More Than a Game: Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Jean Côté, Ph.D
Professor and Director
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen’s University at Kingston
Ontario, Canada
(jc46@queensu.ca)
Outline

1. Positive Youth Development Approach
2. Sport and Positive Youth Development
3. Characteristics of Sport that Promote Positive Youth Development
4. Conclusion
1. POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH
Positive Youth Development

- Several research programs focus on youth “problems” such as drug use, violence, suicide, minor delinquency, teen pregnancy, obesity…

- Less research focuses on youth “positive development” such as how youth become invested in a domain, socially competent, compassionate, a leader…
# Research for Advancing the Health and Well Being of Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>1. Deficit Reduction</th>
<th>2. Asset Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Reduce deficits, risks, and health compromising behavior.</td>
<td>Promote or enhance developmental assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Vulnerable youth.</td>
<td>All youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention programs targeted at high-risk behaviors.</td>
<td>Mobilization of all citizens to act on shared vision for positive human development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>Professionals take the lead, citizens support.</td>
<td>Citizens take the lead, professionals support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes of Youth Development: The 5 C’s:

1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character
5. Caring (or Compassion)

(Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008; Lerner, 2004)
Activities for Youth

To develop complex dispositions, assets, and skills (i.e. 5 C’s) youth need to be involved in activities that promote positive development.

Larson, 2000
Three Elements of Activities for the Development of Positive Outcomes

1. Engagement over time
2. Challenge (concentration)
3. Intrinsic motivation (enjoyment)

Larson, 2000
## How Activities Are Experienced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School work</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Organized Leisure</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities for Youth

1. Relaxed Leisure:
   - enjoyable
   - not demanding in terms of effort and concentration.

2. Constructive Leisure:
   - has set of constraints, rules, and challenges.
   - requires effort and concentration
   - self controlled and voluntary (most often)
   - can be enjoyable

Larson, 2000
Positive Youth Development

Involvement in constructive leisure activities → Engagement over time

Challenge → Enjoyment

Competence
Confidence
Connection
Character
Caring
2. SPORT AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Research on Athletes’ Development: 4C’s

1. Competence:
   - Positive view of one’s action in sport. Learning sport specific skills, competing, and performing.

2. Confidence:
   - An internal sense of overall positive self-worth.

3. Connection:
   - Positive bonds with people and institutions.

4. Character/Caring:
   - Respect for societal rules, integrity, empathy for others.

(Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008; Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008; Lerner, 2004)
Sport and Positive Youth Development

1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character/caring
5. Physical Health
Negative Outcomes of Youth Sport

Living in kids’ hockey hell

Some say the expensive, months-long ordeal of spring tryouts is a ‘scam’

BY PETER CRENDA

A s a professional magician and former lawyer, David Ben may have the ideal résumé for a father trying to get his son a place in the Greater Toronto Hockey League—ingenious and deal making, as he has learned, are the order of the day.

“IT’S A BRUTAL PROCESS,” Mr. Ben says. “If you’re smart, you get on the phone and make calls.”

For those who don’t know the ropes, the pressure of trying to find a place in Canada’s most competitive children’s hockey league can be severe.

The process can be compared to a game of musical chairs on ice, with thousands of families jockeying for a limited number of positions.

Savvy parents like Mr. Ben begin the hunt well before Christmas, putting out feelers to see if there’s a team that might be interested in their child. The luckiest and most cunning parents — or those with superstar children — secure a position almost immediately and relax until the start of the next season. The rest enter the living hell of spring tryouts, a months-long ordeal that can take families across the city, and cost hundreds of dollars.

“The time it’s over, you’re beat,” says Rob Veilend, an Etobicoke businessman who has two sons in the GTHL. “It’s insane.”

The GTHL, which has divisions for children aged 8 to 10, is renowned for its competitive play and for the machinations that surround the team selection process.

Under league rules, teams are forbidden from holding tryouts until the end of the season, but nearly all get around that by holding “skill development sessions” and birthday skates — tryouts disguised as a birthday party for a team member. These run from December on. By April, most of the top teams have nearly filled their rosters. Even so, they hold tryout sessions that cost up to $30 per player.

“It’s a fundraiser,” Mr. Ben says. “Everyone knows it.”

As a veteran hockey dad, he knows that most players get a position because they are spotted by scouts, or because their parents have negotiated with coaches.

“It’s one of those nudge-nudge, wink-wink things,” he says. “Nothing official, but your kid’s on the team.”

For those who fail to secure a position in advance, the pressure climbers with the official tryouts in late April. With the clock ticking, parents are often pushed to sign a contract with a team that prevents them from looking elsewhere.

Dale Lastman, a lawyer and son of former Toronto mayoral candidate Mel Lastman, whose eight-year-old son began playing in the GTHL last season, little that the season should be overhauled. “It’s ridiculous that we have to go through something like this with eight-year-olds,” he says. “There’s a lot of stress.”

Mr. Lastman thinks that the GTHL should introduce a reform similar to one that was introduced years ago for attracting law students. Under the revised system, law firms are prevented from signing students until the end of the first week, allowing students to look at a number of firms before making a decision.

“I think that would help a lot,” Mr. Lastman says. “The way it is now, you have to make a decision in a couple of minutes.”

Dean Dart, a trainer with the GTHL’s Humberside Valley Sharks, one of the country’s top minor hockey teams, calls the tryout process a “scam.”

“Almost no one gets on a team by going to a tryout. The scouts have been on the phone and the phone calls have been made. That’s the way it works.”

After watching his sons progress through the minor hockey ranks, Mr. Dart is philosophical about the system’s failings. “It’s a funny system,” he says. “Is it a bad system? Maybe. But I’m not sure there’s a good one.”
Negative Outcomes of Youth Sport

- Physical Development
  - e.g. injuries, eating disorders
- Emotional / Psychological Development
  - e.g. low perceived abilities, low self-esteem, burnout
- Social Development
  - e.g. violence, aggression, low morality reasoning

e.g. Bredemeier, 1995; Coackley, 1992; Beals & Manore, 1994; Beamer & Côté, 2003; Gardner & Janelle, 2002; Wankel & Mummery, 1990
Positive Outcomes of Youth Sport

For kids, good things come in triathlons

Fitness

BARRIE SHEPLEY

Triathlon's early roots were planted in the 1970s beach towns of San Diego, where individuals were inspired to run every day. These fitness enthusiasts created the swim-bike-run sport of triathlon. These early triathlons had few rules, standard distances or prize money.

Triathlon originated from the sandy beaches of Southern California and the jagged volcanic rock of Hawaii, where the ironman Triathlon became the marquee event. ABC's annual television coverage of the Hawaii Ironman helped the sport grow as thousands of adult endurance enthusiasts were attracted to test their fitness.

As a student at McMaster University and a novice triathlon participant, I was concerned that the sport had no entry-level opportunities for children to get started. Some of the long-term benefits for young children (hockey, soccer, swimming, gymnastics) with participation rates falling into disfavor. In an effort to spread awareness, a local youth triathlon program called Kids of Steel was created.

The goal was to create a participation opportunity for kids of all ages and skill levels. Instead of worrying about winning, and goals scored, every participant would receive a medal, a T-shirt, and a chance for prizes, regardless of their time. If you think back to their childhood, almost every boy and girl was a natural athlete. Children spend their idle time in the summer riding their bicycles in the park for a swim, then returning home to run around before repeating it again the following day. Triathlons, born from the desire to keep kids active, have become the ultimate goal for many young athletes.

The 2003 Kids of Steel competition in Midland, Ont. Most kids spent an all summer riding, swimming and running and made ideal triathletes.

The 2003 Kids of Steel competition in Midland, Ont. Most kids spent an all summer riding, swimming and running and made ideal triathletes.

Sports lift esteem in young athletes

Laumann, Olson have started programs to help youngsters considered at risk

Active young, fit for life
Positive Outcomes of Youth Sport

- Physical Development
  - e.g. fitness, skills, muscular strength & endurance, flexibility, bone structure
- Psychological / Emotional Development
  - e.g. self-esteem, stress reduction, challenge, fun, enjoyment, life satisfaction
- Social Development
  - e.g. citizenship, social success, peer relationships, leadership, career achievement, community integration, discipline, commitment
- Intellectual Development
  - e.g. school grades, school attendance, cognitive development

e.g. Aaron et al., 1995; Baranowski et al., 1992; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2004; Health Canada, 2003; Larson, 2000; Taylor et al., 1985; Wankel & Berger, 1990
The Big Question

- How can participation in sport promote positive youth development and reduce the negative outcomes associated with sport participation?

Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005
3.
CHARACTERISTICS OF SPORT THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Environment of Youth Sport

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Youth in sport
Parents, peers

Sport organizations,
Sport systems
City infrastructure…

Bronfenbrenner, 1977
Process-Person-Context-Time Model

1. Process:
   - the regular “activities” of youth sport.

2. Person:
   - the “assets” or characteristics we (i.e. coaches, teachers, parents) want to transmit to the participants involved in sport.

3. Context:
   - the environment in which the activities are happening.

4. Time:
   - changes occurring over time (e.g. age and development).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)
Environment of Youth Sport

Changes over Time

Environment
The larger institutions

Process and Person

Coaches, Teachers

Context

Youth in sport

Parents, peers

Sport organizations, Sport systems City infrastructure…

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
Environment of Youth Sport

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Youth in sport

Parents, peers

Sport organizations,
Sport systems
City infrastructure…

Process

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
1. Process (Activities)

1. Early Specialization vs Sampling
2. Deliberate Practice vs Deliberate Play

(Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)
1. Process (Activities): Early Specialization VS Sampling

- Early specialization is defined as limiting participation to one sport that is practised on a year-round basis.
- Sampling refers to participation in a variety of different seasonal sports.
- Early sampling in sport has the potential to promote a broader spectrum of developmental experiences and outcomes than early specialization (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Wright & Côté, 2003).
5 Developmental Outcomes Associated with Sampling
(Strachan, MacDonald, Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2008)

1. Life skills (Danish, Forneris, & Wallace, 2005).
   - Intrapersonal (e.g. time management)
   - Interpersonal (e.g. communication skills, leadership)
2. Prosocial behavior (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986)
   - Exposed to prosocial norms in multiple sports
3. Healthy Identity (Coackley, 1998)
   - Exploration of a variety of roles as opposed to identity “foreclosure.”
4. Connection to diverse peer groups (Patrick et al., 1999)
5. More opportunities to build “social capital” (Smylie et al., 2006)
1. Process (Activities): Deliberate Practice VS Deliberate Play

Deliberate Practice:

- Is the most relevant activity for improving performance.
- Is NOT the most enjoyable activity that one could engage in.
- Requires a high level of physical and mental effort.
- Requires optimal resources.
- Promote “selection of talent” at an early age and early specialization in one sport

(Ericsson, 2003; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993)
1. Process (Activities): Deliberate Practice vs Deliberate Play

Deliberate Play:

- Regulated by flexible age-adapted rules.
- Set up and monitored by children or an involved adult.
- Little intervention for skill instruction and feedback during the activity (i.e. maximize time on task).
- Requires minimal resources.
- Designed to maximize enjoyment.
- Promote inclusion.

(Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy 2007)
5 Developmental Outcomes Associated with Deliberate Play

1. Enjoyment (Wiersma, 2001)
2. Creativity (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007)
3. Regulate emotion (Stephens, 2000)
5. Problem solving and conflict resolution skills (Hellison, 2003)

(Strachan, MacDonald, Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2008)
Process: Summary

- Through *early sampling* and *deliberate play*, children will learn emotional, cognitive, and motor skills that will be important in their later investment in sport.

- By the time athletes reach adolescence they will have learned fundamental movement skills and will have more mature cognitive and emotional skills.
Environment of Youth Sport

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Youth in sport

Parents, peers

Sport organizations, Sport systems City infrastructure…

(Person)

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
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(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)
2. Person: Developmental Assets

- The taxonomy of developmental assets focuses on a scientifically based set of environmental and psychological strengths that enhance health outcomes for children and adolescents (Search Institute, 1997; Lerner & Benson, 2003).

- External and Internal assets in sport (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005).
The Framework of Developmental Assets

- *External assets*: The positive experiences a young person receives from their world.

- *Internal assets*: Characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive inner growth and development of the young person. The internal assets help young people make thoughtful and good choices and prepare them for challenges to their inner strength and confidence.
The Framework of Developmental Assets

- 40 developmental assets (Search Institute, 1997).
  - 20 External Assets
    - Support (6)
    - Empowerment (4)
    - Boundaries and expectations (6)
    - Constructive use of time (4)
  - 20 Internal Assets
    - Commitment to learning (5)
    - Positive values (6)
    - Social competencies (5)
    - Positive identity (4)
# 20 Developmental Assets and Sport Participation

*(Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Asset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family support (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Positive family communication (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other adult relationship (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Community values youth (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Safety (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Family boundaries (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Adult role models (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Positive peer influence (15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>High expectation (16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Youth programs (18; i.e. constructive use of time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Achievement motivation (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caring (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Honesty (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Responsibility (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Planning and decision making (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interpersonal competence (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Peaceful conflict resolution (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Personal power (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Self-esteem (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sense of purpose (39)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Developmental Assets and Positive Youth Development

Protection role of assets.
- alcohol, tobacco, drugs, drinking and driving, sexuality
- depression, suicide, antisocial behavior
- violence, school problems

Enhancement role of assets.
- school success, leadership
- volunteering, showing care/concern for others
- resiliency in the face of obstacles
- optimism for future happiness and success

The mean # of developmental assets for adolescents in the United States is 18.

Benson, 1997
Environment of Youth Sport

Context

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Youth in sport

Parents, peers

Sport organizations,
Sport systems
City infrastructure

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
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(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)
3. Context: Eight Setting Features

1. Appropriate structure
2. Physical and psychological safety
3. Supportive relationships
4. Opportunities to belong
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

(U.S National Research Council, 2002)
Physical and Psychological Safety

DESCRIPTORS
- Safe and health promoting facilities
- Decrease confrontational interactions

OPPOSITE POLES
- Physical and health dangers
- Verbal abuse
- Feeling of fear and insecurity
Appropriate Structure

DESCRIPTORS
- Age appropriate activities
- Clear and consistent rules and expectations
- Firm-enough control
- Continuity and predictability

OPPOSITE POLES
- Chaotic
- Disorganized
- Over controlled
- Autocratic
- Age inappropriate training
Supportive Relationships

DESCRIPTORS
- Caring
- Support
- Guidance
- Good communication

OPPOSITE POLES
- Cold
- Distant
- Over-controlling
- Focused on winning
Opportunities to Belong

DESCRIPTORS
- Inclusion regardless of one’s skill level.
- Engagement and integration of all.

OPPOSITE POLES
- Exclusion
- Marginalization
- Favor certain athletes
Positive Social Norms

DESCRIPTORS
- Values and morals
- Rules of behaviors
- Expectations
- Respect of others

OPPOSITE POLES
- Norms that encourage violence or cheating
- Disrespect for others
Support for Efficacy and Mattering

DESCRIPTORS
- Practices that support autonomy
- Enable responsibility
- Meaningful challenge
- Focus on improvement rather than winning

OPPOSITE POLES
- Practices that undermine motivation and desire to learn
- Unchallenging
- Excessive focus on winning
Opportunities for Skill Building

DESCRIPTORS
- Opportunities to learn physical, emotional, psychological, and social skills
- Exposure to intentional learning experiences
- Opportunities to learn life skills

OPPOSITE POLES
- Practices that promote bad physical habits (overtraining, injuries)
- No opportunities to learn physical, emotional, psychological, and social skills.
Integration of Family, School, and Community Effort

DESCRIPTORS
- Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community

OPPOSITE POLES
- Discordance; lack of communication; and conflict
3. Context: Eight Setting Features

Sporting environments that integrate the 8 setting features increase chances to increase positive outcomes in sport.
Environment of Youth Sport

Changes over Time

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Youth in sport

Parents, peers

Sport organizations, Sport systems City infrastructure…

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
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(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)
4. TIME

**1. Probable Outcomes**
- Recreational participation
- Enjoyment
- Physical health

**2. Probable Outcomes**
- Elite performance
- Enjoyment
- Physical health

**3. Probable Outcomes**
- Elite performance
- Reduced health
- Reduced enjoyment
- Increased dropouts

**Recreational Years**
- High amount of deliberate play
- Low amount of deliberate practice

**Investment Years**
- High amount of deliberate practice
- Low amount of deliberate play
- Focus on one sport

**Specializing Years**
- Deliberate play and practice balanced
- Reduce Involvement in several sports

**Sampling Years**
- High amount of deliberate play; Low amount of deliberate practice
- Involvement in several sports
- Focus on external and internal developmental assets
- 8 features of positive development settings

**Entry into sport**

**Early specialization and investment**
- High amount of deliberate practice
- Low amount of deliberate play
- Focus on one sport

**Elite performance through early specialization**
4. CONCLUSION
Sport and Positive Youth Development

- Sport contains all the elements of activities that can promote positive outcomes in youth (i.e. engagement over time, concentration, and enjoyment).

- If structured properly, sport can help youth to develop complex dispositions, assets, and skills.
Environment of Youth Sport

Environment
The larger institutions

Coaches, Teachers

Parents, peers

Youth in sport

Sport organizations, Sport systems City infrastructure…

Process and Person

Context

Changes over Time

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
Conclusion: Proximal Processes

“Sampling” and “playing” during childhood are posited as the *proximal processes* that form the primary mechanism for continued sport participation and personal development.
Conclusion: Proximal Processes

Sport programs during adolescence (i.e., age 13+) can change to include proximal processes that focus on more specific training activities (i.e. deliberate practice) and specialization in one sport.
Conclusion: Person

The external and internal assets of the person (i.e., child or adolescent) involved in a sport program should be the priority of coaches, parents, and adults involved.
Conclusion: Context

The eight setting features of the NRCIM should be implemented in sport programs to provide youth with a context that promotes continued participation in sport and the development of Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character/caring (i.e. 4 C’s).
Conclusion: Time

Youth sport programs must be designed in consideration of a person healthy development over time. The Developmental Model of Sport Participation provides a framework that guide the development of sport participation over time.
Policy Makers, Sport Organizations, Coaches, Parents Develop and Implement Youth Sport Programs

40 Developmental Assets

Sampling

Specializing → Recreational Participation

Investment

8 Setting Features

Failed or Inappropriate Design and Implementation

Diminished Competence Confidence Connection Character

Dropout

Appropriate Design and Implementation

Expertise or Recreational Involvement

Enhanced Competence Confidence Connection Character

An applied sport-programming model of positive youth development
Thank You