

Sports Done Right: Making an Impact

The national attention that surrounded the introduction of *Sports Done Right* three years ago has subsided. But the report, billed “a call to action on behalf of Maine’s student-athletes,” continues to have an effect on high schools and middle schools around the state. “We are seeing progress,” said Karen Hawkes, director of the Maine Center for Sport and Coaching. “It’s slower in some communities than others. Each district is different and has different needs.”

Sports Done Right addresses issues such as fan and parental behavior, playing time, sportsmanship, health and quality of coaching. The report is broken down into seven core principles, core practices and out-of-bounds behaviors.

“It’s a great resource,” Cony High School athletic director Paul Vachon said. “Every coach and every school always tries to get to that standard.” Twelve communities, including Augusta and Winthrop, were chosen as pilot sites and participated in the program for a year before applying for accreditation, which both have received.

Karen Criss, who is the Winthrop middle and high school principal, said many of the report’s recommendations have already been implemented at the middle school after discussion with parents and other community members. “We instilled a no-cut policy and decided every child would play,” Criss said. “That didn’t mean equal playing time. We really focused on sportsmanship of players, coaches and parents.”

Criss pointed out that athletes who want extra games or practices can get them through specialized travel teams or outside venues including recreation departments, YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs. One of the goals in the report is for schools to partner with outside organizations to enhance participation.

In Augusta, recent athletic director Dan Bowers spent hundreds of hours researching programs and talking to athletes and community members. He planned to use the report, he said, as a way to remain on task rather than institute sweeping changes. Vachon sees it the same way. “It’s not a mandate,” he said. “It’s a guide and I think it’s an excellent guide.”

Hawkes, who oversees the statewide program, said field consultants are currently working in seven school districts, located in southern Maine or along the mid-coast.

“It involves talking with parents and communities,” she said. “Many schools are using it but have not started accreditation.” To become accredited, communities need to do self-assessments, target areas of concern, and establish an action plan. Many, such as School Administrative District 9, which encompasses the Farmington area, are still in the planning stages.

“We do so much of the *Sports Done Right* program anyway,” Mt. Blue High School athletic director Scott Walker said. “It gives us some further support from a policy standpoint.” Walker said implementation of the program is ongoing, but the community is holding off on a comprehensive plan until athletic facilities are in place.

Messalonskee High School athletic director Jim Marascio is one of two consultants working with schools around the state and said those that have embraced it have shown improvement in several areas, including participation among athletes and members of the community. “You hear some very positive things from coaches and from the kids,” he said.

By Gary Hawkins, *Kennebec Journal*, September 14, 2008

Early focus on one sport raises alarms

Around the country, little girls are donning leotards and tumbling into gymnastics classes - a surge of interest that typically happens every four years after the summer Olympics. While pediatricians encourage children to exercise more, there is growing concern about specializing in just one sport. Growing bones can't handle the same stresses as mature bones. When a child specializes in one sport early in life, certain body parts are subjected to repetitive stress and overuse. Especially among young soccer players, there has been an alarming rise in injuries to the anterior cruciate ligament - a particular concern because repair involves drilling into a growth plate, an area of developing tissue at the end of the leg bone. This spring the medical journal *Pediatrics* published a troubling study of gymnastics-related injuries treated in hospital emergency rooms over a 16-year period ending in 2005. On average, 26,600 gymnastics-related injuries are treated by emergency room physicians every year, a rate of about 5 injuries per 1,000 participants. While only 3 percent of the patients were admitted to the hospital, many of the injuries were still serious: nearly half were strains or sprains and nearly a third were fractures or dislocations. Most were to the shoulders, arms and wrists, but a frightening 13 percent involved the head and neck. The researchers, from Ohio State University, concluded that gymnastics had one of the highest injury rates of all girls' sports. Lara McKenzie, the study's lead author and a principal investigator for the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, said that the study shouldn't discourage parents from enrolling children in gymnastics, but added that they should be diligent about finding a reputable gymnastics program that emphasizes safety. Children should be discouraged from practicing while unsupervised. In the absence of firm data about the best age to start competitive sports, the solution may not be to discourage young athletes from working out too much, but instead to encourage them to try out more sports. The journal *Pediatrics* reported last year that young athletes who participated in a variety of sports had fewer injuries and continued longer than those who specialized before puberty. - *By Tara Parker-Pope, The New York Times, September 2, 2008*

Sports participation can foster fitness

A recent study by Michigan State University kinesiology professor Jim Pivarnik found that students who perform well on basic fitness tests also tend to get higher scores on standardized academic tests. The reasons for that are unknown, but Pivarnik and his colleagues theorize it could be a combination of physical and emotional benefits that come from being fit and healthy - both of which can be the positive results of playing sports. We've all heard the shocking statistics. The number of kids between the ages of 6 and 19 who are overweight or obese has tripled since 1980, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, prompting many in the medical community to call childhood obesity an epidemic in the United States. Experts agree that children need not only a balanced, nutritional diet, but also daily exercise to stave off the threat of obesity. Playing a sport is one way to ensure your kids are getting enough exercise. Orthopaedic surgeons want parents to know that the more your kids condition their bones early in life, the stronger they'll be as they get older. "Bones build up their greatest amount during childhood and early adulthood," says Dr. Darin Leetun, spokesman for the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. "So the more you can work on those things through sports, which is a great way to do it, the better opportunity over your lifetime to avoid injuries." - *By Louise Knott Ahern, Lansing State Journal, September 3, 2008*

Title IX lawsuit

Parents of two Westmoore softball players have filed a complaint against Moore Public Schools for violations of the Title IX amendment. Passed in 1972, the Title IX amendment states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." David and Teresa Cochran and Marvin and Kandy Bishop filed complaint Thursday. Marvin Bishop said he feels Westmoore softball parents have felt like this for a long time. David Cochran said this has been an accumulation of 15 years of being promised one thing and having something different delivered and the biggest concern is the amount of money being spent on boys' programs compared to the girls'. "If the team would receive more funding and attention, it would draw more athletes to the sport," Cochran said. "They're deserving of it." Moore superintendent Deborah Arato could not be reached for comment. As the superintendent, Arato has also been named in the complaint. Some of the items being addressed in the complaint include: 1) Funding of athletics. Baseball program is able to raise funds at the concession stands at football games and offers summer camps. Softball does not; 2) Provision of equipment and supplies; 3) Scheduling of games and/or practices. High school softball practices are cut short to give junior high time to practice. Baseball does not have to do that; 4) Provision of transportation and/or meals; 5) Assignment and/or compensation of coaches; 6) Provision of locker rooms and facilities for both practice and competition - everything from the size and quality of locker rooms, to the quality of the bleachers, to the lack of a public restroom at the softball field, to the size of the scoreboard and concession stand being half the size of the baseball stand, no running water, no wastewater drainage, no cooking appliances and no working lights; 6) Provision of training facilities and services. The main training room is located in the football locker room; 7) Publicity. Lack of promoting individual and team achievements. - *By Robert Przybylo, The Oklahoman, September 8, 2008*

Transfers take toll on high school basketball

The Southern Section, the City Section and the California Interscholastic Federation can put forth all the transfer restrictions they want, but it's not deterring parents, their publicity-seeking sons and travel coaches from embracing the switching-schools routine for athletic reasons. Welcome to the modern era of high school basketball. It's not a pretty scene, and it's the reason there won't be many coaches sticking around for 25-year tenures as in the past. Steve Miller, a former coach at North Hollywood who retired after the 1997 season, said he's grateful to be gone after seeing what has happened. "It's sickening," he said. "You put in so much time and then wonder if it's all worth it when [the player] leaves to go to a better deal." On the other side are the parents who believe they have the right to move their child any time they want for academic, athletic or any reason. High school sports has evolved into a multifaceted scene, with increasing focus on what it offers for the individual rather than the team. It's now about branding opportunities, exposure to recruiters and media, and preparing for future stardom. Taft Coach Derrick Taylor, under scrutiny for receiving transfers, said his school has lost numerous players in recent years, citing a summer game in which he counted nine ex-Taft players playing for Reseda. Students are leaving so quickly they don't even have the time - or the courtesy - to tell their coach. Asked for his thoughts about player movement the first week of school, Southern Section Commissioner Jim Staunton said, "This late in the game and knowing the summer associations, it clearly looks like these kids are being manipulated and moved around like chess pieces, and it does concern me." - *By Eric Sondheimer, Los Angeles Times, September 8, 2008*

High School football teams to be rated on sportsmanship

For the first time, high school football teams sportsmanship will be graded by local football officials in an effort to promote responsible conduct at games. Officials will rate teams on issues such as team discipline, language, intentional fouls and interaction with referees. At season's end, the team that finishes with the highest marks will receive the first Sportsmanship Award issued by the Mohawk Valley Chapter of Certified Football Officials. The award is fashioned after a similar program in the Syracuse area. "We wish the coaches would emphasize sportsmanship as much as they do winning, that's the point of this," said Pat Cardinale, chairman of the chapter's sportsmanship committee. A local football official for 28 seasons, he has taken this crusade to heart. "I feel like my job is to enforce the rules, and one of the rules is good sportsmanship," Cardinale said. Dave Czesniuk, the director of operations at Sport in Society, a Northeastern University center, believes it is coaches, athletic directors and school administrators who have a responsibility to encourage players to respect the rules, their opponents, their teammates and the integrity of the game. "They set more than an example," Czesniuk said. "They set everything, on and off the field. They have an incredible amount of power." For seven weeks, the five officials working each local football game will complete a sportsmanship evaluation form using a 0-to-4 point scale. The conduct of coaches and players, before, during and after the game, as well as each team's "game management" - the chain crew, ball boys, clock operator, etc. - will be evaluated. "We're hoping the winner will put the award in a trophy case, just like they'd do if they had won a league or sectional championship," Cardinale said. "There's so much emphasis put on winning now, instead of sportsmanship...We'd like to see some of these coaches recognized for their sportsmanship." - *By Ron Moshier, Observer Dispatch, September 12, 2008*

Horrific high school football hazing shakes New Mexico town

Six high school football players were accused of sodomizing six younger teammates with a broomstick during training camp. The scandal has raised to a whole new level when the coaches were accused of turning a blind eye to the hazing. Robertson High's head football coach and all five assistants have resigned, and prosecutors are considering charges against adults and youngsters alike. The scandal unfolded at a four-day, mid-August preseason training camp. According to state police reports, a group of juniors assaulted several younger teammates over two days. Police did not find out about it from school officials; instead, a state police officer whose son is on the team learned of the allegations through his wife, a camp volunteer. The alleged ringleader was expelled from school. The others - some of them veteran members of the highly successful team - were suspended through the end of the school year. Several residents declined to give their names but expressed disbelief, frustration and embarrassment over the case, along with anger - some directed at the coaches, some at the media inquiring about the scandal. A school district investigation released earlier this month accused the coaching staff of not adequately supervising the players and failing to look into initial reports of hazing. District Attorney Henry Valdez in Santa Fe said coaches and school administrators could face charges of failing to report child sexual abuse. School Superintendent Rick Romero said the coaches believed they had intervened in time to stop a hazing incident. But "as our investigation has unfolded, we learned that it had already happened." Head coach, Ray Woods, asked the players if anyone had been violated. One 15-year-old raised his hand but before the boy could elaborate, other players began making jokes, the report says. Several coaches told investigators that because of the laughter from the players, they didn't believe the allegations were serious and took no further action. On day 4 of what was supposed to be a five-day camp, Woods was approached by concerned parents. He gathered the boys again, insisting they identify those involved. Woods immediately kicked several players off the team and training camp was cut short. "This was a very violent, very serious form of bullying," Romero said. "Until we do a better job of identifying and dealing with it, this is not going to be the last time we hear about it." - *Associated Press, September 24, 2008*

Youth-football incident leads to doctor's resignation

A physician who served as a volunteer coach in a youth football league left his job with an orthopaedic practice after being accused of kicking one of his 8-year-old football players. Doug Flory, a longtime coach in the Center Grove Bantam Football League, allegedly kicked the boy during a recent practice. The boy continued to practice, but his parents later took him to a doctor, where he was diagnosed with a bruised pelvis. Flory worked at the South Emerson Surgery Center. The center said in a written statement that Flory agreed to resign after discussing the matter with officials. "Our own investigation unfortunately revealed the allegations to be true," the statement said. "(The center) does not condone such conduct." - *By Michael Pointer, Indystar.com, September 25, 2008*

An ounce of prevention may avoid an ACL injury

Female athletes are at a disadvantage when it comes to anterior cruciate ligament injuries, suffering more than their male counterparts. ACL injuries involve a ligament in the knee joint that helps with stabilization, but that ligament often tears during activities that put an enormous amount of strain on the knee, such as soccer, basketball and gymnastics. That's why so much emphasis has been put recently on prevention - stretching and strengthening programs that shore up not only muscles surrounding the knee, but other muscle groups that affect muscle balance and coordination as well. A study in the August issue of the American Journal of Sports Medicine found that female college soccer players who participated in a specific warm-up program had an overall injury rate 1.7 times less than the control group. Non-contact ACL injuries in the intervention group were 3.3 times less than in the control group. While studies like this often up the awareness factor, the news doesn't always get out. "There are some communities in which we haven't done a perfect job in disseminating the information," says Holly Silvers, a physical therapist and director of research for the Santa Monica Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Research Foundation. She adds that some communities might also not have the finances to implement programs. Silvers helped develop the Prevent Injury, Enhance Performance Program, a training session warm-up that concentrates on increasing flexibility, strength and targets muscle imbalances. The American Physical Therapy Association features some ACL prevention exercises on its website as well. - *By Jeannine Stein, Los Angeles Times, September 29, 2008*

Boys cross-country winner puts on sportsmanship display

Overwhelming favorite is seldom the most rewarding position. Win as everyone expects and the reaction is likely to be a shoulder shrug, a brief handshake, some polite applause. Aaron Fletcher of South experienced some of that, as well as a deeper satisfaction. The senior led by two strides after 100 yards, and stretched his gap to 26 seconds at the finish to polish off his third-consecutive Cook Inlet Conference Cross Country Championship in 15:59, launching him into the pantheon of Anchorage's greatest high school runners. As Fletcher crossed the finish line beneath bluebird skies framed by the golden birch leaves, there were cheers from the crowd but no throaty roar. Fletcher sprinted hard down the final straightaway, even with a cushion so large he could have lollygagged. Did he raise his arms in triumph, pound his chest or otherwise lead the cheers for Aaron Fletcher? Hardly. Instead, before leaving the area near the finish where exhausted racers caught their breath and removed timing chips from their shoes, Fletcher shook hands and congratulated all 55 finishers, right down to the last place runner. "David Bondi taught me that," Fletcher said of the 2004 CIC champion from South now running for the University of Oregon. "It's really a big deal to even finish this race on a tough course and to finish strong. I think of it like everybody's on my team." - *By Mike Campbell, Anchorage Daily News, September 29, 2008*

Player's dad charged in attack on coach

MONTGOMERY, OH. - A man faces charges he attacked a Sycamore junior varsity football coach over the weekend at a school stadium. Police said Michael Smith, 38, of Blue Ash, faces one count of assault after the alleged Saturday attack at Sycamore Junior High. Smith is the father of one of the players, said a school spokesperson. It is unclear if that player is from Sycamore or another school. Smith is accused of grabbing Hank Ray and slamming him into a fence behind the stadium. Then, Smith allegedly rammed his arm into Ray's jaw. Ray refused medical treatment. Spokesperson Erika Daggett released a statement Monday. "Sycamore Community Schools does not condone any display of aggressive behavior such as what was reported to have occurred on Saturday. As such, we have taken appropriate measures to ensure the safety and well being of our employees and students." Daggett would not elaborate on what those measures were. - *The Cincinnati Enquirer, September 30, 2008*

For more information about the *Sports Done Right* initiative visit
www.sportsdoneright.org or call 1-866-767-8540

