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The Impact Sports Have On Youth Development

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When you think of the word “sports” you most likely think of the basics which include Basketball, Baseball, Football, and Soccer. For most people these are the first words that come to their mind. For me when I hear the word, I think of all of the benefits I received while playing sports starting at such a young age especially in middle school. I think of how sports can be used as a beacon of hope for middle school kids in economically depressed communities to develop social skills, positive self-esteem, , and

Sports are a big part of a child’s life especially those kids in economically depressed communities. The sport they choose to play in middle school can impact their future for many years to come. The benefits they will receive while playing that sport is something they may not even realize until later on in life.

As a young middle school adolescent, playing sports is a very normal after school activity. Many children play for their school’s team while others may choose to play for a traveling team. Either way, they are still involved and participating in some type of sport. For most of them they go to school, go to practice, and then go home. What they are not realizing is that during the time they are at practice or at school with their coaches and teammates they are learning and being exposed to so many positives behavior and life skill patterns. These are patterns that will not only help them in their current situations in life but in their future as well. These are the key skills they will need to become successful individuals.

Unfortunately, not all children come from loving, caring, and supporting homes. This breaks my heart for those kids because it is not their fault. I was very blessed to come from a family that cares about my well-being. When I was in middle school playing sports they were at all of my games. My mom made sure my siblings and myself were respectful to everyone especially our coaches and teammates. Not all children have a mom or a dad in their life that tells

them they love them or makes sure they have every need fulfilled whether at home or away from home. Not every student has a parent at home showing them and teaching them the proper behavior and life skill patterns they need to be successful not only while they play sports but in life in general.

When I was growing up, it was my brother and I that were playing sports. I am the oldest of four children. My brother is only a year younger than me. We were always on the same teams from little league all the way into Junior College before I transferred to play Basketball here at Murray State.

We were very fortunate to have someone in our lives who always taught us how to treat others. We had many great role models to look up to on and off the court. We had our mom who raised us to treat everyone with respect and who showed us how to be the best person we could be. On the other hand, we had male role models such as our coaches who taught us how to behave not only on the court but off the court as well.

I have two younger sisters. One is in high school and currently plays basketball as well. She also has great role models who are helping her grow and learn on and off the court as well. I think sometimes it is easier for young females to find those positive role models to look up to. In today's day and age, not every young male has a male role model in their life and it can be harder for them. Coaches can be that great male role model for them.

Specifically, for the young male athletes who do not have a positive male role model in their life, it can affect them more than you might think. The Father and Son relationship is very important in a young adolescent male's life. It can affect a male's present and future in many more ways than what people might imagine. "Youth Sports have been recognized as an arena for men to meet increased cultural expectations of being involved in their children's lives. Through

involvement in formal and informal sports activities fathers are seen as contributing to children's socialization to values and useful adult life such as competitiveness, self-esteem, responsibility, and collaboration." (Gottzen, Kremer-Sadlik, 2012) Male coaches can be that positive role model for these youth that come from these types of backgrounds and fill that gap.

These athletes are just kids. They need someone to guide them. They need someone to show them they love and care about them. If a child feels as if they are not loved and cared for, it can and it will affect them for many years to come. It affects everything about them. It will affect their behavior, attitude, relationships, school, friends, sports, all of the above.

This is why sports can be a great way for these kids to learn how important all of these skills are in life no matter what type of background they may come from. First, one of the most important skills sports can teach these kids is to develop social skills. The term social skills covers so much more than just communicating with someone. The term includes displaying good manners, communicating effectively with other people, and being considerate of other people and their feelings.

When on a team, it sounds so cliché but there is no "I" in team. "When you score a goal, hit a three, or get a touchdown, you do not do it for yourself, you do it for the team because the name on the front of the shirt is more important than the one on the back." – Herb Brooks (Uhlmann and Barnes, 2015) For a lot of young middle school students, they are really starting to get serious about whatever sport they are playing. They are developing and growing. This can cause them to gain selfish tendencies and focus only on winning or on themselves and their own feelings.

When this happens, it can cause conflicts between teammates and the relationship they will have with both their coach and their teammates. Any athlete knows that the relationship

they have with their teammates and their coaches is crucial. One negative relationship on the team between just two people can and will affect everyone and not in a good way. One negative attitude can ruin it for the entire team.

I have seen this happen before. I have played basketball my entire life. Over the years, I have had many different teammates. Some were better than others. The ones that stood out to me the most were the ones that were either really easy to get along with or they were the ones who could not get along with anyone.

During the middle school years of a child's life they are going through so many changes. These changes are physical and mental and cover a multitude of situations. This can be a rough transition period for them. For some middle school kids they are helping to raise their younger siblings due to the parent or parents having a vigorous work schedule. Some kids are having to help their mom or dad bring money into the home because they cannot live on just one income. It can be an overwhelming period of time for them especially for these children in low economic settings.

“Based on the variety of provisions offered by peer relationships, including companionship, affection, intimacy, instrumental aid, and enhancement of worth, as well as the rising of importance of peers during the adolescent years, it seems quite likely that peer relationships play a critical role in helping youth negotiate the challenges of transitioning to the middle school environment.” (Kingery and Erdle7, 2011)

Due to these changes, their emotions are on extremely high levels and it can cause conflicts in the classroom, at home, or on the field or court with teammates and coaches which is completely understandable. These are the times when they are the most vulnerable causing them

to be emotional. Their moods can change extremely fast. Almost at the snap of a finger. One thing someone says or does can push a button causing conflicts to arise.

“When handled effectively, conflict provides opportunities to strengthen relationships and assist youth in developing peaceful conflict resolution skills.” (Farrar, Gordon, Hemphill, Janke, 2018) Conflict usually has a negative connotation and is seen as being a bad thing. I think quite the opposite. I think conflict can be used in a positive manner. It all depends on how these adolescents choose to respond to the conflict in their lives. It can also depend on how the other people in their lives choose to deal with conflicts as well.

There can be many different types of conflicts and on many different levels. Here is an example, in middle school the chances of you being on the same team as your best friend is very likely. The chances of you playing the same position are also very likely. When friends are on the same team, it has the potential to cause problems. It may be a conflict due to something sport related. It could also very well be a conflict that is not sport related and has to do with something that happened outside of practice or a game. Either way, it is so important they are taught how to handle these conflicts in the proper manner and sports can be a great learning tool for these situations.

When on a team, you spend countless hours together with your teammates and coaches. Hours at practice together. Hours at school together. Hours outside of school or practice as well. When you spend that much time with someone you get to know them very well. You start to pick up on characteristics about their personalities. When you know someone so well due to spending so much time with them, you get comfortable. When you get comfortable you sometimes feel as if you can say whatever you want to them.

Middle school kids are already inclined to do this due to them maturing during this developmental period of their life. We all know how we were back in middle school thinking we knew everything and were always right. Believe me, middle school kids still feel this way in today's society if not even worse than before. This can be a central cause of conflict. It is a normal trait for kids this age to have.

When conflict arises between teammates or coaches it is so crucial that it is handled the proper way. These kids if they do not already know how, must be taught how to handle these situations in order to build positive relationships. Like I said earlier, for a lot of middle school adolescents they may not have these positive role models in their lives. They may have the opposite. They may have someone in their life who is showing them how to handle conflict in the worst way possible. Coaches and teammates have such a great opportunity to reach out to these kids and help guide them into the right direction of conflict resolution.

When I was growing up, there was one athlete on my middle school team that came from a very rough background. His father was not around. His mother did the best she could to provide for them. He was helping her take care of the house, bills, and his younger siblings. He was having to do it all at such a young age. He was not a happy kid and he had many reasons not to be. One thing I remember about him was that he would come to practice with a very negative attitude which was understandable. He was tired. He would pick fights with other teammates and the coaches. He never thought anything was his fault and he never wanted to fix the situation. He did not have good conflict resolution skills.

In 2018, there was a study that was conducted that addressed conflict resolution. "The purpose of this study was to develop an applied model that addresses conflict resolution in sport based youth development programs." (Farrar, Gordon, Hemphill, Janke, 2018) The main goal

of this program was to encourage the youth that participate to be responsible and to handle themselves in the correct manner. “These programs provide strategies that encourage youth to transfer personal and social skills into other areas of their life. The program includes responsibility goals for youth participants and a structured lesson format.” (Farrar, Gordon, Hemphill, Janke, 2018)

One of the things that stands out to me the most about kids in today’s society is that they want to know how this is going to help them in real life. They want to know how learning something in school or on the court is going to be applied to a real-life situation they may be put in. If they do not feel as if it will help them in real-life they do not care. They do not want to learn about it. Coaches must now adapt those principles into the way they coach now. They must be able to transfer the skills they are teaching them during practice and games about how to treat themselves and their coaches and teammates into their personal and social lives as well. A great way for coaches to make that connection is through goal setting.

One of the things that stood out to me the most about this study was the use of goals. You are never too young to begin setting goals for yourself. The earlier the better. Middle school kids can set realistic and achievable goals in all areas of their lives if given the proper support system and guidance. For some of these students, their goal may need to be working on their conflict resolution skills. These kids can become so stressed out due to things going on at home, at school, etc. and it can take a toll on them.

The stress they see or experience at home can become their stress that they take other places and to other people; coaches, teammates, and friends. It can become very easy for them to get a negative attitude and think their life will always be like it is right now. This is why goal setting can be such a great tool for these kids. They can choose to set a goal to make a better life

for themselves starting at such a young age. The earlier they begin to make positive life decisions the better.

Coaches can help guide them into setting these goals for themselves. One of the most important things for coaches to do is to know their players. To really get to know and understand their players not just on the court or field but in their personal lives as well.

They should be updated on what their home life is. They should know who they live with and the relation to them. They should know the living conditions of their home. They should know who they are friends with and who they hang out with. They should know what they like to do for fun and in their free time. The bottom line is, coaches should get to know their athletes.

This can help them when setting goals. It may not be realistic for one of their athletes to set the goal of losing/gaining weight if they do not have the proper food supply at home. It may not be realistic for one athlete to stay at the gym after practice or before practice to make an extra 50 shots per practice. They may not have someone who can take them and pick them up. They may walk to school and practice every day. The point I am trying to make is that, in order for coaches to help their athletes set these goals, they must know their background and who they are.

A second great skill these adolescents can gain from playing sports is the building of positive self-esteem. Middle school is such a difficult time for students already. It is very normal for them to have low self-esteem. They are constantly comparing themselves to their peers. They are constantly wanting to change something about themselves. You can see this in the classroom and in sports as well during the middle school years of a student's life.

“Adolescence is a period of dramatic change that often sets the stage for losses in positive feelings of self-worth (self-esteem). The identity struggles and egocentrism can contribute to painful emotions and a greater emphasis on peer relations often ignites youth's concerns about

their own social skills and others' sincerity and allegiances. These changes appear to be particularly difficult for young adolescents, who are often coping simultaneously with the onset of puberty and the transition to an unfamiliar and possibly stressful middle school setting. Negative views of the self, in turn, constitute a risk factor for emotional difficulties (depression) and engagement in delinquency.” (Rhodes and Roffman, 2004)

I think for many girls, middle school is hard because they are having low self-esteem issues with physical traits about themselves. “Gender can also affect changes in self-esteem during the early adolescent years. Girls consistently experience sharper declines than boys in their levels of self-esteem.” (Rhodes and Roffman, 2004) It is easier to spot in girls than boys. When boys have low self-esteem it usually can be sports related.

Middle school is really the first time for many of these students to try out for their desired sport. I know when I was in middle school tryouts were very serious. My school took basketball tryouts seriously and cuts were made. It was not easy to make the team and there were some boys who did not make it. I can understand why they could have low self-esteem due to this. They just want to fit in.

These students are trying to find their place. They are trying to find their place with their friends, classmates, teammates, etc. They want to be accepted. They want to be liked by their coaches and their teammates. For some of these athletes in economically depressed communities, they may not get that acceptance at home so they look for it in other places through other people. They look to find their confidence and their purpose through sports.

In 2017, a study was conducted to research how youth sports can be used as a vehicle for social identity and positive youth development. “The purpose of this study was to investigate the

relationship between social identity and positive youth development in sports.” (Balish, Brown, Bruner, Christopher, Forrest, Gray, Shields, Webber, 2017.)

To test this, they used a sample of 219 youth engaged in sports. The results showed that “being able to identify as part of a sports team may be particularly important for youth to psychosocially develop during the tumultuous changed and instability associated with adolescence.” (Balish, Brown, Bruner, Christopher, Forrest, Gray, Shields, Webber, 2017.)

The article clearly states that these peer groups (teams) provide essential support that they need in order to develop socially. When they develop socially in positive ways, they are going to be more confident in themselves and their abilities. This then leads to improved self-esteem.

“The findings extend previous research highlighting the benefits of social identity on teammate behavior and team performance demonstrate how social identity may contribute to positive youth development through sport.” (Balish, Brown, Bruner, Christopher, Forrest, Gray, Shields, Webber, 2017.)

For a lot of these students, they are around negativity at home. They may be told, “You can’t do this. You will never achieve that. You will never be good enough.” If told these things and exposed to this type of environment for too long, they will eventually begin to believe these things. Kids want to be loved. They want to be accepted. The ones who need love the most will show you they need it in the most unloving ways too. The ones who want to be accepted and want to fit in the most will act as if they do not care and act as if they do not want to fit in. When in reality, they do. They just never thought they could because they do not have that positive self-esteem.

I think one of the best ways a coach can encourage and build that positive self-esteem in their athletes is by saying one positive thing about their athletes each practice or game. Coaches

should never focus on only the negative during a game or a practice. If you give one critique, follow that up with a positive. For example, “Shaq, you turned the ball over twice during the game tonight. But, you played great defense and lead the team with three steals.” The purpose of this is to build their confidence and their self-esteem. Not tear it down. They may already get that at home. They need to be built back up. Not torn back down. This will build their confidence.

When kids are more confident in themselves, they are more likely to step out of their comfort zones in many areas of their lives. Their goal should be to constantly improve and get better. This is a great leadership quality to have and on teams, there are always leaders.

For the most part, it is usually the older members of a team. But, they had to build up to that leadership role. It did not just come immediately after the first day. They kept working to become that leader and take that role. Sports are a great way for kids to gain these great leadership qualities that can be used on and off the playing field.

I am a junior college transfer. I have only been at Murray State for two years. But, in this year, my senior year, I am a leader. Throughout my years of playing basketball I learned how to be a leader on and off the court. I learned how to lead my team which is what I am doing now. We have three seniors on the team and we all work together to lead the team and set the example they need to follow especially for the younger guys. We are a pretty young team. We have quite a few freshman and sophomores but we also have quite a few junior college transfers like myself. I have taken the responsibility to take those guys under my wing and show them the ropes. I would not be able to do that today if my coaches would not have taught me how to do so starting at such a young age.

A third characteristic kids can gain while playing on a sports team is the development of behavioral skills. “Worldwide there is an increasing recognition of the positive role of programs

instilled with the philosophical basis of get involved rather than dissuade from. These programs developed alongside health promotion initiatives can strengthen, the positive behavioral patterns and lifestyles of today's youth." (Agnieszka, Leslaw, 2015)

This article talked about how important it is to create a program that promotes physical activity and sports. This will then help children refrain from such bad behavior. "One effective means of preventing anti-social behavior, especially among young children and adolescents has been through the use of sports and physical activity." (Agnieszka, Leslaw, 2015)

I think one of the biggest stereotypes people can make about athletes is that, "oh you play sports. You stay in shape all season." This is not always the case. There are many athletes who only train and stay physically active during the season especially young athletes. They think in their minds that they will stay fit even during the off-season. Coaches have the great opportunity to stress to these athletes how important it is to stay physically active and to always take care of yourself even after sports are over. Instilling these positive physical activity patterns at such a young age is a strategy they will hopefully carry with them as they grow older as well.

Even though these kids are in middle school, they are still kids. They still need time to get their energy out. They still need time to let their frustrations out. Physical activity is a great way for them to do this. It is not good for them to keep all of their energy or frustrations balled up inside of them. If built up long enough, it will eventually all come out and it will not be pretty. It will show in the classroom, at home, with friends, and with teammates. "It involves on the one hand mimicking the patterns learned at home." (Agnieszka, Leslaw, 2015)

Sometimes these frustration patterns are behavior patterns they pick up on at home. For some of these youth in economically depressed communities they come from families who are under a lot of pressure at home, at work, or just in life. These pressures eventually begin to build

up and just like with kids, eventually come out in behavior patterns. Due to this, these students may be seeing this happen at home a lot.

They see it so much and so often it becomes normal for them. They think it is normal and okay for them to respond in the same manner. It is all they have ever known and all they have ever been exposed to. They think it is okay to lash out at their teachers, friends, or teammates. This is why sports are such a great tool for showing them positive behavior patterns and the proper ways to handle stress and stressful situations.

Just like we talked about earlier with learning positive conflict resolution skills, behavior and conflict resolution skills go hand in hand. If you have both, you will be able to handle life situations with a lot more ease and less struggle. For example, if a coach get upset with one of their athletes because they turn the ball over at the end of a tied ball game, the other team steals it, scores, and wins, there is a good chance the coach and the rest of the team is not going to be happy with the athlete that made the turnover.

How should the coaches and teammates react? Many people would probably say they should be mad. They should be upset. While those are all very common behavior patterns for that situation, that is not the best way to handle it because that will only cause conflict. Instead, they should point out what happened, make an adjustment for the next game, and move on. It should not be something that is harbored on for many practices and games to come.

That will not change the outcome of the game. It will not change anything at all. It will only make the athlete who made the turnover feel worse than they already do and cause the team to be against them. The athlete may have had a situation go on at home before the game that caused him to be unfocused. Coaches must be willing to understand the pressures their athletes are going through no matter what happens at practice or in a game.

The pressures these students deal with at home are the same pressures that cause them to lash out on the playing field. When all of this stress and pressure builds up inside of them it will eventually come out. Coaches must show them how to handle those pressures. They must show them and teach them that they can take those frustrations out on the playing field but not on others.

When I am frustrated or upset, I take it out on the court but in a healthy and positive way. I go to the gym and shoot. I go and shoot for as long as I can until I feel better and relaxed. This was something my coach always taught me starting at a young age. It is fine to let your sport be where you let your frustrations out. But, you must make sure you are doing it in a healthy manner.

A manner that is not hurting anyone else or yourself, but you are still improving yourself and your game. Let your frustrations out while you play ball. I do. I have found if I am mad or upset I usually have a really good game. I take all of that energy and use it on the court. That is what fuels me to want to play so good. That is what fuels me to keep going. Basketball is what makes me and has always made me want to make good decisions and smart behavior patterns.

Back in December, against Middle Tennessee State University, I was mad. I was dealing with some things and I was frustrated. That night, I had one of my best games ever in my collegiate career. I followed the advice my coaches starting in middle school had always told me. "Let the court be where you let your anger out. Use that as motivation to win." That is exactly what I did that night.

Coaches at the youth level have the chance to make such a big impact on their athletes when it comes to these smart and positive behavior patterns. "Coaches at the youth level have been found to assume at least 13 different roles: instructor, teacher, trainer, motivator,

disciplinarian, substitute parent, social worker, friend, scientist, student manager, administrator, publicity fundraiser.” (Bloom, Loughead, Julie. 2008)

The titles that stuck out to me the most on that list of thirteen was substitute parent and motivator. For a lot of these athletes their coach may be the only person they have that makes them feel like they are valued or loved. This can be a main reason why students act out and chose to make bad behavior patterns. They are seeking attention but in the worst way. In reality they want someone to show that they care about them and that they care about the behavior choices they are making.

Coaches can sometimes be the only person in those athletes’ lives who are motivating them to do good in school, outside of school, in sports, and outside of sports. My siblings and I were very blessed to have our mom be our motivator and the reason we wanted to do good. But sadly, not all students have that role model in their lives.

For athletes their coaches can sometimes be the only ones who show them how to handle situations. This brings me to another point as to why sports are so important in the behavior development of these young adolescents. Coaches must also conduct healthy and positive behavioral decisions. Coaching is not easy. Coaching can be stressful. Life is stressful. Coaches have a critical role in staying positive and making good decisions to be a positive role model for their athletes in any and all situations they may be placed in.

Whether you think they are or not, the athletes on a coach’s team are always looking up to the coach. They are always watching what they do. They are watching to see how they react in certain situations. Coaches should be that proper example showing them how to handle those situations and how to keep their emotions intact while in those situations. “Coaches’ behaviors,

attitudes, and values are imitated by their players not only in sports settings but in other context of players' lives too." (Lisinkiene, 2018)

"How a coach behaves can influence aggressive behaviors, thoughts, and anxiety among his or her athletes. It is therefore important that coaches behave in a way that athletes perceive as being positive or supportive. Hoigaard identified positive coach behaviors among a sample of elite Norwegian football players, reporting that supportive behaviors included providing positive feedback (behaviors that recognize and reward good performances), training and instruction (e.g., coach behaviors that enable an athlete to improve), and democratic behaviors (e.g., allowing team members to make decisions). (Nicholls and Jones, 2016)

In a study conducted, "A total of 274 athletes who resided in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Australia, aged between 16 and 45 years of age participated in the study. The 47 item CBS assessed the athletes' perceptions of seven of their coach's behaviors. Thirty-nine of the questions were classified as supportive coaching behaviors, compared to eight of the questions that were classified as unsupportive behaviors." (Nicholls and Jones, 2016)

Some of the questions on the survey were as follows, "How frequently do you experience the following coach behaviors? A questions classified as from the supportive coaching behaviors was *The coach(es) most responsible for my physical training and conditioning provides me with structured training sessions. And the coach(es) most responsible for my mental preparation provides advice on how to perform under pressure.*" Examples of unsupportive coaching behaviors were, "*my head coach yells at me when angry and shows favoritism to others.*" (Nicholls and Jones, 2016)

"The findings from this study illustrate that perceptions of coach behavior are associated with how an athlete perceives his or her relationship with the coach and the appraisal of

situations. It is therefore paramount that coaches consider their behavior and maximize their level of supportive behavior, whilst minimizing unsupportive coaching behaviors. (Nicholls and Jones, 2016)

The choices these students make starting at such a young age can be the decisions that they carry later on in life with them. The behavior choices they choose to make at a young adolescent age can be the same decisions that affect their future. But due to them being so young they do not realize this. They simply do not understand their actions can have serious consequences.

These students are living in the present. They are living in the moment. They do not have the ability to step back and see the impact their behavior choices are making on themselves and the others around them. They only see what is happening now and what is happening to them. One bad decision can be the end for them. One bad decision can be the reason they are kicked out of school. One bad decision can be the reason they are no longer able to play the sport they so desperately love.

If their sport is taken away from them it is like a death in the family. They do not know what to do with themselves. Their sports is what was going to make a better life for them. Their sport is what was going to make a better life for their family. Their sport is what keeps them out of trouble outside of school and keeps them on the right path in life. One mistake and bad behavior decision can take all of that away for them and their family but at such a young age, they simply are not thinking that deep.

Coaches should remind their athletes of this. They should remind them that at any point, your sport can be taken from you. It is a privilege to play the game you love, not a right. They should provide them with example of athletes who have ruined their careers by making bad decisions. This generation is always wanting you to make real-life connections. This is a prime

example of when coaches can. They should stress to them that we all make mistakes. We all mess up from time to time. but sometimes, some mistakes are bigger than others and have bigger consequences and they are not invincible even though at that age, most of them believe they are.

Take Lamar Odom for example. He was a huge superstar playing for the Los Angeles Lakers. He had everything going for him. He was married. He had a great career. He was making great money but he had a problem. He had a terrible addiction and the choices he chose to make ruined his life, his family, and his career.

He was suspended for violating the NBA's drug policy. He received a charge for driving under the influence. He was ordered to be in rehab for three months for alcohol abuse. He seemed to be doing better once he was traded to the Dallas Mavericks but he began to use drugs again because he was not happy with the deal he had been given in his trade to Dallas.

He was found at a brother after passing out from an overdose. During that time he almost died. Not only did his choices affect him but they also affected his family as well. It ended his marriage and his career. He never played in the NBA ever again.

Athletes in today's day and age should be kept up to date on stories like this because unfortunately this is what our world has come too. This is what sports has come too for many of the professional athletes. While some things do get swept under the rug and passed on, not everyone gets that lucky. Young athletes should know, they are not above the law just like professional athletes are not above the law either.

When kids make good behavior choices it can also have an impact on their family as well. Just like in the story I shared about in the previous paragraph. It can be what causes a change in other family members. Coaches have the opportunity to reach out to athletes and their families and encourage positive behaviors in them as well. "Participation in sports has been linked to a

series of positive social and psychosocial benefits including greater communication in family.”
(Kanters, Tebbutt, 2001)

Sports are a great tool for communication between the child and the parents. This gives them time to spend together. It gives them something to talk about. When parents are engaged and want to know how their child’s practice went, it makes the child feel good.

If these athletes come from a single parent household, this can help that parent feel at ease. It allows them to know someone else also cares about their child and the wellbeing of their child. It gives them after school opportunities to be active and make friends while engaged in activities that keep them out of trouble.

Communication is key in every single relationship you have no matter how old you are. Just because these athletes are young adolescents does not mean they cannot properly communicate with someone. Just because they may not have the best communication with their families at home does not mean they cannot learn how to better communicate. The interaction with coaches and teammates can be that great learning tool these kids can then carry into their relationships at home.

Coaches should have a good relationship with the parents of each child on their team. A good coach/parent relationship is critical. “If we want to make a positive change in youth sports then it seems logical to start with factors that are likely to have the greatest impact on a child’s sport experience- the parent.” (Kanters, Tebbutt, 2001)

If coaches do not have a good relationship with their parents, the kids will pick up on this and the kids will be the ones to suffer. Coaches with the help of parents can show them how to properly communicate. Coaches and parents working together can be that positive model for

these students to show them how to interact with others and how to properly communicate. The sooner they learn and pick up on these traits the better.

A fourth characteristic kids can gain while playing on a sports team is the improvement in their academics. Sports and academics go hand in hand. Without good grades you cannot play. Without good behavior at school you cannot play. There is a strong correlation and relationship between the two.

Teachers and coaches should make it their mission to preach and explain how the performance of an athlete in the classroom can and will affect their performance on the playing field. If a student cannot maintain the proper GPA requirements they must be held accountable. They should be held accountable for their actions even the ones they chose to make in the classroom.

Coaches should stay in close contact with teachers to ensure their athletes are performing to the desired academic levels in the classroom. Sports are not more important than academics. Sports are a privilege. A privilege that can be taken away at any given moment if they are not performing well or behaving properly at school and in the classroom.

Coaches should motivate their students to do well in the classroom. Coaches should motivate their students to want to do well and be successful in school. For many of these students they begin playing their sport at such a young age. This can cause them to become burnt out and they can lose motivation faster than others. This can be a trait they carry into other aspects of their lives as well especially in the classroom.

Once you stop enjoying something, you no longer want to do it. You no longer want to participate. You no longer find joy in it. You create a negative attitude and lose motivation. For many of these students they have these negative feelings about school. They simply do not enjoy

it. They do not want to do their work and they have no motivation to do well in the classroom. Their only focus is on whatever sport they are playing. They must be told and shown by coaches and teachers that their actions in the classroom have a direct impact on their team and their teammates.

For example, in basketball, you cannot play without your leader on the court, your point guard. The point guard takes charge and runs plays. Without them, the rest of the team would suffer. What is going to happen if that point guard is not performing well in the classroom and has to sit out? Things will not run as efficiently on the court without them. The point I am trying to make is everyone must do their part. "The success of any team depends on the commitment of its members to not only excel personally, but also aid one another." (Uhlmann and Barnes, 2014) Everyone must hold each other accountable especially in the classroom.

Teammates can hold each other accountable and help each other not only on the court but in the classroom as well. If an athlete knows one of his teammates is struggling in a certain class, coaches can encourage them to help that teammate. In order to be successful everyone must work together. At the end of the day, all these athletes want to do is play ball. But, without doing well in the classroom they cannot. This is why sports play such a huge role in motivating these students to continue to do well in their academics.

Studying, learning, attending school, maintaining good grades, and making good behavior choices at school is not easy for all of these adolescents. Many of them may have negative attitudes towards school. They may have negative attitudes towards teachers and negative attitudes about whether school is important to them or not. They may have the attitude that the only reason they go to school is because they have to. This is an extremely common attitude for

adolescents in economically depressed communities. This can reflect in their work at school and their behavior at school.

We already discussed how these adolescents do not come from the most loving homes where their every need is made a priority and is met. Academics may not be that important to their family. Grades may just be a number on a sheet of paper to them and their family members. A high school education or even less may be all their family has. It is so easy for these same attitudes and beliefs towards education to become instilled in these adolescents.

Coaches must stress to their athletes how important education is. They must express to their athletes how an education can change your life, drastically in amazing ways and offer tremendous opportunities for you if you let it.

Sports are temporary but an education is forever. Coaches cannot stress this enough to their athletes. This should be one of the main mottos a team stands for. Sports can be taken away from you in the blink of an eye. An injury can ruin your future. But there is not a single person who can ever take your education away from you. The sooner you become motivated in the classroom the better.

Take John Wall for example. He was a star athlete growing up. He still is. He attended the University of Kentucky in college to play Basketball. While there, he was one of the very first student athletes to start the trend of one and done's. He came to Lexington for his freshman year and then left. He declared for the NBA Draft and was taken as the number one pick. Essentially, leaving his education behind.

He plays for the Washington Wizards now. In the 2018-2019 season, he was injured ending his current season. But, one of the things that stood out to me the most about his injury was that he announced he was going to go back to school and finish his degree.

“He revealed at February’s All-Star weekend last year that he promised his dad, who died when Wall was eight years old, that he would finish school. In a letter to his dad published in *The Undeclared* last January, Wall said, “ I know you are proud of the man I have become. I am the first in our family to attend college and although I have not yet completed my degree, it is a goal that I hope to accomplish.” (Neuharth-Keusch, 2019)

I think coaches should use athletes like John Wall as an example to show their team that the plan you may have for yourself can change. You must always have a backup plan. Something to fall back on when things do not work out the way you planned for them too. It can happen to anyone including professional athletes. But your education will always be there.

At the University of Kentucky, their student athletes have a life time scholarship. It doesn’t matter how long they stay at Kentucky. It doesn’t matter if they choose to leave after their first year. They can always come back and finish their education. Athletes should look for colleges like this. They should be motivated by schools that allow their players to do this.

It has always been a stereotype that athletes just get from grade to grade because teachers pass them. It is in every movie script and every story line. While this may be true in some cases, coaches must never let their athletes attain this attitude. They must never let them think they do not have to try just because they play sports or that things will come easy to them just because they are an athlete. Coaches must instill a hardworking and motivated mindset in their athletes about school and the effort they put forth in the classroom.

Athletes are and should be held to a higher standard than the rest of the student body at school. Being on a team comes with great responsibility even in the adolescent years of age.

Everyone knows teamwork is key to any successful sports team. “In sports you have to collaborate with other team members to win. To succeed in education, a student needs to work hand in hand with teachers and fellow students.” (Winters, 2018)

Many of these students see teachers and principals as their enemies. They see them as people who just stay on them or as people who just nag them and give them work to do. They are seen as an enemy to them because of the negative attitude they have towards education. They view them as people who do not want them to play.

Athletes must know and coaches must explain that their teachers are there to help them. Their teachers want them to succeed in the classroom just like their coach wants them to succeed on the playing field. Teachers act in the role of their coach just in a different setting, the classroom.

When kids feel like you care about them the more open-minded they will be and the easier they will be to work with. This can be a very big struggle for teachers when it comes to athletes. Sports are a great model to teach and show these adolescents that the adults in their lives actually do care about them, including their teachers.

When adolescents feel like they can trust their teachers and feel like their teachers care about them, they are more willing to give a better effort in the classroom and show motivation to keep improving in their academics. Just like coaches, teachers hold these students accountable for their actions not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom as well.

For a lot of the students in economically depressed communities, they have a hard time trusting people. Sometimes they cannot even trust their own family members so why should they trust their teachers? This can be a huge void teachers have a hard time filling. They must show these students they can trust them and they must build that trusting relationship with them.

One of the most special things a teacher can do for their student who is also an athlete is to complete one simple act. To go and watch them play. To actually go their game and watch them compete. One of the most important things a teacher can do is build relationships with their students. This is a great way for teachers to build those relationships with athletes.

When a teacher takes time out of their day, outside of school hours to come and watch these students it will have a big impact on these adolescents. It shows them that someone cares about them. It shows them a very important concept. Teachers are role models in their lives who do more for them than just teach them from 8:00 to 3:00, Monday through Friday.

When teachers really invest in their students, adolescents are more willing to listen to them. They are more willing to work with them. It becomes easier for them to motivate the students to want to do well in school. Athletes do not want to let their coaches down because they know their coaches will be disappointed in them. The same principle can apply in the classroom as well. These athletes become motivated to give great effort on their assignments because they want to make their teachers proud of them.

Many times it can be hard for these athletes to balance school and their sport. Most of them put sports as the top priority and school second or maybe even further down on their list of priorities. This is natural for these adolescents. Teachers and coaches can help these students find a way to balance both.

They can help them find ways to be successful in both worlds, academics and sports. Teachers, coaches, and athletes can all work together as a team to ensure an athlete is staying motivated in the classroom and on top of all of their studies. At the end of the day like we said earlier, sports are temporary but an education is forever.

In today's society of sports it is so easy for these kids to get caught up in the lifestyle of professional sports. Every year in college basketball you see the "one and done's." Athletes who go to school for one year, leave, and then go to the league. That is the norm in the sports society today.

That has become part of the culture. No wonder these young adolescents are putting academics to the side. They are seeing it on tv every day. They are seeing eighteen and nineteen year-olds dropping the importance of education to cash a check. What they do not see is the percentage of those who get to the league and do not make it. Or the ones who chose to leave school, go to the league, and do not get drafted or picked up by any team at all. Then what do these athletes do?

They do not know what to do because they chose money over an education. It is crucial starting at a young age for these kids to be taught that money is not everything. Money will not make you happy or solve all of your problems. Sports will not last forever and when you need that backup plan when the plans you had for your life go wrong, your education will always be there no matter what to save you and be there to pick you up.

It has become part of our everyday sports culture to choose money over an education. For a lot of these students, money is a scarce resource for them and their family. They are barely getting by. They live paycheck to paycheck. They do not have the adequate funds to live a lavish lifestyle. Therefore, the minute they can get that opportunity they are going to jump on it as fast as they can and you cannot really blame them. But, what you can do and what coaches can do is to help better prepare them to handle those situations when the time comes.

Coaches have the opportunity to instill and encourage smart decision making in their athletes starting at a young adolescent age. For the rest of their lives, they are going to be faced

with making decisions. They are going to be put into situations where they must make smart and responsible decisions and choices.

They may not have the guidance at home or the role models at home to help them make these decisions. They may not have someone in their family who is helping them manage their money or manage their simple everyday life. Coaches can be that positive reinforcement and role model to these students. They can be the ones to encourage them to focus not only on their sport but on their education. They can be the ones to encourage them to make smart decisions about everyday life, about their money, about not only their present but also their future.

The sooner these students learn to make smart decisions in life, the better off they will be when they become older later on in life. A lot of these students are forced to grow up a lot faster than most kids. They are exposed to more and are put in more difficult situations than a lot of adults ever will be. Due to this, they begin to mature a lot faster than most kids do. This is why their decision making is so crucial.

This is a prime example of how the decisions and way you choose to make decisions is a trait that should be learned at a young age in life. In today's society, students are exposed to a lot more. It is a lot tougher to be a young adolescent in today's day and age. They are exposed to more. They have social media at the tips of their fingers. One bad decision to tweet, Instagram, or Snapchat can be the reason they get into trouble. Trouble that can follow them and haunt them for the rest of their lives.

It seems now a days, more and more athletes are gaining the attention of college scouts starting even earlier than high school. This means these athletes must be even more careful about the information they are putting onto their social media.

Just one simple post can be the reason they do not get their scholarship for college. Coaches are now looking at social media even more in today's society and it is the reason they are passing on a lot of great athletes. When you come to college, you are not only playing your sport but you are an ambassador for that program and for that school. That is a huge responsibility.

“College coaches frequently emphasize their efforts to educate players on social media etiquette. But before they get on campus, coaches must monitor recruit's online lives closer than ever. It is common to hear coaches talk about attempting to avoid recruits with poor character but they also do not want a public relations disaster damaging the university's reputation.”
(Ryan,2018)

Jeff Brohm, Purdue head coach makes a great point about social media. “That is your resume to the world. That is what you are trying to tell the world you are all about. That is how you are advertising yourself. Be smart with that stuff.” (Ryan, 2018)

Even when you think you have deleted a social media post, it can always be found. It never truly goes away. Coaches should check on their athletes social media no matter what age they are frequently. They should set rules and guidelines after tryouts for social media. The team should know what the consequences are and should be held accountable.

Mike Gundy, football coach for Oklahoma State stated, “We have people on our football staff that track every one of our players and every one of our recruits. I remind our guys every week about that. I just tell our guys to stay off social media! Especially, if you cannot behave. I have three sons and I tell them the same things. I just do not understand how taking a picture of something you are doing and presenting it for the whole world to see makes any sense. Why would you do something questionable and incriminate yourself by posting it? That kind of

behavior has certainly lost some young men an opportunity to play football at Oklahoma.”
(Hawley, 2018)

Not only is Mike Gundy stressing the importance of social media habits for anyone but especially for athletes. He clearly states social media has been the reason they do not offer scholarships to men in today’s society. You can be passed on and overlooked if you chose to make poor social media decisions. Or your scholarship can be taken away from you after a school has chosen you.

“An athlete’s criticism on the field will get them recognized and perhaps earn a college offer. However, an athlete’s character and actions off the field- and on social media- can get them recognized but for the wrong reasons. One high school football player learned this the hard way and is looking to use his experience to help educate others.” (Toler, 2017)

Shedrick “Shell” McCall III was a star running back. “He started a YouTube channel in hopes of beginning a YouTube career. He wanted to talk about funny experiences and things he has been through in life. Unfortunately, McCall was unaware that his use of foul language and actions in these videos would have huge ramifications for him.” (Toler, 2017)

“College scouts do not just look at the player and their abilities on the field, but also how player, the person, acts off the field; even what they post on social media. For McCall it was one YouTube video in particular. He talked about an incident in which he was trespassing. That video went viral.” (Toler, 2017)

Not long after the video was posted he began to learn about the repercussions that would soon follow after his decision to post that video. “Soon after the video was posted, McCall received a phone call that his offer to play Division I football at Old Dominion- to a school he

had been committed to for six months- was revoked. All of his hard work to receive a Division I offer was gone, because of a video he posted on YouTube.” (Toler, 2017)

“McCall’s latest Youtube video has a different, positive message, and one for athletes of all ages. He wants to share his experience to prevent other athletes from harming their futures because of social media.” (Toler, 2017) His goal is to educate young athletes about the powerful effect of social media.

As you can see, social media can be a controversial topic. Social media has many great purposes if used properly and appropriately. If not, social media can be the reason an athlete’s life is changed forever. One bad decision they make as a young athlete can jeopardize their future. Yes, kids need time to be kids and have their fun with social media but they should be encouraged to use it properly.

Not only can sports be used as a way for these students to gain great character traits for life, but it gives them a chance to have fun and to be a kid. Like I said earlier, many of these kids are forced to grow up fast. They lose the time that they should have to act like a kid and most importantly to enjoy being a kid.

Sports should be fun for them. They should enjoy coming to practice, playing in games, and being around their coaches and teammates. Sometimes, the fun can be taken away for kids in sports. There must be a fine balance between winning and having fun. It is the coach’s responsibility to determine that line while still developing meaningful relationships with their players. “The relationship between the coach and the athlete has been recognized as an important factor in creating positive educational sports experiences for athletes.” (Lisinkiene, 2018)

One of the best and easiest ways to help foster these meaningful relationships while still being productive is to give the athletes a chance to be in control and to hold frequent meetings with them. These two simple tasks help athletes stay focused and motivated.

Practices should be focused and athletes should know what is expected of them. But not every practice has to be intense and hard. Coaches should allow for certain practices to be fun every once in a while. Let the athletes take control of practice one day. Let them choose what drills to run. Let them decide what practice will consist of that day.

Switch roles and let them be in control for a practice. Now, that does not mean you totally let them have control but show them they are important and their voices are important too. Coaches should sit down with their team at various points throughout the season to talk about the game but also to talk about life.

“The type, amount, and timing of feedback coaches provide underscores the nature of the coach-athlete relationship. Athletes’ self-perception and motivation were significantly related to the quantity and quality of coaching feedback they received concerning both performance successes and errors. Athletes reported being more satisfied when coaches offered positive feedback and when they offered rewarding feedback and more social support. Sinclair and Vealey (1989) found that athletes associated self-confidence with immediate feedback from coaches.”
(Kassing and Infante, 1999)

At the start of the season, they should sit down and talk about their goals for the upcoming season. What do they want to accomplish as a team this year? They should ask their players how they are doing. If they can help them in any way. Show them they care about them more than just on the court.

In the middle of the season, they should sit down and discuss their progress towards making those goals at that point and time. They should talk about what they have done to achieve those goals or what they need to do to better achieve them. During the middle of the season they should also talk about how school is going. Especially around midterms and when grade comes out. Coaches should be kept up to date on their player's grades and behaviors inside and outside of school. These meetings can be a perfect time to approach those matters and see how they can help them.

At the end of the season, they should reflect back on their season. They should see areas of improvement that they need to work on in the off season. They should ask their players what they think should be different for the next season or what should stay the same. Allowing their voices to be heard is crucial. That is one of the components that makes a strong team.

A second communication point at the end of the season should be specific for each individual on the team. Coaches should sit down with each player by themselves and reflect and discuss how they performed that season. This is a great strategy to use for players who will be returning next season. You can look at their stats, break them down, look for areas of improvement or areas they were successful in, and set goals and motivate them for the off season and next season.

Just like we talked about earlier, athletes must stay motivated. They need to stay focused and if they do not have a good relationship with their coaches or their teammates they can and they will struggle. "Coaches who are supportive, knowledgeable about the sport they are coaching, that prioritize athlete development, and are good motivators receive greater recognition. Conversely, coaches who offer little or no support are seen as ineffective. In this

sense, the interpersonal relationships between the coach and the athlete is of highest importance, because it can influence an athlete's motivation in sport." (Lisinskiene, 2018)

Communication between coaches and athletes is not always verbal. They can communicate nonverbally too. "Nonverbal communication is concretized in a group of messages that are not expressed in words and that can be decoded, creating meanings that can accompany, contradict, or accentuate the message transmitted through words. Nonverbal communication is a form of body language. The communication through body language is constant; the messages sent this way are continuous, making a permanent dialogue between the internal and external easier." (Dobrescu, 2014)

The facial expressions coaches use. The way they stand. These are all small but important characteristics athletes will pick up on. They can pretty much tell by the look on their coach's face if they are happy or not. Sometimes using nonverbal communication says more than actually saying something verbally. Coaches should be able to control their facial expressions and teach their athletes to do the same. The way you communicate nonverbally can say a lot about you and can change the situation.

"The coach-athlete relationship that contains elements of success and effectiveness is the ideal athletic relationship. The coach-athlete interpersonal relationships includes performance success, as reflected in improving a skill or achieving success, and personal growth." (Lisinskiene, 2018) The frequent meetings that we discussed earlier included these same key points.

One of the biggest impacts a coach-athlete relationship can have on these adolescents is helping foster athlete burnout like we talked about earlier. Athletes can train so hard and so long starting at such a young age, they can lose their motivation and it can start to take a toll on your

mental and physical health. These are issues good and successful coaches can help their athletes with.

“Psychological health outcomes of burnout and engagement are important to understand in athlete populations because of increasing the overall health and well-being of athletes may lead to more satisfied and resilient individuals through both good and bad sport-related experiences. Thus a deeper understanding of the impact of the coach-athlete relationship has on specific athlete physiological outcomes including athlete burnout and engagement has potential theoretical applied benefits.” (McGee and Defreese, 2019)

One of the biggest factors that can have a negative or positive impact on the well-being and burnout of an athlete is the behaviors of the coach. “Coaching behaviors have been found to be positively associated with athlete engagement.” (McGee and Defreese, 2019) As a coach, they should want to encourage their athletes. They should encourage positive attitudes, engagement, confidence, dedication, and enthusiasm just to name a few.

“For example, Curran, Hill, Hall, and Jowett found that the coach-created mastery climate, which reinforces learning and effort from athletes, was positively associated with confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigor in an athlete population. Ultimately, coaches’ relationships with athlete may promote athlete engagement, a positive psychological outcome for athlete, as well as potentially deter the maladaptive outcome of athlete burnout. Thus, collectively examining athlete perceptions of burnout and engagement and the coach-athlete relationship is an important empirical need.” (McGee and Defreese, 2019)

One of the best attributes an athlete can have is dedication and confidence. When an athlete has both of these and uses them to his/her best ability, they can be tough to compete

against. These are two great attributes they can use not only in sports but in other areas of their lives as well.

They can carry enthusiasm, confidence, and dedication into the classroom, their relationships at home and at school, their future endeavors, etc. It is never too early to begin to foster these characteristics into young adolescents. When an athlete is dedicated they will continue to work. They will not settle for only half of their best. They are going to always go above and beyond in everything they do. They will set goals for themselves. They will not only want to improve but they will want their teammates to improve as well.

They will push their teammates. They will encourage them to become better as well. The more you work on a skill, the better you become. The better you become, the more confidence that will grow within you. When you increase your confidence your enthusiasm for whatever you are doing will soon follow because you know you are capable of achieving whatever it is you are trying to accomplish.

One specific area we have not talked a lot about is the population of females in sports. It is very easy to overlook them when discussing this topic. They make up a very big group for sports even in economically depressed communities. These girls also receive a lot of benefits by participating in sports clubs.

“There is substantial literature describing the determinants of participation in PA (physical activity) for adolescents, and these are increasingly being understood using socio-ecological models. It is now common practice to examine determinants across the different domains of socio-ecological models. “ (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

“In socio-ecological terms, socio-economic status (SES) has aspects of the intrapersonal (e.g. education level, employment status and income of the individual), interpersonal (e.g.

education level, employment status and income of parents or caregivers) and environmental (e.g. profiles of education level, employment status and income for neighborhoods as a whole.)

Another important SES-related environmental factor is access to facilities, which in turn has various aspects including levels of provision (presence), geographical accessibility, and affordability. (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

“SES is associated with PA participation, with those adolescents higher SES households and or neighborhoods are more likely to participate in PA. there is evidence that adolescents whose parents have attained higher education levels are more likely to participate in organized sport, structured exercise and games play in their leisure time than those with parents with lower education levels.” (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

“Family support and support from peers/friends are key interpersonal factors which significantly influence adolescent’s PA behavior, including participation in leisure-time sport. Recent study results have indicated that of various psychosocial determinants, family social support was the strongest predictor of PA behavior for female adolescents.” (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

“Sport is a popular form of PA amongst adolescents and we know that involvement in club sport can impact positively on social and psychological well-being, with potentially greater physical and psychological health benefits than other forms of PA. Adolescents have ranked their life satisfaction higher if they were involved with sports clubs.” (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

“Community sports clubs provide opportunities for social interaction through both organized and competitive and unstructured (social) participation in sports. For example, clubs may work as social catalysts, leading to enhanced involvement and participation. Participation in

sports can also enhance social connectedness, social support, peer bonding, life satisfaction and self-esteem, and may reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.” (Eime and Harvey, 2013)

Young adolescent girls can handle the transition from elementary school to high school a lot different and lot harder than boys. That is very normal for females to have a harder time adjusting. They handle situations a lot differently.

Girls are typically more emotional. Girls can be a lot harder on themselves than boys are . Some of the factors that influence this is because of their peers. Therefore, it is very common for them to have low confidence, self-esteem, and anxiety during this transition. In today’s society it is harder for any adolescent to grow up, but it is even harder in my opinion to be a female growing up in today’s day and age.

There are so many resources out there, especially in the media that can influence young girls in either a negative or a positive way. Unfortunately, most of the time it is in a negative way. They are told they should look a certain way. They should dress a certain way. They should do this or they should not do that. Adolescent girls need those positive role models who encourage them to be themselves.

For girls on a sports team, they are around their teammates quite frequently. If they play on a school team, there is a good chance they are in classes together during the school day. Like we said earlier, being around their teammates a lot can sometimes cause problems because they become comfortable with each other. I think more problems can arise between girls.

Girls are constantly looking at the person beside them, in front of them, behind them, etc. They are comparing themselves to the other members on their team or in their class. They are looking at their physical appearance and may be questioning themselves. They may compare their own performance on the court, field, mat, etc. to another girl on their team. No matter what

it is, they are comparing themselves to someone or something else. They need someone to encourage them. Coaches and older athletes can help reinforce these positive attitudes in them.

Athletes have the opportunity to use their platforms for good to help the adolescent athletes that look up to them. “In today’s world, adolescent girls are bombarded with a constant influx of images of external beauty, which can cause them to question themselves and how they should look, but what they need are strong, confident, healthy female athlete role models.”

(Olmstead, 2015)

Peer pressure is difficulty for girls of all ages but female athletes can help offset that by encouraging girls to participate in sports and maintain a healthy active lifestyle. It has been shown that high school female athletes have more positive body images than non-athletes.”

(Olmstead, 2015)

“Female athletes make good role models for adolescent girls by promoting physical activity and involvement in sports, confidence, a strong work ethic, and emphasizing the importance of education. Confidence is very important to instill in young girls and it is a quality many female athletes exemplify both in and outside of their sport. Sports build leadership and teach girls how to work together as a team. both professional athletes and Olympians demonstrate how important it is to believe in themselves and their team in order to achieve greatness, which every young girl should do.” (Olmstead, 2015)

“These female athletes are also strong role models because they show girls everywhere that it is their work ethic and not good looks that will help them succeed. By practicing and spending time honing their craft, they can truly be all that they dream of no matter what their gender, race, or ethnic background.” (Olmstead, 2015)

“In order for many girls to compete in the sport they love, they must first make the grades, whether that is to stay on the team in middle school and high school or to gain acceptance to college, grades matter. Sports can be a means for many to go to college but they must also demonstrate a strong work ethic and good grades in order to be considered.” (Olmstead, 2015)

“Successful collegiate athletes show young girls the importance of gaining an education and there are lots of former female athletes now working at Fortune 500 companies, which can promote girls to stay in school and work hard. It has certainly been proven that women who have played sports carry that sense of teamwork, leadership, and confidence into their jobs after sports, which is another encouragement for young girls to get involved in sports.” (Olmstead, 2015)

“Female athletes, such as the recent United Women’s National Team who just took home the Women’s World Cup trophy, or Serena Williams who just won her 6th Wimbledon title, providing strong influences and show girls the benefits of being active. It is important for young girls to see the incredible achievements of these athletes and know that they too can accomplish such great feats both in their sport and later in their careers and personal lives.” (Olmstead, 2015)

There are several great organizations out there to help be a positive influence for young adolescent female athletes. The organization that stuck out to me the most while conducting my research was the Women’s Sports Foundation. “Founded in 1974 by tennis legend, Billie Jean King, the Women’s Sports Foundation is dedicated to creating leaders by ensuring all girls access to sports.” (Womenssportsfoundation.org)

One of the biggest components of their organization is their Athlete Ambassador Program. “The Women’s Sports Foundation Athlete Ambassador Program connects professional,

Olympic, amateur, and collegiate athletes with organizations throughout the country. The program matches athletes who want to “pay it forward” by serving as role models to inspire, educate, and relate to young girls and those who surround them.”

(Womenssportsfoundation.org)

“The Athlete Ambassador Program is designed to engage young girls in a meaningful and active way, through sports activities and to educate communities through discussions about health, responsibility, and leadership. Our ambassadors receive WSF training and educational tools, direct access to WSF team for consultation and mentoring. They are athletes across a wide variety of sports, who are experts in their fields and can speak to issues surrounding leadership, motivation, safety, and health. The athletes who participate in the program are women who foster a love of sports and want to spread the positive impact that sport can offer to all girls.”

(Womenssportsfoundation.org)

“The Women’s Sports Foundation commissioned the Coaching Through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls’ Play and Potential report to examine the intersection of early adolescent girls’ sports developmental needs with their “current day” experiences in sport, with the purpose of identifying coaching practices and strategies that will be support girls’ initiation and continued participation in sport.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

In my own personal opinion, I think it would be much harder to be a coach for a girls’ sports team than a boys’ sports team. The reason I think this is because girls are a lot more emotional than most boys are. Coaches must be more considerate of their feelings and really be careful about the approaches they take for coaching them.

“Coaches play an important role in getting and keeping girls involved in sports. Given the gender gap and disproportionate drop-out rates in girls’ sports participation which is heightened

as girls transition from childhood to early adolescence, there is a need for coaching strategies and practices that address the unique challenges girls encounter in participating in sport. Yet, there is a lack of evidence based research on developmentally appropriate coaching strategies to nurture girls' love for sport and to counter the barriers to their participation." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Employing a gender lens, the current report set out to learn from young girl athletes and their parents what they think and feel about coaches and to hear from experts and exemplary sports programs about coaching and program-level practices that maximize girls' personal and sport potential. While this report focuses on coaching as it relates to girls' sport participation, many of these findings would also serve to enhance the youth sport experience across gender." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"The research involved the use of multidimensional/multi-informant approach that entailed three major research components. First, interviews were conducted with experts in girls' sport and positive development to identify what might be key contributions to the gender gap in sport participation, and the specific types of coaching practices that can either contribute to or counter the gap." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Second, informed by what we learned from the expert interviews, the Women's Sports Foundation commissioned a national survey of 1,129 girls between ages of 7-13 who currently participate in sports and their parents. The survey results provide insight on how parents and young girl athletes experience and evaluate coaching practices and the coach-athlete relationship." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Lastly, to determine the degree to which current sport organizations that serve girls are able to meet the needs and optimize on the strengths of participating girls, a brief assessment was

administered to a sample of 64 programs within the WSF's extensive network of community partners. These programs have been identified by the WSF as exemplary for their service in providing quality sports opportunities to undeserved girls. The assessment offers important insights on how to build and improve upon coaching practices in girls' sports programs."

(Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

There were ten key findings. First, girls love sport. Second, The power of a coach. Third, girls want to have fun and be challenged. Fourth, Build supportive relationships. Fifth, Girls are strong and athletic. Sixth, Competition is a winning factor. Seventh, Goals motivate girls. Eighth, Female coaches are important role models. Ninth, Parental involvement is key. Tenth, Girls still face gender related challenges.

"Overall the vast majority of girls (93%) loved or liked their sport a lot, and this was key to their desire to continue their sport participation Liking/loving the sport was identified as the most prominent factor for predicting girls' intentions to continue playing their sport in the future. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of girls (64%) reported planning to play in high school and beyond."

(Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

The top predictors found to influence girls' liking/loving their sport are centered around social and mastery aspects of participation and include being with their friends, really liking the coach, not being afraid to try new skills, not being one of the least skilled players on the team, having goals related to their participation in sports, and perceiving sports as very important in their lives." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Coaches play a central role in getting and keeping girls involved in sports. Girls' liking of the coach was directly associated with future intent to keep playing sport, importance of playing, and love for the sport. Experts, as well as girls and parents, identified several features of

coaching practices and strategies critical for supporting girls' participation that align with two major dimensions of coaching. 1) the importance of a mastery-based coaching approach, and 2) the need to build supportive relationships with the context of sport." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"The majority of girls (85% or more) reported that their coaches created a positive environment that encourages safety, fun, skill building, and healthy competition. The girls cited supportive coaching practices that reward effort or trying a new skill over winning, encourage learning from mistakes while staying positive, and promote integrity and honesty. However, when asked about whether the coach places more emphasis on fun/skill development on winning, only about half of parents and their girls (49%), said their coach was more focused on team members having fun, and 83% of parents agreed that coaches should put more priority on having fun." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Building supportive relationships within sport is a critical ingredient for engaging and retaining girls in sport. Key relationships include those between the coach and player; those among the players through friendship and team cohesion; and those between other influential individuals that are involved in the athletes' daily lives, including parents, friends, and others in their schools and communities." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"Do not underestimate girls' ability. Girls are powerful, strong and very capable, and they need to be treated this way. Coaches who do not meet girls' needs and interests for competitiveness, or who "are too soft on girls, do not push them enough or treat them as fragile," send detrimental messages to girls that they are different and/or not as capable as boys or that they are not taking girls' sports as seriously. This can result in girls' lower perceived

competence, sense of belonging, and investment in their participation.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“An emphasis on winning was also perceived to be a highly positive coaching behavior when combined with an emphasis on fun and skill development, a combination that was predictive of girls intentions for long-term sports participation. Healthy forms of competition are ideal for fostering girls’ engagement. Competitiveness, including liking to win, competing against other teams/individuals, and even friendly competition among teammates, was one of the primary reason girls provided why sports are “fun.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“ Goal setting is a particularly important part of coaching so that having a coach who sets goals is not only predictive of girls liking the coach, but also girls loving the sport and intending to play in the future. Seventy percent of girls have goals related to playing their sport, with the majority of these goals focused on their own improvement in the sport, whether that is becoming better generally, working on a specific skill, or making the high school team. Although less common, some girls are discussed even higher achievement goals of acquiring college sport scholarships or becoming professional athletes.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“Girls more readily identify with and see a female coach as a mentor and as a role model, which in turn, can help counter stereotypes and boost girls’ confidence, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. Female coaches were overrepresented (85% and above) on sports viewed as more feminine (gymnastics, dance, cheer) and on all-girl teams (65%), but highly underrepresented (35% or lower) on sports viewed as more masculine (baseball/softball, basketball, soccer) in which girls are likely to face greater gender barriers for continued participation.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“Programs indicated female coaches were key to girls’ participation and retention, yet noted challenged in recruiting female coaches. Despite female coaches receiving more positive ratings (82%) than males, nearly three quarters (73%) of girls said they think very highly of their male coaches. It is equally important for female coaches as for male coaches to use a gender informed approach in their coaching practice to help promote engagement and offset the barriers girls experience in the sport context.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“The more parents participate, the more likely it is that their daughter loves their sport, intends to play throughout high school and beyond, and thinks playing sport is very/extremely important. While over 90% of programs responded they build relationships with parents and get them actively involved, and 75% of programs indicated parental education was a part of their programs (meeting with parents, providing materials), the most frequent challenge programs reported when coaching girls was engaging and communicating with parents.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“In contradiction to the numerous cultural messages that tell girls that sports are “for boys”, our national sample of girl athletes and their parents both highly endorsed (97%) that sports are as important for girls as they are for boys, and 75% of girls and 70% of their parents reported that it is extremely or very important that they play sports. However, these girls did not report experiencing some of the additional gendered challenges of being a female athlete.”

“For example, nearly one-third (32%) of the girls reported that sometimes boys made fun of them or made them feel uncomfortable while they practiced. Nearly one-third (31%) expressed that appearance related reasons were part of their motivation for their participation. Over one-third of girls (36%) said they intend to drop out of their sport prior to high school.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“Findings from this report will inform coaching education and practices across sport to help create a sport climate and coaching dynamic that encourages girls of critical age (ages 7-13), to fully participate, develop, and persist in sport so that they can reach their personal and sport potential. Consequently, improvements in sport climate and coaching practices will contribute to reducing the disproportionate drop-out rate among girls in sports beginning at early puberty, and close the gender gap in sport participation.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“The report indicates a number of positive ways parents, coaches, and programs are meeting the needs of girl athletes, and programs tell us more can be done to help address the challenges of recruiting and retaining girls in sport. While most exemplary programs surveyed have specific policies or coaching practices targeted toward enhancing girls’ sport participation, they indicated a need for more resources and coaching tools to build on their existing policies and practices.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“These include the development of education materials to address strategies for recruitment and retention of girls as well as coaching strategies for girls; the implementation of formal training programs for coaches, particularly volunteer coaches who may lack sport-specific coach training; the development of technology/apps for coaches; the establishment of accessible and widely available coaching clinics; and increased resources to encourage women to coach. Given the vital role coaches play in the lives of girl athletes, ensuring coaches’ success will have meaningful impact on maximizing girls’ play and potential.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

Some of the many benefits that we have already talked about that adolescents receive from participating in sports, it has been proven that girls benefit from sports in an even greater way than boys. “Youth sports participation is linked to substantial physical, social-emotional, and achievement-related benefits. For girls in particular, research consistently demonstrates

sports participation is linked to their improved physical and mental health; academic achievement; and increased levels of body esteem, confidence, and mastery, with some indication that girls reap greater benefits from sports participation than boys do.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

Even though it has been proved that girls receive greater benefits in sports participating than boys do, sadly there is still a high drop rate due to girls feeling inferior to boys in sports. They see the media coverage of sports on TV and it is all about men. They do not feel as important and therefore, decide to stop playing.

“Communities, schools, and parents devote more resources and invest more in supporting boys’ participation. “Pay to play” in public schools disproportionately affects girls’ ability to play sports and reap its benefits, as parents place greater value on sports participation for their sons than their daughters, both financially and ideologically. Thus, girls receive subtle messages from parents, schools, and communities that their participation matters less than their male peers.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“The media coverage of sports centers on male athletes, sending the message to young girls (and all viewers) that sports are for and about boys and men. This has the potential to limit girls’ and women’s participation as girls internalize the negative societal messages about girls and sports. These factors add an additional set of challenges on top of the typical reasons youth drop out of sport (lack of time, competing interests, lack of fun/enjoyment.)” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“The current report set out to identify specific coaching and program-level practices that can address these major barriers that contribute to the gender gap. To accomplish this objective, the report aims to:

1. Examine girls' own personal experiences in sport and the degree to which specific parent, coaching, and program practices/experiences impact girls' participation, motivation, and retention.
2. Highlight the major barriers that contribute to the gender gap in sport, which coaches and programs need to address in order for girls to become and stay involved in sports. These barriers include cultural, environmental, and policy-based barriers centered on gender norms as reflected in their self-perceptions, values/interests, and motivations in sport.
3. Determine the ways in which youth sports organizations serving girls can successfully meet the needs of participating girls to foster their continued engagement in sport, with a focus on identifying existing strengths and areas still in need of improvement." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

"The national survey of girls' participation in sports indicated that sports participation is dominated by soccer, dance, basketball, and gymnastics, with the popularity of softball/baseball, diving, cheerleading, and volleyball close behind." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

Kids that come from lower income households are more likely to only participate in one maybe two sports. This is because they do not have the financial resources and stability that other children from middle to higher income families have.

"Girls from higher-income households, as well as girls in urban areas, were more likely to participate in a wider range of sports (two or more within the last year.) Girls and their parents were randomly assigned to answer about one sport in which the girl had participated over the past year. Over one-third of girls reported playing the identified sport for three years or more." (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

Just like we discussed earlier, adolescents can play on their school team or a lot of students play on traveling teams. This applies to girls as well and can depend on their income level. “Variations in team type by youth race/ethnicity and household incomes were also likely reflective, at least partially, of differences in access to sport with Hispanic girls and girls from low-income households (less than \$40,000) most likely to play on school-based teams, and girls from high income households (\$100,000+) most likely to play on travel teams.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

When we began talking about the participation of girls in sports earlier in the paper, the one thing that I really focused on at the beginning was how important it is for these girls to have positive female role models in their lives. Unfortunately, there is a lack of female role models for them.

“A 2015 survey conducted by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association reported that only 27% of the more than 6.5 million adults who coach youth teams up to age 14 are women. Instead of coaching, women in organized youth sports often serve the role as team mom, responsible for coordinating schedules, bringing snacks, or performing other care-giving tasks. Female coaches in girls’ sports have significant impact on girls’ participation that goes beyond skill transfer.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“Female coaches are important role models for girls and enhance girls’ feelings of social inclusion. The presence of female coaches also challenges the negative cultural messages girls receive about their participation.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

“Girls need to see women in leadership roles; this helps with girls’ own confidence and psyche in playing sports. Girls who have female coaches have the opportunity to see that if she can do this, then I can too.” (Cooky, Veliz, and Zarrett, 2019)

I have two little sisters and one of them is very involved in basketball. She is in high school and she loves the game. I have had the chance to watch her grow up playing and I have had the chance to see her develop and grow as an athlete and as a person because of this sport. There is a light in her eyes while she is on the court.

She deserves the same opportunities to play just like I had. She should not be limited just because she is a girl that chose to play sports. She should still have the same access to resources that boys in our community does. She deserves to have positive athletic role models in her life to help guide her. Every girl on her team deserves that. Every girl in our community deserves that. It should not matter where you live, what economic status your parents have, or what your race or ethnicity is. All children, including girls should have access to the same sports resources that males do.

When writing this paper, I had a goal. I had a goal to educate myself and to hopefully be able to educate someone else on the topic of how sports can be such a great tool for adolescents, especially those in economically depressed communities.

This is a topic that in my opinion has gotten pushed to the side and not given as much attention as it deserves. No, this paper does not include a cure for an illness. No, this paper does not tell you how to cure cancer, but it is still just as important. Kids deserve to have the best possible opportunities to live life to the fullest. Kids are the future.

Kids deserve to be adequately equipped to handle any situation life may throw at them. Sports and coaches can be that great tool to bridge that gap. It is so much more than just going to practice, playing in games, and hanging out with teammates. These adolescents gain so much more than just that. They gain traits that will help shape them into the great people they are destined to be. The benefits they receive can and will change their lives. They can and will use

their sport as a beacon of hope to develop social skills, positive self-esteem, behavior skills, and improve their academics.

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