Using sports to control deviance and violence among youths: Let's be critical and cautious

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Using Sports to Control Deviance and Violence among Youths: Let's Be Critical and Cautious

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The goal of this chapter is to encourage critical thinking about using sports as a means to control deviance and violence among young people. One way to accomplish this goal is to frame the topic in new and unexpected terms and to ask new questions about the topic. This helps us to break away from the dominant public discourse that usually occurs around the combined topic of youth, deviance, violence, and sports. I have found that many people in the United States have particular images in their minds when they think about using sports to control deviance and violence among youth. For the purpose of raising questions about those images, what would you think if I indicated that this chapter will focus on the following two questions:

1. Are corporate CEOs who participated in organized youth sports less likely than other CEOs to initiate and approve corporate policies that deviate from anti-trust rules, do violence to the environment, or have violent consequences for residents in low-income inner-city neighborhoods?
2. Can we control corporate deviance and violence through youth sports programs offered to young people who are likely to acquire power as adults in this society?

Are these questions consistent with the images that most of us have in mind when we think about controlling deviance and violence through sports? How are they different? What are the origins of the dominant images that many of us use when we think about this topic, and what are the consequences of those images for the way we think about policies, programs, and research agendas?

My purpose in asking these two questions is not to distract us from important issues, but to force us to keep a wide range of important issues in mind as we discuss the possibility of using youth sports to control deviance and violence. As we think about this topic, it is important to ask at least eight additional questions:

1. How are deviance and violence defined in our research reviews and program discussions, and what "counts" as deviance and violence, and what does not?
2. Who is identified as deviant or violent as we use our theories and frame our research?
3. What conceptual frameworks do we use to think about deviance and

violence among young people, and on what assumptions are particular frameworks based?

4. Who and what escapes our critical attention as we use particular frameworks to discuss youth, deviance, violence, and sports?

5. How and why have youth sports have been identified as a potentially effective antidote to the wide range of problems facing some young people today -- problems such as teen pregnancy, a lack of prenatal care, low birth weight babies, child malnutrition, lack of child care, under-funded schools, poor and unsafe housing, unemployed and underemployed parents, a lack of public transportation, high stress, high levels of environmental pollution, drug use, HIV and AIDS, assaults, murders, and gangs formed around desperate attempts to find hope or express anger and despair?

6. What leads many people to think that youth sport programs might solve problems of deviance and violence when research clearly shows that these problems are related to a long history of economic decline, high rates of poverty, and feelings of despair in inner cities (Wilson, 1996).

7. Why do many people see corporations as the new hope for solving the social problems affecting inner city youth when these same corporations have moved jobs away from inner cities and demonstrated little interest in training and hiring workers from low income areas in the United States?

8. Why do so many people today ask, "What if there were no sports?" instead of "What if there were no decent jobs enabling parents and their children to live with security and hope?"

These questions are important because we live in what might be called an "era of the corporation," and many of the images that influence public discourse about social problems are generated and distributed by those corporations. Those of us in the academic world realize this because we find that we must apply to corporations for grants when we seek support for research and programs related to social problems. We know that power and resources today rest primarily in the hands of the men who control large, transnational corporations. In the United States, over 98 percent of these powerful men are white. The policies set by these men and those who work for them serve to set parameters and to direct the focus for many of our grant proposals.

Although many of the white men who run these corporations and sit on corporate boards are good people who want to do the right thing, their jobs depend ultimately on maximizing dividends for shareholders. We should remember that the CEOs of major corporations do not receive incomes frequently in excess of $7 million per year (during the late 1990s) plus other perks because they have worked to solve social problems. Therefore, I frequently ask critical questions when the CEOs and public relations directors of large, transnational corporations generate and distribute the images used to frame many of our ideas about social interventions and social programs.

The images generated by corporations, including corporations selling athletic shoes and apparel, are so pervasive today that students in my classes now

express their social concerns by asking the question, "What if there were no sports?" When I hear my students say this, I wonder if this question, first asked in Nike commercials in 1997, distracts my students from asking more critical and useful questions such as, "What if Nike hired low wage workers in Indonesia and Vietnam, and there were no jobs in the inner city?" I think it does distract many of them. Therefore, we have class discussions through which my students quickly realize that having no job, coping with the legacy of racism, living in communities without strong and supportive social institutions, and facing the future without hope are indeed worse than having no sports to play.

 With these issues in mind, I will critique some of the public discourse that increasingly frames our ideas about social intervention in the lives of young people today.

Dreams about Character, Behavior, and Sport Participation
 I often am amazed by the pervasiveness of beliefs and assumptions about the character-producing and behavior-shaping potential of sport participation. Dreams of using sports to promote or redirect the development of young people, especially those who have been defined as problems and threats to society, has a long history in the United States. I will not discuss that history other than to say that these dreams have taken different forms depending on historical conditions, the prevailing political climate, and dominant beliefs about the populations of young people encompassed by the dreams.

 Through U.S. history there have been two major recurring dreams about youth sports. The most prevalent one is the dream of using sports to control deviance and violence by constraining and constructively socializing young people who have been identified in dominant public discourse as lacking the character required to restrain themselves from disrupting the social order. This is what might be called <u>the social control and deficit-reduction dream</u>.

 This dream often corresponds with cultural climates in which certain young people have been identified as "problems" or "threats" to society. The dream focuses on changing the personal characteristics and behaviors of these young people so that they can escape their immediate environments and become productive citizens in the very same social and economic system that gave rise to the conditions that limited their lives in the first place. If this seems to be an ironic dream, it is.

 This dream does not focus on the need for social justice, <u>or</u> on rebuilding strong community-based social institutions, <u>or</u> on reestablishing the resource base of the communities where these young people live, <u>or</u> on politicizing and then empowering these young people to be effective change agents working on behalf of their communities. Instead, it focuses on increasing self-esteem among young sport participants so that they can pull themselves up by their athletic shoe laces and escape the conditions that led others to label them as "at-risk," mark them as problems, and see them in need of control and socialization. This dream consists of a modern version of the <u>pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-</u>

bootstraps approach to solving social problems.

According to this dream, sport programs are forms of social intervention that can be used to "fix" the character and lifestyle defects of certain young people in inner city areas, while controlling them at the same time. Success in this dream occurs if crime rates decline and if young people are less apt to disrupt the social order. The young people most in need of "fixing" in this dream usually come from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds.

This social control and deficit-reduction dream is frequently described in dramatic terms by people in "the social problems industry -- a high growth industry in our increasingly privatized political world. The people in this industry sell proposals that are based on the dream that sports can be used to eliminate character deficits in certain children and thereby minimize problems in the society as a whole. For example, when the Midnight Basketball League was founded in Glenarden, Md. in 1986, it was noted in Sports Illustrated that this program would take "Black inner-city males off the streets by keeping them in the gym during . . . the hours when they would be most likely to get into trouble" (Bessone, 1991, p. 21). Subsequent discussions of "midnight basketball" have followed this dream theme. In fact, most of them have occurred in association with debates about crime bills. During these debates it has been clear that many people believe that these leagues can be used to control the behavior of young, black, inner-city males -- a segment of the population defined by many policy makers as an "urban other" in need of policing (Pitter and Andrews, 1997).

A second recurring dream about character, behavior, and sport participation involves using youth sports to expand developmental opportunities and to build leadership and other usable skills among young people defined as assets to the community. This is what might be called the social opportunity and privilege-promotion dream. This dream also focuses on individuals, but the emphasis is on building their strengths rather than reducing their deficits. The dream does not focus on young people learning to pull themselves up by their athletic shoelaces. Instead, it focuses on young people achieving success by learning how to take advantage of the privileged positions their parents have obtained in the society.

This dream, like the social control and deficit-reduction dream, has nothing to do with social justice, community development, or structural and cultural transformation. It assumes that the world is right as it is, and that the challenge for young people is simply learning to position themselves to benefit from how the world works.

Those who have this social opportunity and privilege-promotion dream see sports as microcosms of the larger world -- a world in which competition prevails, where individual confidence makes a person a good competitor, and where teamwork is needed to put together the deals that lead to success in the marketplace. Those who have this dream assume that sport participation prepares young people for this world, that playing sports opens doors to

opportunities and enables young people to live more successful lives than their parents live.

My goal in this chapter is to first raise questions about the usefulness of these two dreams and then to argue that we need alternative dreams that fall outside the parameters set by either the social control and deficit-reduction dream or the social opportunity and privilege-promotion dream. Examples of alternative dreams would include dreams informed by a quest for community development rather than by a quest only for individual achievement, and dreams based on concerns for justice rather than on concerns only about individual freedom and choice. They would also include dreams that visualize young people growing into political and cultural change agents, not just young people who are aspiring stock brokers and bank presidents. They would be dreams in which progress is defined in terms of maximizing the public good, not maximizing only individual and corporate bottom lines.

My point here is that we need dreams, including sport dreams, that go beyond images of smiling, airborne, athletic cultural icons that have magically escaped or transcended a world full of difficult social, economic, and political challenges to reach awesome heights of individual achievement. Of course, these "be like Mike" (i.e., Michael Jordan) images are comforting for privileged people who wish to think that difficult social, economic, and political problems can be solved if every individual would only try harder, run faster, and jump higher to achieve the American Dream. But they are not the images needed to inspire real social transformation.

Unfortunately, the alternative dreams that I have described do not inform dominant public discourse about social problems today. Where are the images that might be used to construct alternative dreams? Why are these images not seen in television commercials and halftime reports of sport events sponsored by corporations? Such images are difficult to find, and they are not included in commercials and halftime reports because they do not represent messages that are compatible with dominant corporate interests today.

Illustrations of dominant sport dreams

Two events that occurred recently in the Denver metropolitan area serve to illustrate the social control and deficit-reduction dream and the social opportunity and privilege-promotion dream. The events, both involving youth sports and both covered by the Denver Post, also show how these dreams draw on and influence ideas about young people and about the social worlds in which they live.

During February 1997 there were two separate cases involving adults pleading for youth sport programs and facilities for young people in the Denver metro area. By chance, one case involved an ethnically mixed, working class and low income inner city area encompassing a predominantly minority population in Denver. The other case involved a predominantly white, upper-middle-class suburb that is far from the inner city.

The texts of the media coverage of each of these cases were quite different, as were their implications and general tone. I realize that there are many ways to read news stories. But when these stories are viewed in the context of current historical conditions, prevailing political orientations, and dominant beliefs about young, poor, inner city youths of color and beliefs about young, upper middle-class, white suburban youths, we can identify at least some of the assumptions that inform them and influence how people read and interpret them.

I have selected quotes from the news coverage of each of these two cases to provide a sense of how the issues involved in each were conceptualized and portrayed in the stories told in the articles. My goal is to show how public discourse and community discussions about policy issues are related to, and informed by, each of the two major sport dreams I have described. My argument is that when these news stories are juxtaposed and viewed in connection with that discourse, they assume, use, and evoke powerful images and ideologies. The news coverage, as the quotes partially show, implies important unstated assumptions -- assumptions about young people, sports, families, communities, ethnicity, adults in the lives of young people, and the organization of society in the United States. Please note that my argument is *not* solely based on these two cases and their associated media coverage. In fact, by themselves, these two cases are not very significant except that they are similar to many other cases that are and will continue to occur in the United States. Therefore, these two cases illustrate rather than provide the basis for my analysis.

The inner city case.

The first case involved a debate over which organizations in the city of Denver would have access to inner city softball fields during the summer of 1997. The Police Athletic League (PAL) had been granted the bulk of field permits, and other organizations were questioning this decision because they had no fields on which to play games and run their leagues. The coverage of this story was informed by the "social control and deficit-reduction dream."

As the debate about access to the softball fields occurred, the coverage in the Denver Post went like this:

> The controversy has been brewing . . .. Competition for the finite supply of fields and play times is always fierce . . .. [An aide to the mayor] said the summer [PAL] would `give kids an opportunity to do something besides hang out on the street and get into trouble.'

> "[The PAL director] . . . said if the police league doesn't get the fields it was originally allotted, the summer baseball program may have to be scrapped altogether. "Summer baseball may not happen this summer. Where it's going to go from here, I don't know (Front page, Denver Post, 2/12/97).

A day later, the follow-up story reported that backers of the police league,

meanwhile, claimed there would be "riots in the streets" if it isn't allowed to play summer ball (Denver Post, 2/13/97, p. B-1).

The underlying theme in the overall coverage of this issue was that the low-income, minority youths in this inner city area need to be kept off the streets, and that if they did not have adult supervised activities to keep them occupied, they might engage in disruptive behaviors. The arguments being used by the representatives of the Police Athletic League, and the newspaper coverage itself was grounded clearly in the social control and deficit-reduction dream.

When viewed in connection with dominant public discourse today, this coverage reaffirms certain assumptions about the characteristics of certain populations of young people and their families. I am not saying that these assumptions underlie everyone's interpretations of the coverage. But popular stereotypes and dominant cultural images strongly suggest assumptions that these inner city youth are potentially dangerous and likely to get into trouble unless they are placed in structured settings where they are controlled by adults. Other assumptions that underlie a dominant reading of the coverage are that the parents of these young people are uninvolved and unable to control their children, that the young people are inclined toward deviance and should be protected from the environment and themselves, and that the streets and the community as a whole would be safer if these young people could be controlled and socialized through sports.

Before everyone who has ever used the "get-kids-off-the-street-and-keep-them-out-of-trouble" argument gets defensive, let me say that I realize the importance of any programs that provide young people with safe contexts in which they can develop competence and come to understand that they are valued members of the community. However, my point here is that when this argument is combined with dominant ideological orientations today, it ties directly into the social control and deficit-reduction dream that many people in positions of power use when they think about certain social problems and about how sports might be used to solve them.

When the political winds are blowing in a strong right wing direction, many legislators do not think twice before taking that argument and using it to justify funding for new prisons instead of new athletic fields. They think that if getting people, especially people of color, off the street is the way to keep them out of trouble, nothing could be more effective than putting them behind bars. Funding priorities in most states suggest that this has already occurred.

Another danger with the "get-them-off-the-street-and-keep-them-out-of-trouble" approach is that it lets powerful people off the hook by reaffirming popular assumptions that identify young low income and minority youth as "problems," as "at-risk" and in need of intervention in the form of externally imposed systems of socialization and social control. At the same time it allows them to ignore key questions that would force them to acknowledge important social issues. These issues include recent changes that have led to (1) a dislocation of economic activities in most inner city areas populated by low-

income minorities, (2) a resurgence of racial and socio-economic residential segregation, (3) a gutting of city funds that could be used for social programs serving the needs of children in low income communities, and (4) the re-emergence of an ideology that blames children and their unemployed and underemployed parents for the problems they encounter as they live lives devoid of hopeful visions of the future (Pitter and Andrews, 1997).

The suburban case.
     At the very same time that the debate over access to inner city softball fields was occurring there was coverage of two competing private, suburban soccer clubs that had joined forces to solicit corporate sponsorships. They also united to lobby the local suburban government to provide funds for a new thousand-seat soccer stadium and twenty-four state-of-the-art soccer fields for the young people in the two clubs. The coverage of this story was informed by social opportunity and privilege-promotion dream. Consider the following segments from the newspaper coverage:

> *Nike has already agreed to supply the combined club with equipment and pledged to open the doors to other companies interested in corporate sponsorship of the stadium.*
>
> *The combined club wants to build a complex in the southwestern part of the metro area . . .. But combining the clubs will do more than just build fields, club officials said. It will also allow them to bump up the caliber of soccer and increase the chances of their kids getting college scholarships.*
>
> *`It's [mainly about] getting our kids national exposure. They would have [the] college recognition they deserve,' [the soccer club president] said.*
>
> *The new club would be able to attract better-paid coaches for the competitive teams, and the club's staff could help train the recreational coaches, who are now often parents of the players (Denver Post, Front page, 2/13/97)*

The coverage of the suburban case emphasizes the hope that sport programs would provide young people in upper-middle-class communities with deserved exposure and recognition. It also was hoped that this exposure and recognition would maximize opportunities for these young people to attend college with athletic scholarships to pay their way. The assumptions associated with such coverage are that sport participation for these young people is secondary to developing competence and attending college, that these young people deserve opportunities to expand their contact with the world and prepare for the future, and that these young people are valued and have potential that should be developed. Also assumed is that their parents care enough to be coaches and to pay for trained and certified coaches for their children, and that communities are best served by giving these young people opportunities to develop their skills, gain recognition, further their education,

and then achieve positions where they can make contributions to society.

Themes in the coverage and interpretation of both cases.
If we view the media coverage of both of these cases as part of a public discourse in which youth sports are defined as vital sites for socialization experiences, there are at least six similar assumptions underlying the overall coverage of these and many other cases:
1. Change is grounded primarily in maximizing individual freedom and choice (as opposed to maximizing social justice).
2. Progress is best measured in terms of individual achievement (as opposed to community development).
3. Problems are best solved by fostering individual mobility (as opposed to transforming communities economically and politically).
4. Programs should focus primarily on increasing self-esteem (as opposed to creating change agents and community organizations to instigate structural and ideological transformation).
5. Controlling deviance and violence best occurs by making poor, young people responsible and accountable (as opposed to transnational corporations and political leaders accountable).
6. Violence is associated with young people, especially those in gangs (as opposed to the corporate and government decisions and policies that have had devastating consequences for low income, minority communities).

Learning from Experience
My purpose in the previous section was to use two everyday examples to illustrate that we must be cautious as we dream about using sports to control deviance and violence. If we are not cautious we may unwittingly reaffirm ideological positions that identify young people, especially young people of color as "problems," and then forget that the real problems are deindustrialization, unemployment, underemployment, poverty, racism, and at least twenty years of defunding of social programs that have traditionally been used to foster community development in ways that positively impact the lives of young people.

When we forget these latter issues, we let off the hook political and corporate leaders who have taken for granted that the bottom line must inform social action. Or worse, we end up letting those "bottom liners" frame our own social action in ways that focus almost exclusively on individual character development and behavior control and ignore issues of community development and social transformation. Of course, it is important to have strategies that increase individual achievement and boost standardized test scores. But strategies are also needed to address key structural problems such as underfunded schools, communities without services, poverty, racism, and the economic dislocation that has devastated inner city areas and given rise to a generation of young people desperate for hope and support.

Regardless of how many sport programs are sponsored by public, non-profit, and private organizations, there will always be an emphasis on using violence as a means of surviving and gaining status when young people live their lives in contexts where there are pervasive threats to physical well-being, moral worth, the achievement of adult status, and in the case of young men, threats to masculinity. Abandoning projects that foster social justice and community development in favor of offering young people a choice between participating in sport programs so they can be saved through assimilation, or joining gangs and risking lives in prison, clearly misses the point (see Cole, 1996a, 1996b).

In addition to creative programs for young people, what we need today are programs and policies that make powerful people and the organizations they represent accountable for the forces that have gradually eroded and sometimes devastated working class communities. The call for such programs and policies will not come until questions are asked about what counts as violence and who counts as deviant in our society. Assuming that chronic unemployment and the poverty and hopelessness it causes are best handled by using sport programs to socialize the children of parents who have no access to decent jobs is certainly questionable. If the provision of sport programs distracts attention from economic factors that have destroyed the foundations for community in inner cities, school funding formulas that produce savage inequalities in the lives of children, and political decisions that have eroded inner city infrastructures and social programs, the programs subvert the possibility of needed social changes.

Additional reasons to be cautious about our sport dreams.

In addition to being cautious about sport dreams because of the ideological foundations on which they often rest, we also should be cautious because research on sport participation and behavior suggests that, <u>by itself</u>, playing sports is a poor antidote for deviance and violence. Those who play sports are less likely than comparable others to engage in deviant or violent behaviors <u>only when</u> participation is accompanied by an emphasis on a philosophy of nonviolence, respect for self and others, the importance of fitness and control over self, confidence in physical skills, and a sense of responsibility (Trulson, 1986; Coakley, 2001). Simply removing young people from "the streets" is just the beginning. Furthermore, if sport programs emphasize hostility toward opponents, aggression as a strategy, bodies as weapons, domination of others, and letting referees and coaches make calls that young people should learn to make for themselves, we can't expect rates of deviance or violence to decrease. Only when the meaning and experience of sport participation connects young people with others in supportive and positive ways can we hope for rates to decline.

Further caution is suggested by research showing that sport participation, under certain conditions, provides a context in which groups of young people develop a collective hubris that may be associated with extreme behaviors such as binge drinking and a range of assaultive behaviors (Donnelly, 1993; Snyder,

1994). When sport participation separates young people from the rest of the community and when young athletes see themselves as superior to others who are not part of their athletic fraternity, deviance and violence may be directed at those "outsiders" who are seen as undeserving of their respect (Coakley, 2001).

In general, we know that sport participation does not produce a catharsis in a psychoanalytic sense or a definitive set of moral lessons leading to special off-the-field sensibilities about good and evil. We also know that sports often <u>do</u> serve as contexts for important experiences in the lives of some young people, and that sport participation can produce positive developmental outcomes when it expands the number and types of connections with others and broadens young people's ideas about who they are, what the world is about, and how they are connected with that world. But when sport participation constricts relationships with others and encourages the formation of a unidimensional view of self, it often will be associated with negative developmental outcomes.

These are not earthshaking conclusions, but they do lead us to be cautious when we make generalizations about the consequences of sport participation in the lives of young people and when we frame sport programs as tools for constructively intervening in the lives of young people.

<u>Making Dreams Happen</u>

Although there are good reasons to be cautious about what we can expect in connection with sport dreams, I empathize with those dedicated people who have used sports as a tool for connecting with and supporting young people. I especially empathize with the dedicated youth sport coaches and program administrators who have used sports as a life preserver for rescuing young people drowning in dangerous mix of malnutrition, inadequate health care, poor housing, underfunded schools, homelessness, HIV and AIDS, dangerous and polluted environments, drug use, teen pregnancy, police brutality, gangs, assaults, murders, and parental unemployment.

Regardless of the social, economic, and political origins of that mix, young people must be rescued by any means available. However, if this rescue work is not accompanied by strategies that attack the origins of the problems, we will continue to run short of life preservers.

In the meantime, for those engaged in this rescue work there is encouraging empirical support for making the case that under certain conditions sports can serve as a life preserver for individuals. Support is found in research on sports, on psychosocial development, and on adolescence. The combined findings on these topics emphasizes the fact that young people, regardless of background, face an identifiable range of developmental challenges as they grow up, and that meeting those challenges is most likely when they have access to a variety of personal and social resources. Sport programs, under certain conditions, can put young people in touch with those resources. But this does not occur automatically, nor do young people automatically use accessible resources in

positive ways. So making dreams happen through sports can be tricky, and it depends on our knowledge of the experiences of young people rather than on our knowledge of sports.

At the risk of oversimplifying an impressive array of research and theory on youth and youth development, I have concluded that positive transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are most likely when young people live in a context in which they are physically safe, personally valued, socially connected, morally and economically supported, personally and politically empowered, and hopeful about the future. To the extent that sport programs serve these needs, we can expect them to contribute to the positive development of participants.

Being physically safe

Research indicates that threats to physical well being produce withdrawal or defensive violence, neither of which is conducive to youth development. When sport programs provide young people with a safe environment they facilitate developmental possibilities. Actual positive development, however, depends on additional experiences. But the importance of providing safety cannot be underestimated, especially for young people who live in areas where violent and destructive forces are prevalent (Wacquant, 1992).

Research also suggests that feeling safe can be difficult when sport programs emphasize hostility as a motive for dominating opponents, aggression as a strategy, and bodies as weapons. Regardless of the sport, an explicit philosophy of nonviolence combined with respect for self and others is important if young people are to feel physically safe. Interestingly, research indicates that even in heavy contact sports such as boxing and the martial arts it is possible to teach participants a philosophy of nonviolence (Trulson, 1986; Wacquant, 1992, 1995).

Being personally valued

Research indicates that a positive sense of moral worth facilitates positive development. When sport programs teach skills, develop competence, and give young people opportunities to display that competence, self-esteem is promoted. If this occurs in settings where young people are treated and respected as whole persons, and learn how to clarify their experiences in the larger community in which they live, self-esteem may then grow into a general sense of moral worth. This is especially important in the case of young people who are members of groups that have been socially and culturally marginalized in society. However, when sport programs separate young people from the community, it is difficult for them to convert self-esteem in an athletic setting into a sense of moral worth in a larger social context. The ultimate goal is not to take young people off the streets, but to enable them to become agents of progressive change and social development in their communities.

Being socially connected

The experience of being connected with peers, of having close friends and belonging to a group in which experiences can be shared, is key to development. (This is why young people become members of cliques, crews, and gangs.) Sport programs contribute to development when they provide access to peers combined with learning experiences that enable young people to connect with those peers in deep and supportive ways. Such connections depend on being responsive to others, caring, being empathetic, being flexible, and having good communication and conflict resolution skills (Martinek and Hellison, 1997). These forms of social competence are especially important for young people who regularly face adversity and conflict in their everyday lives.

Being morally and economically supported

Development during childhood and adolescence depends on receiving moral and economic support from adults, including parents, teachers, mentors, and advocates. Adults and adult institutions structure the life course of young people by providing opportunities to develop and use abilities in their communities. Adults also guide the moral and economic choices made by young people (Williams and Kornblum, 1985). When supportive adults and adult institutions are absent, development suffers and poor choices are common.

Marita Golden highlighted the importance of adult support in the lives of young African American males in her book, Saving Our Sons (1995). As she thought about what her own son would need to survive his life as an adolescent growing up in Washington, DC, she concluded that he would need "a `congregation' of fathers, formal and informal, to surround him" (p. 62). And as she thought about the importance of those men in her son's life and in the lives of his peers, she noted that "all the `male role models' in the world could not reach a boy unless he had been consistently, purposely loved and cared for, unless he already had been taught and was prepared to trust himself and others" (p. 64).

Golden's insights remind us that rhetoric about role models often distracts attention away from the fact that young people need advocates, as well as models, in their lives. Too often the call for role models is used by privileged white adults to justify why they should not be held responsible for providing moral and economic guidance for young people of color.

Being personally and politically empowered

When sport programs are organized so that young people themselves have a voice in the program and are heard by those who run the programs, sport participation is likely to facilitate positive development in the form of autonomy (Martinek and Hellison, 1997). When young people have a voice they are much more likely to be seek information about the program in which they participate and the community context in which the program exists. Many young people desperately need experiences that show them they can exert control over their

own lives and the contexts in which they live.

Using sport programs as sites for enabling young people to become critically informed about their connection with the world and the social, economic, and political forces that are at work in the world around them is rare. However, sport programs have been used to enable young people to gain more control over their personal lives and over the immediate sport settings in which they practice and play games (Martinek and Hellison, 1997). Of course, it is a big jump from exercising control over one's personal life in a gym and over the immediate context in which sport participation occurs to exercising control in the community at large. But the process is similar, and it would seem that there is the potential for learning how to exercise such control in the community.

Being hopeful about the future

When sport programs expose young people to a wide range of possibilities and visions for their lives, they open the door for positive development. Hope is grounded in a sense of efficacy or the belief that goals can be achieved. After years of working with young people in inner city areas, Tom Martinek and Don Hellison (1997) note that hope exists in the lives of young people to the extent that they see significant others in their lives achieve goals and see some degree of predictability in their immediate social environment. Similarly, Golden notes that as young people grow up they "need to see their parents capable of providing for them [so they can] learn that the world is a fair and reasonable sphere for them to enter, one that they can trust" (p. 60). If they see parents unable to deal with their own problems and an environment in which events appear to be random and capricious, hopelessness is likely.

Sport participation may put young people in touch with significant others who can deal successfully with challenges in their own lives and who can serve as "hook ups" to experiences and opportunities that provide young people with the exposure to possible futures and the hope of making positive things happen in their lives. But this clearly involves more than shooting baskets or running sprints. Many adults who work with young people in inner city areas realize this and try to serve as "hook ups" for as many youngsters as possible.

This list of needs can be daunting for anyone who considers how sport programs might positively impact the lives of young people, especially young people living in areas where economic dislocation and other social problems are pervasive. But unless these needs can be met, sport programs will never be a viable form of _social_ intervention.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to help all of us keep sports in perspective in our discussions about youth, deviance, and violence. Strategically organized sport programs may serve to control rates of deviance and violence among those lucky enough to be included in them. But the long-term effectiveness of sport programs as forms of social intervention depends on how they are

combined with critically informed strategies to alter the forces that have produced serious economic dislocation and other social problems in certain communities.

When sport dreams focus our attention strictly on issues of individual mobility and distract us from developing strategies for community development, they often do more to reproduce social and economic inequality than they do to produce meaningful social and economic transformation. In the absence of policies and programs designed to foster transformation, the provision of sport programs is likely to benefit corporate bottom lines more than it will ever benefit those who have been socially and economically marginalized to the point of desperation. And it is desperation that gives rise to deviance and violence.

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