

Chapter 1

Youth Sport: A Different Game

Introduction

Beyond X's and O's is about kids in sport. It is directed toward the millions of adults and teenagers who are involved with school age youngsters in some type of leadership role. If you consider yourself among any of the following people, you will find this book useful. This book is written for:

parents of players and former players
coaches, both volunteer and paid, who give so much
elementary, junior high and middle school teachers who want to offer recreation,
intramural, sport and physical education activities for their students
physical education teachers at all levels
directors and supervisors of youth programs in community sport, recreation, clubs,
associations and agencies
board members who are responsible for leading the way
school administrators with broad concerns about the youth of the community
any person employed in the youth service area
any relative or friend of youth
education majors who plan to go into coaching, and
college professors in recreation, physical education and the various
gymnologies and their students who study youth and school sport- sport
management, elementary and secondary teaching methods, programming, sport
psychology, and sport sociology

How and why, you might justifiably ask, can one book be directed to such a variety of people at one time. The answer is threefold. First, sport is a very popular facet of life among the school age population. There are an estimated 40 million school age players. They exist in school sport (4-6 million in organized community programs (20-30 million), in play, and in the informal, pick-up games that run from morning to night. Most every youngster gets involved in sport activities in some way. The parents, interested relatives, and leader-coaches of these millions of players number another 60 to 80 million people. In the United States alone, sport and related activities for the school age population may involve as much as one-half of the population at some time during any given year.

This book, *Beyond X's and O's*, more than anything else, is about teaching and learning. If you consider this a major focus of nearly any activity for youngsters, the importance of doing it well takes on great long-term significance. There are few books that offer parents and other interested adults ways to conduct sport activities in the community that are specifically for youth. Principles of teaching and learning are offered here and they can be applied in a variety of settings.

Last, *Beyond X's and O's* is a first step in the development of a model that presents youth sport as a form of sport that is distinct from other sport activities. As such, it is based in large part on research and the professional preparation of recreation and physical education leaders. It draws upon teacher education, sport management, the social sciences (psychology and sociology, in particular), the bio-medical field, and sport itself. These are the fields from which people develop their leadership skills and competencies in community sport, recreation, and physical education for youth.

There are several reasons this book was written. First, it should point out that this is not a book that shows parents and others how to develop superior athletes. Instead, it offers the readers a systematic, yet flexible, approach to becoming a more knowledgeable youth leader who puts the kids first.

The critics of youth sport have made their views known. *Beyond X's and O's* is a response to the critics. It contains philosophically sound and professionally accepted methods and alternatives that will help leaders develop safe and sane programs for school age kids. Now, the critics can stop complaining, start promoting these options, and move on to other social issues.

Most importantly, however, this book was written so that kids can be permitted to enjoy their sport activities more completely and without qualifications. The critics note that far too many youngsters are turned away from sports because they are not good enough to make the team. Many adult leaders seem to follow a "coach the best and cut the rest" or bench the rest approach to programming and youth leadership. The result of this is that fewer and fewer young people come to develop good sport skills. They also fail to recognize sport and physical activity as an important part of their daily lives. These exclusionary and elitist practices of adults ignore the professional goals of lifetime participation in healthful sport activities. Not getting to play sends kids off looking for other things to do - - some bad, some good. Getting to play is fun. The dominant motive for writing *Beyond X's and O's* is to show adults how to increase player participation in and satisfaction from sport. In doing so, adult enjoyment will also be increased. This will give youngsters a more positive outlook toward physical activity and set the stage for a lifetime involvement in sport activities.

Underlying Concepts

There are a number of underlying concepts or themes that are carried throughout this book. They represent, in part, ideas around which my feelings, motivations, and actions revolve. (Luft, 1969) They are my biases and they have evolved through my academic training and experiences. These concepts are labeled: values, perspectives, education, research, social structure, styles of leadership, product- process and quality of life.

Our VALUES either determine our actions or our actions shape our values. The definition of values, as proposed by two well-known sport sociologists, is: "culturally prescribed criteria by which individuals evaluate persons, behavior, objects, and ideas

as to their relative morality, desirability, merit, or correctness.” (Eitzen and Sage, 1978:59) Values shape basic human drives. When value systems clash it can result in verbal as well as physical confrontations. Value differences cause some of the problems in youth sport. These differences exist, in part, because there is no dominant model that provides guidance in this realm.

Our PERSPECTIVES, like our values, are based on our individual backgrounds and experiences - - player, coach, teacher, parent. Each sees the game differently. This point was made remarkably well by Michael Maccoby in his highly acclaimed book, *The Gamesman*. He explained how we adopt perspectives from our work associations. Maccoby wrote:

Bureaucracies tend to type people to fit the requirements of their hierarchies; teachers type students as bright, average or retarded; police type criminals and law abiders; psychiatrists type normals, neurotics, and psychotics. Factory managers typically type workers and managers into categories of hard working, lazy, incompetent, responsible, irresponsible, etc. - - all according to how well they serve the organization. (1976:44)

You can see how easy it is to adopt terms like winners and losers from the televised sport system and apply them to our youngsters. While growth and change are two signs of life, unnecessary labels become permanent and inflexible reminders that: Once a/an _____, always a/an _____. You fill in the blank! Our perspective on youth sport is unclear, but influenced strongly by what I have labeled Revenue Sport.

EDUCATION or learning is another sign of life. Kids who learn to play ball and adults who learn to be better leaders, grow. Growth seems to be a necessity for a satisfying life. If adults will grow in youth leadership through self-study, many will profit from it.

RESEARCH has been given a “dirty name” by some people, and with justification. In the past, change occurred by individual trial and error. The present belongs to a new, more stringent form of trial and error called research. For the most part, that which is suggested in *Beyond X's and O's* comes from research backed up by authoritative opinion. It has been used and well tested in a number of fields, and is becoming more important in youth sport. With thought, readers will be able to apply this material in a variety of situations, not only with youngsters, but in other daily contacts.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE or the social units that we form receive scant attention in youth sport. It is an important area of study in the administrative sciences. It is built on the psychologists' attention to perception, thinking, motivation, and behavior and is combined with the sociologists' interests in roles, groups, systems, organizations and cultures. The end result is that we know that people determine how organizations operate and the structure of organizations influences how individuals function within defined social units. Organizations do not have personalities, at least as we recognize them in people. However, organizations do “behave” in predictable ways, depending on

how they are structured. This gives them unique styles. Some of the recognizable characteristics that determine how organizations function include: division of labor, hierarchy of authority, punishments or sanctions, criteria for evaluation, symbols, and goals. (Eitzen and Sage, 1978:1) Much more attention can be given to how we design our youth sport leagues.

LEADERSHIP is a central element any time two or more people come together. There are just three basic types of leadership- authoritarian, democratic, and laissez faire. Many of our social experiences are dominated by authoritarian leadership. This includes the military, family, church and sport. One of the solutions to the problems that develop within and between organizations is to adopt more democratic styles of leadership. This permits the people to achieve a balance between the static rules, policies, and less flexible design of the organization and the dynamic and variable nature of people who are always changing. This leadership approach cuts across education (Brubacher, 1962), voluntary organizations (Likert and Likert, 1976), as well as business (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981).

The PROCESS of daily living and the material PRODUCTS we seek continually influence one another. As we go about our lives, our thoughts wander to concerns about work, homes, cars, and vacations. We think about what we must do to obtain these in the right proportions. From time to time it is worthwhile to step back from our lives and examine what we are doing and how we are doing it. In doing this it is good to remember that the journey through life is every bit as important as where we are going. We pass along this particular road only once. We can make it a very good journey for our children and ourselves when we do not become too preoccupied with material possessions, particularly those so commonly found in sport.

The first 15 to 20 years of our lives are important for what we do during the years that follow. Thought and study create opportunities as well as good times. Part of making this journey more satisfying is to take advantage of what is known. This means that we should read what is written, study it, evaluate it, and use it. Plan. Then apply that knowledge as an "antique buff" or "sports car buff" would use it. Make sport a good thing for your children, yourself, your family and your community. After all, what is the purpose of the journey if there is nothing good to enjoy or remember when you arrive? Henry David Thoreau (1817- 1862) summed up these thoughts best when he wrote: "Time is but a stream I go a-fishing in."

The QUALITY OF LIFE that we create for ourselves and our children is highly variable. A number of factors contributes to how satisfactorily we live. They include: family and marital status; housing; neighborhood and community; friendships; standard of living and savings; amount and usefulness of education; religion and other organizational affiliations; health; work; and non-work domains. (Campbell, 1976:70).

People who participate actively in sports (e.g., running, tennis, bowling) frequently state that it is one of the more important things they do. Sport contributes to quality of life for adults and children. Sport is fun to do and is a lifetime source of pleasure. It

contributes to the other domains such as health, friendships, work and family. You can evaluate the quality of your adult life with The Jack Hutslar “True Life Adventure” Test. See Table 1-1.

Sport has the potential to be a very positive influence in the lives of people when these activities are conducted properly. Well designed sport programs improve the quality of life for youngsters and the adults who lead the way.

As we live and experience the ups and downs of our children, it is important that we examine our journey in time. Your perspective on sport, not to mention the other domains in your lives, is shaped by your values. Responding, learning and using what is known to become more knowledgeable youth sport leaders is part of the process of life. Accepting leadership and forming useful, positive programs requires thought and planning so youngsters will benefit from these sport experiences. However, as the journey proceeds, ask yourself and your children from time to time how satisfying things are. *Beyond X's and O's* is but a small fish in Thoreau's stream. Nevertheless, it is my hope that it will help make the journey more satisfying for all of the youngsters who play in these games.

Table 1-1
THE JACK HUTSLAR “TRUE LIFE ADVENTURE” TEST

The PURPOSE of this test is to provide you with feedback about those areas that influence the quality of your life. There is no correct or normal score. Judge yourself at various times against your personal feelings.

DIRECTIONS: Circle one selection (one is high, five is low) for each of the 16 statements that best describes your feelings about each area at this very moment. Please Answer All Statements! Write your total score at the bottom of the page and divide by 16.

1. Great. I can give lessons.
2. All right. Not too bad. Pretty good in fact.
3. So So. Nothing to brag about. Undecided. Neutral.
4. I am in trouble. Action is needed.
5. It is the pits. Help is the only answer.

THE ADVENTURES

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | My spouse |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 2 | My children |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | My family |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | My home and neighborhood |

1	2	3	4	5	5	My work
1	2	3	4	5	6	My financial state or condition
1	2	3	4	5	7	My friends and acquaintances
1	2	3	4	5	8	My clubs and other organizations
1	2	3	4	5	9	My education
1	2	3	4	5	10	My religion
1	2	3	4	5	11	My health
1	2	3	4	5	12	My self
1	2	3	4	5	13	My political involvement
1	2	3	4	5	14	My leisure and recreation activity
1	2	3	4	5	15	My life here in the United States
1	2	3	4	5	16	My overall level of satisfaction

_____ My total score divided by 16 equals _____

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Summary of the chapters in *Beyond X's and O's*

Beyond X's and O's shows adults how to work with youngsters in the sport setting. It seeks to create youth sport buffs. In CHAPTER 1, readers are introduced to the idea that youth sport is a different game from the other form of sport. The more common forms of sport are described in CHAPTER 2. In CHAPTER 3, it is emphasized that it is very important to develop good programs for the youngsters right from their first introduction to sport. The traditional style of coaching is presented in CHAPTER 4 while more recent finding about teaching and coaching are incorporated into CHAPTER 5. It encourages people to become "youth sport buffs." In CHAPTER 6, a number of practical coaching points are explained including motivation, conditioning, and injury prevention. Practical management suggestions about cheerleading, officials, legal matters, and school physical education are offered in CHAPTER 7. In CHAPTER 8, readers are introduced to several league or program features that can have positive influences on how the adults conduct themselves with the players. CHAPTER 9 is a summary of *Beyond X's and O's*.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY of sources referred to in this course is located at the end. They include a five-stage series of COACHING CLINICS for parents and coaches, RECOMMENDED REFERENCES to be acquired for a RESOURCE CENTER, and a YOUTH SPORT PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM that is biased toward and reflects a philosophy that goes beyond X's and O's.