

## **Chapter 9**

### **A New Perspective on Youth Sport**

#### **Introduction**

Beyond X's and O's is addressed to a variety of people who work with kids. It can be of value to parents, volunteer or paid coaches, directors, referees, teachers or college professors, community leaders, youth work professionals, or those who are involved with school age youngsters in other capacities. Beyond X's and O's is one of the first books that addresses and critiques the issues in youth sport today. More importantly however, it offers concrete solutions to change and improve these programs - - positive steps for positive people.

The suggestions, most of which are being carried out daily somewhere, will make the sport experience better for the players and their leaders. This is accomplished ultimately by helping youth leaders (i.e., parents, coaches, directors) become more knowledgeable leaders of youth - - youth sport buffs.

This final chapter is composed of sections dealing with the problems and solutions to the problems that exist in youth sport, the emergence of a youth sport model, and a summary. The Appendices contains other valuable resource information to aid people in their quest for knowledge about sport for kids.

#### **Problems And Solutions**

It was debated for some time how to present this last chapter. We considered laying the foundation for a youth sport model. This is needed. We considered also to introduce more information about sport management. At the same time, we felt that it would be useful to have more basic information about how to form instruments to evaluate people and programs. After careful consideration, we elected to devote a segment of this summary chapter to the very nature of youth sport. In doing this, we decided to be general rather than specific. Problems are identified. Then, solutions are offered that will be most effective in changing and redefining how programs are conducted for kids.

The problems in youth sport seem to go beyond local programs, coaches, parents and players. The problems in youth sport appear to be generic or society-wide and even inter-continental. We say this recognizing our perspective biases of sports, sport management and sociology. Some of the same problems appear from Atlanta to Calgary and from Melbourne to Kernersville. Therefore, it seems most appropriate to look at the problems in youth sport from the broadest possible perspective.

One of the two or three more general problems with youth sport, as we see it, is that it is not a known entity. There is no consistent or central focal point, other than the players, around which youth sport happens. Other forms of sport (i.e., therapeutic.

revenue, intramural, instructional, outdoor pursuits), have regular clients at specific locations with predictable needs. These forms of sport, including leisure sport, have established places in society. Their purposes are clear.

In marked contrast to this, youth sport is fuzzy. It does not make a profit, sell newspapers or command air time. While sport entrepreneurs waste money quite literally in the Revenue Sports industry, they are reluctant to invest in youth sport. These grass roots programs operate on a shoestring. Part of the reason for this is that youth sport is fragmented and diverse. Unlike other enrichment programs for children, youth sport has no general philosophy, central organization or advocate, pattern, main sport, personalities, leadership, publication, motive, address, place or time, or main event.

There is no return on investment or empathy for the kids. For parents and coaches, youth sport can be anything. It can be non-serious play, building future pros, something to avoid, and the best thing on Earth for kids. The other forms of sport have solid identities and characteristics. Youth sport has no identity or popular agreement about what it is.

This lack of agreement has made youth sport an unsolved riddle among youth sport advocates. It remains everything and it is nothing. Any view of it, regardless of how illogical it may appear, can be supported by people with similar views. Some will even fight physically over their views. Ironically, few adults ever get this involved over their children's performance in school.

Generally, there is agreement about the other forms of sport. Followers of the popular media sports like Big 10 football, Carolina basketball, Penguins Hockey, or New York Yankee baseball are not shy about their love and hate relationships. It is understandable and predictable. This unified passion does not exist in youth sport. Disagreement about youth sport seem to cause a social paralysis. Until a more predictable view of youth sport emerges, the riddle goes unsolved and prevents it from being an more positive activity for the kids.

What are the problems of youth sport? Former teachers, directors and professors, as reputations dictate, strive always to place the greatest number of things in the smallest number of categories. As an example, Bobbitt and his colleagues in the administrative sciences noted that the problems within organizations can be placed in four basic groups. They are:

- trained incapacity,
- goal displacement,
- dissatisfied clients, and
- value conflicts. (Bobbitt and others, 1974:56-73)

Their categories are defined here briefly. Trained incapacity is learning more and more about less and less. Goal displacement is substituting your goals or sub-unit goals for those of the organization at large. Dissatisfied clients are people who are disturbed

by the system and cannot find fast relief from those on the inside. Value conflicts occur when people clash over personal feelings or differences of opinion based on professional preparation.

The problems in youth sport fit well in these same categories. Here are our views of the problems in youth sport with Bobbitt's problems noted in parentheses. Keep in mind that these are general problems that do not occur in all, but may apply to and influence, many programs. You may find also that these problems apply to many different types of organizations with which you deal.

1. Youth sport has no popular identity. Youth sport is everything to everybody. As a result, anything goes. (The problem as noted by Bobbitt and his colleagues is: 1. goal displacement)
2. Conflict, unrest, and turmoil. Conflict, in itself, is not the problem. Like high blood pressure, it can be symptomatic of underlying problems. (Problem: 1. dissatisfied clients, 2. value conflicts)
3. Drop outs and pressure. Generally we view drop outs as quitters. It might be more proper to count them as votes regarding how they feel about the adult leadership in their programs. (Problem: 1. goal displacement, 2. value conflicts) (Pooley, 1980)
4. Poor models. The great teacher today for millions of volunteers in sport is the media, television in particular, and the Revenue Sports Model it promotes hour after hour. Until popular alternatives to this model are publicized and popularly accepted (e.g., 27 ways to work on this were listed at the end of Chapter 8, page 188), the players and their coaches and parents are not likely to behave any better than do the undisciplined Revenue Sports personalities and their fans. (Problem: 1. trained incapacity)
5. Communication and cooperation. These facets of organized life are linked in many ways. If there is no communication, effective action will be limited. If there is no cooperation, we cannot play the same games. (Problem: 1. trained incapacity, 2. value conflicts, 3. goal displacement)
6. Individualism. Socialized society can take individual initiative away from people and organizations. It is done in the name of self-protection. As a result, conformity prevails. At the other extreme, people focus on their own initiatives and may be unwilling to consider or work on cooperative projects that could enhance their own actions. Both have the same result: nothing happens. (Problem: 1. value conflicts, 2. goal displacement)
7. Territoriality. Organizations commonly build fences around their programs. These fences can take the form of rules, policies, and new interpretations of existing rules and policies. Barriers between school and community programs,

among sports, between beginner and elite players, and between districts, towns, and organizations contribute nothing and can detract from effective programming for the kids. (Problem: 1. goal displacement)

8. Untrained Leadership. Youth sport leadership is, in many cases, without training and credentials. It can be also unmotivated and disinterested. Some people seek only the position of leader. Others work their way to the top, some by default, and then become obstacles or inactive retirees while in office. A number rule their activities with closed minds. Too many routinely dampened the fire of enthusiasm. (Problem: 1. trained incapacity. 2 goal displacement)

9. Lack of funds. Budget cuts have reduced program offerings and limited others over the years. However, financial distress has been a persistent historical problem among girls, juvenile offenders, poor, and handicapped youth. It may be more of an excuse than a problem. (Problem: 1. value conflicts, 2. goal displacement)

10. Narrow program offerings. Narrow program offerings are supported by the traditional value that sport is for males and their aspiring parents. Another view of the problem centers on one-sport organizations that allow themselves to become preoccupied with that sport, and nothing else, sport or non-sport. It dominates their actions 12 months a year. Other areas of growth do not exist. The leaders forget or ignore that kids and their parents have seasonal interests in other activities. This unbalanced over-emphasis on one activity may yield youthful specialists who are exposed needlessly to mental, social, and biological risks and long term dead ends. (Problem: 1. goal displacement)

11. Absence of philosophy and goals. If there is one dominant flaw in our youth sport efforts, it is the glaring absence of underlying philosophies and goals. Our short term objectives are to get at least one coach for every team, then win. After that, there are few goals. Crisis management rules the day. (Problem: 1. trained incapacity, 2. goal displacement)

12. The status of sport in society. Sport has not enjoyed real social respectability, apart from what existed in Athenian Greece. Those who are involved with sport, at other than at the high profile Revenue Sports level, are regarded generally as second class citizens. This is part of the burden that working professionals must endure while attempting to compete on equal ground for the attention of those who are in positions to make changes on a large scale. (Problem: 1. value conflicts, 2. trained incapacity, 3. goal displacement)

Problems in our daily lives, whether inter-personal or organizational in origin, are not new. They seem, however, always more disturbing when they occur in activities that are designed and conducted for kids. Of the problems noted here, four stand out. The first three of consequence are the lack of an identity for youth sport, poor models, and untrained leadership. However, the fourth problem has the greatest potential, when

solved, for bringing about positive changes, greater stability, harmony and satisfaction for the participants. If we adhere to the proponents of Theory Z management (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981), we should look first at the philosophy and goals of our programs. (Hutslar, 1982) Philosophy sets the course of action. It is that simple.

On the practical side, several predictable approaches to the management of youth sport programs have emerged. Some leaders, as always, ignore what is known and repeat past errors. A few wash their hands entirely of youth programs. They get out or are driven out. Others get around the problems by becoming facility brokers. Some search for information and work through the problems.

With greater frequency, leaders have solved their problems by withdrawing into small, in-house, neighborhood programs run by dedicated parents, advocates, and professionally prepared leaders. They have rejected the Revenue Sports Model. Other have developed specialized enrichment programs combined with recreation. Their dominant trait is that they all put the kids first. This is their motivating force. Their philosophy is, generally, let the kids play and learn. When the philosophy is correct, the goals emerge. The kids let us know that they agree when they come out to play. It can be measured in their participation and their smiles.

In the administrative sciences, there are a number of strategies that can be used to address problem situations. These techniques need not be thought of exclusively in terms of problems. However, problems do create an atmosphere that moves people to seek change. One series of management strategies includes job expansion (more similar tasks), job rotation (a variety of set tasks), and job enrichment (more tasks at varying levels of responsibility). On a larger scale, many companies now offer Management By Objectives (MBO) as well as training programs for their employees. (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1978:349-367; Ouchi, 1981:60) The latter seems to be a necessity in corporate life today. Train and retrain, the management consultants say. On a system-wide basis, organizational development specialists take programs apart. They work with the management and employees to determine the problems and see what is required to make the organization function properly. Then, they offer plans to restructure the system so that it works as intended. (Schein, 1969; Hutslar, 1984)

These strategies center on Theory Y management. It stresses developing a more positive outlook toward work and creating a good place to work. The dominant management approach prior to this, and still popular, was Theory X. It means, even today, bear down. Control what happens and provide more rewards. Theory X relies on external motivation and sounds suspiciously like the Revenue Sports model. Theory Y seeks to develop internally motivated people who take pride in their work. The more recent management strategy, regarded as the motivating force behind the world dominance of Japanese industry, was Theory Z. A very simplistic explanation of Theory Z is, become absorbed in your work and it was widely copied in business and industry.

The underlying purpose of all management approaches is to get people inspired about their work, their goods, their services, and make a profit. Right now, Theory Z

organizations appear to be doing well in these areas. Therefore, it seems that we should study their style a bit more seriously, whether driven by the motives to make a profit or to serve kids.

The main features of Theory Z and other successful human relations strategies used in management have similar characteristics. They are summarized here from the practical writings of Bobbitt and his management colleagues (1974), Koontz and O'Donnell (1978), the social research team of the Likerts (1976), and the Theory Z proponents like Ouchi (1981) and Pascale and Athos (1981).

- **Philosophy.** Simple, concise statements of purpose give meaning and direction to all who are involved. With this, the direction becomes clear. The philosophy determines what actions occur.
- **Structure.** Organizations are organic. (Pascale and Athos, 1981:180) They must be well designed and somewhat static on paper so people will know how they are to function within the system. At the same time, the organization must be dynamic in operation to accommodate for the ever-changing nature of the people within and the people they serve. Design the program for effective action.
- **Persistent Leadership.** Establish a leadership style that motivates people by drawing them into the decision-making process. Teach them your philosophy of youth. Lead by example. Stay after them and do not let up. Show all of the participants how they can use their creative energies for the benefit of the youngsters and themselves. Fuel the fires of enthusiasm. Show them how sport contributes to balanced living without regard to the skill level of the players or their mentors.
- **Education.** Prepare all of the participants for their involvement with the youngsters. Teach them, through educational programs, how to be a positive influence on the kids. Base it on what is known to be sound human behavior and the philosophy of the program. Do not preach, teach. Teach them what is known. Just as with the kids, start with where they are. Help them progress to become more knowledgeable leaders of youth.
- **Communication.** Open the doors to information and knowledge. Keep people informed about what is occurring. Do not omit people because they do not respond. Assume they are interested but busy. Continue sending messages and be receptive to what others say.
- **Decentralize.** Suppress the urge to develop uninspired conformity through rigid bureaucratic and centralized restraints on the people. Loosen up. Fuel the fires of individualism. Foster it. Then guide the productive energies of the kids (when you are a parent or coach) and the coaches (when you are a program leader) in directions that most benefit the kids. Grant people freedom. Trust them to do it

their way while working continually to maintain the philosophical direction and integrity of the program.

- **Open participation.** Get your people involved. Get your players involved. Do not exclude. Include everyone. Design the program so all of the kids play all of the time - - 100% participation. - - as do the adult participants.

- **Balance.** Design the program for the whole person. Resist the urge to specialize. Help the leaders show the players what they know, both sport and non-sport in nature. Help the youngsters explore, learn, and become what they are capable of becoming. Develop lifetime players and good students in the classroom as well as in life. Help the youngsters become balanced people.

- **Character.** People who conduct and participate in youth sport can and should display a quality in their actions that shows they have become completely overtaken, engrossed, or absorbed in what they are doing. Their enthusiasm can override other motivations, attitudes, and actions when acting for youth. It gives the program a distinctive flavor which may be called style, family, air, class, reputation or culture. It means, be a youth sport buff. Be an expert. It is a way of thinking and a way of life. Put the kids first.

There are three basic elements that will determine how we conduct our sport programs for the kids. First, we must develop a sound philosophy about the purposes of youth sport. (Example: Youth is a time to explore, learn and grow in relative safety.) The second element is to design and conduct regular, on-going educational programs so the leaders (i.e., parents, coaches, and directors) will behave in accordance with the philosophy of the program. The third element is the parent, the coach, the director, or the teacher. Change will occur when you exercise your individual initiative and make something happen. This means, you will either change what is or start something better. In the end, your individual initiative is most critical. Anything is possible when you begin to act.

### **Toward The Emergence Of A Youth Sport Model**

The more prominent forms of sport are the Revenue Sports, Intramural Sport, and Instructional Sport models. There is no popular or overriding youth sport model. A youth sport model, should one emerge and become popularly known, might be distinguished from the other forms of sport by some of the following characteristics:

- 100% participation. in practice, games, and league management
- Fun. for the youngsters as well as all other participants
- Learn basic skills. sport skills for the players; sport, coaching and leadership skills for the other participants; become youth sport buffs

- Safety. for the participants that overrides all other concerns
- Balance. in sport and non-sport offerings

**IT IS NOT WHETHER YOU  
WIN OR LOSE, BUT  
HOW MUCH YOU GET TO PLAY**

There is no one correct way to view or conduct youth sport activities. There are many correct ways to do this, and that is good. From the perspective of those who have been trained or professionally prepared, it seems that the best we can do for our youngsters is to introduce them to a variety of activities, make the experiences enjoyable, and present them with sufficient skill (based on reading, studying and doing) so that the kids will return to play tomorrow, the next season, and for all time thereafter.

It is not our responsibility or obligation to tell youngsters that they are not suited for this or not right for that. That is their decision, after they have had many opportunities to test the water and satisfy their own questions and desires. For the most part, youngsters want to participate regularly, in the sport of the day, have fun, and play year after year. If we provide these types of opportunity for our children, we will have done the best we can do for them. Anything else positive that occurs beyond this will not be of our doing. However, the basis for “wanting to participate” will have received its greatest boost from the opportunities we provided for them to try and do.

### **Summary**

Beyond X's and O's demonstrates how adult leaders can run programs and teach sport skills to youngsters. In CHAPTER 1 readers were introduced to the concept of youth sport - a different game from the other forms of sport. The more commonly recognized forms of sport were described in CHAPTER 2. In CHAPTER 3 it was emphasized that it is quite important to get youngsters involved in sport activities that can be managed successfully. In CHAPTER 4 the traditional style of coaching was presented while more recent findings about teaching and coaching were incorporated into CHAPTER 5. Here, youth leaders were urged to become youth sport buffs.

In CHAPTER 6 a number of practical coaching points were explained including motivation, conditioning, and injury prevention. Practical management suggestions about cheerleading, officials, legal matters, and school physical education were offered in CHAPTER 7. In CHAPTER 8 readers were introduced to several league or program features that can influence how adults operate youth programs. CHAPTER 9 was a summary of Beyond X's and O's.

Also a BIBLIOGRAPHY of sources, COACHES CLINICS, RECOMMENDED REFERENCES, and a YOUTH SPORT PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM that is biased toward and reflects a philosophy that goes beyond X's and O's.



It is hopeful that readers remember more than a few interesting facts from reading BEYOND X's and O's. If not, try to conduct the activities with your kids on the following key concepts:

- Know children. Know something about the nature of your players and students.
- Plan. Put your practice activities in writing.
- Teach. Learn and apply the skills needed to transmit knowledge.
- Teach skills. Learn the basic skills and the X's and O's of your sport.
- Be positive. Applaud effort as well as accomplishments.
- Have fun. There is no need to explain this?

Throughout BEYOND X's and O's there have been a number of underlying themes. They are as important as the philosophical basis of our youth programs. We would like to reemphasize them here. They are: values, perspectives, education, research, social structure, leadership, the eternal debate over process and product, and quality of life.

Our VALUES are shaped in part by the society in which we live. The PERSPECTIVE we bring to youth sport comes from our unique lives at home, work and play. These elements join to shape how we think and feel, see things, and then behave on the fields and courts. Throughout this book we have stressed that we should adopt an EDUCATIONAL perspective with our kids and help them develop into lifetime players. Here, youngsters are taught how to perform by trained adults who take the time to teach everyone, not just the best. RESEARCH, along with practical experience and authoritative opinion, provides clues, guidance, and strategies to develop better programs for the kids. When it is used, it results in effective SOCIAL STRUCTURES known as programs for kids. It happens through the LEADERSHIP style that is learned by adults in books and in their training programs and is used on the fields and courts with the players.

The PROCESS of becoming a leader and a player requires periodic review. For kids there is no tomorrow and no yesterday. They live mostly in today's world and this experience should be good. It sets the pattern for many good tomorrows. Therefore, treat your children as though today were the most important day in their lives. It is, you know!

When sport is a positive force in the lives of youngsters, QUALITY OF LIFE is improved immeasurably. Sport has that capacity, both for the players and their leaders. This is not to suggest that all problems and conflicts can be eliminated when the points in Beyond X's and O's are implemented. That would be nice, but unrealistic. However,

when these suggestions are considered, modified, and instituted, the problems that do arise should be resolved more peacefully and without unnecessary stress for the participants.

It is worth reemphasizing a few basic points about the adult leadership of school age youngsters in the sport setting. The basis for placing a high value on physical activity begins with parental influence at birth, just as with other aspects of life. The two most important features of any sport experience, as with most learning, is full participation and enjoyment or fun. Through participation children learn the basic skills. When their programs are well designed and properly conducted, most of the activities are totally safe and fun.

The sport experience can be kept in balance by helping the youngsters learn a variety of positions in a variety of sports. There is no need for them to specialize, not in one position, not in one sport, and certainly not in sport at the expense of all else. The skills of life involve sport taken in shared proportions with the scholastic pursuits of reading, writing, math, and science, computer skills, art and music. Youngsters learn most from us when we show them how to live a complete life, a full life, a balanced life.

People in sport are much more fortunate than we realize. Every boss, manager, and training director tries hard to inspire their employees to produce at peak capacity. Yet almost every child who comes into sport is already driven by his and her internal fires. All that we need do is provide them with opportunities and a little guidance in how to use these energies productively. When we give them their chances to learn, and as many chances as they want, we will help them see and feel the pleasures that can be derived from a lifetime of participation in sport.

Sport is important in the life of children. Help them learn the enjoyment that comes with a balanced life that includes participation in a variety of sport activities year after year. Put the kids first, make it fun, and keep it in balance. That is the core of youth in sport and a philosophy that goes beyond X's and O's.