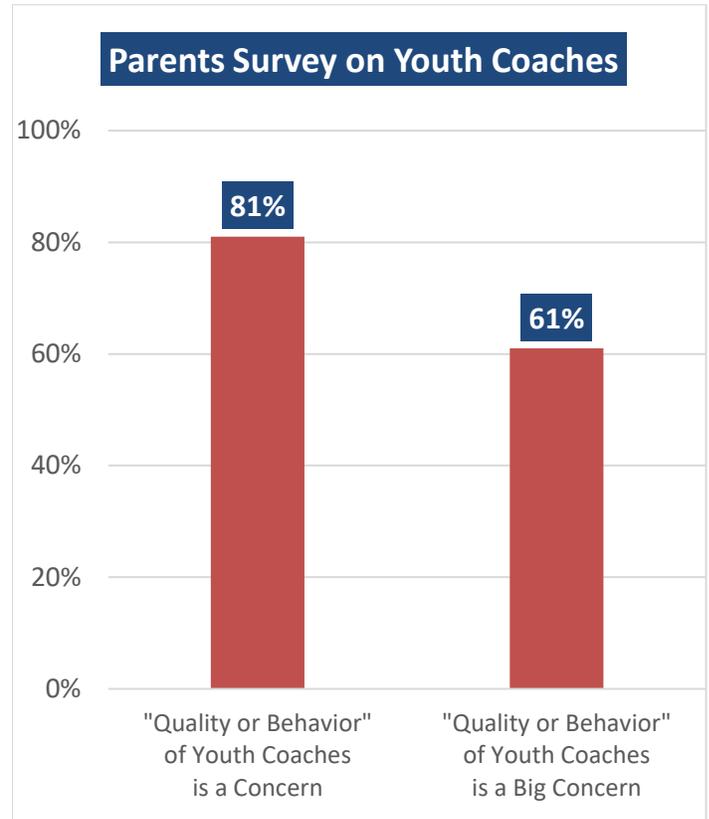
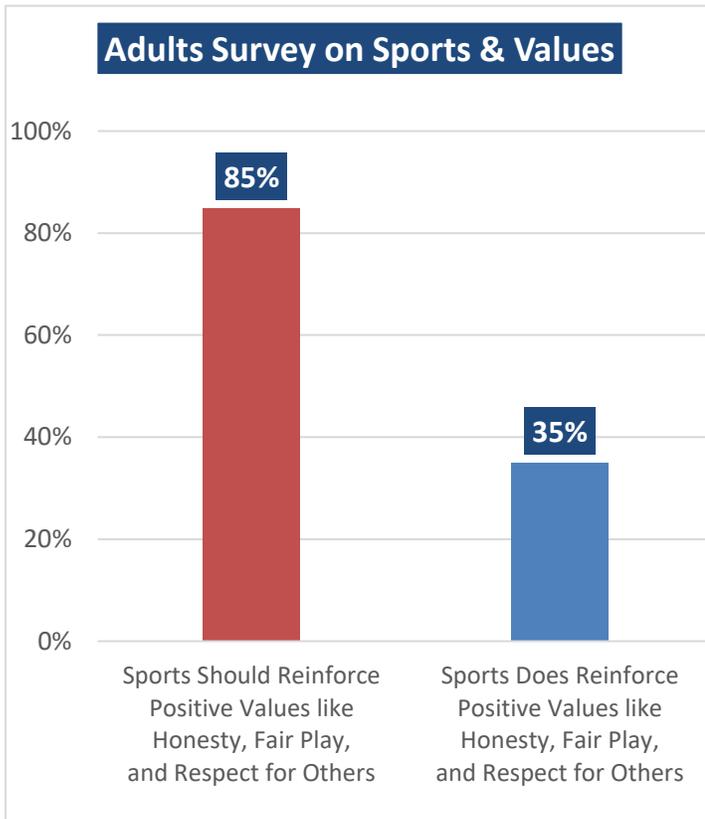
Visek, Amanda J. et al., “Fun Integration Theory: Towards Sustaining Children and Adolescents Sport Participation,” *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*, 2014

- **17-of-the-top-20 most important factors** to kids having fun playing sports were identified as behaviors or actions that **involved character, effort or attitude**.⁴ And, multiple studies have shown that enjoyment of the sport and intrinsic motivation, predict attainment.

- **Parents Are Concerned that “Winning is Everything” in Youth Sports**

A poll conducted for espnW and the Aspen Institute revealed that 66% of parents with children old enough to play youth sports agreed that, “there is too much emphasis on winning, over having fun.”⁵ Additional research shows that adults are concerned about the youth sports environment.

Adults Believe Youth Sports Should Better Promote & Model Good Character



National survey conducted by *Discovery Education*, commissioned by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) for its research project titled *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society, 2010*

- **Youth Coaches Recognize Need for Greater Character & Team Culture**

Youth coaches overwhelmingly agree with the concept of cultivating sportsmanship and fair play through sports, but a much smaller percentage of them see it being done well.

**9-of-10 coaches agree:
“Fair Play and Respect for Others
are highly important to reinforce
in youth sports.”**

**Only 1-of-4 coaches agree:
“Fair Play and Respect for Others
are effectively fostered
in youth sports.”**

National survey conducted by *Discovery Education*, commissioned by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) for its research project titled *What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society, 2010*

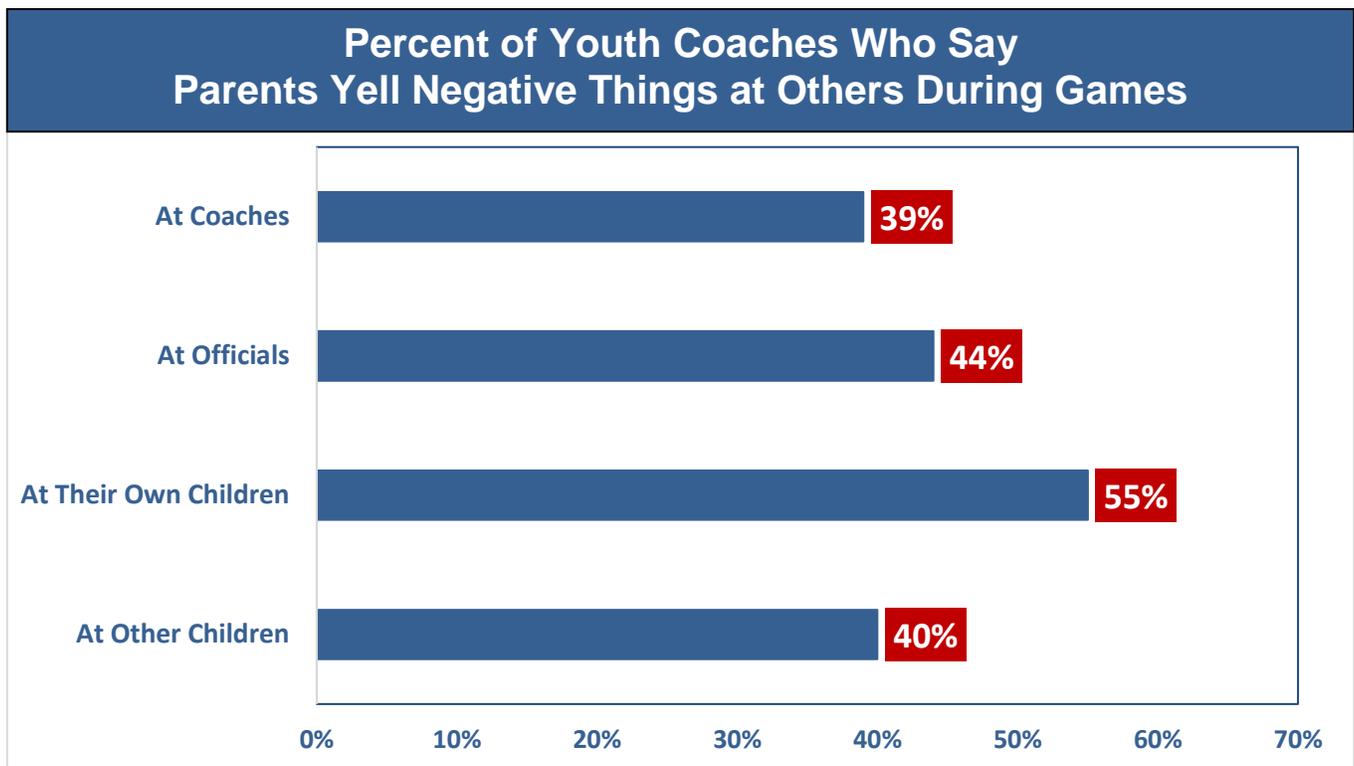
▪ Behavior of Coaches and Parents is Key to Keeping Kids Engaged

Studies show that young athletes want to learn and will accept constructive criticism. What they don't want is adults to embarrass them in front of their friends.

Yet, criticizing the performance of pre-teen athletes by name-calling and belittling them, continues to be a common occurrence. It's a practice viewed by some youth coaches and parents as an acceptable and effective form of instruction. They see it as a necessary means to improving player performance and believe that accepting such criticism develops mental toughness.

The research is on the kids' side. Studies have found that **young athletes respond best to instruction that is specific, supportive, and patient**. And, negative messaging from coaches, turns "off" more kids than it motivates.³⁵

In a 2013 survey, three-out-of-four youth sports parents said the primary reason for getting their kids involved in organized sports was to have fun. But, 36% of coaches in that survey said that when it came to "winning", parents had unrealistic expectations. And, the coaches expressed concern about the negativity of parents, during games.⁷



Liberty Mutual Insurance Responsible Sports survey of 501 youth coaches, 2013

▪ Shortage of High School Game Officials Traced to Behavior of Parents

- 76% of game officials in a national survey identified **poor sportsmanship by parents** as the **single biggest reason** that **officials quit officiating high school games**⁸
- On average, only **two of every 10 high school game officials return** for their **third year of officiating**⁹

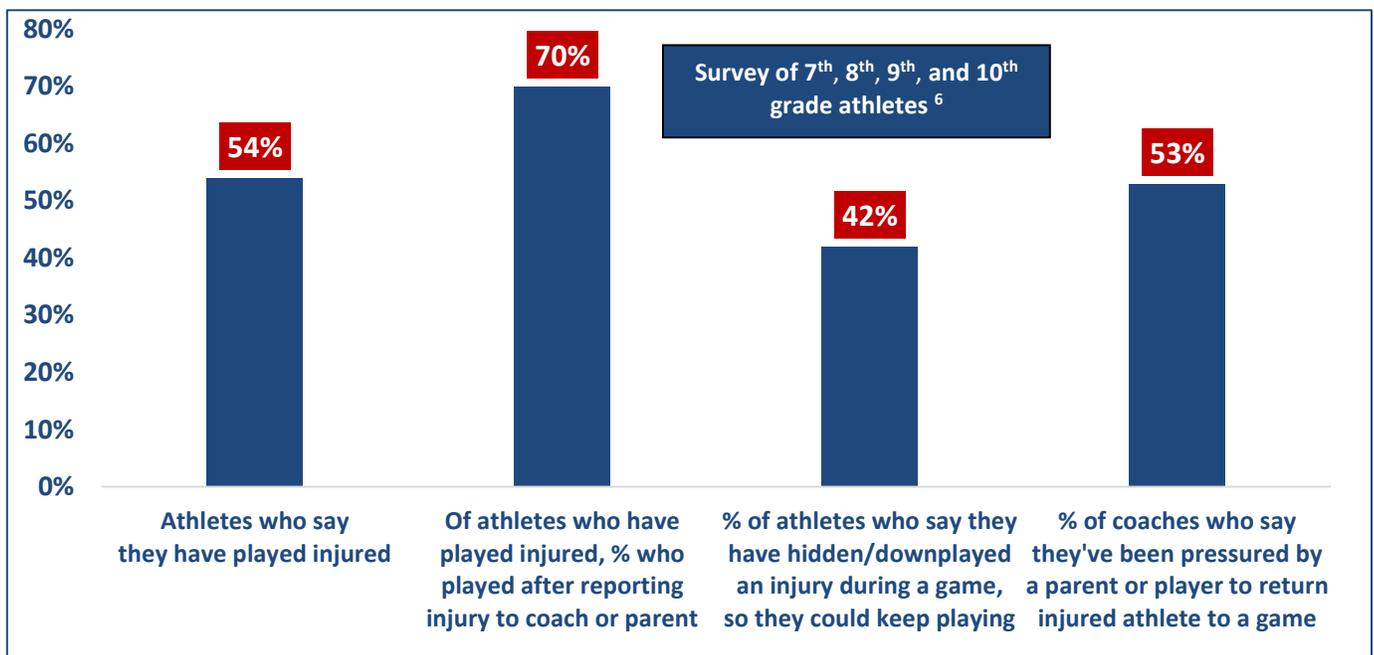
■ The Pressure to Perform

Handling pressure is especially challenging for pre-teen athletes, who lack the experience and perspective of adults. Most of them just want to avoid making mistakes that might embarrass them in front of their friends and family.

- 1,000 U.S athletes were asked “When you played youth sports, who pressured you the most? 42% of respondents said the “coach”, 27% said “friends”, and 21% said “Dad”³⁶
- A 2016 study found that the more money that families spend on youth sports, the more pressure their kids feel --- and the less they enjoy and feel committed to their sport ²⁷

■ Young Athletes Feel Encouraged to Keep Playing, While Injured

College and pro athletes are praised for “toughness” when they continue to play after sustaining an injury. Many kids think that’s what they should do, and adults sometimes reinforce this message. This has led a significant number of young athletes to prioritize “playing”, ahead of their health and safety.



Young athletes are at particular risk of injury when they continue to play after an injury. Pain is a signal. So is fatigue, especially in repetitive motion sports, such as baseball.

A young pitcher who throws despite arm fatigue is 36-times more likely to injury their arm, than a pitcher who does not have a tired arm.³⁸ According to the *American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS)*, **there has been a 500% increase in the number of serious shoulder and elbow injuries among youth baseball and softball players since 2000.**

Despite the clear medical data, a 2015 study found 46% of actively competing youth baseball players reported at least once being encouraged to keep playing despite arm pain.³⁹

■ What Are We Teaching Children through Their Youth Sports Experience?

“We know that sport, at its best, can build character and promote the virtues of honesty, respect, selfless teamwork, dedication, and commitment to a greater cause. Sport lessons (good and bad) transcend the playing field, spilling over into the classroom, the business world, and the community, and continue to shape the character and culture of America’s citizens.”¹⁰

Those were the words in a United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) report titled, *What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society*.

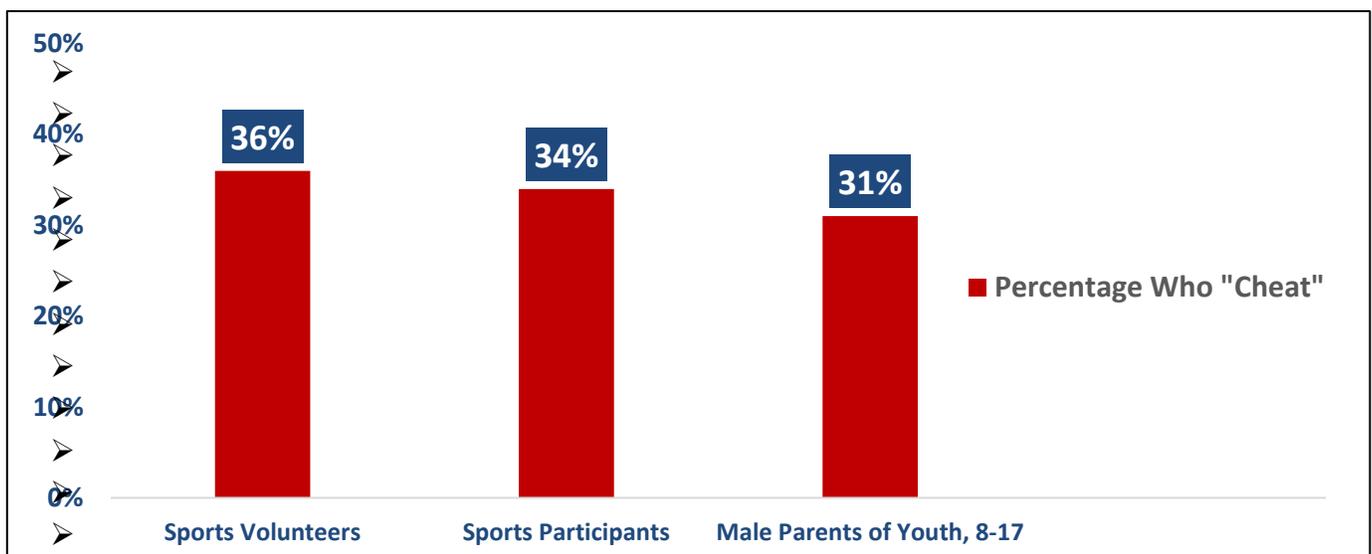
However, the next words in that report raised a warning flag.

*“In acknowledging sport as a valuable national asset, we must be candid about the issues currently tearing at its fabric. **There are those who place winning above all else and are willing to cheat for the sake of this goal. This willingness to prioritize winning, at the sacrifice of ethics and health, erodes our trust in sport and its inherent value.**”¹⁰*

■ The Effect of Prioritizing “Winning” Ahead of Integrity in Youth Sports

The emphasis on “Winning” has led some involved in youth sports to try to “game the system”. A study commissioned for the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency indicated that “Cheating” involves all stakeholders and that competitive integrity largely is dependent on the example set by adults.

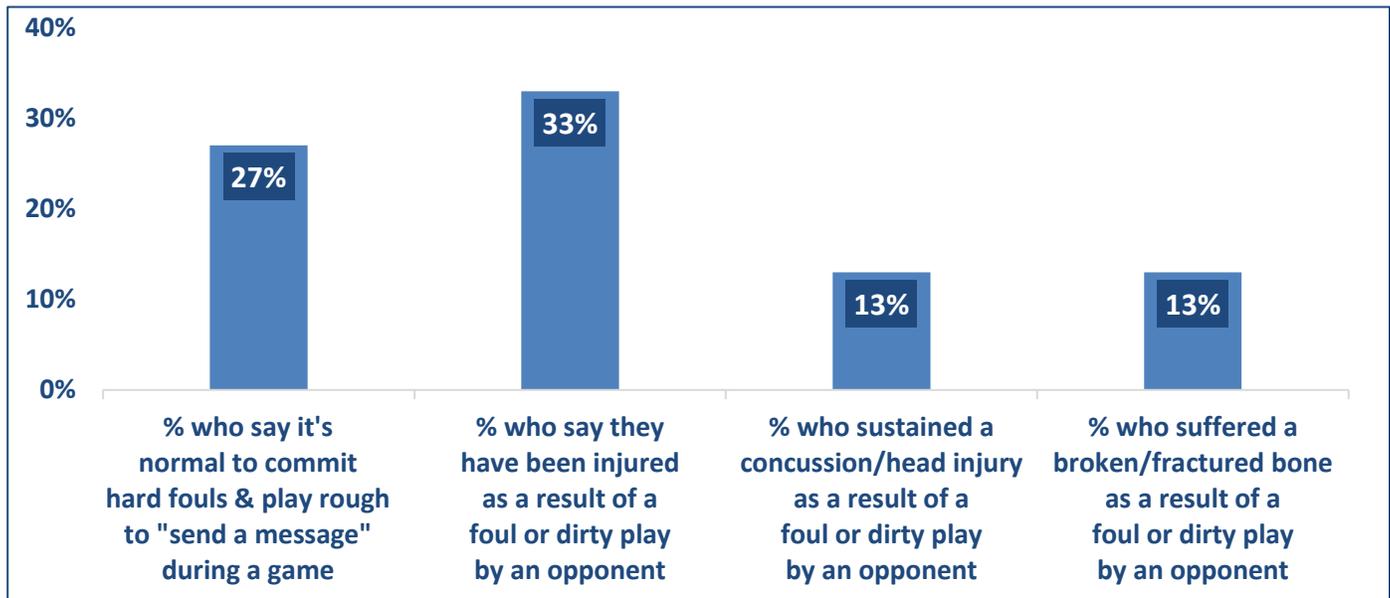
Groups in Which “Cheating” Has Been Most Common in Youth Sports¹⁰



- The report concluded: *“As children get older (and stakes get higher) teens experience more cheating than do younger children (ages 8-10) and they become more tolerant of it”¹⁰*
- The USADA survey found growing acceptance for circumventing the intent of rules, with **39% of teens** stating that **bending the rules to win, is not the same as cheating.**¹⁰

■ When Competitive Integrity is Compromised, So is Player Safety

In a survey of 7th thru 10th grade athletes, 27% agreed that its normal to commit hard fouls and play rough to “send a message” to opponents. 1-in-3 said they had been injured by such tactics.⁶



Safe Kids WorldWide online survey of 1,000 pre-teens & teens in 7th to 10th grade; 1,005 coaches of athletes between 7th & 10th grade; and 1,000 parents of athletes between 1st & 10th grade; survey May 16-23, 2014; the Survey Sampling International panel.

■ *The Way You Win Matters*[®]

As travel programs for pre-teen athletes have proliferated, the pro/college approach to competition has been brought to kid-level sports. Beyond basic introductory and rec league play, the stated #1 goal of most leagues is to “win”. We have found that youth sports leagues who prioritize “winning” seldom emphasize “winning with integrity”. That’s an important distinction since the early years of competitive athletics lay the foundation for how young athletes will compete.

Authentic competition is merit-based. It requires an “even-playing field” in which opponents compete under the same, intended rules and conditions. Competition must not be compromised by attempts to circumvent the intent of rules, or by altering the conditions, or by seeking an advantage through questionable means. Without competitive integrity, true victory is unattainable.

Young athletes should be taught that bending rules, exaggerating fouls, faking injuries and other such tactics, are dishonest and unethical. These actions distort the competition and compromise the integrity of the game. They bring dishonor to the player, the team and the sport.

That is why *Even Field*[®] believes “*The Way You Win Matters*” should be the motto of youth sports.

Competing respectfully, safely and responsibly must be the priority, and it must continually be reinforced. Adults have to be intentional in cultivating a team culture that emphasizes respect for the sport, and its players, officials, and fans. Coaches must make clear to everyone, that there is no victory or honor, without integrity. And, that the coach will not teach, tolerate or condone actions that disrespect opponents, or undermine honest and ethical competition.

▪ The Importance of Being Trustworthy

Whether personal or professional, positive relationships require *trust*. A belief that one will be treated fairly, honestly and respectfully. *Lasting trust* requires an ethical foundation --- one built on integrity and strengthened through our daily interactions with others.

A single breach of that trust can destroy it. And once lost, it is difficult to regain.

In 1972, half of U.S. adults said most of their fellow citizens could be trusted. In 2012, only one-third of U.S. adults felt that way, according to the annual General Social Survey.¹¹ Purdue University political scientist and public opinion researcher, April K. Clark said, “When trust is low, the way we react and behave with each other is less civil”.¹² Expectations for ethical and moral conduct reflect that. Consider these findings:

National Gallup® Poll of U.S. Adults --- May 3-7, 2017

- American’s ratings of moral values in the U.S. slipped to their lowest point in seven years.
- More than four in five adults (81%) rated the country’s moral values as *Poor* or *Only Fair*.
- For 13-straight years, the percentage of U.S. adults rating the nation’s moral values as *Poor* or *Only Fair* has been at least 76%.
- *Respect* has been identified (by far) as the most important problem with the state of moral values in the United States.

Gallup® reported, “Americans’ views about the declining state of moral affairs largely reflect a belief that there is a deteriorating collective moral character. When we asked Americans...what was wrong with moral values, many responded by talking about the lack of consideration of others, deficits in the public’s compassion, personal accountability, respect and tolerance; greed, selfishness, dishonesty...”¹³

▪ Most Young People Have a Low Expectation for Honesty and Trust

57% of high school students surveyed agreed with this statement:

“In the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating.”¹⁴

▪ **The Josephson Institute's Report Card on Ethics of American Youth**

This national study surveyed more than 20,000 public and private high school students. Its findings showed a disconnect between the ethical and moral principles that teens said were important to them, and how they had behaved.

Percentage of H.S. Students Who Said They Agreed with These Statements



Josephson Institute's Report Card on Ethics of American Youth, 2012

Percentage of H.S. Students Admitting to Certain Behaviors in Prior 12-Months



Josephson Institute's Report Card on Ethics of American Youth, 2012

Despite admitting to the behaviors above, nearly all the students surveyed expressed confidence in their integrity. That's remarkable, especially considering that 3-of-10 students acknowledged they hadn't been truthful in response to some of the questions.

- **93%** said *"I am satisfied with my own ethics and character."* ¹⁴
- **30%** admitted *they weren't completely honest in answering the survey questions!* ¹⁴

■ The Positive Role that Sport Can Play in Youth Development

For many children, playing sports is the primary way in which they keep physically active. In addition to important health benefits, participation in organized sports can provide young people opportunities to develop leadership as well as social, emotional and intellectual skills. And, “sport has also been increasingly recognized as a means by which people are able to develop skills that allow them to positively contribute towards society”.⁴²

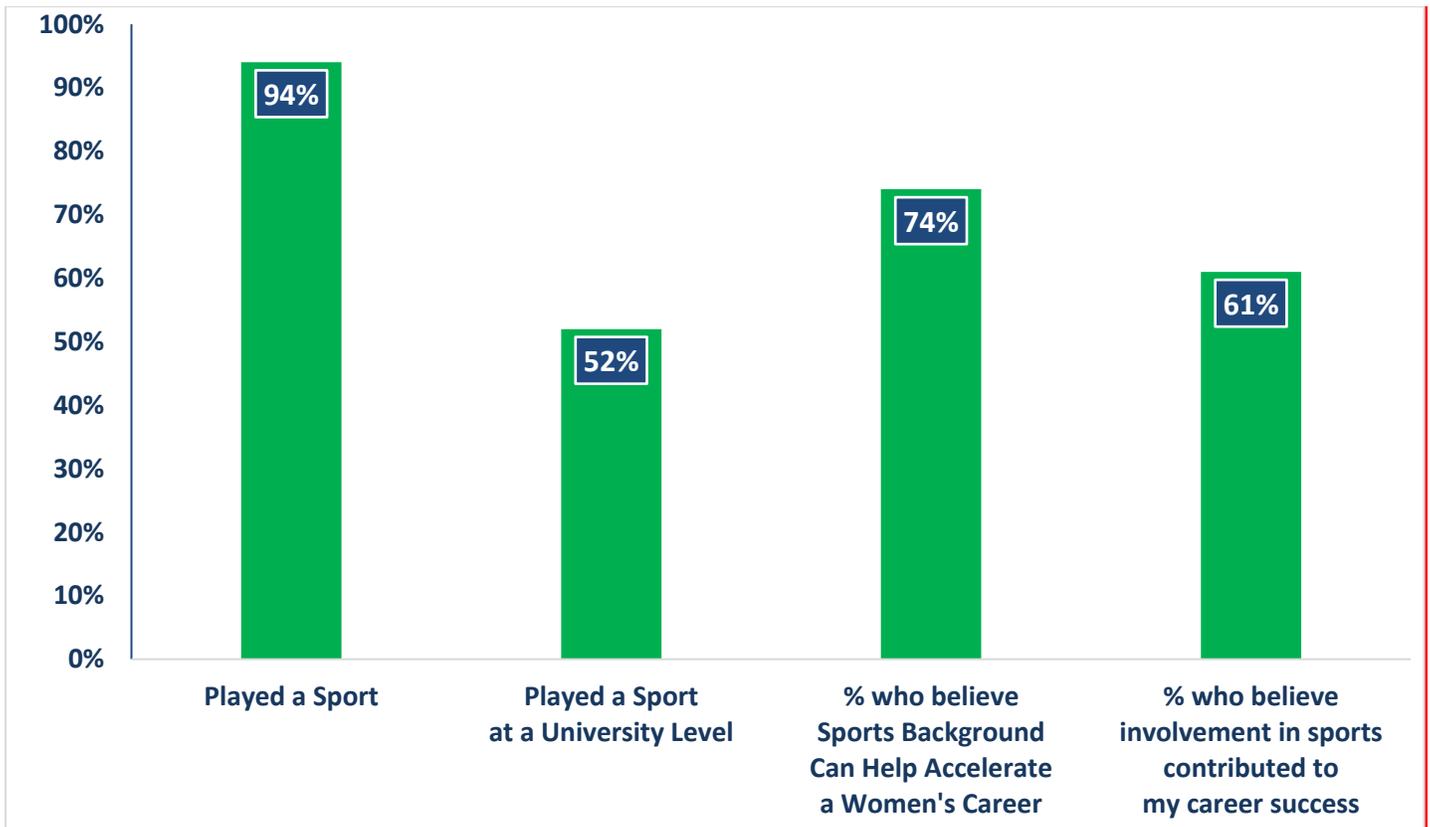
The positive relationship between participation in sports, and educational and professional success, is clear. And, it applies strongly to girls and women.¹⁵

■ “Sports turns girls into women who lead” (former U.S. Olympian Julie Fouly)

“An EY/espnW global study of senior women executives shows that sport is a positive determinant of leadership performance and achievement. It also showed that executive women are more likely to have played, and to hire other women who also played.”¹⁵

400 female corporate leaders were surveyed. Among the other findings: 80% of Fortune 500 female executives played sports in their earlier years.¹⁵

Female Corporate Executives on Role of Sports in Career Success



Survey results courtesy of EY Women Athletes Business Network/espnW, 2014

▪ Athletes as School Leaders

Students who excel at sports generally are considered among the “cool kids” at school. They are popular and often admired. This gives them power to lead and influence the actions of their peers.

Many athletes are positive role models in their schools, leagues and youth organizations.

However, middle school, high school and college student-athletes also have been involved in troubling incidents of hazing, bullying, racial hostility, abuse and disrespectful conduct towards women, and other forms of vulgar and offensive behavior.

Despite what coaches or parents may think, it is important to understand that these often long-standing practices in sports programs do not promote competitiveness, nor do they bring teams closer together. They drive them apart.

Bullying and hazing have nothing to do with being competitive, demonstrating leadership, building toughness, or team camaraderie. It is simply an act of cruelty. An abuse of power. It's a dangerous practice, often a criminal act, and there is no context in which it should be acceptable.

Some adults dismiss hazing and bullying incidents as overblown, believing kids are overly sensitive to criticism today. However, the evidence suggests the problem is more systemic and destructive than those adults may realize.

Research shows young adults who bully, often continue the trend of abuse and violence, into adulthood.¹⁶

By the age of 30, approximately 40% of boys who were identified as bullies in middle school and high school, had been arrested three or more times, according to a 2014 UCLA psychology study.¹⁶

▪ Building Moral Leadership Through Youth Sports

Positive role-modeling doesn't happen in a vacuum.

If student-athletes are to use their leadership abilities in positive ways to influence the actions of others, they must have the desire, the courage, and the communication skills to fulfill that role.

Even's Field's Peer Into Character[®] programs, including our *The Way You Win Matters*[®] concepts, are designed to promote “Intentional Leadership” dedicated to continually prioritizing, modeling and reinforcing behaviors associated with positive character qualities.

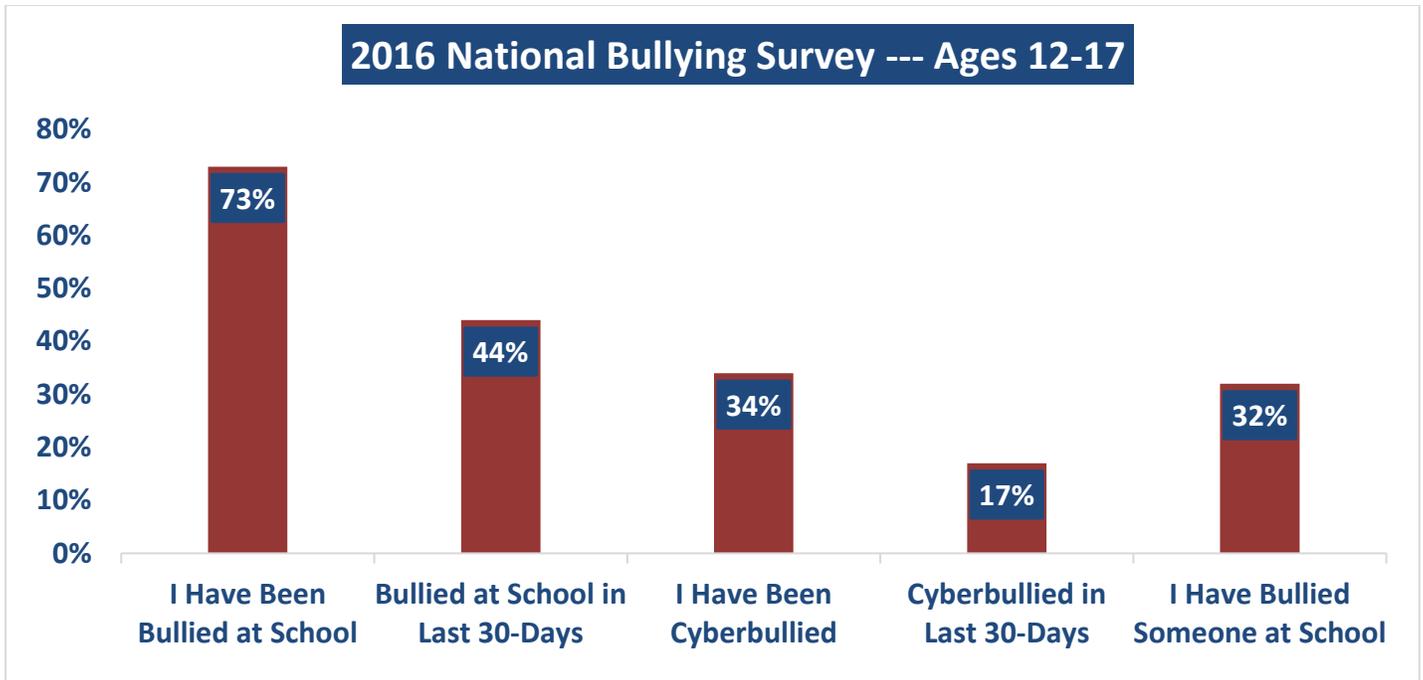
We believe that cultivating character, integrity and moral leadership will result in a greater number of young people possessing the attributes needed to effectively influence others in positive ways.

We also believe that raising levels of respect, caring and compassion within peer groups, even the expectation for those behaviors within a peer group, will help lower rates of harmful behaviors, including hazing, bullying and youth suicide.

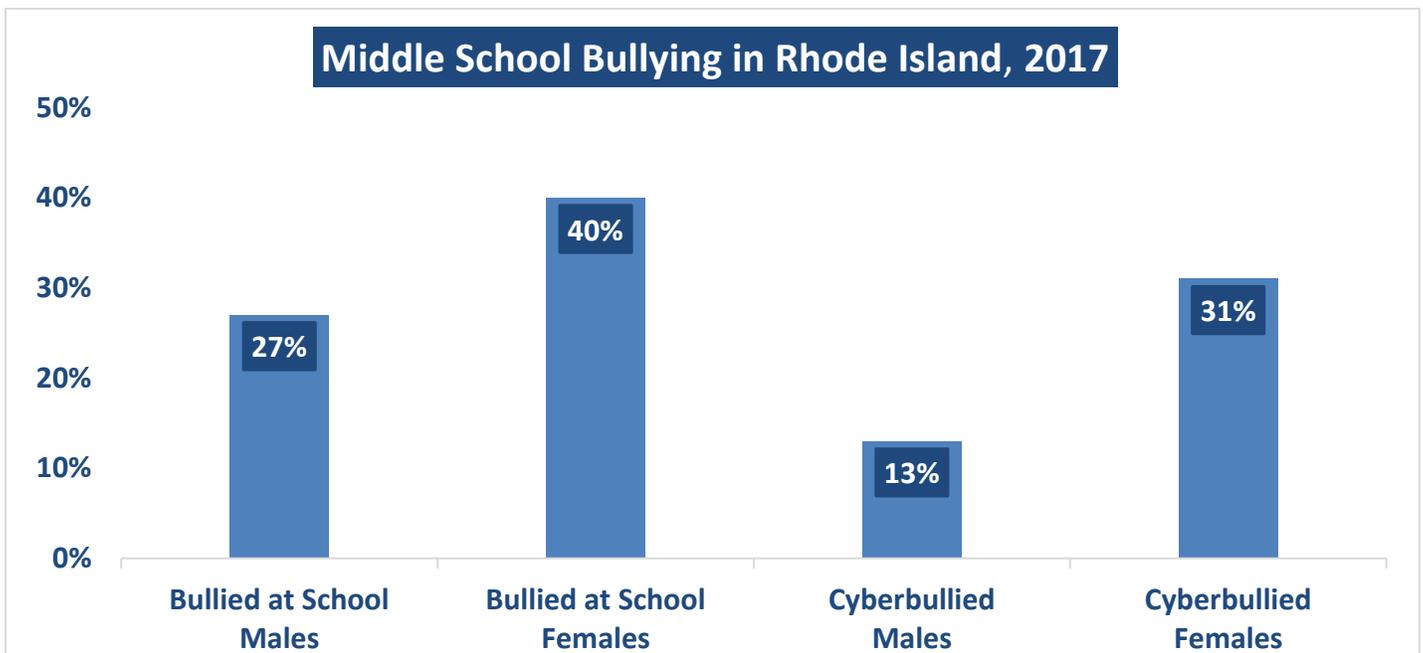
▪ The Effects of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Victims of bullying are at risk of emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems. Both victims and perpetrators of bullying are more likely to contemplate or attempts suicide.¹⁷

- 83% of girls, and 79% of boys, report being bullied, either in school or online. Most incidents occur during middle school years.¹⁸
- From 2007 to 2015, the rate of suicide deaths among children, aged 10-14, doubled. The rate for girls aged 15-19, also doubled, reaching its highest point in 40-years.¹⁹



Cyberbullying.org National Bullying and Cyberbullying survey data, 2016



Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017, Rhode Island Dept. of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis; 2018 KIDS COUNT Factbook

■ We Can Make Youth Sports Safer

More than half of all sports injuries in children are preventable, according to the CDC.³⁷

- **Overuse or repetitive trauma injuries** are responsible for nearly half of all sport-related injuries to middle school & high school students, according to *Safe Kids USA*.⁶
- Injuries, including fractures, are more likely to occur during periods of rapid growth.²⁰

Researchers say, “overscheduling is a huge issue, with young athletes participating in multiple events on the same day and consecutive days.”²⁰ They also state that when determining level of competition, it should be remembered that “*chronological age* is not equal to *developmental age*.”²⁰

■ Delaying Sport “Specialization” Reduces Risk of Injuries and Burnout

Many parents believe that the best way for their child to become an elite athlete, is to have them focus on playing a single sport, year-round, starting at an early age.

For most sports, there is no evidence that intense training and specialization before puberty is necessary to achieve elite status.²¹ Instead, “early specialization promotes one-sided physical, technical and tactical development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout.”⁴¹ Other risks include increased psychological stress, and quitting sports at a young age.²¹

- The *American Academy of Pediatricians* states: “**Delaying specialization**, for the majority of sports, **until late adolescence (ages 15 or 16)**, will minimize the risks, and lead to a **higher likelihood of athletic success**.”²²
- The *International Olympic Committee* has identified **insufficient sleep, increased overuse injuries, overtraining, burnout** and **eating disorders** as concerns with early sport specialization. The IOC recommends that “*children be encouraged to participate in a variety of different activities and develop a wide range of skills and avoid specialization until at least puberty*.” And, the focus should be on “*development of the entire athlete in terms of competence, confidence, connection, and character*.”²⁰ (terms from *Positive Youth Development*)

■ Early Diversification Benefits Young Athletes

- Among high-level athletes of basketball and field hockey, the greater the number of activities they experienced and practiced in their developing years (under age 12), the less sports-specific practice was necessary to acquire expertise in their sport.^{20 21}
- Early diversification followed by specialization may lead to more enjoyment, fewer injuries, and longer participation, contributing to the chances of success.²⁰
- A survey of 376 female Division 1 intercollegiate athletes found that the majority had their first organized sports experiences in other sports.^{20 24}
- 97% of professional athletes surveyed said they believe being a multisport athlete was beneficial to their success.^{20 25}

■ Youth Sports is Becoming “Professionalized”

A September 2017 report in *Time Magazine* stated that “The U.S. youth-sports economy – which includes everything from travel to private coaching to apps that organize leagues and livestream games--is now a \$15.3 billion market, according to WinterGreen Research, a private firm that tracks the industry.” And, according to the firm’s research provided exclusively to TIME, “the nation’s youth-sports industry has grown by 55 percent since 2010.”

The cover story featured eight-year old athletes being shuttled from East Coast to West Coast by professional instructors and trainers to participate in elite-level, “travel team” competition.

■ “Money is the Biggest Driver of Participation”⁴⁰

As for-profit, private club teams flourish, fewer young athletes are participating in community rec leagues, which “can be stigmatized as inferior, a casualty of tryout-based, early-forming travel teams that cater to the “best” child athletes.”⁴⁰ Kids from families with fewer resources often are priced out.

- 41% of children from households earning \$100,000 or more, have participated in team sports. In households with income of \$25,000 or less, participation is 19%.²⁶

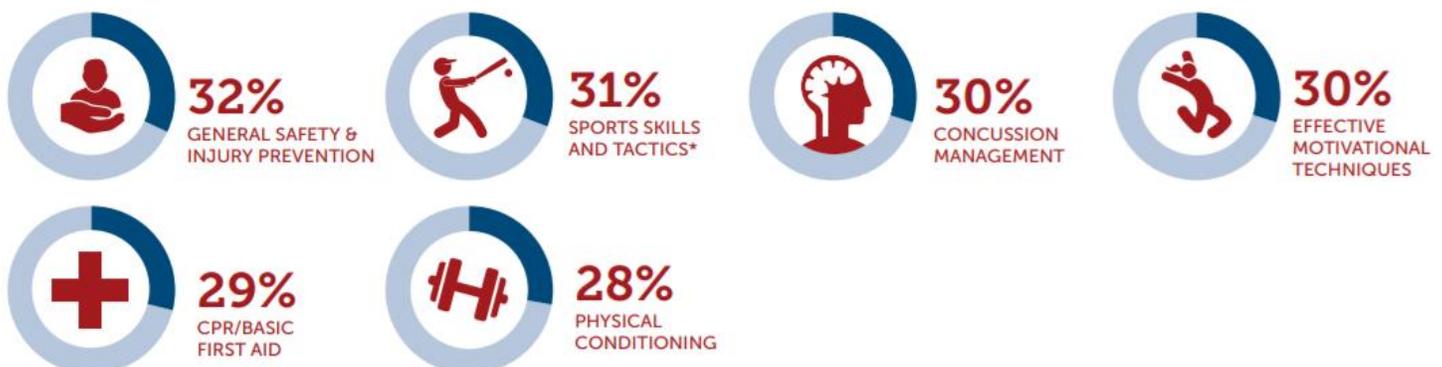
Playing a travel sport requires a considerable commitment of family funds, as well as time.

- In 2015, parents spent an average of \$2,266 on their child’s travel team participation.²⁶

Meanwhile, most youth sports coaches are volunteers, who are doing their best despite lacking the training they need to serve the needs of young athletes.

■ Fewer than 1-in-3 Youth Coaches is Trained in Key Competencies

Percentage of current coaches who say they received specified training



*In primary sport they coach

The data above are from the Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) through a survey conducted by Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) at the request of the Aspen Institute; graph courtesy of Aspen Institute’s State of Play Report, 2017)

■ **NCAA Data Shows Odds Against Receiving a Div. 1 Athletic Scholarship**

Parents and athletes have to be realistic when it comes to college athletic scholarships. The probability of a high school athlete going on to compete in college athletics depends on the sport. Of the major sports listed by the NCAA, the highest likelihood is for high school hockey and lacrosse players, both male and female. High school participants in most of the other listed sports face tough odds of playing in college at the Division 1 level.²⁸

Chances of Playing NCAA Division 1 Basketball

- Only 1.0% of the more than 546,000 boys playing high school basketball in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 basketball in 2015-16 ²⁸
- Only 1.2% of the more than 429,000 girls playing H.S. basketball in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 basketball in 2015-16 ²⁸

Odds of Playing Playing in the NBA or WNBA

- About 3-of-10,000 high school boys' basketball players go on to be drafted by the NBA ²⁹
- About 1-of-5,000 high school girls' basketball players go on to be drafted by the WNBA ²⁹

Odds of Being Drafted by the NBA or WNBA

- Of the 4,152 NBA Draft-eligible NCAA players in 2015-16, 44 of them (1.1%), were drafted. All of them were among the 1,216 players competing at the Division 1 level ²⁸
- Of 3,687 WNBA Draft-eligible NCAA players in 2015-16, 35 of them (0.9%), were drafted. All of them were among the 1,110 players competing at the Division 1 level ²⁸

The average NBA career is short. 47% of players on NBA opening day rosters in 2016-17 had 3-or-fewer years of NBA experience and only 12.5% had been in the league 10-years ²⁸

Chances of Playing NCAA Division 1 Soccer

- 1.3% of the more than 440,000 boys playing high school soccer in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 soccer in 2015-16 ²⁸
- 2.4% of the more than 381,000 girls playing H.S. soccer in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 soccer in 2015-16 ²⁸

Chances of Playing NCAA Division 1 Baseball

- 2.1% of approximately 489,000 boys playing high school baseball in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 baseball in 2015-16 ²⁸

Chances of Playing NCAA Division 1 Softball

- 1.6% of the more than 366,000 girls playing H.S. softball in the U.S. went on to play NCAA Division 1 softball in 2015-16 ²⁸

▪ Children Who Keep Physically Active, Enjoy Healthier Lives

Regular physical activity has been shown to yield physical, cognitive and academic benefits.

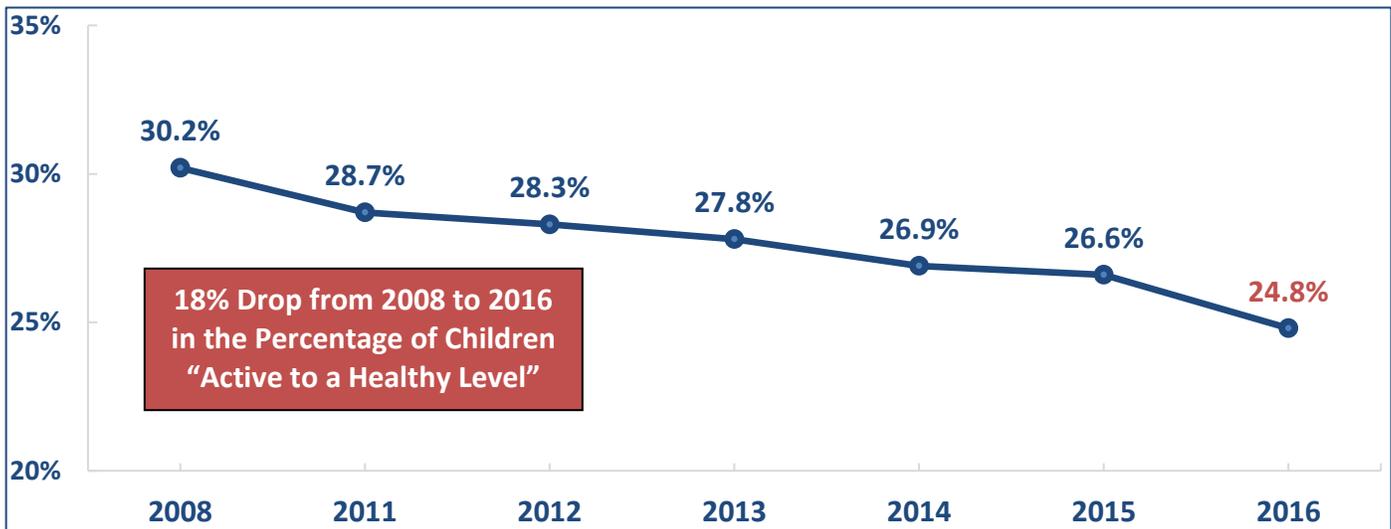
- On average, students who regularly participate in sports have greater cognitive function, higher grade point averages, fewer class days missed, a lower dropout rate, and fewer discipline referrals. They are much less likely to be obese, or to suffer from depression. ³⁰
- In older students, studies show athletes have lower rates of drug, alcohol and tobacco use, lower teen pregnancy rates, and higher graduation rates, than non-athletes. Those who continue to be active as adults, have been found to live healthier lives, with lower health care costs, and a reduced risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. ³¹

▪ Only 1-in-4 children in the U.S. is “Active to a Healthy Level”

A study for The Aspen Institute’s *Project Play* found that the percentage of children aged 6-12, physically “Active to a Healthy Level”, declined by 18% in an 8-year period to 24.8% in 2016.¹

(Based on guidance from the CDC, this SFIA statistic is defined as those engaging in high-calorie-burning-activities a minimum of 151-times during the year. That is 25 minutes of physical activity, 3-times a week)¹

Percent of Children, Aged 6-12, “Active to a Healthy Level”



(Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) & Sports Marketing Surveys (SMS) for the Aspen Institute; 2017)

Sports considered by SFIA to be high-calorie-burning include: bicycling (BMX, mountain, road), running/jogging, basketball, field hockey, football (tackle, touch), ice hockey, roller hockey, lacrosse, rugby, soccer (indoor, outdoor), swimming (on a team or for fitness), track and field, badminton, racquetball, squash, tennis, cross-country skiing, martial arts, wrestling, stand-up paddling, climbing (sport, traditional), trail running, triathlon, snowshoeing, boxing, dance, step and other choreographed exercise to music. The list also includes several activities more associated with teens and adults, including high impact/intensity training, cardio kickboxing, stationary cycling, rowing machine, stair-climbing machine, treadmill, aquatic exercise, bodyweight exercise, cross-training-style workouts, Pilates training, adventure racing, cardio tennis, pickleball, MMA and other combat training.¹

- In 2017, 25% of Rhode Island middle school and 23% of its high school students, reported being physically active at least 60 minutes each day, which is the recommended amount. ⁴³

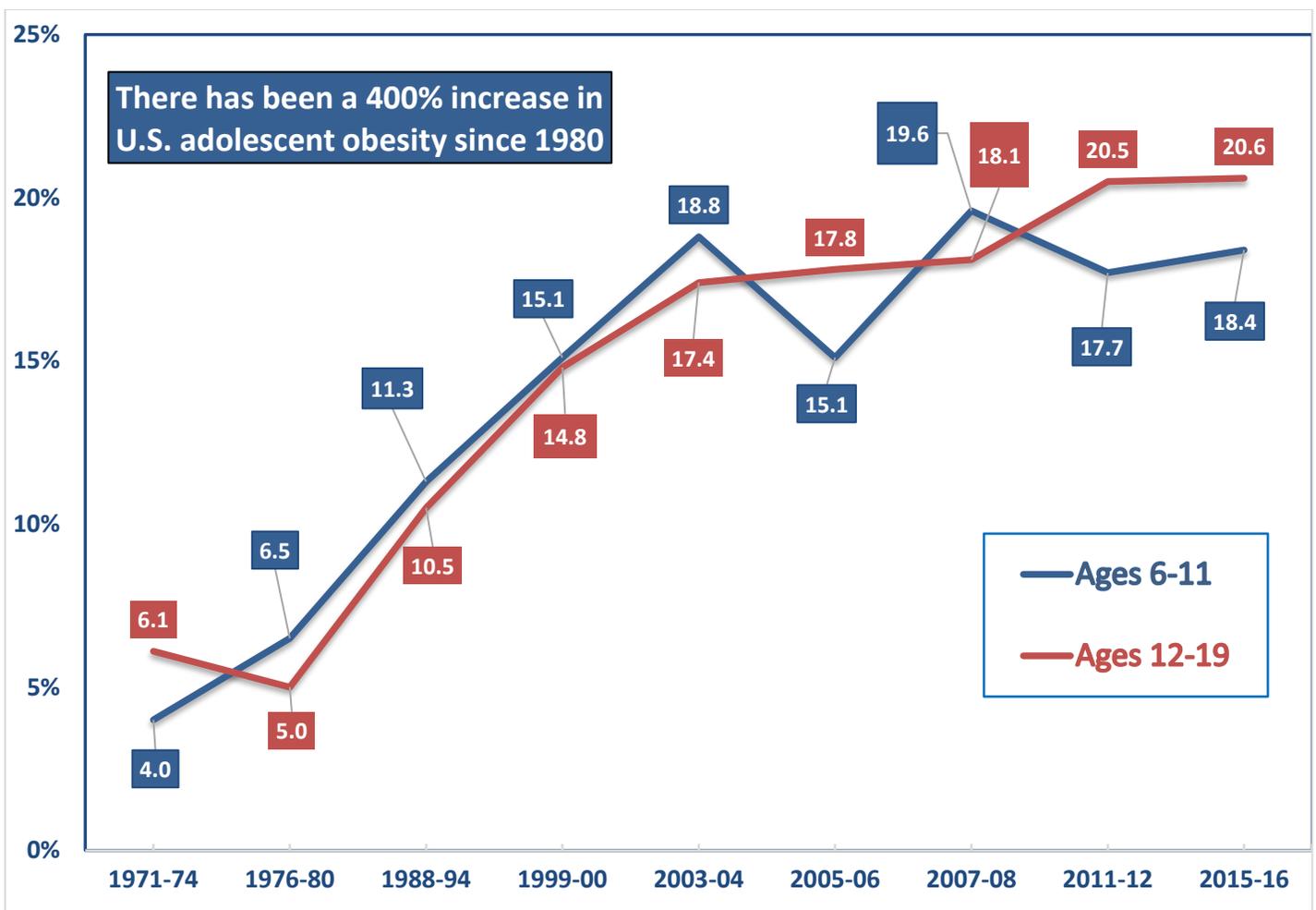
▪ **70-Percent of U.S. Adults are Overweight or Obese**

- A record 39.8% of U.S. adults are clinically obese, according to the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics. An additional 30% of adults are overweight. ³⁰

▪ **Nearly 1-in-3 of Children and Teens in the U.S. are Overweight or Obese**

- Overweight is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) at or above the 85th percentile and below the 95th percentile for children and teens of the same age and sex ³⁰
- Obesity is defined as a BMI at or above the 95th percentile for children and teens of the same age and sex ³⁰

U.S. Child and Teen Obesity Rates Continue Disturbing Trend

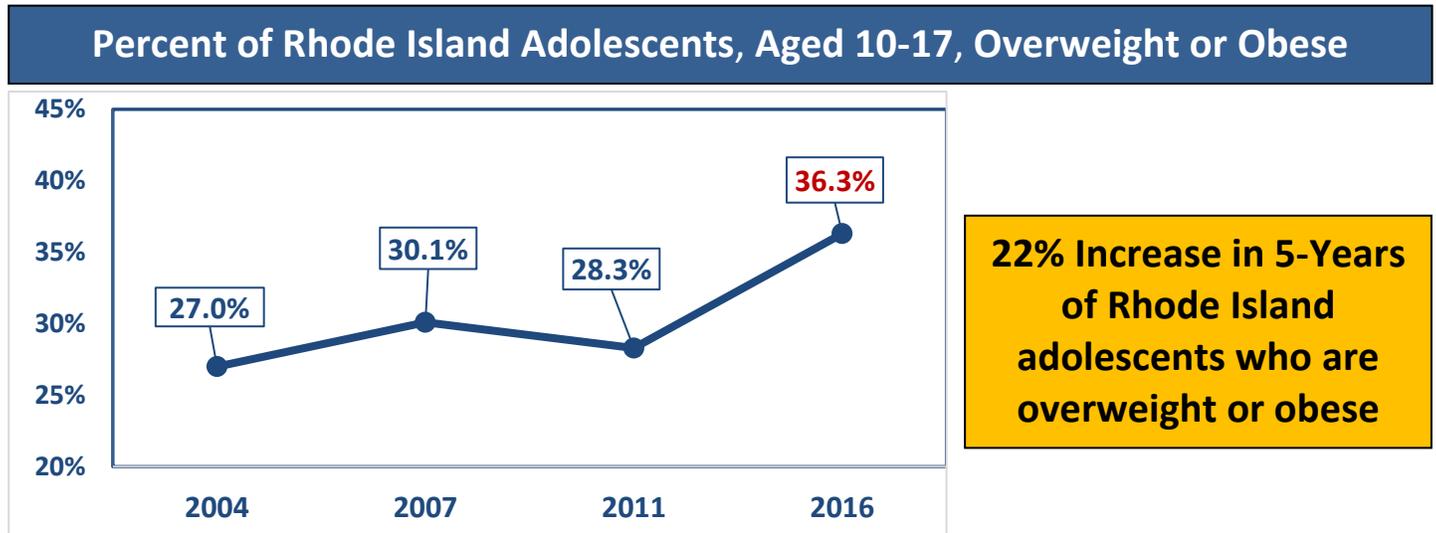


CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics (HCHS), October 2017

- If current trends continue, 57% of the nation’s children and teens will be obese by the age of 35. That is the finding of a recent Harvard University research study. Its model concluded that an overweight 15-year-old today has a 75% probability of having obesity at age 35. ³³

■ **An Alarming Percentage of Rhode Island Youth are Overweight or Obese**

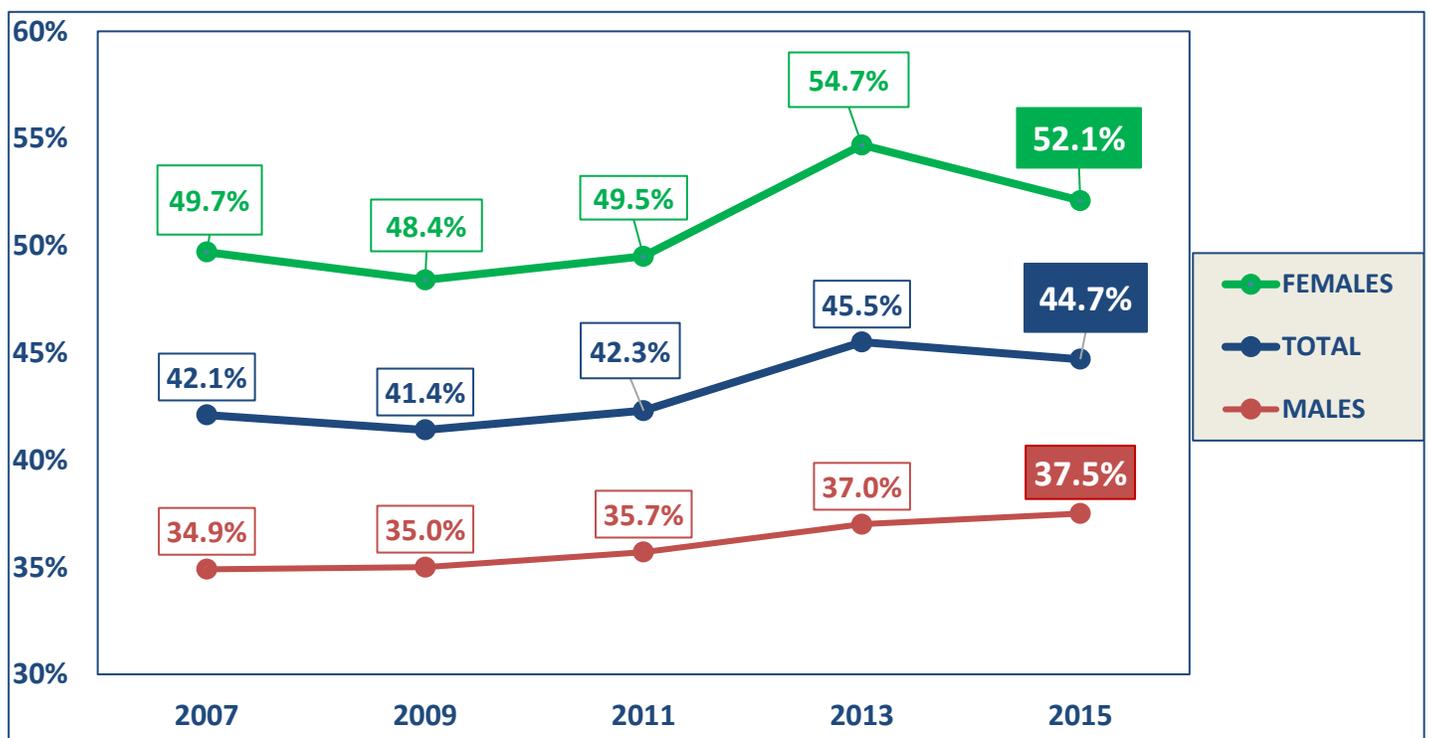
- 36.3 percent of Rhode Island adolescents, ages 10-17, were overweight or obese in 2016 ³⁴
- Rhode Island had the nation's 5th-highest rate of overweight or obese adolescents in 2016 ³⁴



Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health. 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) data query

- 42% of Rhode Island children, ages 10-13, were overweight or obese, in 2016, according to the 2017 National Survey of Children's Health ³⁴

Percent of R.I. Middle School Students Who Are Trying to Lose Weight



(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2015 middle and high school Youth Risk Behavior Survey results)

■ Transforming the Youth Sports Culture

The Aspen Institute's *Sport for All, Play for Life* report puts it best: **"The basic challenge facing youth sports is that it's organized by adults, with little input from kids."** ¹²

"Video games (and the technology industry more broadly) often get blamed for our kids' sedentary habits, yet they provide much of what children want out of a sport experience...lots of action, freedom to experiment, competition without exclusion, social connection with friends as co-players, customization, and a measure of control over the activity – plus, no parents critiquing their every move." ¹²

"Simply put, the child is at the center of the video game experience, all made possible by research and feedback loops that seek input from its young customers." ¹²

"Now imagine if youth sport providers worked half as hard to understand the needs of kids, especially those who are left out or who opt out of sports." ¹²

The growth of travel leagues has made youth sports increasingly more competitive and selective at younger ages. Kids as young as five, play in leagues where the #1 goal is to "win".

This adult-driven model provides young athletes increased game competition, in the belief it will accelerate their development. However, this "win now" model leads coaches to focus on tactics that maximize the talents of a few, early-maturing athletes. On many travel teams, a few players get almost all the playing time. This slows development for the other players on the team. Many of them lose interest and no longer play.

Why are we doing this? Studies shows that "Where coaches have created more outcome-oriented learning environments, the consequences have been lack of enjoyment and dropout from sport."⁴² So, why prioritize "winning" ahead of "development" at these early ages? Scores and stats aren't transferable skills. They don't carry over from one season to the next. And, they aren't predictive of athletic achievement.¹¹ Where is the evidence that youth benefit athletically, socially or emotionally from this approach?

In their book, *Long-term Athlete Development*, Istvan Balyi and his co-authors support *Even Field's*[®] contention that this early, external competition model is flawed. The researchers maintain that girls ages 6-8, and boys, 6-9, should participate in a variety of activities "that develop fundamental movement skills (e.g. running, jumping, throwing) and overall motor skills...formal competition should only be minimally introduced."⁴¹ They contend these fundamental skills should be practiced and mastered before sport-specific skills are introduced.⁴¹ That, as children improve their coordination, balance, agility, speed and endurance, they gain competence and confidence. This process improves self-perception, reduces fear of failure, and is highly motivational.

The authors believe these are such critical, long-term building blocks that "If the fundamental motor skill training is not developed between the ages of 9 and 12, skills cannot be (fully) recaptured at a later time".⁴¹ Even middle school athletes should "spend more time on skill training and physical development, and less on trying to win (process vs. outcome). Concentrating on the *process*, as opposed to the *result* of a competition, leads to better development".⁴¹

■ *The Way You Win Matters*[®] Concepts

We believe organized sports for pre-teens should be youth-centric and focused on development. This starts with an environment that is *learning*-based, rather than *performance*-based.

During this foundational period, we want young athletes to feel empowered to develop initiative and a sense of purpose, to set their own goals, track their progress, and view mistakes as opportunities to learn, so they enjoy taking on challenges, rather than fear consequences of failure.

Incremental improvement is motivational. As young people gain competence, they gain confidence. They are more willing to persist in mastering new skills.

We echo the words of the late UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who encouraged his players to learn to do something today that they couldn't do yesterday. He told them that instead of competing with others, they should learn from them. He called on them to internalize their competitive fire by focusing on self-improvement.

This internal competition approach helps prevent early maturing athletes from getting complacent and slower-developing athletes from becoming discouraged by comparisons with their peers.

The bigger picture is that youth sport is more about life lessons, than game scores. Sport is a vehicle for learning. Each day, young people interact with others in a group setting and learn how others think and behave. It provides them continual opportunities to improve communication and relationship skills. They can learn how to lead, how to bring out the best in others, and develop character strengths and reasoning skills.

None of this happens without "Intentional Leadership" committed to the long-term developmental needs of young people.

Youth coaches must have the courage to set aside their egos tied to won-loss records and instead derive enjoyment and satisfaction from the transferable sport skills, life skills, and life lessons their players will take into the next season and beyond.

Even Field's[®] community coach/mentor pilot program serving younger athletes combines our *The Way You Win Matters* concepts with principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD). The emphasis is on **team culture**, **skill-mastery**, **leadership** and **character development**.

We believe this character-based program will create a positive team culture that fosters integrity, teamwork, initiative, a valued team role, and respect for others. More kids will be intrinsically motivated, engaged and having fun, as they learn life skills along with sport skills.

This model intentionally creates a development-focused learning climate that empowers positive psychosocial growth, helping youth acquire skills important for managing relationships and life challenges. Built into this concept are opportunities for young athletes to give back to their neighborhoods through youth leadership, peer mentoring and community-service. These are key principles of PYD programs.

■ Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Even Field® is fortunate to have the guidance of psychology professor **Al Petitpas**, retired head of the **Center for Youth Development and Research at Springfield College**.

Professor Petitpas is a proponent of **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** through sport and is regarded as one of the foremost authorities in the field. He is a pioneer in the field, having developed *The First Tee*® and *Play It Smart* programs. Both were created as youth-centered, relationship-focused youth development programs using sports as the means of engagement.

It has been more than 30-years since Dr. Carol Dweck and her research colleagues reported that a task-oriented “growth mindset” leads to higher achievement than a performance-oriented, “fixed mindset”. Yet, the pre-teen sports learning climate seldom promotes a “growth mindset”. As Professor Petitpas and his colleague have noted, “Coaches and parents who place primary emphasis on external motivations such as winning, social comparisons, and public recognition, can create an ego-oriented or performance-focused environment. Coaches and parents who focus on effort, self-improvements, and intrinsic motivation create a task-oriented or mastery climate”.³²

A core principle of PYD programs is **autonomy-supportive coaching**. This relationship-focused instruction is less authoritative and controlling than typical youth sports programs. When presented in a structured, supportive environment, PYD empowers young athletes by providing them input and choices. It helps them set clear and realistic goals. It promotes two-way communication and feedback, and a better understanding of the purpose of rules and drills. This model promotes responsibility and self-determination. It encourages athletes to evaluate their performance based on self-improvement, rather than social comparison.^{32,50,51}

In the 2017 research paper titled “*Facilitating Positive Youth Development by Fostering Collaboration Among Community-Based Sport and Physical Activity Programs*,” Professor Petitpas and his colleagues wrote that “PYD programs assist youth in acquiring the skills, attitudes and values that are critical in coping with various risk factors in their neighborhoods.”⁴⁴ Also presented were the barriers to collaboration and strategies to overcome those obstacles.

Meanwhile, professor Petitpas has noted the body of research supporting PYD through sport programs.

*“Research has shown that **the most effective youth sport coaches** are those that **provide high levels of coach instruction** but do so **within an environment** that provides **plenty of support and encouragement**”*^{32,48}

*“Coaches that create a **mastery-driven learning environment** and **provide their athletes with opportunities to offer suggestions** and **to make decisions**, **promote self-paced learning** and **an autonomy supportive instructional style**.”*^{32,49}

*“Rooted in **Basic Needs Theory**, a subset of **Self-Determination Theory**, **autonomy supportive coaching** fulfills youth's needs for **autonomy, competence, and relatedness**.”*^{32,50}

■ [Our Appreciation](#)

We hope that you have found the information presented here to be informative.

We would like to acknowledge the many individuals, groups and organizations who have produced research studies, polls and reporting that supplied important data for this publication.

In particular, we would like to thank the *Aspen Institute's Project Play*, which is making an enormous contribution in its framing of the issues facing youth sports, and in leading much needed reforms. Valuable research, commissioned by the Aspen Institute, has added to our society's understanding of the challenges. Some of that data have been included here.

Tom Farrey is the executive director of the Aspen Institute's Sports and Society program, which he founded in 2011. He launched *Project Play* in 2013. As a colleague at ESPN, I had the pleasure of witnessing his award-winning work. As *The Nation* magazine wrote in 2017, Tom "has done more than any reporter in the country to educate all of us about the professionalization of youth sports."

We support the efforts of *Project Play* and believe our mission-aligned work contributes to its goals. For more on *Project Play*, we encourage you to visit www.aspenprojectplay.org.

■ [Even Field's® Role](#)

By "sounding the alarm" about the challenges facing organized youth sports, *Even Field* is echoing concerns expressed by a wide range of groups, organizations, and individuals. This includes sports governing bodies, psychologists, pediatric and orthopedic physician groups, mental health organizations, government agencies, sports leagues, youth groups, and research studies.

Even Field is focused on cultivating a renewed emphasis on *character* and *competitive integrity* across organized youth sports.

Unless the learning environment for young athletes becomes more character-driven, we risk the distinct possibility of an entire generation of young people losing out on the life-lesson benefits of playing youth sports.

Character matters. The lessons learned playing sports stay with young players long after game scores have faded from memory.

If leagues, coaches and parents aren't *intentional* about prioritizing character and integrity, many young athletes will become ever-more tolerant of "whatever it takes to win" tactics in sports and life. Absent appropriate teaching and modeling, our children's moral development may be harmed, rather than helped, by playing youth sports.

It's time to end the corrosive "Whatever it takes to win" culture and make ***The Way You Win Matters®*** the motto of youth sports.

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