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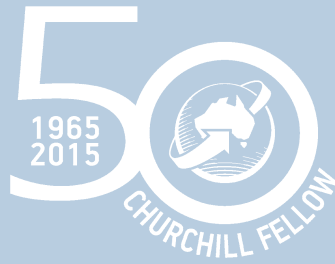
To investigate innovative and inclusive retention strategies for
youth participants in community sport

Canada, USA, UK



TROY KIRKHAM
2015 CHURCHILL FELLOW





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Troy Kirkham





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4	The Parent	56
Introduction	6	The Sports Structure	62
Travel Programme	8	Talent Development	75
An Interconnected Model of Youth Retention	10	Opportunity & Access	80
Fun	13	Additional Considerations	91
Play	20	Recommendations	92
Participant Motivation	26	Conclusion	96
The Participant	34	Acknowledgments	97
The Coach	46	References	98

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Aim:

To investigate innovative and inclusive retention strategies for youth participants in community sport – Canada, USA & UK

Description:

Increasing levels of obesity and environments where youth have varying lifestyle and entertainment options present challenges to sport organisations and community clubs to maintain relevance and provide environments for youth to engage and ultimately be retained in Community Sport.

Involvement in sport has a number of broader societal benefits including reduced crime rates, positive educational outcomes & wider health outcomes; however Youth Participation is a segment that experiences significant participation dropout across all sports.

A key aspect of this Churchill Fellowship was exploring examples of best practice in youth retention across the world in order to ensure that community sport in Australia continues to provide access & opportunity for youth participants.

An Interconnected Model for Youth Retention:

Children identify that the primary reason that they participate in sport is to have fun with their friends. However, adults and sporting organisations introduce a number of barriers into a child's sporting environment or context that contradict their main reason for participation, and subsequently children drop out of sport at an alarming rate. In the United States for instance, 70% of participants drop out of organised sport by the time they turn 13.

There is certainly no easy fix when it comes to youth retention in sport, and there are a wide-ranging number of factors that play a role in achieving this desired outcome. This fellowship research looks to propose an **Interconnected Model for Youth Retention** (Figure 1) that addresses a number of components influencing retention in youth sport.

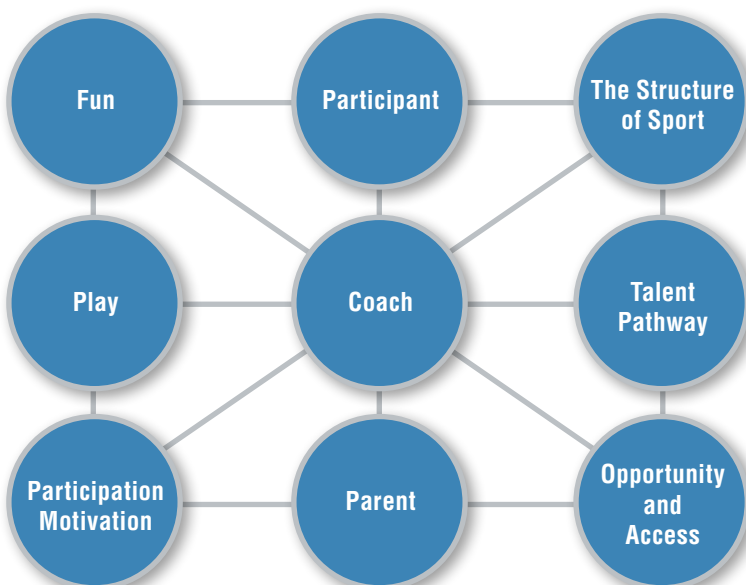


Figure 1: An Interconnected Model for Youth Retention

Sports organisations have often looked to solve the issue of youth retention by looking at parts of the issue in isolation, rather than looking to address the components as a whole, and subsequently this doesn't fully address the myriad of influencing factors, and ultimately does not achieve a successful outcome. As an example sporting organisations may look at the important role that the coach plays in youth retention, but when approached or addressed in isolation, it won't achieve the anticipated outcome of successful retention.

The proposed interconnected model looks to focus on the fundamental factors impacting youth retention whilst addressing key elements of each. The nine components are:

- **Fun** – understanding what fun is to kids and how this impacts on their sport.
- **Play** – the difference between structured and unstructured play / sport and how this impacts a child's experience and longer term development.
- **Participant Motivation** – a focus on intrinsic and extrinsic locus of control, and other theories of motivation and how these impact on a participants decision to stay involved in sport or drop out.
- **The Participant** – focusing on youth advocacy and ownership of the experience, whilst also including aspects such as the development of physical literacy, the notion of sport sampling versus specialisation and the impact of injury.
- **The Coach** – the coach is central in regards to player retention and this component focuses on coach education and associated follow up, an athlete centred coaching approach and the importance of an inclusive and safe approach to the game whilst understanding the “bigger picture” outcomes of youth sport.
- **The Parent** – parent education in sport is a must in order for them to understand the critical role that they play in terms of retention and a lifelong love for physical activity.
- **The Structure of Sport** – organised sport needs to fully understand the often unintended consequences of their decisions in regards to a sport structure including aspects such as models of participation, season length, competition format, alternative products, the community club environment, multi sport clubs and the importance of research, data and insight to inform decision making processes.
- **Talent Development** – focus upon the philosophy of talent development and the distinction between selecting for ability or talent identification including the selection / de-selection processes, the quality of programs and the structural format of development programming.
- **Opportunity and Access** – for all players, of all abilities and ensuring that the environment is a place where participants want to be. This also includes the role that Governments can play in enabling access and opportunity.

The proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' examines the key components that influence a participant's decision on why they play sport, the influences that affect them whilst participating, and ultimately explores some of the reasons as to why they drop out of sport. The model effectively investigates the factors influencing a participant's journey in sport, and suggests potential intervention strategies at key phases and in key areas.

Youth Sport has the potential to have a significant influence on the long term physical, emotional and mental health of participants, however if sport fails to meet the needs of youth, then there will undoubtedly be an increase in the levels of player dropout. Sport can no longer position itself with a traditional mindset. Sport must adapt and it must evolve to ensure that the mentality of 'participant first' and evidence based decision making through using data, research and insights, underpins our decisions and our reasoning, so that greater numbers of youth participants can be retained in community sport.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is far greater than simply wins and losses, and it certainly isn't about which team won or lost on the weekend. It has an ability like no other to connect, unite and bond communities. It has a long lasting impact on an individual's physical, social and emotional well-being and there is strong evidence to suggest those who are active youth participants are significantly more likely to participate in physical activity as an adult. Subsequently, if we can achieve greater levels of youth retention the ongoing wider community and health related benefits would be substantial.

The social capital that is established through engagement in sporting clubs contributes to society. Sport provides an opportunity for inclusion, education and employment and has a considerable cultural significance to all Australians.



Research indicates
70%
of kids in the US drop out
of sport by the age of 13.

Project Play

This fellowship report looks to build on innovative international approaches to physical activity and retention in youth sport and make recommendations for an Australian context. It will explore factors influencing retention, contemporary approaches to accessibility of programs and provide a benchmark for future approaches to retention of youth participants across local clubs, State Sporting Organisations (SSO) and National Sporting Organisations (NSO).

Upon embarking on this journey, there were eight key focus areas that guided the discussions with the organisations that I planned to meet with. These were:

- The importance of unstructured play, along with the development of fun, and the significant role that both of these factors play in youth retention;
- The development of physical literacy and fundamental movement skills and the role that this development plays in retaining participants long term;
- Engagement strategies – with a particular focus on diversionary programs;
- The role that technology can play in youth sport retention strategies;
- The impact of parenting styles in youth sport retention – particularly around female engagement and retention;
- Socioeconomic influences – and the importance of programs to support accessibility for all,
- Youth advocacy – and empowering youth in program and product development; and
- Inclusive program development – ensuring opportunity for all.

However, the discussions provided so much more than the eight key discussion points listed above. They provided insight and knowledge around a number of factors that directly or indirectly impact youth retention in community sport, and they helped to shape and redefine my thinking around this topic. The conversations all lead to one key premise, in that there needed to be an integrated or interconnected approach that sought to coordinate and organise the key components impacting youth retention, thus providing clear direction to sport.



Ultimately, retention comes down to relationships, and the ability to maintain and enhance these relationships over a number of years and through a number of key transitional phases within a sport context. It is from this foundation that the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ was developed. It looks to unite all the key factors impacting youth retention, but also highlights the importance of the relationships between these components, and the interconnected manner in which they impact or influence each other.

One of the real challenges in sport is that organisations or clubs when looking at youth retention tend to focus on one part of the puzzle. That is a great starting point, but it fails to recognise the interconnected manner in which key components influence each other. By only addressing one aspect, you may get some small improvements in retention or churn rates, but when you have a direct focus (or an interconnected approach) on all key components, then that’s where the real improvement and success can be achieved.

When setting out to finalise this Churchill Report, the objective was to develop a tangible document that could be utilised by sports to guide and/or challenge their current way of operation, and provide authentic ideas or strategies that could be introduced to enhance youth retention in community sport. This document needed to be more than simply a report that explained where I went, and whom I met with. Hence, this report proposes a model for youth retention and discusses the key aspects that impact each of the proposed nine components. The outstanding individuals and organisations that I visited all helped to shape this report, through their willingness to share ideas, resources and strategies around youth retention, and for that I am truly indebted.

The opportunity to meet with leaders in their field and examine examples of best practice provided not only knowledge, but also discussion and debate, and through proposing this model I hope that it helps to encourage further debate around youth retention, and its importance in community sport. I look forward to having ongoing conversations and working with others in the industry to shape and mould the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ into a workable template that achieves significant community outcomes that benefit youth participants and enable them to gain the positive impact that sport can provide.

Thank you to the Sir Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia for providing an amazing opportunity to explore and investigate a topic that I am extremely passionate about, and believe can play a significant role in the future of young people in Australia. The following report looks to highlight my discussions, make observations and seeks to encourage community sport to potentially do things differently.

TRAVEL PROGRAMME

Vancouver, Canada (18th March 2016 – 24th March 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
Kidsport BC	Pete Quevillion	Director
BC Hockey	Bill Ennos Jeremy Ainsworth Brianna Davey Sean Raphael Michael Butler Stacie Couch Bonnie Unwin Carla Soares Nicole Latreille Allie Moore	Director: Programs Director: Operations Manager: Programs Officiating Coordinator/RIC Manager: Programs Generalist: Communications Manager: Registrations Director: Finance & Admin Manager: Programs Generalist: Programs

Ottawa, Canada (29th March 2016 – 3rd April 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
Ottawa University	Tanya Forneris Eileen O'Connor Kristi Adamo Audrey Giles Martin Gamire	Associate Professor Associate Professor Associate Professor Associate Professor Assistant Professor
True Sport	Kasey Liberoiron Liz Muldoon	Project Manager Project Coordinator
Queens University (Kingston)	Jean Côté Luc Martin Ian Cowburn	Professor, Tenured Director Assistant Professor Adjunct Professor

New York City, USA (5th April 2016 – 11th April 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
National Football League (NFL)	Jerry Horowitz Matt Birk Matthew Reamer	Senior Director High School Player Development Director Football Development High School Player Development Assistant
Aspen Institute – Project Play	Tom Farrey	Executive Director
Changing the Game Project	John O'Sullivan	Founder

Washington DC, USA (12th April 2016 – 17th April 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
George Washington University: The Milken Institute	Amanda Visek	Professor
George Washington University	Mark Hyman	Professor & Journalist
University of Texas	Matt Bowers	Clinical Assistant Professor

London, England (18th April 2016 – 23rd April 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
Street Games	James Gregory	Strategic Lead - London
Rugby England (RFU)	Mark Saltmarsh	Head of Education Development
The Football Association (The FA)	Pete Ackerley	Head of Participation
The Lawn Tennis Association (The LTA)	Alastair Marks	Participation Director

Loughborough, England (24th April 2016 – 27th April 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
Loughborough University: Centre for Youth Sport	Carolynne Mason	Senior Research Associate
Youth Sports Trust (YST)	Baroness Sue Campbell Helen Vost	Chair Youth Sports Trust & The FA's Head of Women's Football Director: International
English Rugby League (The RFL)	David Butler Dave Rotheram	Head of Community Head Talent & Player Development

Edinburgh, Scotland (28th April 2016 – 4th May 2016)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE	POSITION
Scottish Rugby	Keith Russell Nick Rennie Darren Burns	Director Domestic Rugby Head of Club Services Student & Adult Participation Manager
Sport Scotland	Mike Roberts Jacqueline Lynn	Director Sports Development Head of School and Community Sport

AN INTERCONNECTED MODEL OF YOUTH RETENTION

Retention is an aspiration of all sporting organisations and the associated health benefits for the community are significant if we can retain a greater number of youth participants in community sport. The proposed **Interconnected Model of Youth Retention** (Figure 1) looks to provide strategic direction to clubs and sporting organisations of the key components that must be addressed to achieve greater levels of youth retention.

The model proposes nine components that are critical to achieving youth retention. These being Fun, Play, Participant Motivation, The Participant, The Coach, The Parent, The Structure of Sport, Talent Development and Opportunity & Access.

Sporting organisations or governing bodies often look to address these components in isolation, as opposed to seeing them as connected entities that impact and influence each other. However, if sports are to achieve greater levels of retention (and reduce participant churn rates) then they must see these nine components as interconnected and gain a greater understanding of the associated factors that drive each component.

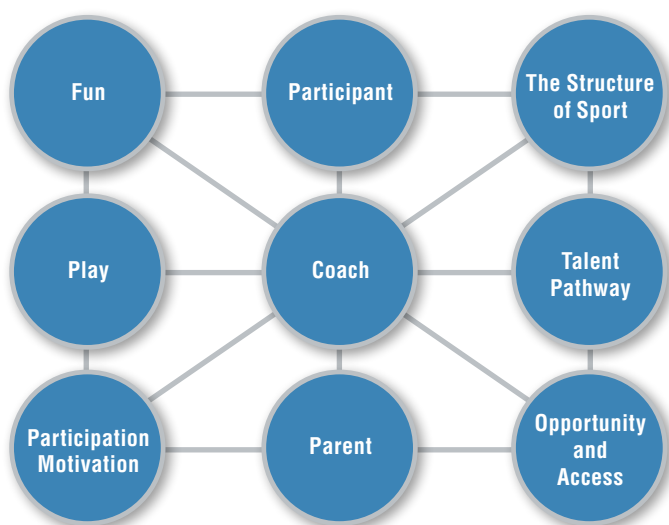
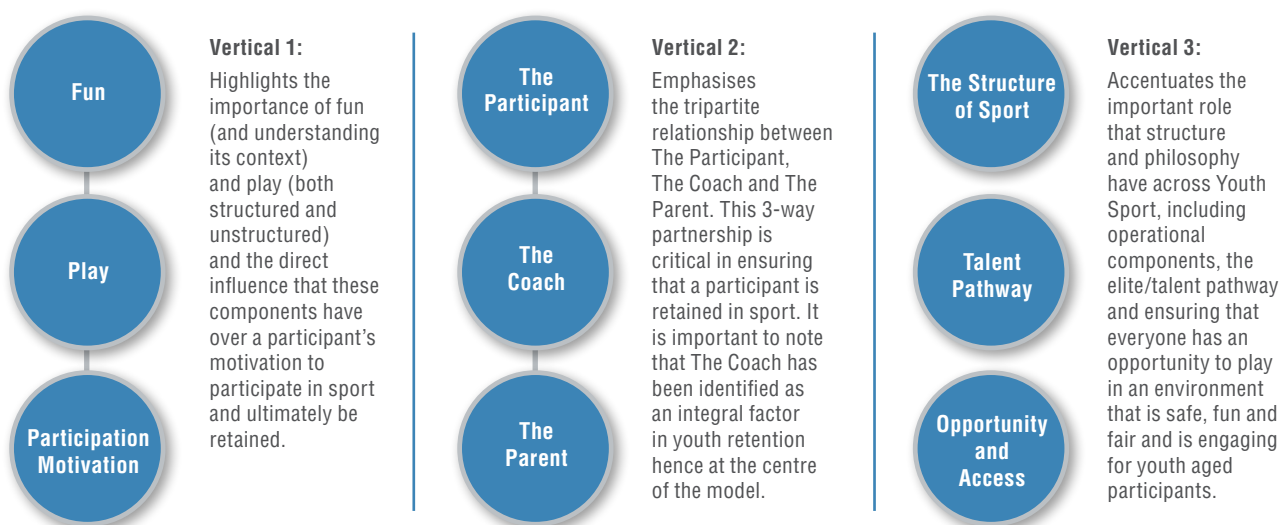


Figure 1: An Interconnected Model for Youth Retention

Each vertical line and each horizontal line of the model also are explicitly linked and influence the outcomes of each of the key components.



These three verticals, and the interconnected manner in which they are structured, play a significant role in enhancing youth retention. It is important to note that the Participant component doesn't refer to the actual participant, but more so refers to factors that directly influence the participants such as ownership and empowerment in sport, injuries, sampling v specialisation and similar. This is the reason that the Coach is at the centre of the model as opposed the participant component.

The 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' also works on the horizontal axis whereby the arrangements of the components also directly influence each other.



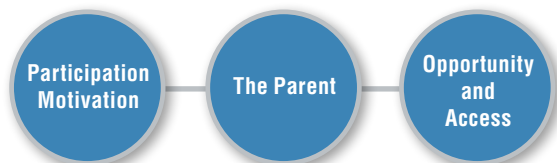
Horizontal 1:

Fun is critical to the participant and is the number 1 reason why kids play sport, and ultimately the Participant should be at the centre of all decisions made (a player first mentality) in regards to The Structure of Sport and the associated factors that feed into this component.



Horizontal 2:

Play is the fundamental factor that drives all sports and/or games, and it is integral that the coach has a thorough understanding of play and in particular how to find the balance between structured and unstructured play. Talent Development is also critical to this and the coach plays a significant role in the associated 'outcomes' of talent programs and a participant's engagement or disengagement from sport as a direct result on how they perceive they are treated through talent programs.



Horizontal 3:

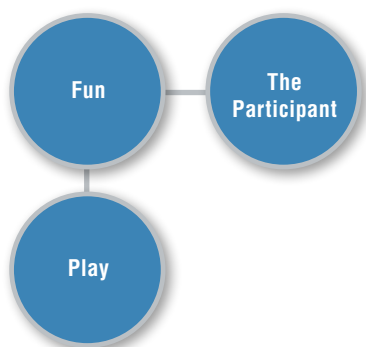
The parents of a participant play a critical role in the overall motivations that drive a participant to engage or disengage from sport, and the level of motivation is also a direct result of their opportunity and access to participate. Parents also play a critical role in ensuring or creating opportunities to the participant. It is important to note that at times parents can also create negative opportunity (through examples such as over involvement) that also leads to kids dropping out of sport.



The Coaching 'Star':

The Coach is the integral factor as to whether a participant is retained in sport or drops out. The coach needs to understand the notion of 'fun' and how this directly relates to the participants that they are coaching. Coaches need to understand what motivates participants and to use that motivation to engage and inspire participation, and not turn participants off community sport. Coaches must provide opportunity and access to all participants, and not just those that are talented, and above all they need to work in the structure of the sport and ensure that any potential barriers are removed or addressed.

The final aspects of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' are the four triangulations that exist. These serve to provide a connection between the outer middle components of both the vertical and horizontal axis.



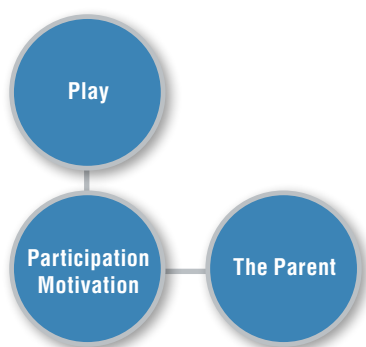
Triangulation 1:

The primary reason that kids play sport is to have fun with their friends. In terms of ongoing development of the Participant it is critical that they engage in unstructured play, along with structured. The unstructured play allows them the opportunity to develop creativity, problem solving, conflict negotiation, resilience and working in a team environment, which are some (but not all) of the number of life skills that we want kids to develop from participating in sport.



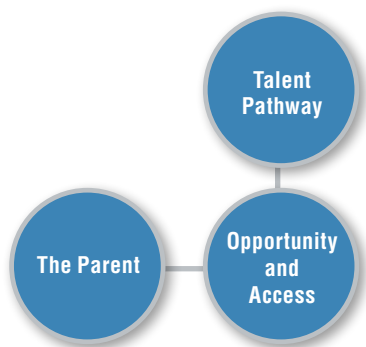
Triangulation 2:

The connection between The Participant and Talent Development is critical as a key factor that will be addressed is Sampling v Specialisation and the impact that early specialisation potentially has on retention and burnout. The focus on developing the fundamentals (in terms of physical literacy and the fundamentals of the game) is critical to all components. The philosophy, programs and processes established in The Structure of Sport component drive the direction of Talent Development and therefore control the level of participation of the child.



Triangulation 3:

Play is critical in the establishment of participant motivation and the Parent is critical in instilling play and the fundamentals of play in their children. Parents need to understand the need for unstructured play and the importance of letting kids be kids. There is also substantial research about how parents can negatively impact the play situations of children by being a 'helicopter parent'. Sometimes parents need to get out of the way to allow kids to lead the play experience. Côté talks about the importance of deliberate play and parents are critical in allowing this to occur.



Triangulation 4:

Opportunity & Access is critical when it comes to Talent Development and the philosophies that are established in talent development programs can either provide opportunity & access or deny a child the opportunity. It is important that sports take measures to undertake a process of talent identification as opposed to merely selecting on current ability. The parent also plays a critical role in both Opportunity & Access and Talent Development. It is important that parents do not become too overbearing and not lose sight of why their child first became interested in sport. The percentage of athletes that make elite levels is often smaller than 1%, so this outcome should not be the sole focus.

The 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' has been formulated through the journey of my Churchill Fellowship and through the discussions with the organisations and their staff that I had the opportunity to meet with. This proposed model serves to guide to direct sports and governing bodies of the key components that impact youth retention in community sport.

Each component of the model will be explored as part of this report, with a number of key influencing factors broadened and expanded upon. I look forward to working closely with others within the sports industry, both in Australia and internationally, to further explore youth retention and the relevance and structure of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Sport'.

FUN

“Just Play. Have Fun. Enjoy the Game!” Michael Jordan

It has been well reported that Michael Jordan had a “Love of the Game” clause inserted in his NBA contracts that allowed him to go out and have fun playing basketball wherever and whenever he wanted. This allowed him to play ‘pickup’ games with friends, shoot baskets whenever he wanted to, but most importantly it allowed him to remain firmly focused on why he first started playing basketball – to have fun and love the game. Throughout the course of my fellowship the discussion around fun was paramount. How do we continue to ensure that participants have fun in sport, in what at times can become an over governed, hyper serious and structured environment? How do we make sure that every participant has a ‘clause’ in their youth sport experience that, like Michael Jordan, allows them to truly love the game and simply have fun?

In 2002, Siedentop suggested, “that the concept of fun is among the most badly understood in the sport field. We all too often use the concept and interpret the use of the term more restrictively than we should. When having fun in sport is discussed, it is too often done so framed by a view of children having fun—gaiety, frivolity, and the like”. Research tells us that the primary reason that kids play sport is to have fun with their friends. But what is fun and how do we better understand this notion of what kids see as fun?



9 out of **10** kids say that **“Fun”** is the main reason they play sport

Project Play

It is important to note that kids see fun very differently to how adults do. Dr Amanda Visek, et al. in a 2014 study, *'The Fun Integration Theory: Towards Sustaining Children and Adolescents Sport Participation'* asked children to define fun in youth sports. Subsequently, they established a list of 81 characteristics of fun that were then classified into 11 Fun Factors that ranked what kids outline as fun in sport.

The three highest rated (and most important) factors of fun for children were:

1. Trying hard,
2. Positive team dynamics,
3. Positive coaching.

This includes aspects such:

- Trying your best,
- Working hard,
- Competing,
- Playing well together as a team,
- Supporting my teammates,
- Good sportsmanship,
- When the coach treats players with respect,
- Having a coach who is a positive role model,
- Getting clear, consistent communication from the coach.

The opportunity to discuss fun with Amanda Visek, highlighted that within their research there was in fact very little difference on the views of fun between; males and females, high socioeconomic and low socioeconomic backgrounds, and talent/elite pathway players and 'recreational' players.

This was important as it highlighted that no matter a participants gender, their background, their motivation to be involved with sport or finally their end goal of the pathway, it substantiated thoughts around the notion that at every level and every experience, fun is the critical factor.

Coaches, parents and sports administrators need to fully understand the importance of fun, and the different way in which kids see fun, to ensure that their planning and decision making is participant centred or player first. Jean Côté of Queens University also highlighted the role that fun has from a psychology perspective, and discussed the importance of fun in developing intrinsic motivation in a participant. Intrinsic motivation (which will be explored further in this paper) is a critical factor in retaining youth in sport.

So often parents and adults raise the notion of winning when it comes to youth sport and the so-called importance of the outcome of a game. They will raise that it is so important to have a winner and loser - just like we have in life or business. They will raise the question of a child's development if they don't learn how to win or lose.

Kids know whether they win or lose a game, and there is nothing wrong with having a winner or loser in sport. However, when we talk about WHY kids play sport, and WHY they are ultimately retained in sport, winning is not the reason. It is simply not the catalyst or the driver for participation. Kids ranked winning at number 48 in Amanda Visek's list of 81 fun determinants, so it comes well down the list of importance in regards to what is fun, however kids do recognise the difference between competing and winning and this will be explored further in this paper. The issue begins when adults take the notion of winning and introduce a philosophy of win at all costs.

Kids ranked **winning** as number 48 on the list of 81 Fun Determinants



A win at all costs mentality introduced by adults extracts fun from sport quicker than any other factor. It's important to explore a few key questions in relation to this:

1. How many coaches see the bigger picture notion of youth retention?
2. How many coaches see past their own team and their responsibility to the game?
3. How many coaches and parents see their role as a coach or spectator in retaining kids in their own team, AND retaining kids in the teams they are playing against?
4. How many coaches concentrate more on the outcome of the game as opposed to the processes of player development or effort of the individual or team?

Coaches and parents that have a win at all costs mentality may get the short term win from one particular game, but ultimately the team, the competition, the league, or the sport will lose as we have kids dropping out due to them not having fun anymore.

Youth sport coaches are responsible for not just their own team but also for the development of kids in other teams. No participant wants to play sport when they are getting absolutely 'flogged' by the opposition, but only a few quality coaches will understand this and make team adjustments to allow another team's players to develop, to find success, and to ultimately feel like they are achieving and having fun in playing sport. Coaches that implement tactics in sport that negate or limit the development of players from both teams, I believe, have slipped into the win at all costs mentality, and ultimately could be responsible for youth participants walking away from the game.

So knowing that fun is the primary factor to kids playing sport, knowing that having a win at all cost mentality eliminates fun from sport, and knowing that there are issues in regards to youth retention in sport ... then all parties (coaches, parents, administrators, governing bodies) need to make a concerted effort in understanding what **IS** fun for kids and what **IS NOT** fun for kids when it comes to sport. Visek's, et al. 11 Fun Factors and 81 Fun Determinants are a great starting point to begin understanding fun and what it is to kids.

The 11 Fun Factors and 81 Fun Determinants

NOTE: The 11 Fun Factors and the 81 Fun Determinants are listed in order of importance from highest to lowest

THE 11 FUN FACTORS	THE 81 FUN DETERMINANTS
Trying Hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying your best • Working hard • Exercising and being active • Getting / staying in shape • Playing well during a game • Being strong and confident • Competing • Making a good play by scoring, making a big save, etc. • Setting and achieving goals • Playing hard
Positive Team Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing well together as a team • Supporting my teammates • When players show good sportsmanship • Being supported by my teammates • Getting help from teammates • Warming up and stretching as a team
Positive Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a coach treats players with respect • A coach who knows a lot about the sport • Having a coach who is a good role model • When a coach encourages the team • Getting clear, consistent communication from coaches • A coach who listens and considers players' opinions • A coach who allows mistakes, while staying positive • A coach who you can talk to easily • A nice, friendly coach • Getting compliments from coaches • When a coach participates with players during practice • When a coach jokes around
Learning and Improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being challenged to improve and get better at your sport • Learning from mistakes • Improving athletic skills to play at the next level • Ball touches, including dribbling, passing, shooting, etc. • Learning new skills • Using a skill you learned in practice during a game • Playing different positions • Going to sports camp • Copying moves and tricks that professional athletes do
Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting playing time • Playing your favourite position • Playing against an evenly matched team • Being known by others for your sports skills • Playing on a nice field • Playing in tournaments
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having well organised practices • Taking water breaks during practice • Having the freedom to play creatively • Doing lots of different drills and activities during practice • Scrimmaging during practice • Partner and small group drills • Practicing with specialty trainers / coaches

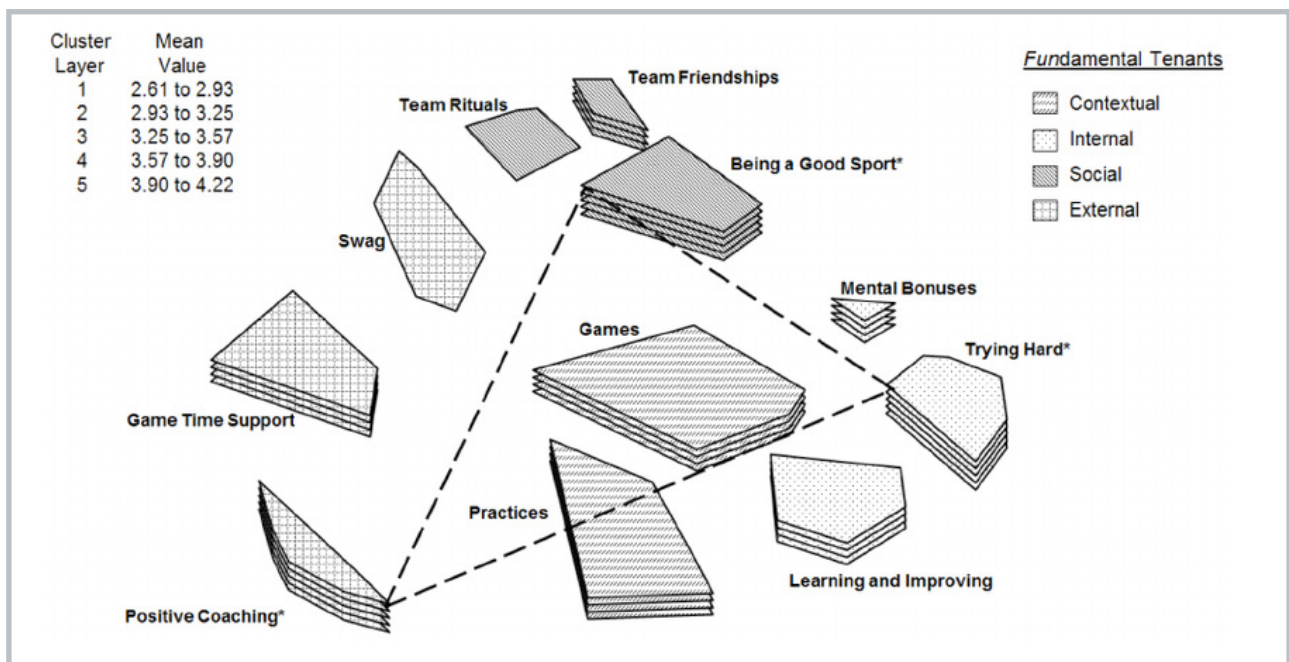
THE 11 FUN FACTORS	THE 81 FUN DETERMINANTS
Team Friendships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting along with your teammates • Being around your friends • Having a group of friends outside of school • Hanging out with teammates outside of practice or games • Being part of the same team year after year • Meeting new people • Talking and goofing off with your teammates
Mental Bonuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping a positive attitude • Winning • It relieves stress • Ignoring the score
Game Time Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ref who makes consistent calls • When parents show good sportsmanship by being encouraging • Being congratulated for playing well • Having people cheer at the game • Having your parent(s) watch your games • Getting complimented by other parents
Team Rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing team spirit with gear, ribbons, signs, etc. • High Fiving, fist bumping, hugging • End of season / team parties • Going out to eat as a team • Doing team rituals • Carpooling with teammates to practices and games • Doing a cool team cheer
Swag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having nice sports gear and equipment • Earning medals or trophies • Traveling to new places to play • Wearing a special, cool uniform • Eating snacks/ treats after the game • Staying in hotels for games / tournaments • Getting pictures taken

Vissek, et al (2014).





Visek, et al (2014) went on to concept map each of the Fun Factors and developed a 3D picture that highlights the various clusters but also their level of importance or rating. This then allows researchers to visually represent the responses on what kids see as fun, or the development of 'Fun Maps'. Visek states "The FUN MAPs provide evidence-based blueprints for the Fun Integration Theory (FIT), which is a multi-theoretical, multidimensional, and stakeholder-derived framework for fostering positive, fun movement experiences through structured skill development and competitive play for youth sport participants".



Concept Mapping: Fun Maps (Visek, et al. 2014)

In presentations conducted by Visek and her colleague Heather Manning, they offer the following challenges to coaches, parents and administrators:

1. Foster fun by coaching and promoting performance behaviour consistent with the FUN MAPS.
2. Maximize skill development and achievement by adopting the FUN MAPS language.

Parents and coaches can learn more and develop knowledge of FUN MAPS and the Fun Integration Theory by following through social media channels:

#Funmaps
 #funintegrationtheory
 #funethos

The Not-Fun Factors and Not-Fun Determinants

When talking with Amanda Visek she also highlighted that when you look at Fun Maps it is only natural that you need to look at the “Dark Side” or the Not-Fun Maps. Visek, et al. 2016, have just completed some preliminary data analysis on the Not-Fun Factors and Not-Fun Determinants. Through this process they have established and ranked the aspects that children see as not so fun in a sports environment.

Unwanted parent behaviour, ineffective coaching, poor officiating, bad team chemistry, player sacrifices and family challenges are all ranked in the top 6 Not-Fun Factors that potentially lead to kids dropping out of sport. The challenges for coaches, parents and sports organisations will be in addressing these issues.

- Unwanted Parent Behaviour - kids often find the behaviour of their parents at sport embarrassing including the way they react, yell, scream and ‘cheer’. In this section the kids also highlighted other not-fun parental behaviours such as: parents putting too much pressure on players to perform or win, parents yelling from the sidelines, the parent contradicts the coach behind their back, parents abusing officials or yelling at opponents, and parents giving too many instructions.
- Ineffective Coaching – the coach is critical to whether a kid has fun or not in youth sport. The kids have identified the following coach behaviours that are not fun: coach puts down the team, coach doesn’t listen to players, coach is unfriendly, coach gets angry easily, coach favours some players, coach puts too much importance on winning, coach takes too long to explain things, coach argues with the referee/umpire.
- Poor Officiating – kids highlighted the following factors that lead to umpires or referees making the game not fun: referee making biased/unfair calls, referee not paying attention to the game, referee is rude, referee making a bad decision.
- Bad Team Chemistry – included aspects like: player gets picked on by teammates, team doesn’t work together, player is blamed by teammates for a mistake, teammates yell at each other, player is left out by teammates, player ‘hogs’ the ball.

The other Not-Fun Factors identified include: player sacrifices, family challenges, opponent misconduct, frustrating teammate behaviour, scheduling and equipment issues, discouraging game time events, uncontrollables, and other responsibilities.

Once the preliminary information and data on the Not Fun Maps is finalised then it is hoped that Visek, et al. will officially release their findings. The combination of the Fun Maps and the Not Fun Maps will be an extremely valuable tool for coaches, parents, administrators and sports governing bodies to be able to isolate what is and what isn’t fun for kids and then put in plans strategies, approaches and planning to ensure that when it comes to fun, that the kids needs are paramount and we truly adopt a kid first or player first approach. We simply cannot have parents hijacking youth sport from the kids, and it is a significant opportunity to adopt the findings and work of researchers and academics, such as Amanda Visek, and introduce these to achieve a common good of retaining youth participants in sport through ensuring that their involvement is fun.

Recommendations

- Fun and a participant first mentality have to be at the centre of all decisions in relation to kids playing sport. Fun has to be the key component to kids sport.
- Parents, coaches and administrators understand what fun is to kids through adopting the Fun Maps and sharing these through their respective networks.
- Parents, coaches and administrators adopt the behaviours and create environments outlined in the Fun Maps and eliminate behaviours in the Not Fun Maps.
- All adults holding each other accountable for behaviours that put at risk kids not having fun at sport, and appropriate consequences introduced and applied if people contravene this principle. As outlined we simply cannot have parents hijacking youth sport.



PLAY

“Unstructured play is not inefficient or unproductive; it is the glue that can bind individual athletes to their teams and communities in meaningful ways”

Matt Bowers (University of Texas)

Modern day families are becoming so over scheduled and structured their lifestyles that the element of free or unstructured play for our kids has almost become a thing of the past. The ability for a child (or a group of children) to explore, to learn, to create, to problem solve and to be independent is almost non-existent. Parent’s protective fear and perception that there is a stranger who is out to harm our kids around every corner is no doubt part of the issue from an independent play perspective, but sports also have to shoulder a significant part of the blame.

Sports have developed a highly structured approach to deliver a ‘curriculum’ of skill development, and so goal oriented to have the kids develop the necessary skills to get them to the next level, that we forget to give kids the opportunity to have fun and explore their own skill development through unstructured play. As discussed earlier, kids want to play with their friends and have fun, but as adults we tend to remove these elements (fun and play) from the sports experience.

Peter Gray in his 2010 paper *‘The decline of Play and the Rise in Children’s Mental Disorders’* suggests that “by depriving children of opportunities to play on their own, away from direct adult supervision and control, we are depriving them of opportunities to learn how to take control of their own lives. We may think we are protecting them, but in fact we are diminishing their joy, diminishing their sense of self-control, preventing them from discovering and exploring the endeavours they would most love, and increasing the odds that they will suffer from anxiety, depression, and other disorders”.

Matt Bower, who I had the opportunity to discuss the importance of play with as part of this fellowship, and his colleague Christine Green (2013) also highlight the potential detrimental impact that an unbalanced shift from unstructured to structured participation may “... have on the development of critical interpersonal and social skills that are better fostered within the informal sport context”.

Structured v Unstructured

There is often the misconception that to have an unstructured environment comes at the expense of structured learning. However, through discussion with Matt Bowers he highlights the need to move beyond organised structured sport **VERSUS** informal unstructured sport /play and work on ways that we can find a balance or have them complimentary to each other.

Discussing play further with Jean Côté, he touched on his research on ‘Deliberate Play’. He described deliberate play as maximising fun and enjoyment for kids whilst providing immediate satisfaction or feedback. His 2007 paper, with Baker and Abernathy, ‘*Practice and Play in the Development of Sport Expertise*’ emphasised the differences between deliberate play and deliberate practice (based on the work of Ericsson). Key differences are highlighted in the below table, however he emphasised the difference between intrinsic motivation (deliberate play) and extrinsic motivation (deliberate practice). Deliberate practice was more focused on the end outcome as opposed to the play behaviour itself, and it really lacked the flexibility and enjoyment that deliberate play could offer, hence being more extrinsically motivating for a participant. Participant motivation will be further explored as part of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ but it is timely to note that greater levels of youth retention are more likely when a participant is intrinsically motivated, as opposed to extrinsically motivated.

The Difference Between Deliberate Play and Deliberate Practice

DELIBERATE PLAY	DELIBERATE PRACTICE
Done for its own sake	Done to achieve a future goal
Enjoyable	Not the most enjoyable
Pretend quality	Carried out seriously
Interest on the behaviour	Interest in outcome of the behaviour
Flexibility	Explicit rules
Adult involvement not required	Adult involvement often required
Occurs in various settings	Occurs in specialised facilities

Côté, Baker & Abernathy (2007)

As cited in the Project Play ‘*Sport for All, Play for Life Report*’, Jean Côté suggests “To promote lifelong, intrinsically motivated sport participation, it is imperative to build a foundation during childhood. Inclusion of high amounts of deliberate play activities early in development provides that motivational foundation.” Côté and Vierimaa (2014) propose “that unstructured sport play during childhood provides optimal conditions for the display of variability, flexibility and adaptability in motor skill performance that is the key to successful athletic performance”. This highlights the link to talent development as part of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’.

The team at Project Play (lead by Tom Farrey) in their research brief also noted “deliberate play often requires minimal equipment, allows for flexibility, and allows participants to experiment with rules, tactics, participant sizes and ages. A program featuring deliberate play during early sport experiences supports an early sampling pathway for talent development”.

Play and Creativity

The Project Play research brief suggests, "... athletes engaged in deliberate play may improve their endurance, strength, motor control and creativity", and cites Côté, Baker & Abernathy (2007) who have also shown that "deliberate play, especially in team sports settings, can lead to creativity when competing".

With a focus on some of the highest profile athletes in the world; Steph Curry (Basketball), Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, or Neymar (Soccer), all of these players spent a large amount of time in their childhoods engaging in deliberate play. Whether it was shooting hoops with friends or street soccer, they had the ability to experiment, to learn and to be creative. A recent article by James Mirtle from The Globe and Mail '*How Auston Matthews became hockey's hottest prospect*' (who was the NHL's number 1 draft pick in 2016) emphasised the importance of developing creativity, and that Matthews had developed it through playing small-sided games with no more than 3v3 on extremely small ice rinks.

The Importance of Play

Play is the fundamental way that children enjoy their childhood. It is essential to their quality of life as children.

- Playing is fun: it is how children enjoy themselves.
- Play promotes children's development, learning, imagination, creativity and independence.
- Play can help to keep children healthy and active.
- Play allows children to experience and encounter boundaries, learning to assess and manage risk in their lives; both physical and social.
- Play helps children to understand the people and places in their lives, learn about their environment and develop their sense of community.
- Play allows children to find out about themselves, their abilities, their interests and the contribution they can make.
- Play can be therapeutic. It helps children to deal with difficult or painful circumstances such as emotional stress or medical treatment.
- Play can be a way of building and maintaining important relationships with friends, carers and family members.

Play England. Charter for Children's Play

Matt Bowers has also undertaken research on creativity in sport with his 2014 paper '*Assessing the Relationship Between Youth Sport Participation Settings and Creativity in Adulthood*'. He highlights substantial research that has "demonstrated the free play of childhood to be a fertile ground for the development of individual creativity and that play has been shown to have a positive influence on two primary means of creative expression: problem solving and ideational fluency". Although his research is more focused on creative development **through** participation in sport, as opposed to creatively developing **in** sport, it still accentuates some key points.

Bowers draws comparisons between structured organised sport (based on competition, evaluation and extrinsic outcomes) with that of unstructured, informal participation (such as 'pickup games') that emphasises engagement as opposed to outcome focused along with the notion of 'self governance' in place of adult involvement or control, as critical to developing creativity.

Play and Adult Involvement

Through fellowship discussions in a number of meetings, the notion of adult involvement in play was also discussed and debated. In order for kids to develop independence and problem solving skills, then at times they need adults to get out of the way. Parents and coaches need to step back and let the kids have the 'control' in play.

Kids don't require adult intervention to provide direction, they don't require adult intervention to solve disputes and they don't require adult intervention to remind them of the rules. These are all opportunities for kids to learn and develop. Tassoni (2007) suggests "children tend to concentrate and persevere for long periods when they are 'in control' of their learning. Their levels of motivation are higher because they have chosen something that appeals to them".

Peter Gray (2010) goes on to state, "children's freedom to play and explore on their own, independent of direct adult guidance and direction has declined greatly in recent decades. Free play and exploration are, historically, the means by which children learn to solve their own problems, control their own lives, develop their own interests, and become competent in pursuit of their own interests".

CASE STUDY: Giraldo Elite Futbol club

Matt Bowers highlighted an example whereby the coaches 'give control' to the kids to run every 4th training session. He also stated that kids entirely run the Winter League. They can "mix/trade players, change rules, whatever, as long as everyone agrees to it". The kids have control.

It is important that sports take note of this and teach the importance of unstructured play in their curriculum development and coach education processes. They need to teach coaches how to get out of the way and simply let kids play. At training sessions this may look chaotic, it may look unorganised and unmanageable, but that is a good thing. Sports need to educate coaches and clubs on how to have the same conversations with their parents, so when they attend a training session they are not concerned, that the coach has simply stepped back and has let the kids 'take control'. Do we also create opportunities for kids to self-referee or self-umpire games? By removing umpires (at certain times) we can provide greater learning opportunities that enhance life skills, if done in the right way.

Bowers and Green (2013) suggest "the presence of adults in facilitative roles can discourage young athletes from exploring their boundaries of their kinaesthetic abilities for fear of negative repercussions, ultimately undermining the development of a deeper joy of movement. In unstructured settings however the fluidity of play and consequence free environment serve as excellent conductors facilitate this process." Players generally also have more opportunity to possess the ball, develop game skills and develop confidence in unstructured play.

In a conversation with Baroness Sue Campbell (Chair Youth Sports Trust) and Pete Ackerley (Head Participation, The FA) we discussed the importance of coaching, and that on a field the coach has very little opportunity to influence the play in that specific moment. The players have to have the ability to make decisions and summarise the situation and make the right call at the right time. If they haven't practiced this in training then it is highly unlikely that they will do it in a game. Baroness Campbell highlighted the importance of letting players 'have control' at training to practice this skill, but also stressed the importance of coaches asking questions, as opposed to telling players what to do. This shifts the focus from being a coach directed scenario to being participant directed or focused and will be explored further as part of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention'.

Discussing this concept further with Matt Bowers, he intimated that the more control kids have in unstructured play environments the better, as it then allows them to control circumstances to a higher degree when it comes to structured sporting contexts. This has positive outcomes in terms of a player's decision-making ability on game day and has significant upside in regards to talent development programs and creating opportunities for players to learn and develop. Bowers and Green (2013) suggest "the control they possess in unstructured settings allows them to embrace the lack of control in organised structures".

Play and Motivation

The importance of intrinsic motivation has been discussed a number of times and will be further explored later in this paper, but there is a fundamental link between unstructured play and the intrinsic motivation of a player. If there continues to be generational shift towards extrinsic motivation (and subsequently away from intrinsic motivation), as seems to be the case, then we will potentially continue to see an increasing rate of dropouts from youth sport, as sport no longer serves its purpose anymore.

Deliberate Play has a significant role when it comes to establishing and maintaining a participants desire to stay involved longer term in sport. By creating an environment that is intrinsically focused there is more likelihood that participants will be retained. Sport has to be prepared to let go of control in some circumstances to allow this to occur. If we continue to do the same things and refuse to change our approach to organised structured sport, then unfortunately the participants will vote with their feet, and we will continue to see declining participation. Sport has to be fun and there has to be an opportunity for participants to play where they have the say, they make the decisions and they have the opportunity to discover and to improve.

CASE STUDY: Play Ball – USA Baseball initiative

Play Ball is an example of an organised structured sport encouraging participants to go out and simply play. Primarily a social media focused campaign that wants kids and adults to simply throw, catch and hit. For further information visit: www.playball.org

Côté and Vierimaa (2014) indicate, “deliberate play during childhood is an important determinate of continued participation and commitment to sport”. Matt Bowers states “Organised sport is a work like setting that could become overwhelming. By balancing its demands with playing informal unstructured in a play like setting sports can potentially mitigate the burnout, drop out, and general dissatisfaction that can be associated with playing organised sport”.

It was mentioned earlier that in order to achieve maximum benefit, that organised sports need to find a balance between structured and unstructured play (as opposed to seeing one at the expense of the other). Sports need to foster more unstructured play as the majority of organised sport is far too structured in its approach. Through getting this balance right, coaches and administrators can begin to address the reasons why kids play sport, but it will come with letting go of control, and giving this ‘power’ to the kids. If the kids experience true control, ownership and empowerment in their sport experience then we can potentially shift their mechanism of motivation.

Bowers and Green (2013) implore “sport managers to reconsider the legitimacy of sport experiences that fall outside the realm of organized sport as not a threat, but rather a complement, to a child’s overall community sport experience.” Unstructured play has the ability to develop in our children conflict negotiation skills, resiliency, creativity, decision making skills, grit, problem solving skills, self regulation and team work, but as adults we need to step back to allow this to occur. It is time to take play seriously.



Recommendations

- The importance and benefits of unstructured or deliberate play need to be widely promoted by organised sports. Promote the role of play and simply let the kids play.
- Organised sports need to find the right balance between structured and unstructured environments.
- Organised sports need to develop coaching resources and education programs that provide coaches with the skills and knowledge to cater for deliberate play.
- Educate coaches on the importance of asking participant questions as opposed to telling them the answer or telling them what to do, which effectively changes the coach's approach from coach directed to athlete focused.
- Organised sports need to develop resources that inform parents of the benefits of deliberate play, and highlights to them that engaging in unstructured play at organised sport is a good thing. These resources should also provide parents with the skills and knowledge to provide unstructured free play in the home setting.
- Sports should also explore strategies through small-sided games that allow participants to self manage or self govern themselves during play, thus removing the need for referees or umpires (and effectively removing an external locus of control).
- Look for opportunities to allow participants to self-umpire or self-referee to enable cooperation through competition. It provides an opportunity to enhance the development of life skills.
- Sports should develop initiatives such as *Play Ball* or *Just Play* that allows casual participants to turn up and simply play their game.

Just Play!

This is a program where participants of all ages can just turn up and play as regularly or as little as suits their needs. Just Play! gives the casual soccer player a chance to just turn up to a venue and play soccer. The Just Play kickabout is recreational soccer at its best – it's about turning up for an hour of exercise and a bit of fun. It's soccer for those who can't or don't want to commit to an eight-month long season of matches and training.

Visit: <http://www.thefa.com/my-football/justplay>



PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION

“The ultimate goal of youth sport programs should be to nurture children’s intrinsic motivation for sport” Fraser-Thomas & Côté (2006)

Understanding the motivation behind a participant’s reason to participate in sport is critical to engaging them in lifelong physical activity, but it is also significant to understanding why they may choose to disengage in sport and dropout. The various motivational theories can serve to assist in understanding the basic principles and provide guidance and direction at ways that we can retain a greater number of youth participants in community sport.

Central to this is developing an understanding of the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and how these impact a participants want to play and effectively be retained in sport. The notions of fun and play (as outlined previously in this paper) serve to drive a participants motivation, and have an interdependent relationship with motivation in terms of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’.

Through investigating other activities that are successful when it comes to retaining participants or customers, computer gaming is an activity that attracts kids. Computer games are a pursuit that generally has a high retention rate, and endeavour to look at ways of engaging participants more often and for longer periods of time. This component of the model will also investigate the influence that computer games have on youth, and what sports can learn from this interaction.

Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation (*behaviour that is driven from internal rewards*) and extrinsic motivation (*behaviour that is driven from external rewards*) are extremely important motivational considerations when it comes to retention in sport. The elements of fun and play have a fundamental and significant role in the development of intrinsic motivation, and shifting from an external locus of control to an internal one. Through discussions with individuals such as Jean Côté it is apparent that there is an increased opportunity for sports to potentially increase levels of youth retention if participants are intrinsically motivated.

As outline previously, deliberate play or unstructured play provide an opportunity for participants to be intrinsically motivated towards an activity. If sports create too much structure around their programming or curriculum (and don't find the balance for unstructured opportunities) then there is a potential decrease in intrinsic motivation, and an increase in extrinsic motivation that creates more likelihood of participant drop out, as participation is very dependent on social or material rewards and is largely driven by external factors.

Self Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory continues to build on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors highlighted above, by including the concepts of competence, autonomy and relatedness. These three psychological needs play a key role in participants being retained in sport. Competence refers to a participant's level of capability (or how effective they are at dealing with a situation or controlling the outcome); autonomy refers to a participant's ability to act for their own interests throughout an activity (level of free will), whilst relatedness refers to relationships that exist (Deci & Ryan (1985) refer this as the need to "interact with, be connected to, and experience caring for other people").

Michelle Fortier et al. outline, "when an athlete's needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness are met, self-determination is fostered and positive outcomes such as high vitality, positive affect and increased self-esteem result. Conversely, when these basic needs are thwarted, maladaptive outcomes such as disordered eating, burnout, depression, negative affect, and perturbed physiological functioning occur".

It is important that clubs, sports and organisations create environments that meet these psychological needs for participants. They must consider and provide opportunities for participants to develop their competence, autonomy and relatedness. If these needs are met then the level of motivation will be higher, and thus more opportunity for youth retention will be enhanced. Do coaches currently provide opportunities for these psychological needs to be met, thus ensuring higher levels of intrinsic motivation? Do coaches provide participants with the opportunity to be autonomous? Do coaches provide an opportunity for youth participants to have a sense of ownership or direction in their activity? If not, then the coach is potentially limiting the participant's motivation levels and therefore could increase the likelihood of player dropout. This is particular relevant to the way in which a coach uses either an athlete centred approach to coaching or a coach centred approach. It is fair to say that a coach centred approach reduces the opportunity for the three needs (competence, autonomy and relatedness) to be met, and hence creates lower levels of player motivation.

Fortier, et al. go on to suggest that when focusing on players who have specialised in a particular sport at a younger age the decision to do so "is rarely made by the athlete himself or herself, it has been postulated that athletes who have followed the early specialization developmental pathway may exhibit motivation that is less self-determined than athletes who have specialized later or who have not specialized at all. This could then lead to a host of negative outcomes such as poor mental health, burnout and dropout". This aspect of participant motivation links closely to the component of 'The Participant' within the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' especially when discussing sampling v specialisation.



Achievement Goal Theory

The goal or objective of an individual in sport is an important consideration when it comes to motivation. Achievement Goal Theory, proposed by Nicholls (1989), looks at two distinct situations that occur from a motivational standpoint; 'task oriented' and 'ego oriented'.

A 'task oriented' goal emphasises a participant wanting to improve their skills and self develop with a focus on 'task mastery'. Fortier, et al describe a task oriented climate that is "characterized by individuals' perceiving that their best efforts are encouraged and recognized, cooperation is fostered, and everyone plays an important role". 'Ego oriented' goals emphasise the individual as opposed to the wider team outcomes, but often compares their individual outcome to the outcomes of other. Those that are 'ego oriented' are often extremely competitive and focused on the win as opposed to self-improvement. Fortier, et al. emphasise that in ego oriented climates "individuals perceive that only participants with superior ability are recognized and valued and that negative attention is drawn to those who make mistakes".

When focused upon youth retention in community sport, it is fair to suggest that individuals that are task oriented are more likely to deal with setbacks, game outcomes or changing confidence levels significantly better and are more likely to be retained in sport. The individuals that are ego oriented tend to have greater ups and downs from a motivational perspective, as their motivation is linked to confidence and perceived competence. When confident they can achieve a wide range of outcomes but they can also be "motivationally fragile when they doubt their own competence" (Spray, et al. 2006).

The challenge for parents and coaches is to seek to develop a high task orientation in participants that focus upon self-improvement, whilst understanding how to develop confidence in those that are highly ego oriented, without creating a climate that purely focuses on those with high ability levels.

Fortier, et al. suggest "the quality of child-parent relationships is an important predictor of young athletes' stress, level of enjoyment, and self-determined motivation. Parent behaviour construed as negative, coercive, or as communicating excessive evaluative concerns (i.e. an ego-oriented or controlling style), has been shown to contribute to a more threatening sport performance environment". When discussing game day environments as a factor that can contribute to either retention or dropout, the parental influence on this is significant and reinforces the need for parents to understand the significant role that they play. Fortier, et al. go on to indicate that "behaviours are frequently part of the 'win-at-all costs' mentality that increases stress and reduces enjoyment in youth sport ... and parental pressure which is related to an ego-oriented climate or controlling style has been linked to higher performance anxiety and negative affect in young athletes".

Competence Motivation Theory

Individuals will tend to focus on areas of strength or goals that they feel competent in completing. Harter (1978) proposes a 'Competence Motivation Theory' that seeks to explore this concept. Through understanding either successful or failed attempts to master an outcome will directly impact on an individual's competence in that task. Ultimately participants are motivated when they feel competent in completing a task. In developing a scale to monitor competence, Harter went on to outline three key fields – physical, cognitive and social, and also included self-worth as a fourth area to assess.

The role of a coach is to balance the participants' need for self-improvement and development with the need of the participant to feel competent in activities. This can be seen as relevant when discussing retention as if participants are unsuccessful in all activities, and do not feel competent in undertaking the relevant tasks then the likelihood of participant drop-out is increased. There needs to be some level of 'success' either as an individual or as a team. The coach is critical in determining what success comprises of and communicating this (and having buy-in) with the individual and the group.

Organisations, clubs and coaches need to also look at ways to minimise games that blowout or are 'floggings' as this could potentially negatively impact on a participant's motivation and perceived competence levels if they are on the receiving end of these week-in-and-week-out. As outlined in 'The Coach' component of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' coaches have a responsibility to both teams when it comes to retaining participants in sport, and their actions or inactions could have a significant detrimental impact.

Social Motivation in Youth Sport

As discussed previously the number one reason that kids play sport is to have fun with their friends. The social aspect of sport is a critical motivating factor for youth participants, and it seems that sports at times put up barriers that prevent these social interactions from occurring. Whether it is the grading of teams, the selection processes of squads, or simply the age grouping requirements of competitions, sports can impose an unintended consequence of negatively impacting social connection as a motivating factor.

Allen (2003) highlighted the importance of social motivation and the sense of belonging, which impacted on a participant's interest, and enjoyment of sport. She also went on to explore how perceived competence could either positively or negatively impact on the sense of belonging. Ultimately, social motivations can play a significant role in the retention of the participant in sport. Parents, coaches, clubs and governing bodies need to be aware of how this social aspect can be a motivational factor in regards to youth retention and subsequently they need to be aware of the implications of separating or minimising the social connection between kids.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969) proposed that attachment is an emotional connection between one or more people. In a sporting context this attachment could be between the players and a coach, or between players themselves. In sport you often see the strong connection that teammates have with each other that extends often for the rest of their lives. The bond that is developed is often strong and enduring.

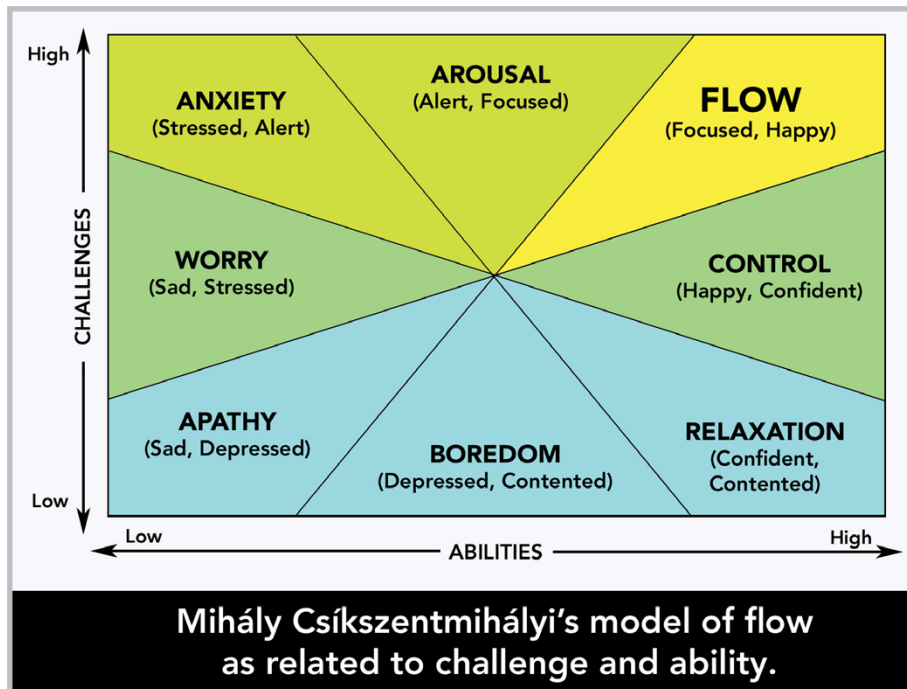
Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) suggest "attachment relationships are relatively stable, a proposition empirically supported for children's relationships with parents and peers. Thus, close sport friendships may represent a stable construct linked with long-term outcomes, such as decisions to continue participation. The role of friendship quality in predicting continued participation is consistent with friendship being a key sport participation motive". This is further supported by Allen (2003) in her work on Social Motivation in that "a sense of secure attachment with significant others—a perception of belonging—may give children the confidence to face challenges and develop their physical competence."

Similarly as with social motivations, it is important that coaches and clubs understand attachment theory and the role that it plays in potentially retaining a participant's longer term in sport. By developing strong bonds within a group it often assists in retention longer term. By being involved with each other and even undertaking other activities outside of the actual sport experience, whether this is social activities or other participating in other sports, participants are more likely to continue to engage in sport and physical activity.

Flow

Developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), Flow looks to explain the state in which a person is totally engaged in an activity, and everything just seems to work. In sport it is known as being in the 'zone' and participants highlight how enjoyable being in this state actually is. Susan Jackson indicates, "Flow is predicted to occur when an individual is being extended by virtue of performing in a challenging situation, and has a skill level that matches the challenge being faced. Flow occurs when the individual moves beyond his or her average experience of challenge and skill in a situation".

In regards to youth retention, Csikszentmihalyi's Model of Flow (see below) highlights the various stages of participant engagement. If a participant has a lower level of ability in a particular activity then the emotions of apathy, worry or anxiety could potentially negatively impact their retention in the game. Similarly, if a participant is bored due to lack of challenge then this could also negatively impact on their longer-term engagement.



Flow: Csikszentmihalyi (1975)

Coaches must understand the various differences in regards to ability and challenges, required for each individual participant and subsequently cater to meet their needs to enable the desired state of flow. Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson (1999) highlight the required Dimensions of Flow that outlines 9 key factors that contribute to the state of flow.

DIMENSIONS OF FLOW

Challenge–skill balance
Action–awareness merging
Clear goals

Unambiguous feedback
Concentration on the task at hand
Sense of control

Loss of self-consciousness
Timelessness
Intrinsically motivated

Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson (1999)

Jackson asks the question "Why does flow matter? Because quality of experience in what we do matters, and it is often when we are placed in a challenging situation that we have the opportunity to experience total involvement in what we are doing (Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson 1999)". By enhancing quality, and catering for individual needs in regards to challenge and ability, sports can play a significant role in retaining participants in community sport. Flow also leads to feelings of happiness which equate to an activity being seen as fun, once again highlighting the interconnected nature of youth retention.

It is imperative that sports understand the principles of participant motivation (and subsequently theories of motivation) and understand the factors that influence these. By considering and understanding a participants motivational influences then sports can work on ensuring that policies and practices are complimentary to these factors and ultimately seek to retain a greater number of youth participants in community sport.

What Sports can learn from Computer Games?

Discussing participant motivation with John O’Sullivan (Changing the Game Project) we started to look at why computer games were so appealing to youth and how the computer game designers motivated players to stay engaged with their product. There were a number of motivational factors that were linked:

- Kids want ownership over their experience;
- Kids want to have fun in their experience;
- Kids want to play with their friends;

In an article on *The Changing the Game Project* website O’Sullivan suggests, “In video games the needs, values and priorities of the child are at the centre of the experience”. He goes on to provide the following statements about how computer games engage kids:

- Computer Games put the kids in control, while in youth sports the adults take over.
- Computer Games are action packed 100% of the time and inclusive of all participants (especially their friends), while organized sports have huge numbers of kids sitting on the bench or standing in line and not participating. Throw in the push to form “select” teams and younger and younger ages and there go their friends too.
- Computer Games allow kids to create their own reality based upon their values and motivations, while youth sports today attempts to impose adult values and priorities upon them.
- Computer Games allow children to experiment and fail without fear of criticism and critiques, while youth sports rarely allow such space, especially in the “competitive” arena,
- Computer Games allow kids to be social, through the use of online gameplay against others. It creates a sense of community.

How many of our youth sports environments; put kids in control, are full of activity and are inclusive, put kids at the centre of the experience, allow creativity and experimentation (unstructured v structured), or allow kids to be social?

The answer is not many, due to the influence of adults and adult imposed “needs, values and priorities”. O’Sullivan suggests that adults “want to win. They want to focus on long-term goals. They focus on trophies and medals, all-star teams and scholarships. That is not to say kids do not value these things. What I am saying is that for the vast majority of kids, they are not high on the list of what makes sports fun”.

Shane Pill (Flinders University) in his 2010 paper ‘Smart Play’ additionally suggests the following additional ways that Computer Games engage kids:

- Risk-taking is encouraged by lowering the consequences of failing, with failure seen as an opportunity to gain feedback about the progress of skill mastery and game understanding,
- The problems players face are sequenced by order of difficulty, so that solutions to the earlier ones are well understood, enabling the development of knowledgeable decision making when confronted by harder problems at the next level,
- Play is the basis for game interaction and so the game mostly provides information when the player is ready for it and can use it

The social motivational factors for computer games are also increasing whereby previously computer games have been a very insular activity; computer games now highlight the importance of team play, cooperation, creating or developing communities and teams. As cited in Olthouse (2009) “Scientists at Rochester University surveyed one thousand video game players and found that the psychological need for connection to other players was one of the top three motivators for video-game players (Dickman, 2006)”.

Another aspect of computer games which is critical in understanding why they engage kids, is the fact that parents do not stand over kids scrutinising their every decision, their every kick, their every throw and ultimately their every move. A child’s sport engagement has become too analysed by parents, and too much pressure to perform is ultimately placed on the kids.



The average teenage boy in the USA plays
17 hours
of video games a week.

Changing the Game Project Website

O’Sullivan goes on to state that computer games “promote the three keys of continued participation in any achievement activity – autonomy, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation – but they have one additional current advantage over youth sports. The makers of computer games actually ask kids for their feedback on how to make the experience better. Their motto: what can we do to get you to play more?”

Sports administrators, coaches and parents need to understand the factors that motivate kids to play computer games, and seek to replicate these into a youth sport environment whilst continually seeking feedback from youth on what they want and need from their sporting experiences.

Côté, et al (2009) research paper titled *‘ISSP Position Stand: To Sample or to Specialize? Seven Postulates about Youth Sport Activities that Lead to Continued Participation and Elite Performance’* hypothesises that “high amounts of deliberate play during the sampling years build a solid foundation of intrinsic motivation through involvement in activities that are enjoyable and promote intrinsic regulation”. This highlights the important connection to play and participant motivation as outline in the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’.

Côté, et al (2009) suggest that “from a motivational perspective, children become involved in deliberate play because of their own interest in the activity, as opposed to external reasons such as improving performance or winning medals. This type of early involvement in sport may help children become more self-directed toward their participation in sport”.

Côté, et al. (2009) also indicate “Self-determination theory predicts that early intrinsically motivating behaviours (e.g., deliberate play) will have a positive effect over time on an individual’s overall motivation and ultimately the individual’s willingness to engage in more externally controlled activities (e.g., deliberate practice). Furthermore, promoting a deliberate play environment during the sampling years is closely linked to creating a ‘mastery’ or ‘task’ climate in sport that will ultimately foster children’s motivation for sport. This type of motivational climate and activities that promote intrinsic motivation during the sampling years will subsequently help children become more self-determined and committed in their future participation in sport”. It is also important to note that the factors that are ranked higher in Amanda Visek’s ‘Fun Maps’ are intrinsic in nature, and as such again suggest the important connection between Fun, Play and Participant Motivation.



Côté and Vierimaa (2014) state that the “theories of motivation such as self determination theory and achievement goal theory suggest that early participation in intrinsically motivating activities such as deliberate play will have a long term effect on an individuals overall motivation”. Fraser-Thomas & Côté (2006) suggest, “The ultimate goal of youth sport programs should be to nurture children’s intrinsic motivation for sport. Programs that focus on deliberate play activities and the sampling of various sports, can eventually promote the development of self-regulation, decision-making skills, and feelings of competence in children. These important skills and feelings are key to the development of future self-determined expert and recreational athletes”.

These three components all play a significant role in the retention of youth participants in community sport, and it is critical that sports, coaches and parents truly understand the importance of each and how they work to strengthen a participant’s long-term engagement. The policies, practices and philosophies of sports must work in a complementary manner to enhance the participant’s enjoyment and connection to their sports experience.

Recommendations

- Develop an understanding of motivational theories that impact youth participants in order to enhance their experience in youth sport.
- Understand the individual participant and the factors influencing their specific motivational requirements.
- Sports need to understand the unintended consequences of policies, philosophies and practices that ultimately impact on a participant’s engagement in sport, and be decisive in their approach to minimising factors that have a negative impact.
- Understand the motivational factors that make computer games appealing to youth, and seek to implement these key learning’s into a sporting context.
- Empower youth to own their youth sports experiences and provide them not only the ability to make and influence decisions, but also consistently and regularly ask them ‘what they want from their sports experience’.



THE PARTICIPANT

“A lot of sports miss the point ... they see the participant as a number as opposed to a relationship” Alastair Marks (*The Lawn Tennis Association*)

Sports and clubs must develop positive relationships with participants that seek to meet their needs on a continual and evolving basis in order to be in the best possible situation to retain them in community sport. Understanding the motivations behind why kids play sport is essential, but it is also imperative that all the relationships that exist are understood between (and by) the child, the parent, the club and the sport. Most of all, kids need to have ownership of their sports experience.

Internationally, leagues, parents and coaches, deliberately or unintentionally take control of the youth sports experience, often thinking they know what's best for individual kids without asking them what they want out of **their** sports experience. Youth advocacy and ownership for children over their own sports involvement is fundamental to building positive relationship between all segments of youth sport, so is creating an environment that is positive and ethical in addition to providing an opportunity to develop an individuals character and integrity.

I was fortunate to sit down with journalist, lecturer and author Mark Hyman who has written three books about Youth Sport. *‘Until it Hurts – America’s Obsession with Youth Sport and How it Harms our Kids’*, *‘The Most Expensive Game in Town – The rising cost of Youth Sports and the Toll on Today’s Families’* and *‘Concussion and Our Kids’* are all must reads when it comes to discussing youth sport and the potential impact it can have on our kids and families. Hyman is certainly not anti youth sport; in fact he is a strong advocate for it and the benefits that it can provide to kids. However, what he does advocate for is a balanced approach to sport. He highlights both positives and negatives and calls out the concerning increase in so-called ‘professionalism’ in youth sport as a major concern. Hyman offers “it’s not the presence of adults that is distorting youth sports. Rather, the issue is our well-documented impulse to turn sports for children into a de facto professional league. For adults, it seems the fewer distinctions between playing fields for pros and kids, the better”.

Kids are not little adults, and we certainly should not treat them (or their sports experience) as such. All parties (club, coach, parent, governing body) that are involved with a child's participation in sport must put the participants needs first. A player or athlete centred approach is crucial, and everyone must act in the best interests of the participant that seeks to prevent burnout, dropout, overuse injuries and ensure that all participants get the best possible benefit that sports can potentially provide.

Youth Advocacy

A key recommendation of this Churchill Fellowship report will be that youth sport must listen to the needs, the concerns and the wants of their 'customer'. They must undertake research and seek continual feedback from their participants. Sports need to develop an authentic relationship with children that are involved (and even those that are not involved) with their game. Sports must provide genuine opportunities for kids to 'own' their experience, and have a say on the direction that it should take. They need to have an opportunity to shape the way that their game is played and most importantly kids need to be listened to by the adults that currently run their particular sport. Tom Farrey describes youth sport as "one of those rare industries that does not capture the thoughts, the feedback or the desires of its end line consumers".

Mark Hyman states, "only kids are losers here. Their voices are rarely heard, and then only to justify the questionable judgments of adults. It's not surprising that children lose their enthusiasm for organized sports, drifting away from such activities or dropping them completely. Training is too intense. Games are too pressurized. Demanding coaches and parents who expect their children to perform as stars and win college scholarships have taken the fun out of the games".

A number of sports, leagues and clubs have Youth Advisory Boards or Councils, but we should question if they actually listen and make changes based on their thoughts or recommendations, or if it is simply a form of tokenism. The traditionalists that are involved with sports tend to be the biggest factor that opposes change proposed by kids. Arguments from traditional sports stakeholders such as "That's not the way that we played when growing up and we turned out alright", "The game has become soft" or "if we do that it takes away from the essence of the sport" a counter the suggestions put forward by kids to improve their own experience in sport.

As part of their strategic direction, Sport Scotland has an outstanding policy around developing and engaging 'Young People as Leaders in Sport'. This approach not only highlights the significant role that young people can play in sport (sport deliverer, coach, official, volunteer) but also emphasises the critical component of decision making and influence. Sport Scotland has developed five principles to ensure that young people are developed as leaders in sport:

1. Young people's contribution as leaders in sport is meaningful and important and is accepted as such by the sector. The sports sector gives them responsibility to play a key role in sport and its development.
2. Young people have a positive experience of being involved in leadership roles in sport. They gain from each opportunity personally – developing new skills and attributes to benefit them in life and work.
3. Young people have access to a range of leadership roles and opportunities. They can choose to sustain or further progress these throughout their lives and into adulthood.
4. Young people's views are heard and valued across the sector. Young people and their views influence decision-making and drive change.
5. Young people are encouraged, supported and mentored by the right people to reach their potential in their sport leadership roles.



Sport Scotland go on to suggest that sports, leagues and clubs self reflect to determine if they are developing young people as leaders in sport by:

- Think about your current offer around training opportunities for young people to gain knowledge and understanding in the range of leadership roles in sport – what successes are and where the gaps are.
- Reflect on your current practice around the deployment of young people in a range of leadership roles – how do they gain experience in these various roles, what opportunities do they have?
- Think about who you need to speak to and collaborate with to address the gaps or enhance your offering for young people as leaders in sport? Make a commitment to speak with them and find a way to work together.
- Review how you communicate with those young people who may not be engaged in such roles, but who may want to.

Sport Scotland are actively engaging youth to develop an authentic and meaningful way in order to truly provide them with ownership and empowerment to enhance their own sports experience. Youth must be provided with decision-making opportunities (that is valued by and across the sector) and provided mentoring to enable growth and development in their leadership potential.

Sports must seek out opportunities for young people to be empowered and involved in authentic decision-making processes. Instigating events such as Youth Summits can be beneficial to gain the thoughts, ideas and direction from young people involved in sport, and there are countless opportunities to link these to key games, events, camps, functions or meetings.



True Sport. Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport



The Principles of True Sport

True Sport is an outstanding program that has been developed by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES), and I was fortunate to meet with key staff at CCES to discuss what the principles of True Sport are and the impact that this type of program can have on not only retaining youth, but in developing good citizens who get the full benefit of what sport can offer.

Based on the values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun, True Sport promotes the ideal that ‘good sport can make a great difference’. CCES, through True Sport, seek to:

- Enable participants, parents, coaches and officials to articulate and act upon their deeply held belief in the virtues of good sport,
- Enable participants, parents, coaches and officials to identify with others holding similar values, and
- Create a fair, safe and open atmosphere where good sport can grow stronger through inclusive competition at all levels.

Throughout the Churchill Fellowship I have been acutely aware of the importance to balance the benefits of sport, but also look at the negatives that can derive from sport. The notions of exclusion, issues of integrity, injury, excessive (and at times unnecessary) physicality, a sense of perceived entitlement by athletes, winning at all costs mentality, or poor role model choices, are all issues that sport must address if we are to see the many benefits that it can provide. By the creating the right environment that promotes the right ideals, sport can have significant benefit to the participant throughout their life, but getting it wrong can also turn people off sport for life.

We all know what good sport is, we understand its presence, we know what it feels like, we know what it sounds like, we know what looks like and we even

know what it smells like. We know when we enter a poor environment and we know when we are at a positive environment. “True Sport exists to try to create the right conditions for individuals to experience good sport, to value it, commit to it, nurture it and stay connected to it all their lives”.

We need to provide opportunities for our participants to develop the principles of True Sport and the values that it seeks to instil, and I would encourage clubs, sports, leagues, governing bodies and even government agencies to look at the True Sport model and replicate it to their local context as a means of ensuring that sport addresses the negative aspects of participation, in order to enhance the positive benefits that can be achieved.

Character and Life Skill Development

We have all heard John Wooden’s famous quote “Sports don’t build character. They reveal it.” This may be true in the context that it was suggested, but sports also provide many teachable moments that can be utilised to continue to educate kids in character and values development. The opportunity to talk about winning and losing with dignity, respecting others and their achievements, cooperation through competition, conflict resolution, teamwork, trust and leadership (to name but a few) in a partnership with both school and home life provide sports with a unique perspective. The notion of life skill development or character development was discussed with a number of different organisations as part of my Churchill Fellowship, along with whether it occurred ‘naturally’ as a part of sport and deliberate play, or whether it should be explicitly taught and addressed.

There is no question that the opportunity to engage in deliberate or unstructured play within sporting environments provides significant opportunities for kids to develop a number of life skills. However, the important aspect to consider is do they ‘transfer’ these skills that they have developed through play or sport into life and then apply it beyond the limited constraint of sport. Martin Camiré (University of Ottawa) has undertaken significant research in Positive Youth Development through

Sport, and discussing this with him he highlighted transfer as a critical aspect that needs to be considered, and taught to coaches to assist participants in getting the most benefit from sport in terms of developing character or life skills. Camiré highlights four factors that can assist in the transfer of skills learnt in sport into other domains:

- **Awareness** – Identify non-sport roles. Help your athletes identify the areas of their lives where the life skills they have learned in sport are valued.
- **Confidence** – Feedback. Discuss with athletes their attempts at transferring skills beyond sport. Provide them with feedback necessary to feel confident in applying life skills in multiple settings.
- **Support** – Peer Debrief. Take 5-10 minutes at the end of practices to get your athletes to share and critically reflect on their transfer experiences with teammates.
- **Opportunities** – Form Adult Networks. Foster partnerships with teachers to create tangible opportunities athletes to apply in the classroom the life skills that they have learned in sport.

Although the development of life skills can be developed innately through play, a key finding is that it can be enhanced through using teachable moments within sport (generally by the coach and/or parent) and that a key aspect is the ability to transfer these skills into everyday contexts. As part of the learning from True Sport, the CCES also indicates “wherever there is organized sport, there’s an opportunity to ensure it’s good, providing opportunities for ethical literacy to be developed in our kids, which will set them on the right path as they mature”. Coaches should look to incorporate the teaching of life skills, character skills and ethical literacy into their sessions as a means of achieving greater benefits from a child’s engagement in sport.

Physical Literacy

The development of ‘physical literacy’ or ‘fundamental movement skills’ is critical to the longer-term retention of participants in community sport. Without a level of competence in these skills participants will struggle to adapt to and fully participate in and with sports, and subsequently will either dropout or not engage with sport at all. As such the development of physical literacy must be an important aspect to be focused upon when discussing youth retention.

Play is a great developer of physical literacy and by providing opportunities for children to engage with deliberate play will assist in the development of the necessary sports skills. Discussion was held with organisations in regards to whether the development of physical literacy or fundamental movement skills occurs naturally through play, or should they be explicitly taught. The conclusion that I have proposed is to provide a balance of both. The opportunity to play and develop these necessary physical literacy skills, positioned alongside the explicit teaching of fundamental movement skills, is perhaps the best approach to achieve the greatest gains. This approach also takes into consideration skills that simply cannot be taught through play (i.e. swimming is an example of this whereby skills need to be intentionally taught).

What is physical literacy and what are fundamental movement skills? The Aspen Institute through the ‘*Sport for All, Play for Life*’ report as part of Project Play looks at three components that seek to define what Physical Literacy is:

Ability

Ability refers to competency in basic movement skills and an overall fitness that allows individuals to engage in a variety of games and activities. This outcome is achieved through a mix of informal play and intentional teaching of movement skills, among them running, balancing, gliding, hopping, skipping, jumping, dodging, falling, swimming, kicking, throwing, and a range of skills that require general hand-eye coordination.

Confidence

Confidence is knowing that you have the ability to play sports or enjoy other physical activities. It is the result of programs and venues that are inclusive of people with differing abilities, and the support and encouragement from parents, guardians, coaches, administrators, teammates, and peers throughout the development process.

Desire

Desire is the intrinsic enthusiasm for physical activity, whether in organized or unstructured formats, in traditional or alternative sport. This result is achieved through early positive experiences that are fun and motivate children to do their best.

The components of Ability, Confidence and Desire link extremely well with the motivational theories and concepts that were discussed in the ‘Participant Motivation’ section of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’.

The Western Australian Department of Education as part of their Physical Education curriculum define Fundamental Movement Skills as the “movement patterns that involve different body parts. They are the foundation movements or precursor patterns to the more specialised, complex skills used in play, games, sports, dance, gymnastics, outdoor education and physical recreation”. They go on to list the following three categories that encompass the various skills.

BODY MANAGEMENT SKILLS	LOCOMOTOR SKILLS	OBJECT CONTROL SKILLS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rolling 2. Stopping 3. Bending 4. Twisting 5. Landing 6. Stretching 7. Climbing 8. Static and Dynamic Balancing 9. Turning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crawling 2. Running 3. Galloping 4. Walking 5. Hopping 6. Skipping 7. Dodging 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Throwing 2. Catching 3. Striking 4. Bouncing 5. Dribbling 6. Kicking

Fundamental Movement Skills. WA Department of Education

These skills, segmented into Body Management Skills, Locomotor Skills and Object Control Skills are the basic skills that provide a base for the development of more complex sporting skills.

An objective of the Aspen Institutes Project Play is to “have all youth in the United States physically literate by the age of 12”, and through their call to action paper ‘*Physical Literacy in the United States*’ they make a number of recommendations that all sectors can look to implement, and includes suggestions such as:

- Integrate Physical Literacy principles into coach training modules that can be delivered at low or no cost, especially in underserved communities,
- Encourage kids to sample a variety of sports through at least age 12,
- Share your most experienced and qualified coaches with lower level teams,
- Encourage youth to participate in free/unstructured play,
- Rewrite incentive structures for coaches and programs based on kids growth in physical literacy skills.
- Create a culture that values child development, not just scores and statistics.
- Educate parents about the benefits of physical literacy.

The full report can be accessed via: http://aspenprojectplay.org/sites/default/files/PhysicalLiteracy_AspenInstitute.pdf

What is the current status of physical literacy in Australia? Is physical literacy highly valued in our education system or are we are reliant on kids picking up physical literacy through play? If so, then with our culture changing to less unstructured play, Australian kids are less likely to have a full range of physical literacy by age 12, and hence the importance of sports including physical literacy in their delivery model i.e. competence/ability equals confidence.

A secondary focus for consideration is who is the advocate for physical literacy? Who holds the responsibility? What is the role of schools? What is the role of clubs? What if you have a less than qualified teacher? Everyone has a role to play to ensure that our children are physically literate.

The development of physical literacy is critical to the long-term retention of participants in community sport. It must be a focus for government, schools, clubs, leagues, clubs, coaches and parents to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop these necessary skills to enhance lifelong physical activity. “Empowering all youth with a foundation of physical literacy has the potential to create active and healthy lives, improve communities, and transform our countries social and economic future” (Project Play. *Physical Literacy in the United States Report*).

Participant Injury

One of the biggest reasons that is cited for youth participant dropout from community sport is the perceived risk of injury or the impact of injuries on participants. This continues to be a growing concern in youth sports, particularly as the win at all costs mentality creeps further into the youth sports environment, which along with the objective of receiving a scholarship or being on the elite talent pathway, increases the overuse injuries for kids in sport. Additionally, the risk in contact sports is compounded with the increasing concern and issue of concussion and the long-term impact that concussions can have on children.

Mark Hyman, through his published work, highlights that increasing physical demands (often placed on kids by adults) is having a detrimental impact on the health of our youth. Hyman writes that overuse injuries are often a result of kids spending too much time specialising in one sport, and having no extended breaks from particular sports. Sports are tending to extend their seasons into each other by holding additional summer leagues, development programs or pre-season (spring) training and this does not give kids enough down time or a physical and mental break from their chosen sport. This can ultimately lead to burnout, physical injury or kids simply saying enough is enough and walking away from the game and dropping out.

An article in the *New York Times* by David Epstein cites a study by Dr. Neeru Jayanthi who conducted a three-year longitudinal study on participants who specialised in one sport indicated that they had a “36 percent increased risk of suffering a serious overuse injury. Dr. Jayanthi saw kids with stress fractures in their backs, arms or legs; damage to elbow ligaments; and cracks in the cartilage in their joints” simply because they chose (or were actively encouraged to) specialise and participate in one sport.

Hyman in his book *'Until it Hurts'* indicates that “Dr. Lyle Micheli, founder of the first paediatric sports medicine clinic in the United States, at Children’s Hospital Boston, says he frequently sees young patients suffering burnout. He just doesn’t realize it right away because the patient’s initial complaint is of some physical injury—a sore knee or tender shoulder. When the injury fails to improve as expected after several weeks, it can signal that the patient isn’t motivated to return to his or her sport. ‘This can often be their escape ticket from the whole process,’ says Micheli”. The additional danger is kids playing more than one game per weekend, or playing on multiple teams, as this only serves to increase the likelihood of overuse injury at an earlier age.

In the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM) Early Sport Specialization Consensus Statement (2016) they highlight that “early or single sport specialisation is believed to be potentially damaging to the long term physical and mental health of athletes . . . Early sport specialisation has been associated with increased rates of overuse injury, burnout, decreased motivation for participation and sports withdrawal”. Sampling v specialisation will be further explored in this paper.

Concussion is an area of increasing concern for parents and for contact sports. Through discussions with the NFL, Rugby England, The FA, BC Hockey, English Rugby League and Rugby Scotland, along with Mark Hyman, it is an area that all sports see as a factor that can significantly impact recruitment and retention rates in youth sport. Sports need to be at the forefront of change in this area, and make the necessary safety and rule changes to improve player safety. This should include looking at the age when tackling or body checking is introduced into contact sports. It needs to be a progressive skill introduction that focuses not only on correct tackling or checking techniques, but also on how to safely be tackled or checked.

Sports must educate players, coaches, clubs, parents, family members and partners (boyfriend/girlfriend) on the signs and symptoms of concussion and the importance of being medically assessed if suspected, and that participants need to be medically cleared to return to both school and play following a suspected concussion. Greater levels of research into concussion in youth sport also needs to be conducted that looks at the impact of long term sub concussive events and the rotational and direct forces that impact participants in contact sport. Sports need to have clear policies on dealing with suspected concussions in training and on game day that are based on the premise of “If in doubt, sit them out”. It needs to become culturally accepted that concussion is a genuine injury and can be a serious issue.

In his book 'Concussion and our Kids' that Mark Hyman co-authored with Dr Robert Cantu, they "make the case for delaying organised tackle football until kids are 14 years old" (*Note: Football refers to American Football*). Cantu, who is a clinical professor of neurosurgery at the Boston University School of Medicine, and Hyman propose (through an online article on *Time*), the reasons for delaying organised tackle football as:

- Kids are not miniature adults. By age 4, the heads of kids are 90% of adult size. However, their necks are much weaker than an adult's neck. The combination creates a danger. When a child takes a hard blow from falling or being struck in the helmet, it is more difficult to keep the head steady. The result is greater force to the brain from being jerked inside the skull.
- Kids don't understand the risks. This is as much an ethical as a medical consideration. A teenager entering high school can make a judgment about the ups and downs of playing tackle football. He has the ability to think through the consequences himself, not as an adult would but at least with an understanding of risk and reward. The same isn't true of a 6-year-old.
- Much is not known about the long-term effects of repetitive head trauma, especially among young children. How will these kids be affected when they're 70, or even 50?

Injuries to participants in sports will inevitably happen, but the occurrence of overuse injuries is something that is largely preventable. Parents, coaches and clubs need to ensure that participants have the opportunity to rest and properly recover from playing and training requirements, and this needs to become culturally acceptable. Sports need to ensure that their seasons do not continue to 'creep' into other seasons, and ultimately parents and kids need to say 'no' to more sport. Concussion will continue to be significant issue that must be addressed by sports. They can no longer put their head in the sand and be in denial about its potentially deadly impact. Sports need to make necessary rule changes to enhance player safety and have strict policies around suspected concussions and return to play policies.

There must be an agreed approach of injury management between the participant, the coach and the parent (and medical staff as required) that adopts a player first mentality. There should never be a rush for a youth participant to return to play too soon due to a fear of non-selection or losing games. The health and welfare of the participant must remain paramount.

Sampling v Specialisation

There is a significant amount of research that highlights the importance of children sampling sport as opposed to specialising in one particular sport at an early age. A number of the researchers and sports (that the notion of sampling was discussed with) agreed that early specialisation was not appropriate and potentially lead to:

- Player injury through overuse;
- Player burn-out;
- A decrease in athletic development, and ultimately;
- Player dropout.

Outside of sports such as gymnastics, it was clear that early specialisation does not assist in the long-term development of the elite player or players on a talent pathway. In fact, a number of sports suggested that developing skills in other sports actually assisted a player's all-round 'athleticism' and made them a potentially better player.

28 of 31

2016 NFL first round draft picks played multiple sports in High School



Another aspect of sampling that was discussed with Jean Côté from Queens University, was sampling **within** the same sport, which really hasn't been explored in the literature when discussing early specialisation v sampling. The opportunity to participate across different formats of the same sport also provides individuals with various options and a way to explore and develop various skills whilst potentially reducing the likelihood of burn out. This was particularly relevant when looking at pick-up games and social formats of sports. Examples from a Soccer context include: full size v 5-a-side v futsal v indoor.

It was also highlighted the importance of players playing in a number of different positions and developing skills across a sport as opposed to being 'earmarked' in a particular position. All sports emphasised the importance of this style of player rotation and equal opportunity for all players regardless of the current level of skill or ability.

Early Sport Specialisation Consensus Statement

Early Sport Specialisation is not a requirement for success at the highest levels of competition and is believed to be unhealthy physically and mentally for young athletes. It also discourages unstructured free play, which has many benefits. *American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (2016)*

A number of the Sport Development Models that will be explored later in this paper look at the notion of increasing sampling as opposed to early specialisation. Sports should be at the forefront of this push and should actively promote sampling of sport up until the age of 13 or 14. The sports that are proactive will see this as an opportunity to not only assist in retaining participants in sport, but can ultimately lead to better skilled players. Some sport administrators may suggest 'why should we promote participation in other sports', but ultimately this is a shortsighted response that shows a lack of understanding of player burnout and overall sport and physical activity retention strategies. If sports create a quality environment for participants and volunteers then this leadership approach to the issue of specialisation v sampling will actually provide benefit to the sport through attracting and retaining a greater number of players who are less likely to burnout.

Côté and Vierimaa (2014) through their analysis of current research into youth sport suggest "although there is evidence that early specialisation can lead to elite performance in adult sport, the associated personal development and long term participation costs of this approach can be devastating for a large number of youth". They go on to state that early specialisation (as evidenced by extensive research) leads to "less enjoyment in sport, more dropout, burnout and injuries".

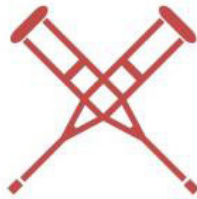
In terms of a participant's personal development, Côté and Vierimaa (2014) propose that sports sampling has been shown to facilitate outcomes in:

- Intrapersonal skills;
- Prosocial behaviour (an action intended to help others);
- Healthy identity;
- Diverse peer groups; and
- Social capital.

The United States Tennis Association (USTA) provided leadership in the US by endorsing and gaining the support of a number of other sports and organisations in promoting the benefits of sport sampling. In a full-page public service announcement (see the next page) in the *Sports Business Journal* these sports (and organisations) promoted a multi sport approach and showed strong leadership on this issue. A recommendation of this paper will be on generating support for such an initiative in Australia where all major sports endorse the notion of sport sampling as opposed to early specialisation.

IN THE LAST 5 YEARS, FEWER KIDS ARE ACTIVE THROUGH SPORTS, DUE IN PART TO EARLY, SINGLE-SPORT SPECIALIZATION*

EARLY SPECIALIZATION* DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD



INCREASES RISK OF OVERUSE INJURIES IN DEVELOPING BODIES



CAUSES KIDS TO BURN OUT AND QUIT SPORTS ALTOGETHER



DECREASES OVERALL ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

MULTI-SPORT PARTICIPATION CAN LEAD TO BETTER PERFORMANCE, LESS BURNOUT, LESS SOCIAL ISOLATION, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, MORE LIFELONG ENJOYMENT IN SPORTS.



THE UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION, ALONG WITH THESE ORGANIZATIONS, ENDORSES MULTI-SPORT PLAY.



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*Intensive, year-round training in a single sport, at the exclusion of other sports, in children 12 and under.
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Sampling helps to develop an all round athlete and significantly increases the likelihood of a longer-term engagement in life long physical activity.



Key Transition Phases Of Sport

There are a number of key transition phases for participants in community sport and it is critical that sports understand when these are and therefore have strategies in place to help manage these periods of transitional uncertainty. The sports that do this well are the sports that focus on developing relationships with players and their families. As outlined earlier through this report, a positive relationship plays a significant role in youth retention.

Key transitional periods include:

- Introductory Program to a Modified Program,
- Modified Program to a Youth Competition,
- Youth Competition to a Senior Competition,
- School Participation to Community Participation,
- Youth/Senior Competition to a Talent Pathway,
- Talent Pathway to Youth/Senior Competition,
- Elite Competition to Community Competition,
- Participant to Parent/Volunteer/Staff,
- Participant to Retirement.

In recent years, sports have had a greater focus on understanding the participants journey or pathway through sport participation – a ‘cradle to the grave’ approach. Through having clear pathways that are communicated with all participants and volunteers assist significantly in ensuring that participants do not drop out simply by not understanding what their next step actually is.

Another key transitional aspect that must be considered by sport is when there is a perceived change in the 'seriousness' of a sport i.e. participation moves from social and fun to competitive. A key strategy that is employed by a number of sports is the development of alternative pathways in the game that allow a participant to meet their participatory needs.

Preparatory intervention strategies need to be implemented as participants begin to approach these transitional phases in order to reduce rates of attrition and enhance retention. Most sports have a sequential learning model that progresses participants through skill and game development and this is a successful strategy that provides participants with an introduction to the next stage of participation.

Ultimately however, it comes down to relationships. If a youth player (and their family) has a relationship with the club/sport, or players within that club/sport, then the chances of retention are significantly increased. Sports need to understand these transitional phases and develop relational strategies to address each aspect.

Recommendations

- Sports and clubs need to develop strong relationships with all of their participants to enhance retention.
- Sporting organisations need to develop authentic and meaningful opportunities to empower and provide ownership to youth participants over their sports experience. They should provide opportunities for youth advocacy, advisory councils and inclusion on boards and panels including mentoring opportunities. This could include events like youth summits.
- Adopt the principles and philosophies of True Sport into an Australian context and outline the role that clubs, sports, leagues, governing bodies and government agencies can play in promoting and adopting these.
- Clubs and coaches should seek opportunities to explicitly teach character or life skills to their participants and provide guidance on how to transfer these into other domains outside of sport.
- Promote the development of physical literacy through both deliberate play and through a coordinated international teaching of fundamental movement skills. Adopt the strategies outlined by Project Play in regards to developing and enhancing physical literacy.
- Sports need to introduce strategies to address the concerns of overuse injuries by mandating game limits for players of particular ages, and encouraging periods of rest and sports sampling.
- Sports must minimise the want/need to extend their season to allow for youth participants to participate in other sports.
- Sports need to proactively address the concerns of concussion by limiting physical contact until the age of 13 or 14 and also implement strong policies around managing concussions and return to play.
- All children prior to the age of 13/14 should be encouraged to sample a wide variety of sports,
- All players learn to play all positions of a particular sport as opposed to being categorized or assigned to a particular position.
- All sports (including National Sports Organisations, State Sport Organisations and State Departments of Sport and Recreation) should openly encourage the sampling of sports through the Primary School years (5 – 12 Years) to ultimately assist with overall retention in sport participation.

It is recommended that a marketing campaign be developed that promotes sports sampling, similar to the example provided through Project Play and the US Tennis Association, that is endorsed by all major sports.

- Sports should encourage their participants to sample other sports during their off season, and connect kids to the relevant sports and/or clubs through cross promotional activities.
- When kids 'drop out' of a sport a generic communication be distributed to them that provides the contact and registration details of all the other sports (perhaps with a reduced fee entry to encourage re-engagement in physical activity). This should be supported by the state based Departments of Sport & Recreation.
- Understand the transitional phases of sport and develop relational strategies to address each of these phases in a proactive manner.



THE COACH

“Our obsession with winning is the enemy of excellence in Youth Sport”

John O’Sullivan (Changing the Game Project)

The coach is the most critical figure when it comes to a player’s retention in sport. They have the ability to develop a participant’s involvement and lifelong love for sport and physical activity, but at the same time they can destroy their love and engagement in the game, and turn a participant off. The manner in which the coach approaches their relationship with their participants and parents can simply not be underestimated. A coach must be a positive role model (not just for the kids but also for the parents) that seeks to develop respect through clear and consistent communication.

Bruce Brown, Director of Proactive Coaching, says, “Be the coach you would have liked to play for”, and whilst acknowledging this, it needs to go further. The coach also must understand their participants, they must know what motivates each individual, they must understand the principles of inclusion (and access for all), they must understand the notions of play and fun, they must work in a partnership with the parents and they must understand the bigger picture of youth sport. They must have the ability to teach skillsets and life skills and encourage the transfer of these skills to everyday life. If sports all accept and acknowledge that the coach is one of the most critical components in youth retention, then we must continue to do things better.

A coach who is obsessed solely on winning, or winning a particular game or the title/premiership is not the right coach to have involved in youth sports – no matter their credentials, expertise or coaching background. When the pressure comes on late in a game then the decisions made by this coach are not going to be based around what is in the best interest of the players and their development. Lets be clear, I am not suggesting that we take winning and losing out of youth sport, far from it, and learning to win and lose is part of developing as a player and a person, but what I am suggesting is that by being purely focused on winning is detrimental to youth sport. The focus must be on player development.

Philosophy

A sport, a club or a competition must have a clear understanding of their philosophy around youth sport. Ultimately this position will guide the club and coaches and significantly impact on the way in which teams/participants are coach and developed. It can certainly be argued that any youth team or youth club must have a player development viewpoint as a central core of this philosophy. It should be a philosophy that aligns to the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention'. It should be predicated on fun, play, understanding the player and their motivations, guiding the coach, a connection with parents, instil the right structure of and around participation, include a clear pathway for the participant, whilst ensuring opportunity and access for all.

Coach Selection Processes

The coach selection processes that clubs or sports undertake are one of the most critical factors when it comes to the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' Coach component. This process can either make or break retention rates not just within that particular team but also across the club, and league/competition. A poor coach can negatively impact not just on participants within their team, but also on participants on other teams, so it is something that sports and clubs simply must get right.

Discussing coach selection with BC Hockey as part of my Churchill Fellowship, Hockey Canada have introduced a comprehensive process for coach selections across all Provinces that aims to minimise the chances of getting it wrong. There is no question that Ice Hockey still has some poor coaches, there is no doubt they have coaches that continue to focus on winning at all costs as opposed to player development, but what they do have is a clear process in place that specifies the steps to follow in terms of coach selection. By having a clear process in place is a positive step towards enhancing youth retention in community sport as it reduces the risk of selecting the 'wrong coach' and increase the likelihood of appointing the 'right coach' with the right approach and capability. The process set out by BC Hockey and Hockey Canada is:

1. Appoint coach coordinator
2. Circulate applications
3. Appoint selection committee
4. Review applications
5. Short list
6. Conduct interviews
7. Finalise selections and check references
8. Notify applicants
9. Give initial instructions
10. Evaluate throughout the year
11. Final report

A number of sports unfortunately are in the position that they feel they have to accept anyone who puts their hand up to coach, or they have a situation where it is the last one who hasn't stepped back that ultimately becomes the coach. This is still no reason to accept or appoint a coach that is clearly does not have the right philosophy, ability and capability. Coaches of youth sport must understand age appropriateness and they must understand how to effectively manage groups of kids, and a lot of times it is this lack of understanding of kids by coaches that leads to player dropout or attrition. The expectation of the coach does not align to the expectation that the child wants from their sports experience.

Amanda Visek, in the 2014 George Washington University study, highlighted the Top 5 things that children want from a coach. These were:

1. Respect and encouragement
2. Positive role model
3. Clear, consistent communication
4. Knowledge of sport
5. Someone who listens

As sports have boomed and many coaches have improved their knowledge of the game, coaches seem to have digressed in their understanding of kids. *John O'Sullivan, Changing the Game Project*

The selection of the right kind of coach is critical to youth retention and this is something that clubs and sports can have a direct influence over. In Vissek's list above, 4 of the 5 factors listed are all about the way a coach interacts with the participant, and ultimately this must be the focus on any coach selection process.

Coach Education

Most, if not all, sports in Australia have mandatory coach accreditation processes, but I was astounded to learn as part of my Churchill Fellowship that this is not the case in the United States and there is in fact a number of sports that have no education process for coaches who take on a youth sport coaching position.

The Project Play website states "most youth coaches (in the US) do not receive any training in key competencies in working with children. Only one in five coaches of youth teams of children under age 14 say they have been trained in effective motivational technique, and just one in three in skills and tactics in the primary sport they coach". In conversations with Tom Farrey he highlighted that it was a situation currently whereby "almost anyone could start a team without any qualifications or education".

Project Play also highlights research conducted by Smoll and Smith (1992) with their study finding "that when coaches received training in skills and communicating effectively with kids, only 5% of children chose not to play the sport again. With untrained coaches, the attrition rate was 26%".

The ongoing challenge will be continual education for coaches. How do we ensure that the coaches continue to develop and learn as opposed to simply getting accredited? How do we balance the time demands on volunteers and their motivation (or at times lack of motivation) to be involved in additional education? Some sports do this well with a required amount of points or credits that must be obtained in order to be eligible to reaccredit, however some sports have no set structure or standards around this at all.

Coach education needs to be taken to the coaches and completed in their own environments, as opposed to having them attend centralised courses. This of course will mean a greater workload for those responsible for coach education, but aside from centralised accreditation processes, this approach has been shown to be most effective. It potentially addresses the volunteer concerns of travel and time commitments, and as the majority (if not all) of community sport coaches are volunteers then this simply makes this more convenient from their perspective. Given dynamic family environments and a changing focus on time/lifestyle choices, we can no longer simply expect coaches to attend centralised education courses or seminars. Working alongside coaches, both at training and in game situations, will lead to the most effective outcomes in coach education, and will ultimately ensure greater levels of youth retention.

There is no denying that coaches have an incredible task that they are asked to undertake, and it seems as though their role description continues to grow year on year. One strategy that appears to work is to have a one on one approach with coach education that can be tailored to meet the individual coaches specific requirements. This could potentially be undertaken by having various modules that meet the different skill sets. Potential modules could include: teaching of life skills and transfer strategies, physical literacy and fundamental movement skill development, how to incorporate play and fun, specific sports skill development, and coach-player communication strategies.

A secondary factor to this is getting the price point right for both accreditation and coach education sessions correct. Sports and governing bodies must ensure that courses are accessible, and don't negatively impact engagement or participation of coaches. If these courses are compulsory for coaches then sports must ensure that they are financially manageable for all coaches.

Additionally, coaching courses must focus on developing the key competencies of coaches in working with the participants. Therefore, the courses for those coaches of junior or youth participants must focus on child management and child engagement strategies and philosophies to ensure that coaches have an excellent understanding of kids, their motivations to play sport, and ultimately how to retain kids in sport. This should simply be a non-negotiable of youth coaching courses.

Athlete Centred Approach to Coaching

Coaches must understand and align their own expectations to that of the expectations of the participant, and it is through this understanding of expectations that improved retention rates can be achieved. As has been outlined previously in this paper, the notion of ownership and empowerment of the participant is critical to ensure that they initially have buy-in, but also in regards to ensuring an internal locus of control from a participant motivation perspective, will ultimately serve to strengthen the participants connection to the sport (and coach) and an increase in likelihood of retention.

By handing the decision making process of a sport experience over to the actual participant will ultimately lead to a significant increase in knowledge, expertise and understanding of what to do in certain situations. Whether this is in reference to Deliberate Play; where the participant can learn to experiment, create and explore with equipment, the environment, other participants and themselves through to Competitive Sports; where they can make decisions on tactics or gameplay without the direct and immediate influence or guidance of the coach, then this will serve to enhance the experience, provide better outcomes and provide a more appropriate learning environment that focuses on participant development for the individual.

John O’Sullivan (Changing the Game Project) writes, “We have far too many training environments that are too coach centric. Conventional wisdom tells parents to look for these environments, with the domineering coach, constantly shouting instructions and solving problems, laying out dozens of cones, and clearly in charge. These coaches make all the decisions, and tell players where to go, when to go, and why to go. The game no longer belongs to kids. Kids do not get to make game like decisions in practice, and play fearful of making mistakes and incurring the coach’s wrath. Then game time comes along, and we wonder why the kids cannot figure it out for themselves”.

A coaching style that solely instructs, or always tell the participants what they must do, simply does not support a learning environment, as opposed to when constructive awareness based questions for the participant are posed. The New Zealand Coach Approach ideals also support the importance of adopting an athlete centred approach to coaching. The NZ Coach Approach Model highlights three distinct ways of coaching:

1. **Instructional mode** (*doing as the coach says*) – the coach talks, the athlete listens and tries to do what the coach tells them (the athlete’s body responds).
2. **Analytical mode** (*creating analysis*) – the coach encourages analysis (either with or without technology), discussion, thinking and/or planning, for example about what worked or what to try next time (the athlete’s mind responds).
3. **NZ Coach Approach mode** (*creating awareness*) – the coach helps the athlete to be in the moment and feel/notice what is happening (humanistic/holistic – mind and body respond together).

Sport New Zealand Website (<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/>)

Sport New Zealand go on to provide a comprehensive overview of these three distinct coaching styles that they have identified through their research on coaching methodology. They do recognise that there may be times when in fact an instructional mode is required (i.e. safety).

	INSTRUCTIONAL MODE	ANALYTICAL MODE	NZ COACH APPROACH MODE
Coach	Instructs	Asks questions for analysis	Asks questions for creating awareness
What is the Athlete Doing?	Listening	Thinking, then doing and/or thinking while doing	Doing
What is the primary outcome for the athlete?	Compliance	Understanding	Self correction and self belief
What is the Athlete using?	The physical body	The mind/brain	The mind and body together

Sport New Zealand Website (<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/>)

As part of the NZ Coach Approach philosophy, Sport New Zealand identified that “an athlete-centred coaching approach helps to develop talented people, who take responsibility for their own learning, regardless of the coaching community they participate in, or their stage of development”.

Sport New Zealand has also identified the different characteristics of a coach centred coach as opposed to that of an athlete centred coach. Listed in the table below these serve to provide guidance for sports, coaches and governing bodies on the clear differences between the two approaches.

COACH CENTRED COACH	ATHLETE CENTRED COACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an environment of dependency • Expects the team to conform to his/her ways of doing • Speaks to rather than listens to the athletes • Tells athletes only what he/she thinks they need to know to suit his/her needs • Expects athletes to conform to values established by him/her • Has a ‘winning at all costs’ attitude, which promotes unfair or illegal practices • Does not actively discourage acts of cheating or unprofessional ways of seeking an advantage • Treats the team as one, rather than as individuals • Does not accept athletes’ opinions • Insists that athletes abide by his/her rules • Is organised • Is inflexible and not open minded • Makes the decisions for the athletes or team • Asks closed and redundant, or few questions • Criticises mistakes • Uses threats or punishment to coerce athletes into following coaches’ expectations of behaviour • Provides feedback of what to fix • Is a disciplinarian • Insists on his/her way or the highway • Coaches to win, rather than to develop or educate athletes • Promotes fear of failure • Does not ask for athlete’ evaluations of his/her coaching • Does not monitor or assess psychological and emotional experience as much as physical and technical ones • Fails to exercise a caring, athlete-centred approach • Stresses extrinsic rewards over intrinsic values • Promotes the role of sport as the most important aspect of athletes’ lives • Promotes dictatorship and a ‘one size fits all’ philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a safe and confirming environment • Encourages wairua (a spirituality Maori term encompassing all aspects of ensuring oneness within a team) • Is empathetic and caring towards his/her athletes • Listens to athletes and takes them seriously • Is honest and open • Reinforces values and morals through facilitation of teams’ goals and the coach’s own actions (role model) • Values all athletes contributions equally, but accepts each athlete as a unique individual • Gives athletes responsibility to encourage accountability for their actions • Is purposeful and provides meaning to learning • Accepts athletes’ opinions • Makes each athlete feel capable of succeeding • Through athlete responsibility, establishes reasonable limits for behaviour • Organises and plans training sessions • Is flexible and open-ended • Provides athletes with appropriate choices and opportunities for decision making • Assists athletes in establishing team and individual goals and values; goals should be multiple (outcome goals should NOT be the only ones) • Asks questions of his/her players; encourages problem solving and critical thinking • Provides information to players about their performance and other matters related to the team • Answers questions, encourages players to ask questions and seek knowledge • Assists players in analysing their individual and the team actions and feelings • Learns about his/her athletes, takes a personal interest in each one and “gets to know them” • Promotes a healthy attitude toward sport and competition; stresses the intrinsic value over extrinsic rewards, the importance for respect for opponents, and other ethical values • Recognises the role of sport in a larger society, which should be democratic and egalitarian

Sport New Zealand Website (<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/>)

Building on the differences in the characteristics of the different styles of coaching, Sport New Zealand also identify the characteristics of the athletes that are coached by either coach centred coaches or athlete centred athletes. This can be utilised by all aspects of sport to determine the manner in which their athletes are being coached and can serve as a guide to the most appropriate manner to coach:

COACH CENTRED ATHLETES OFTEN:	ATHLETE CENTRED ATHLETES OFTEN:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have their goals set for them • Feel as if they don't have a say in any direction • Lack enthusiasm • Are treated as a means to an end • Make no decisions • Talk back when they've had enough • Compete 'robotically' • Display anger and stubbornness • Listen to the coach's way • Have a disrespectful attitude • Are defensive when challenged • Get easily frustrated • Are not listened to • Feel that there is no respect or trust from the coach • Are encouraged to be individuals and therefore show uncooperativeness • Lack confidence and competence to make informed decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set their own goals and have an intrinsic desire to reach them • Enjoy their sport • Show enthusiasm • Develop self-efficacy and confidence in their ability and are enabled to control results produced by their skill and effort • Understand that they contribute and take responsibility for their learning and direction • Are accountable for their actions • Are resourceful and innovative • Feel that they are important because of coaches' actions in understanding the athletes (e.g. listening, empathy) • Understand that there is a mutual trust and respect • Cooperate to enhance mutual goals and directions • Are more coachable because they have freedom and choice • Are highly committed to achieving levels of excellence • Are willing to engage totally in what they believe

Sport New Zealand Website (<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/>)

Siedentop (2002) states, "I am convinced that junior sport must increasingly allow for decision-making and foster independence as youth grow through their teens. If we are to have adults who choose to participate in sport, we must take more seriously the goal of helping youngsters become more independent and make good choices in sport. Unfortunately, models of coaching throughout the world tend to emphasize coach control over athletes that limits their independence and decision-making".

An Athlete Centred Approach to coaching is a critical to long-term retention of participants in community sport. By shifting the focus of the coaching styles can have an immediate impact on learning and development, enjoyment of the sports experience, and also in regards to long-term athlete development. As Baroness Sue Campbell suggested "if they haven't practiced it in training then it is highly unlikely that they will do it in a game".

Autonomy Support

Coaches have the ability to create environments that enhance opportunity and autonomy of the participants to ultimately achieve greater beneficial outcomes. Conroy and Coatsworth (2006) suggest that in "contrast to controlling climates, autonomy support has been associated with high levels of intrinsic motivation, creativity, cognitive flexibility, conceptual learning, persistence in behaviour change, self-esteem, perceived competence, trust, and health".

Through established and traditional mechanisms such as coach directed training sessions and competitions, structured and fixtured competitions that are scheduled by controlling bodies, and participant evaluation processes; all tend to work against the very ideal of participant autonomy. "Athletes' choice is generally limited, particularly in youth sport, given that coaches usually take responsibility for planning training programs and developing competitive strategies. These contextual characteristics can be construed as controlling and, as such, may be antithetical to autonomy support" (Conroy and Coatsworth, 2006).

Through the development of strong working relationships and an understanding of creating autonomy supportive environments, coaches can provide opportunities for participant growth and development. Mageau and Vallerand (2003), as cited in Conroy and Coatsworth (2006), propose, “Coaches can support athletes’ autonomy by:

- Providing choices within limits,
- Offering rationales for activity structures,
- Recognizing athletes’ feelings and perspectives,
- Creating opportunities for athletes to demonstrate initiative,
- Providing informational feedback,
- Avoiding overt control and criticism,
- Structuring reward systems thoughtfully, and
- Limiting athletes’ ego-involvement in the activity”.

Coaches should seek to develop strong relationships, and focus on creating an environment that supports autonomy in their participants, in order to enhance learning and development outcomes.

Effective Coaching

Through discussion with Jean Côté at Queens University on coaching effectiveness to enhance youth retention, reference was made to his 2009 paper; *An Integrative Definition of Coaching Effectiveness and Expertise* (Côté & Gilbert). This paper looks to conceptualise and define coaching effectiveness, and noted three key factors requiring consideration:

- **Coaches Knowledge** – includes professional knowledge, interpersonal knowledge and intrapersonal knowledge.

Côté and Gilbert (2009) go on to suggest, “Coaching education programs around the world have traditionally focused their attention on the development of professional knowledge ... the assumption here is that the primary requirement to become an effective coach is an extensive knowledge of the sport. Seldom is consideration given to how well an individual connects with others (interpersonal knowledge) or their openness to continued learning and self reflection (intrapersonal knowledge)”. This strongly supports the connected components of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ as the importance of developing strong working relationships is critical.

In terms of enhancing youth retention it is strongly recommended that both interpersonal knowledge and intrapersonal knowledge be considered as part of coach appointments and coach education programs. The development of a positive relationship between the coach and the athlete is critical to the long-term retention of a participant.

- **Athletes’ Outcomes** – Côté and Gilbert (2009) highlight 4 C’s that emerge through the interactions between coaches and players that are effective.
 - Competence – sport specific technical and tactical skills, performance skills, improved health and fitness, and healthy training habits.
 - Confidence – internal sense of overall positive self worth.
 - Connection – positive bonds and social relationships with people inside and outside of sport.
 - Character – respect for the sport and others (morality), integrity, empathy and responsibility.
- **Coaching Contexts** – Côté & Gilbert (2009) classify coaching contexts into four distinct categories, and align these to different stages in the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP):
 - Participation coaching for children (Sampling years),
 - Participation coaching for adolescents and adults (Recreational years),
 - Performance coaching for young adolescents (Specialising years), and
 - Performance coaching for older adolescents and adults (Investment years).

Côté & Gilbert (2009) subsequently propose a definition of coaching effectiveness as “*the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes competence, confidence, connection and character in specific coaching contexts*”.

This proposed definition then leads to four supporting hypotheses:

Postulate 1: Effective coaches in any context integrate three forms of knowledge: professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge,

Postulate 2: Effective coaches in any context develop athletes' capacities in the areas of competence, confidence, connection and character tailored to specific athlete needs,

Postulate 3: The composition of effective coaches professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge varies according to at least four different coaching contexts.

Postulate 4: Expert coaches are able to demonstrate coaching effectiveness on a consistent basis.

Côté & Gilbert (2009) finally propose the following coaching objectives for developing athletes' outcomes (4 C's) in the different contexts:

	PARTICIPATION COACH FOR CHILDREN	PARTICIPATION COACH FOR ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS
PARTICIPATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adopt an inclusive focus as opposed to an exclusive selection policy. 2. Organise a mastery oriented motivational climate. 3. Set up safe opportunities for athletes to have fun and engage playfully in low organisation games. 4. Teach and assess the development of fundamental movements by focusing on the child first. 5. Promote the social aspect of sport and sampling. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide opportunities for athletes to interact socially. 2. Afford opportunities for all athletes to have fun and playfully compete. 3. Promote the development of fitness and health related physical activities. 4. Teach and assess sport specific skills in a safe environment for long-term sport involvement. 5. Teach personal and social assets through sport (citizenship).
	PERFORMANCE COACH FOR YOUNG ADOLESCENTS (14+)	PERFORMANCE COACH FOR OLDER ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS
PERFORMANCE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organise the sport experience to promote a focus on one sport. 2. Teach "rules of competition". 3. Offer opportunities for fun with increasingly greater demands for deliberate practice. 4. Teach and assess physical, technical, perceptual, and mental skills in a safe environment. 5. Present positive growth opportunities through sport (i.e. civic engagement, responsibility). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set up training regime grounded in deliberate practice. 2. Allow athletes appropriate physical and mental rest. 3. Prepare athletes for consistent high-level competitive performance. 4. Teach and assess physical, technical, perceptual, and mental skills in a safe environment. 5. Allow opportunities for athletes to prepare for "life after sport".

Côté & Gilbert (2009). Effective Coaching

The discussions with Jean Côté utilised this research and postulates to look at ways of ensuring more effective coaches in a community context, which ultimately enhance the retention of participants. Through understanding how coaches can become more effective leads to sporting organisations developing more appropriate coach education courses and seminars, provides guidance on the appointment process and requirements for coaches and ultimately helps to achieve greater outcomes for all participants through and from sport leading to higher levels of retention.

Martin Camiré (University of Ottawa) spoke at length about the importance of coaches developing strong coach athlete relationships. In the manual ‘*Coaching for Life Skills*’ developed by Camiré he indicates, “a strong coach athlete relationship is a fundamental component of effective coaching. Coaches who demonstrate that they genuinely care and take the steps necessary to develop quality relationships with their athletes are those who must effectively coach life skills through sport”. He suggest that you develop strong relationships with athletes based on:

- Closeness,
- Commitment,
- Complementarity.

	DIMENSION OF THE COACH ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP	HOW COACHES CAN PROMOTE THIS
Closeness	<i>Affective</i> How one feels in the presence of the other	Get to know your athletes’ internal assets (talents and interests) and external assets (family situation and school situation).
Commitment	<i>Cognitive</i> Desire to maintain the relationship over time	Make mistakes learning experiences, not punishments. Be responsive to your athletes’ efforts.
Complementarity	<i>Behavioural</i> What members do to sustain the relationship	Coaches must include concrete initiatives in their coaching plan to develop and nurture the coach athlete relationship.

Coaching for Life Skills. Camiré (2016)

Coaching effectiveness is crucial to the long-term retention of participants in community sport. Coaches need to be self-aware, but also understand the critical role that they play in the lives of the children that they coach and teach, therefore highlighting the importance of the coach participant relationship.

Small Sided Games

To enhance retention and minimise player dropout “youth sport programs should not focus on developing athletic fitness through intense and routine training, but rather on sport-specific practice, games and play activities that foster fun and enjoyment” (Cote & Wall, 2007). Small sided games can serve this purpose and the majority of sports can be ‘shrunk down’ to include this style of play in both either training and or in competitive games. Soccer has introduced Futsal, and in discussions with the FA, small-sided football in England continues to grow and develop at a faster rate than the traditional 11v11 version of the game. On top of this the opportunity for street soccer experiences such as those experienced in South America serve as a playground to the future stars of the game.

Tennis (Lawn Tennis Association) has introduced games that are played across the court in order to increase participant time on court and also meet the size requirements for the participants. Ice Hockey (BC Hockey) continues to invest considerable effort into encourage ‘cross ice’ games and training sessions, once again to meet the size requirements of the participants and also to enhance skill development of participants through players have less time for decision making in tighter confined games.

These reduced sized games, with at times little structure, serve to provide fun and enjoyment, in a play environment that meets the needs of participants. Players touch the ball or the puck more often, which again leads to better overall athlete development, but they also have the opportunity to create, experiment and ultimately learn through the experience.

Reducing the size of sporting fields or rinks for younger participants in order to meet their development needs as part of a sequential learning model is critical to their overall experience in the game. A number of sports have created ‘experiments’ for adults that seek to simulate what it would be like for kids playing on full size fields/rinks:

- **The FA** ... ‘Lets See How the Adults Like it’ - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Pc1vf_tlg
- **USA Hockey** ... ‘From Child’s View, Parents Find Full-Ice Hockey No Fun’ - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXhxNq59pWg>

Kids aren’t little adults and subsequently we need to ensure that the equipment that they use, the goal sizes, the size of the rinks, fields or pitches and all other aspects of their sport meets their development needs in order to enhance fun, enjoyment, skill development and ultimately increase the likelihood of youth retention.

Youth sport programs should not focus on developing athletic fitness through intense and routine training, but rather on sport-specific practice, games and play activities that foster fun and enjoyment.

“Coaches can play an important role in youth sport experiences because their behaviors, standards, and goals contribute to the motivational climate and to the developmental benefits attained by participating youth” (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). Coaches have a responsibility to the game and understand the bigger picture, they have a responsibility to meet the needs and expectations of all participants and they have a responsibility when it comes to youth retention.

The Coach component is central in the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ as the coach is the critical person when it comes to a kid being retained in sport or not. The behaviours of the coach, the philosophy of the coach, the coaching style of the coach and the effectiveness of a coach are all critical factors when focusing on the coach’s ability to retain participants. Sports, clubs and governing bodies need to invest in coach education and they need to invest in resources to support coaches, and ultimately if a coach is not the right person for the role of being a youth coach, we need to have efficient and effective strategies for removing the coach from their position, as if we fail to act immediately then we can have a detrimental impact on the long term engagement of participants in sport.

Recommendations

- Clubs, leagues and governing bodies must develop a coaching philosophy that has an athlete development focus.
- Coaches must develop a coaching philosophy that has an athlete centred and development focus.
- Coaches should strive to develop autonomy in their athletes or participants in order to enhance learning and developmental outcomes.
- Clubs and leagues must adopt clear processes and structure in relation to the selection of coaches.
- It is important that everyone understands what kids want from a coach – this being respect and encouragement, a positive role model, clear and consistent communication, knowledge of the sport and someone who listens.
- All sports must introduce mandatory coach accreditation processes.
- All sports must introduce ongoing coach education to enhance participant development that meets the needs of coaches in the most appropriate environment.
- Coach accreditation and education seminars for junior or youth coaches must concentrate on child management and child engagement strategies and philosophies to ensure that coaches have an excellent understanding of kids, their motivations to play sport, and ultimately how to retain kids in sport.
- Introduce modules to coaching courses that address specific target areas for coaches to meet their individual needs and requirements.
- Sports, leagues and clubs must ensure that the price point for accreditation and education is appropriate for all stakeholders.
- All coaches, clubs, leagues and governing bodies should understand the principles of effective coaching.
- Coaches and sports should look to introduce small-sided games as a means of engaging participants and enhancing participant development.

Follow the below link to read a great article on ‘The Enemy of Excellence in Youth Sports’
<http://changingthegameproject.com/the-enemy-of-excellence-in-youth-sports>



THE PARENT

“When I grew up, it was children competing against children. Now, more often than not, it’s adults competing against other adults through their children.”

John O’Sullivan (Changing the Game Project)

“I Love Watching You Play” are quite possibly the 5 most powerful words a parent can say to child in a sporting context. Parents play a critical role in ensuring that their child stays involved in sport for a lifetime or alternatively walks away from the game/sport and the benefits that it can provide. The way that a parent behaves on a sideline, the conversations that parents have with their kids about sport or the way they played, a parents attitudes and behaviour towards sport on TV, the parents attitudes towards umpires or referees, and countless other examples all feed into the relationship that the parent has with the child and their sporting endeavours.

Parents must remember ... This is about **THEIR** ambition and not **YOURS!**

Parents can often fail to look at the bigger picture. Youth sport is not about ‘that play’, ‘that missed shot’, ‘that quarter/half’, ‘that umpiring decision’ or ‘that win/loss’. Youth sport should be about the development of teamwork, it should be about the development of resiliency, it should be about a child developing self-confidence, it should be about developing leadership skills and it should be about setting a goal and striving to achieve it. Far too often parents are focused on the short-term outcomes of sport, as opposed to the longer-term benefits. It is important that all involved in sport (including coaches, clubs, organisations and governing bodies) take an active role in educating parents on a continual basis to ensure that they don’t lose sight of why kids play sport and why parents should want their child to play sport.

Feedback from children indicates that they are quite often embarrassed by the way that parents behave at junior sport. The yelling or ‘cheering’ is quite often distracting and negatively impacts on the child. The advice that parents give (often which can differ from the advice or direction provided by the coach) is not received well by the kids. Amanda Visek, et al (2016) when talking about the number 1 factor that is **not** fun for kids in sport is the unwanted parent behaviour. This includes:

- Parents putting too much pressure on players to win,
- Parents yelling from the sidelines,
- The parent contradicts the coach behind their back,
- Parents abusing officials or yelling at opponents,
- Parents giving too many instructions.

If the above is the behaviour that exists at youth sport, then by the kids own words, sport isn’t fun and there is a significantly increased risk of them dropping out or quitting due to the actions and behaviours of parents.

The feedback from the kids is very clear ... **just let us play!**

John O'Sullivan, Changing the Game Project, also talks about the car ride home and the conversations between a child and a parent. "Emotions are high, disappointment, frustration, and exhaustion are heightened for both player and parent, yet many parents choose this moment (in the car ride home) to confront their child about a play, criticize them for having a poor game, and chastise their child, their teammates, their coach, and their opponents. There could not be a less teachable moment in your child's sporting life than the ride home, yet it is often the moment that well intentioned parents decide to do all of their teaching. Many children indicated that parental actions and conversations after games made them feel as though their value and worth in their parents' eyes was tied to their athletic performance, and the wins and losses of their team".

Winning v Competing

Winning is an outcome whilst competing is part of the game or process. Parents and children have distinct differences in their understanding about the importance of both. Children love to compete, but winning/losing is a by-product of this, and generally a child will have moved on from the end result of a game 10 minutes after the final siren. Parents, on the other hand, generally are more focused on the outcome of winning and are subsequently more emotionally attached to the win or loss. It often takes parents longer to 'get over' the final result and this then puts added stress on the parent – child relationship. There is a clear difference between the expectations of the parent and the expectations of a child when it comes to sport participation. The over emphasis on winning by parents can ultimately reduce a child's enjoyment of the sport and potentially lead to dropout.

The first question we often ask participants of any sport is "did you win?" and for kids this question places a subconscious focus on that winning is the only thing that matters. As parents as a way of increasing youth retention we should be looking to change the question. "Did you have Fun?" or "How did you play?" or "What was the best part about the game today?" changes the focus of the question and serve to not place an over emphasis on winning.

Siedentop (2002) suggests "when children and youth allow winning to overwhelm the other reasons for participating, it is because this value has been imposed on them prematurely by adults". There tends to be an overemphasis on winning and competitive success. Côté and Vierimaa (2014) state "motivation theories suggest that children's perception of competence in late childhood (8-12) are largely the results of comparison with their peers. It is only about the age of 12 or 13 that children are able to fully understand the differing effects that effort, practice and ability have on their performance. Because children do not understand competition and sport performances the same way adults do, coaches should not overemphasise performance through deliberate practice or overly structured practices during childhood".

Parent Expectations v Kids Expectations

There are at times a distinct difference between the expectations of parents when it comes to sport and the expectations of the kids. When the expectations are the same or extremely similar then these are the times when the youth sport experience is a positive one, with both the parent and the child understanding the focus. However, the issues occur when the expectation gap between that of the parent and child are significant, and when the parental expectations do not meet the child's ability or motivations for participation.

Coaches and clubs can play a meaningful role in getting parents to understand the motivations and effectively the expectations that kids have from youth sport. By creating an opportunity for kids to share their expectations of the week ahead, the season ahead, the year ahead or even their objective long term in sport is a valuable process. The parents can also undertake this process (on the expectations that they have), and then the club and coach have an opportunity to match the expectations of the child and the parent, and effectively discuss the similarities or differences that exist. This helps to gain a common understanding.

Parent Education

This is one area that was certainly highlighted through my Churchill Fellowship as an aspect that we do not undertake well in Australian sport, and certainly an area that we can improve. Parent education needs to be a task that all levels of the game focus upon whether it be the coach, the club, the league, the governing body or the state/national-sporting organisation.

Parents need to understand the critical role that they play in not only engaging their kids in sport, but also in retaining them in sport. They need to be aware of how their behaviour and approach can either negatively or positively impact their child's sports experience. There are some straightforward things that all levels of the game can undertake to start this process.

- Codes of Conduct – although it is debatable about how effective these actually are, it does remind parents that they will be held to account for their behaviour and actions.
- Parent Meetings – at the start of each year it is important that the coach (and the club) meet with its parents to outline their expectations for the upcoming season. They need to reiterate the things that the clubs stands for, but also they need to emphasise the things that the club wont stand for. By being up front and outlining these at the start of the year it can make a significant difference.
- Discuss Expectations – as outlined above the coach should establish a process to determine a child's expectations and compare that to the parents. This helps in managing expectations and in the longer-term managing appropriate behaviours.
- Signage - leagues and governing bodies should develop appropriate signage that reminds parents of the expectations of their involvement in youth sport. Although it is a shame that sports and leagues need to display these signs they are a great visual reminder for parents. (See examples below)

Things for coaches, parents and spectators to keep in mind while children are playing on our fields ...

- This is a game being played by children.
- If they win or lose every game of the season, it will not impact what college they attend or their future income potential.
- Of the hundreds of thousands of children who have played youth sports in Buffalo Grove, very few have gone on to play professionally. It is highly unlikely that any college recruiters or professional scouts are watching these games; so, lets keep it all about having fun and being pressure free.
- Image how you would feel if you saw a parent or coach from the opposing team cheering for your child when they made a great play. Then envision what kind of person you would think they are for doing that. You can be that person!
- Referees, umpires and officials are human and make mistakes, just like players, coaches and you. No one shouts at you in front of other people when you make a mistake, so please don't yell at them. We do not have video replay; so, we will go with their calls.
- The only reason children want to play sports is because it is fun. Please don't let the behaviour of adults ruin their fun!

Buffalo Grove Park District



Your Child's success or lack of success in sports does not indicate what kid of parent you are.

But having an athlete that is coachable, respectful, a great team mate, mentally tough, resilient and tries their best **IS** a direct reflection on your parenting

I discussed the FA's Respect Campaign with Pete Ackerley (Head of Participation) which is an successful campaign that focus' on educating parents to concentrate on creating positive game day environments. Following its success the FA is looking to move this message from a campaign into what would be considered the norm – a way of life. They have developed a number of resources for clubs, coaches and parents that seek to address the issue of abusive coaches, parents and players. They have developed online resources to support the push to embed the Respect Campaign into all corners of soccer.

Some of their leagues have also trialled initiatives such as 'Silent Saturdays' where there is no yelling or cheering from the sidelines from any parent, or the introduction of lollipops for parents. The feedback from the kids on these initiatives has been extremely positive, as they have just been able to play. The question is how do you take this from being a gimmick promotion and embed it fully into the way that parents behave at the games. Ongoing education and awareness is the key.



Parenting Styles

An aspect of this Churchill Fellowship that I was interested to explore further was the notion of parenting styles and the impact that a particular style had on youth retention – particularly in reference to female engagement and retention. Holt, et al. (2009) suggests “Autonomy-supportive parenting is more beneficial for enhancing children’s and adolescents’ well-being and intrinsic motivation than controlling parenting”, however does this translate into sports participation and retention?

In research at the University of Western Australia by Saunders, et al. (2012) ‘*Cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between parenting style and adolescent girls’ physical activity*’ they identified that authoritarian parents had more of a direct influence on physical activity rates (in reference to walking and cycling), but it would be interesting to examine this over a longer period and if it had an impact on youth retention in community sport (as opposed to physical activity).

Anecdotally, Fellowship conversations with Eileen O’Connor, Audrey Giles and Tanya Forneris from the University of Ottawa suggest that parenting styles do have an impact and that generally authoritative parenting styles (as opposed to authoritarian) have better outcomes in terms of longer-term retention in sport. Permissive/indulgent parenting styles also have a degree of success but as Côté (1999) suggests “parents assumed a leadership role during the sampling years by initially getting their children interested in sport and allowing them to sample a wide range of enjoyable sporting activities”, and at times a permissive approach can lack in regards to parental direction or support.

Similar to Holt’s, et al. (2009) proposition it would be fair to suggest that parents that are supportive of their child’s participation, without being over controlling or demanding in regards to expectations, often have better outcomes in terms of lifelong retention in sport. An authoritarian parenting style may have a degree of success (particularly from a talent perspective), however the motivational factors can be negatively impacted and this style can adversely impact longer-term engagement and a lifelong love of physical activity. This is certainly an area that I would like to explore further from an Australian community-sporting context.



The Impact on Parents

Fellowship discussions with Michelle Fortier (University of Ottawa) highlighted both the positives and potential negatives of involvement in youth sports. In the 2014 paper, *'Understanding How Organized Youth Sport May Be Harming Individual Players within the Family Unit: A Literature Review'* (Bean, C., Fortier, M., Post, C, and Chima, K.) highlighted some potential stressors or issues that can arise for parents in a youth sport context.

The authors highlight that 'parental commitment' to youth sport is a key factor in long-term sport participation and retention of their children, but they also highlight some of the issues that parents face in this domain. They suggest that parents involved in youth sport face some of the following potential challenges:

- **Parents' financial investment** – the increasing costs of participating in sports is an area that requires careful consideration by clubs and organisations that set registration fees. It places significant stress on parents, who want their children to gain the potential benefits from sport involvement, but when you also add in the associated costs of sports equipment, uniform costs, additional coaching costs and any travel costs, it quickly adds up. Bean, et al. (2014) indicate “that there are substantial financial demands for parents with youth involved in sports that affects their personal, social, and family life choices”.

My fellowship meeting and subsequent discussions with BC Hockey supported this notion and indicated the potential cost that parents face in participating in Ice Hockey was substantial. The cost of equipment and ice time was continuing to increase, but being a proactive organisation they highlighted the important role that they play in not only endeavouring to minimise these cost increases, but also in linking and connecting families with organisations such as KidSport. Pete Quevillion (Director, BC Kidsport) indicated that the increasing costs of youth sport are negatively impacting on the sporting choices that families are making in Canada.

- **Parents Time Commitment** - Participation in sport “requires a significant time investment by the family. This time investment can include travelling to and from events, watching the events, coaching, volunteering, and fundraising” (Bean, et al. 2014). They go on to note that it can have a significant impact and 'conflict' on both work commitments and family time. In households where traditional gender roles still exist, quite often the mother also feels an increase in time related stress as they are often the parent that manages schedules, gets kids to training, prepares meals and undertakes associated household responsibilities whilst the father may be working.
- **Parental Mental Health** – parents can often develop an emotional attachment to their child's youth sport experience that it can lead to subsequent mental health issues. In the research Bean, et al. (2014) highlight that parents can often have negative emotional experiences such as rage, anger, frustration, guilt and resentment and show high levels of stress when involved with youth sport. They go on to suggest that “Parents also expressed feeling mentally and physically exhausted and as a result often experienced relief at any break in the sporting season”.
- **Multiple Athlete Families** – the great balancing act of having different kids, playing different sports in two or more different directions. It is often a period of time that causes angst and stress for parents as it forces “parents to split their focus and send parents in different directions with their children. This reduces the amount of time couples and families spend together as a unit. Within these multiple child-athlete families, while sport was initially perceived as a disruption by the parents, it eventually became a way of life leaving parents feeling powerless and trapped by the demands associated with it” (Bean, et al, 2014).
- **The Parent-Coach** – this creates an interesting dynamic for the parent child relationship as it is quite often difficult to separate the role of coach to that of the parent. McCann (as cited in Bean et. al, 2014) suggested “that while some parents enjoyed coaching their own child, they were uncertain about how they should treat their child in comparison to other children on the team. To avoid demonstrating favouritism, some parent-coaches would praise their child less and substitute their child more often than other team members, which in turn created strain on the parent-child relationship”.

- **Impact on a parent's healthy lifestyle** – quite often a parent's sport and recreational activities, interests or pursuits are sacrificed to make way for their children's sport involvement. There is a perception that in order to balance children's sports, family life, work life and school life that something has to give, and it is more often than not the parents physical activity opportunities that are sacrificed. This can often then lead to the unhealthy lifestyle choices for the parent. There is also research (cited in Bean, et al, 2014) that suggests that youth sport can also lead to an increase in fast food meal consumptions as families try and balance hectic life schedules, along with youth sport training and competition.
- **Impact on 'Couplehood'** – Parents often forgo personal and social time with each other as a couple in order to meet the demands of youth sport involvement. Bean, et al. 2014 indicate that "parents feel pressured by the wider culture to place their children's needs over their own and those of their partnership". They go on to suggest that an increased focus on careers, and also balancing children's sports participation can lead to 'marital tension and strain'.

So what does all this mean? Sporting organisations and governing bodies often introduce philosophy, policy or programs without considering the significant role that parents play in sport, and more importantly do not fully understand or recognise the significant stress that parents, and families, are often under as they try and balance all their life requirements. This sections purpose is not to make excuses for poor parental behaviour (which is unacceptable at all levels of sport and should be stamped out), but it is to raise awareness and suggest that sports should also be examining ways to reduce the stress that parents confront. Through being proactive in this area, sports can work closely with parents to ensure greater levels of youth engagement and retention.

Recommendations

- Every person involved in youth sport must understand the power in simply saying to kids 'I Love Watching You Play'.
- Parents should work collaboratively with the club and the coach to fully support them and not seek to undermine them through behaviours or actions.
- Sports should introduce comprehensive parent education processes that both educate and inform parents about their responsibilities at youth sport and their role in supporting their child in order to retain them as a life long participant in physical activity.
- Clubs and coaches must hold pre season parent meetings to outline expectations and responsibilities of all parties for the season ahead. Outline what you stand for and what you won't stand for.
- At these pre-season meetings coaches should introduce an opportunity to compare the expectations of both the child and the parent in order to ensure that the expectations from sport are appropriately aligned.
- Sports, club and coaches must embed game environment initiatives into all aspects of youth sport. The focus on creating positive game day environments must be held to a higher focus than that of winning the game. Every single person involved with youth sport has a critical role to play. Programs such as The FA's Respect initiative are extremely valuable, but must be embedded in every aspect of the sport in order to become the norm.
- All parents to sign relevant Codes of Conduct to reinforce their knowledge of behavioural expectations associated with youth sport.
- Leagues, Clubs and Governing Bodies to introduce signage that reminds parents of their behavioural expectations.
- Further longitudinal research and exploration around parenting styles to determine which style has a greater positive impact on youth retention is required.
- Leagues, clubs and governing bodies must seek to understand the potential stressors on parents when involved with youth sport and seek to develop strategies that can seek to minimise these concerns. A focus on elements such as fixturing, financial imposts, and seeking to develop healthy lifestyle habits of parents should be an area of concern for clubs, leagues and governing bodies to address.



THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT

“Football ... but on their terms” Pete Ackerley (*The Football Association*)

The structure of sport plays a significant role in the retention of youth participants. Sports can create barriers to participation or they can remove these factors that can negatively impact on a participant's long-term engagement in sport. Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2006) state “while youth sport programs are often assumed to foster positive youth development (i.e. physical health and psychosocial skills), as well as expert athletes and lifelong sport participants, this is clearly not always the case. To the contrary, these positive outcomes are dependent upon a multitude of factors that must be considered when planning and designing youth sport programs”.

It is important to acknowledge that pathways in sport are non-linear, however some models of development are very linear and structured in nature and subsequently do not allow or cater for evolving entry and exit points, and fluctuating levels of engagement and motivation, along an individual's journey in sport. Sports must ensure that participants can re-enter the pathway at any stage along the journey, and not merely focus on those already engaged on the path.

Sporting organisations have a significant role to play in creating flexible and alternative formats of the game, but also in establishing programs that meet the evolving needs of its participants. Fellowship discussions with organisations such as The Football Association and Rugby England highlighted their ‘participant first’ mentality, and was particularly evidenced through programs such as ‘Return to Rugby’ (<http://returntorugby.com/>), whereby they look to reengage participants.

Côté & Fraser-Thomas (2007) suggest that there are three outcomes linked to youth sport;

- **Performance:** Develop motor skills for future elite athletes and recreational adult sport participants.
- **Participation:** Improve physical health and continued participation.
- **Personal Development:** Contribute to positive youth development and developmental assets such as discipline, self-control, leadership, and cooperation.

Understanding that these are the three key objectives helps sports administrators in designing sport programmes and implementing structures that can support the long-term retention of youth participants in community sport.

A Development Model

In a sporting environment or context where there are limited resources (physical, financial or human) available, the use of a Model or Framework will help guide the decision making of an organisation to ensure that the resources are utilised in the most appropriate and resourceful method. A model also provides guidance, it provides direction and it provides a structure for administrators, parents, coaches and athletes. In saying this, through my Churchill Fellowship discussions there are various models of development that are utilised by differing sports organisations and each have its positives and negatives.

Focusing on an Australian context from a junior sport perspective we rely heavily on the Junior Sports Framework (JSF), which was released by the Australian Sports Commission in 2003. The Framework provides clear direction and guidance on the principles of inclusion, meeting the developmental needs of participants, program design, and pathway development and understanding participant motivation whilst ensuring that sports are safe, fun and fair. The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) also has a model for pathway development known as the Foundations, Talent, Elite and Mastery (FTEM) model. The purpose of this report is not to explore current Australian development models, however it is important to recognise that the JSF and FTEM are held in strong regard internationally as examples of best practice.

The **Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD)**, developed by Istvan Balyi (1998), is a widely utilised development model for sport with sports organisations across Canada, the USA and the UK adopting similar LTAD models. Originating in Canada, Bayli's LTAD model originally focused on five key stages as part of an athlete's pathway:

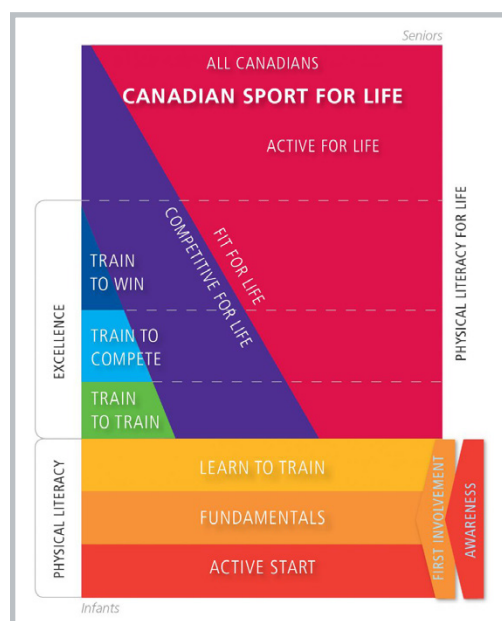
1. **FUNdamental** – Males and Females (age 6-10) with an emphasis on the development of fundamental movement skills, physical capability and athleticism whilst having fun.
2. **Training to Train** – Males (age 10-14) and Females (aged 10-13) with an emphasis on learning how to train along with the basic skills of a specific sport as well as being introduced to the basic technical/tactical skills.
3. **Training to Compete** – Males (age 14-18) and Females (13-17) with an emphasis on high intensity individual and sport-specific training whilst learning to perform skills under a variety of competitive conditions. Fifty per cent of training is devoted to the development of technical and tactical skills and fitness improvements and fifty per cent is devoted to competition-specific training and to competitions.
4. **Training to Win** – Males (age 18+) and Females (17+) emphasising that the athlete's physical, mental, technical and tactical skills are now fully established. Training is now on optimising performance and is typified by high intensity and high volume.
5. **Retirement/Retaining** – is the stage where an athlete has retired from competition permanently and can move into other aspects of sport including coaching, officiating, sport administration and the media.

This was later adjusted to add an additional stage between Stage 1 (FUNdamentals) and Stage 2 (Training to Train). Learning to Train was included with a focus on continuing the fundamental movement skills and developing all round sports skills.

Bayli's LTAD has been further adapted and expanded upon to form the **Canadian Sport for Life Model**. The website [www.http://canadiansportforlife.ca/](http://canadiansportforlife.ca/) outlines seven stages of the LTAD Sport for Life Model, these being:

1. Active Start (0-6 years)
2. FUNdamentals (girls 6-8, boys 6-9)
3. Learn to Train (girls 8-11, boys 9-12)
4. Train to Train (girls 11-15, boys 12-16)
5. Train to Compete (girls 15-21, boys 16-23)
6. Train to Win (girls 18+, boys 19+)
7. Active for Life (any age)

Active Start focuses on encouraging children to engage in different formats of play and the development of fundamental movement skills. Stage 2 – Stage 6 align with Bayli's LTAD model as described above, whilst Stage 7 (Active for Life) focuses upon participants enjoying 'lifelong participation in a variety of competitive and recreational opportunities in sport and physical activity'.



Through discussions, it was noted that organisations opinion on the LTAD Model was mixed. The Canadian Government has mandated that all sporting organisations must follow their adapted LTAD Sport for Life Model in order to receive funding, however a number of these discussions highlighted a few common criticisms. These can be summarised as:

- The LTAD Model doesn't have a strong evidentiary or research background (although from accounts this research is currently being done and therefore makes it an evolving model).
- The "10,000 hours" research forms a part of the LTAD model, and the theory has now been debunked, with the original researcher K. Anders Ericsson also indicating that his research has been taken out of context.
- The "Windows of Trainability" or opportunity as described in the LTAD model effectively mean that once an athlete has missed a "window", there is little opportunity for them to develop this into the future. This aspect was heavily criticised in discussions due to not catering for late developers.
- The LTAD is very physiological in nature and doesn't take into consideration other factors including psychological or social elements.
- The LTAD model is very linear in nature and doesn't address factors such as drop out.

There is no doubt as a model that the LTAD does offer some benefits such as adaptability, however these must also be weighed up with the criticism that it receives from a number of sources.

The **American Development Model (ADM)**, which is strongly influenced by the work of Balyi, is primarily being driven by the United States Olympic Committee and its National governing bodies as a means of addressing concerns with the American sports system and associated health impacts of falling participation levels. Developed in 2014, the underlying philosophy is to develop 'positive experiences for athletes at every level' in the American sports system, and embraces five key principles:

1. Universal access to create opportunity for all athletes;
2. Developmentally appropriate activities that emphasise motor and foundational skill development;
3. Encourage multi-sport participation;
4. Fun, engaging and challenging atmosphere;
5. Quality coaching at all age levels.

The ADM's five stages are:

1. *Discover, Learn and Play* (Ages 0-12)
Learn fundamental movement skills, encourage deliberate play, play multiple sports, emphasize practice over competition and having fun.
2. *Develop and Challenge* (Ages 10-16)
The refining of skills through challenges and competition. The development of physical, psychological and social, technical and tactical age appropriate skills
3. *Train and Compete* (Ages 13-19)
Athletes begin to train and compete in programs that meet their personal interests, goals and development needs. Competitions become more clearly defined. Focused training through coaching. Increase sport specific training.
4. *Excel for High Performance or Participate and Succeed* (Ages 15+)
During his stage the ADM model offers two distinct pathways – High performance or participation. The High Performance aspect is about maximising the athlete's talents and potential. The Participation aspect is about being active and involved at the level that meets the athlete's needs and goals.
5. *Thrive and Mentor* (Active for Life)
The final stage is about continuing to participate at a level that suits your needs and goals, or transitioning from a participant into a sport leader (such as a coach, official or administrator)




The ADM also makes some recommendations to the various key stakeholder groups that assist in providing some direction in regards to sports development.

NATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES (NGB'S)	SPORTS CLUBS	COACHES	PARENTS	ATHLETES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an NGB-specific pathway and visual representation to guide your members and future champions. • Encourage increasing the volume of programs and limiting athlete cuts. Emphasize development over results. • Support multi-sport/activity and cross training for athletes of all ages. • Outline and implement age appropriate training practices and duration recommendations for your sport, as well as periodization plans for each age level. • Drive physical literacy development at all age levels to match age and physical ability. • Provide quality-coaching education based on national standards that encourage ADM concepts and age-appropriate teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit cuts for ages 0-12 in sport programs and focus on developing skills over competition outcomes. • Use your NGBs sport pathway to design your own club development pathway for participation and competition offerings. • Provide physical literacy (i.e. agility, balance, coordination training) at every practice at every level. • Periodise training and rest time for your athletes to cut down on overuse injuries and burnout. • Encourage multi-sport/activity and cross-training to keep your athletes active and developing outside of your program. • Use developmentally appropriate drills and practice plans at all levels. • Provide qualified and certified coaches at all age levels. • Keep participation / competition costs reasonable. Find ways to increase numbers and retention rates from year to year, season to season. • Provide quality feedback and age-appropriate development benchmarks to parents and athletes. • Operate with an athlete-focused philosophy by creating fun, engaging and challenging sport experiences across all levels of development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodise training and rest time for athletes to cut down on overuse injuries and burnout. • Provide physical literacy (i.e. agility, balance, coordination training) at every practice at every level. • Use developmentally appropriate drills and practice plans at all levels. • Operate with an athlete-focused philosophy by creating fun, engaging and challenging sport experiences across all levels of development. • Provide quality feedback and age-appropriate development benchmarks to parents and athletes. • Focus on effort and development over outcomes to reinforce physical, technical and tactical advancements over winning. • Maximize athlete potential and retention at all stages of development. • Obtain certification as a coach and continue to develop your coaching skills, including age-appropriate teaching skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand your child's sport pathway and recognize where they stand in terms of age and development. • Encourage sport sampling, in which your child plays several different sports up to age 12, at minimum, to help enhance physical literacy and to be sure they find sports they enjoy. • Encourage multi-sport/activity and cross training to keep your child from burning out or developing overuse injuries. • Reward your child for sport development and proficiency over performance outcomes and winning. • Enrol your child in age-appropriate activities to ensure healthy progression and skill development before advancing to a heavy volume of competition. • Monitor the dose and duration your child is playing each week and encourage rest and recovery. • Ask for feedback from coaches and administrators on your child's development and maintain interest in your child's experience over performance outcomes. • Support and encourage your child to have fun. Don't forget it's about them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop your physical literacy and sport skills every day. Use multi-sport/activity and cross training to help develop and achieve all-around success. • Focus on your skill proficiency and game development over competition results and performance outcomes at the early stages of sport development. • Use free-play/pick-up game opportunities to stay active and build creativity outside of structured play. • Listen to your body and understand that rest and recovery are part of the sport development process. • Set goals and gather feedback from coaches and administrators to help achieve those goals. • Stay active year-round and use sport as an outlet for physical activity and exercise.


American Development Model Recommendations

As outlined above, a key recommendation is for NGB's to develop a pathway model and visual representation. A good example of this is USA Hockey's American Development Model where they have adapted the ADM and LTAD models to create their own version that is specific to their needs.

Discussions highlighted that a number of organisations in the USA indicated that the ADM was a positive step forward in the American sporting structure.



USA Hockey's American Development Model



Hockey for Life

Any Age – Players can enter at any stage. 'Hockey for Life' can provide quality recreational opportunities for all ages. USA Hockey also hopes that as adults we lead a physically active lifestyle and continue to contribute to the sport through volunteerism as coaches, referees and administrators.

Active Start	FUNdamentals	Learn to Train	Train to Train	Learn to Compete	Train to Compete	Train to Win
<p>Ages 0-6 This early development period is essential for acquiring fundamental movement skills (running, gliding, jumping, kicking, catching, striking...) that lay the foundation for more complex movements, thereby preparing children for a physically active lifestyle. USA Hockey encourages activity that incorporates fundamental movement skills in the 4 environments that lead to physical literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the water: Swimming • On the ground: Athletics • In the air: Gymnastics • On ice and snow: Sliding (skating) <p>Kids should start with a learn to skate program and then a learn to play program as their initial steps into ice hockey.</p> <p>6 & Under (Mites): 50-60 ice sessions 2-3 ice sessions per week 50-60 minute ice sessions 7-9 skaters per team 0 full-time goals 34-40 quality practices 16-20 cross-ice game days</p>	<p>Ages 6-8 Female Ages 6-9 Male The objective of this stage is to refine fundamental movement skills and begin to acquire basic sports skills. This is the time when a foundation is laid for future acquisition of more advanced skills.</p> <p>The focus is on the development of physical literacy. Fundamental movement skills should be mastered and motor development emphasized, while the participation in many sports/activities is encouraged. For optimal skill acquisition, the basic hockey skills of skating and puck control are introduced. FUN competitions are also introduced in a team environment.</p> <p>8 & Under (Mites): 50-60 ice sessions 2-3 on-ice/1 off-ice sessions/week 50-60 minute ice sessions 9-12 skaters per team 0 full-time goals 34-40 quality practices 16-20 cross-ice game days</p>	<p>Ages 8-11 Female Ages 9-12 Male This is the period of accelerated learning of coordination and fine motor control and is the critical stage for the acquisition of hockey skills.</p> <p>Prior to the beginning of the growth spurt, players have the best opportunity to learn and begin to master fine motor skills that can be used in combination with other skills. In most cases what is learned or not learned in this stage will have a very significant effect on the level of play that is achieved later on.</p> <p>Players should be able to begin to transfer skills and concepts from practices to games. Group interaction, team building and social activities should be emphasized. A balance of practices and games will promote the continued development and mastery of key hockey skills.</p> <p>10 & Under (Squirts): 95-100 ice sessions 3-4 on-ice/2 off-ice sessions/week 60 minute ice sessions 10-12 skaters and 1 goalie 75-80 quality practices 20-25 game days</p> <p>12 & Under (Peeeweeks): 105-120 ice sessions 4 on-ice/2 off-ice sessions/week 60+ minute ice sessions 12 skaters and 2 goalies 80-90 quality practices 30-35 game days</p>	<p>Ages 11-15 Female Ages 12-16 Male The focus of this stage is to further develop sports specific skills, begin to introduce competition, and start to emphasize support training to continue development of speed, strength and stamina while maintaining flexibility.</p> <p>Players should consolidate sport specific technical skills with an increased emphasis on hockey and a reduction in the number of other sports played. A continued emphasis is also placed on the development of individual and group tactics. Social and emotional considerations are addressed by placing an emphasis on team-building, group interaction and social activities.</p> <p>14 & Under (Bantam) & 16 & Under (Midget): 160 ice sessions 4-5 ice sessions per week 80 minute ice sessions Combined and separate practices for team/position 9 month training calendar 16 skaters and 2 goalies 120-130 quality practices 40-50 games Appropriate off-ice training for LTAD stage</p>	<p>Ages 15-18 Female Ages 16-18 Male This is the time to prepare athletes for the competitive environment, continue to refine technical skills, ancillary skills and develop the physical attributes.</p> <p>The focus is on optimizing fitness preparation and to begin to specialize in ice hockey. Training should be individualized to the athlete's particular needs in skill development, mental preparation, fitness and recovery. During this stage, training volume will increase, as does training intensity. Competitions become more important and the focus shifts to performance. Training will stress the development of position specific technical and tactical skills under competitive conditions. Mental skills that contribute to performance are also emphasized.</p> <p>18 & Under (Midget) & 19 & Under (Female): 200 ice sessions 5-6 ice sessions per week 80 minute ice sessions Combined and separate practices for team/position 10 month training calendar 18 skaters and 2 goalies 130-140 quality practices 50-60 games Appropriate off-ice training for LTAD stage</p>	<p>Ages 19-21 Female Ages 19-23 Male The objective of the Train to Compete stage is to transfer from the training environment to a competitive environment. Athletes must consolidate technical skills, and maintain ancillary skills and underlying physical capacities. During this stage training volume remains high while intensity increases with the importance of competitions. The training is usually 10+ months of the year and is disciplined and hockey-specific. Athletes will usually be required to move away from home for training and competition environments that fit this level of athlete development. The training is individualized to the athlete's particular needs in skill development, mental preparation, fitness and recovery.</p> <p>Junior, NCAA: Training calendar that equally supports both training and competition.</p>	<p>Ages 19+ Female Ages 19+ Male The focus of this stage is the stabilization of performance on demand characteristics and excellence within the highest level of performance at the NHL, World Championships and Olympics. This is the final phase of athletic preparation that only a very small minority will achieve. Maturation is complete and all the performance factors should be fully established to optimize performance in national or international competitions. The athletes in this stage will be the performers in the highest level professional league and at the highest international level. It is important to build a winning strategy with these athletes, and to individualize training and recovery programs to prevent over-training.</p> <p>NCAA, Professional: Appropriate training that supports competition calendar.</p>

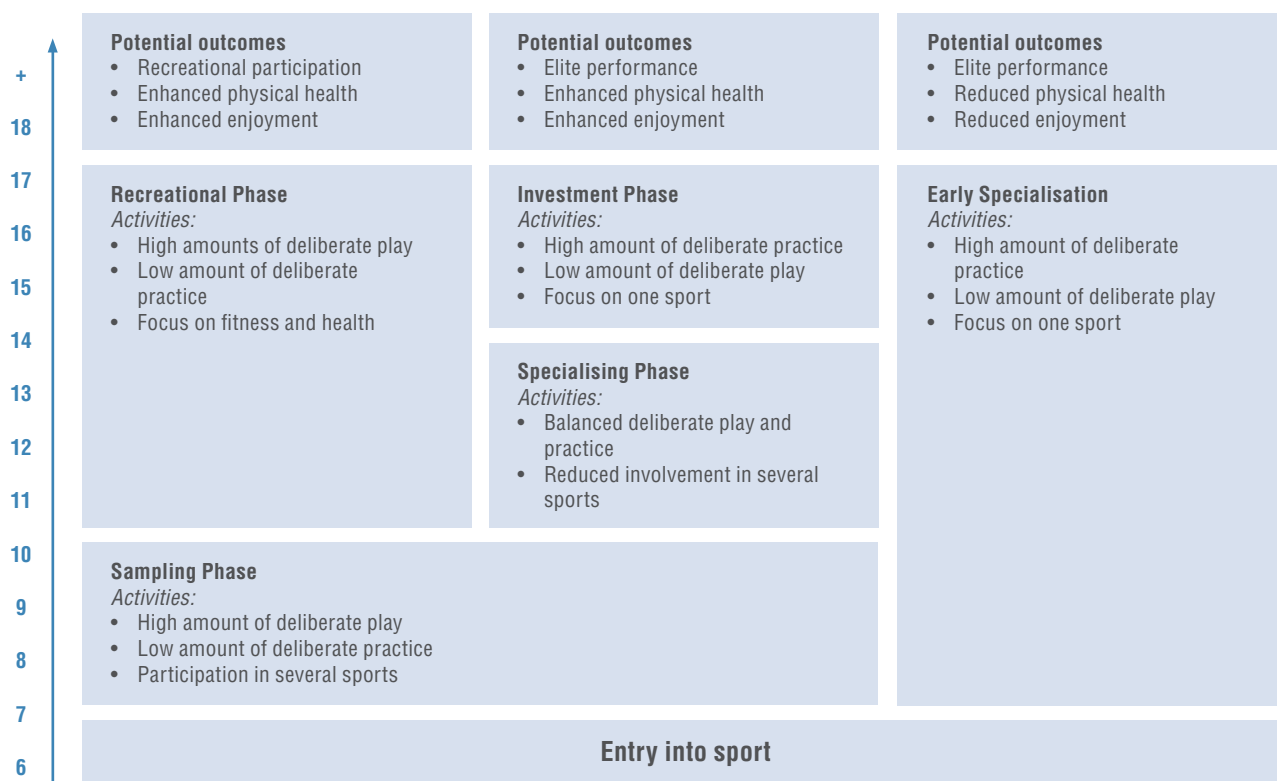
For complete details, visit ADMkids.com

USA Hockey American Development Model

The ADM is highly regarded by many in the US, as for the first time it has provided sports in America a guiding framework or structure of which to develop their sport around. As Project Play suggests the ADM is seen as “an essential document in encouraging best practice in youth sports”.

Jean Côté (Queens University, Ontario) has also proposed the **Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP)**, which is based more on a psychosocial approach to sport development. Utilising development theories, Côté's DMSP model introduces a number of key phases through a participation pathway including:

- *Sampling Phase* – is when participants (usually aged between 6 to 12) should sample a number of different sports. They should develop fundamental movement skills and associated all round sports skills, and there should be a high amount of deliberate play and a low amount of deliberate practice.
- *Specialising Phase* – participants start to balance deliberate play and deliberate practice, and they start to focus on a smaller number of sports, and develop sport specific skills. Participants are usually aged between 13 to 15 years old.
- *Investment Phase* – participants focus purely on one sport, and they have high amounts of deliberate practice and low amounts of deliberate play. The participant generally is looking at a high level of elite performance through this phase. The participant's age is generally 16+.
- *Recreational Phase* – Participant's focus is on enjoying sport for fitness and health reasons, and is characterised by high levels of deliberate play with low levels of deliberate practice. Participants can generally be in this phase 13 until they stop playing or move into a specialising or investment phase of participation.
- *Early Specialisation* – Côté highlights that this phase is not ideal long term in retaining youth participants. It involves an early focus on just one sport, high amounts of deliberate practice and very low amounts of deliberate play. It also can lead to reduced levels of physical and/or mental health and reduced levels of enjoyment or fun in sport.



Côté, Development Model of Sport Participation

The optimal pathway for participants through to elite performance is via the sampling phase to the specialising phase and into the investment phase. This pathway helps to ensure that participation is fun for the kids, they develop physical literacy and fundamental movement skills, they have a high level of intrinsic motivation, they develop sport specific skills but above all they don't burnout or suffer from overuse injuries through early specialisation. The DMSP model describes the "processes, pathways and outcomes associated with sport development throughout childhood and adolescence" (Côté and Vierimaa, 2014).

As part of DMSP research Côté et al. (2009) proposed 7 postulates that are associated with the various pathway aspects of the model.

- *Postulate 1:* early diversification (sampling) does not hinder elite sport participation in sports where peak performance is reached after maturation,
- *Postulate 2:* early diversification (sampling) is linked to a longer sport career and has positive implications for long-term sport involvement,
- *Postulate 3:* early diversification (sampling) allows participation in a range of contexts that most favourably affects positive youth development,
- *Postulate 4:* high amounts of deliberate play during the sampling years build a solid foundation of intrinsic motivation through involvement in activities that are enjoyable and promote intrinsic regulation,
- *Postulate 5:* a high amount of deliberate play during the sampling years establishes a range of motor and cognitive experiences that children can ultimately bring to their principal sport of interest,
- *Postulate 6:* around the end of primary school (about age 13), children should have the opportunity to either choose to specialise in their favourite sport or to continue in sport at a recreational level,
- *Postulate 7:* By late adolescents (around age 16) have developed the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills needed to invest their effort into highly specialized training in one sport.

The postulates highlight the notions of diversity and deliberate play during childhood. Côté and Vierimaa (2014) suggest "most models of athlete development in sport have been atheoretical and descriptive in nature, providing no account of individual differences in attained performance or participation rates among athletes with similar developmental opportunities. There is consequently a need to move from description to prediction of athletes' development and assess the variables that affect their progression in sport". The DMSP model serves to address these concerns.

Examining the 3P's

Côté and Vierimaa (2014) state “the DMSP and its postulates integrate the various outcomes for sport performance, participation and personal development – by focusing on key proximal processes (deliberate play, deliberate practice, early specialisation and early diversification) and the environment in which the processes are happening (e.g., role of coaches, peers and parents)”.

In terms of defining and developing an effective sporting structure it is important to understand the different contexts of the 3P's (performance, participation and personal development) of potential sport outcomes, as well as the way that they integrate with each other.

- *Performance* – the initial performance focus should be on sports sampling. Participants should be encouraged to participate in a range of different sports with a focus on deliberate play to diversify the participant's skill base. Côté and Hancock (2014) suggest that specialised programs for participants under the age of 12 or 13 are not necessary in order to develop elite athletes. They go on to propose that providing opportunities for all children to participate in various informal and organised recreational sports should be the focus of sport programmers even if developing elite athletes (e.g., the performance objective) is the ultimate goal of the programme. In other words, diversity (instead of specialisation) during childhood has a positive effect on future elite performance as well as long-term participation in sport”.
- *Participation* – Côté and Hancock (2014) highlight a disturbing trend that they have observed in youth sport programmes across the world. They suggest that sports are “adopting a view of sport that focuses on long-term athlete development, institutionalisation, elitism, early selection and early specialisation with the explicit or implicit goal of developing elite-level athletes instead of focusing on the short-term and inherent enjoyment that result from sport participation”. The danger with this approach is that the focus of sports administrators, sport programming and the sport structure is on the less than 1% that make the elite level, as opposed to the 99% are involved in community level or the recreational phase of the DMSP model. This is the reason we are seeing a drop out in youth participation. We are no longer meeting the needs of the majority (and establishing a structure to suit their requirements), and we are unfortunately focused too heavily on the small minority of participants. We do not understand (or do not listen to) the expectations and motives that kids want from their sports experience – to have fun with their friends.
- *Personal Development* – through discussions with Jean Côté in regards to the teaching of life skills or character development, he did not believe that they needed to be explicitly taught (along with the notion of transfer) as suggested by Martin Camiré, as it could be developed and learnt through deliberate play and unstructured environments. Côté and Hancock (2014) intimate “if sport is only perceived as a support for personal development in other domains, there is a risk to undermining the value of sport-specific knowledge and skills also beneficial to long-term sport participation. A sole focus of sport programmes on personal development is an adult decision that does not necessarily align with children's motivation to participate in sport”. They go on to suggest that programmes that are developed on the notions of deliberate play, sport sampling and fun “have a protective effect against negative outcomes such as burnout, dropout and injuries”.

So what does all this mean in terms of developing a quality, inclusive sport structure that aids youth retention? As part of the DMSP Model Côté and Hancock (2014) developed 10 recommendations that should be considered in the design of sport programmes or sport structures for children:

Regulate length of season to 3 or 4 months, with a maximum of 6 months.	Limit lengthy travel to organised competitions.	Introduce 'grass-roots' sport programmes that focus on trying different sports.	Do not implement a selection process of more 'talented' children until the specialisation years.
Provide healthy competitive opportunities, but do not overemphasise winning and long-term outcomes such as championships.	Discourage early specialisation in one sport.	Allow children to play all positions in a given sport.	Promote deliberate play within and beyond organised sport.
	Design play and practice activities that focus on fun and short-term rewards.	Understand children's needs and do not 'over coach'.	

These ten recommendations serve to guide sports administrators in what is considered current best practice when it comes to designing sports programmes for children that will ultimately retain youth participants in sport.

Personal Assets Framework for Sport

Côté, Turnbridge and Vierimaa (2014) have developed a framework that recommends that the; **'what'** (the activity that you undertake), the **'who'** (the relationships you create with others), and the **'where'** (the specific setting), all play a significant role in youth retention when these three basic elements 'positively interact'. Côté, et al. suggests that it "creates a context that, when repeated on a regular basis, leads to changes in the personal assets (competence, confidence, connection and character) of the participant".

Growth in these personal assets (the 4C's) has been associated with "positive sport experiences which in turn lead to long term outcomes, including continued sport participation, higher levels of performance in sport, and personal development through sport (the 3P's)". It is anticipated that through this process of growth and a development in competence, confidence, connection and character that youth players will be retained in community sport.

Côté, et al. highlights the DMSP model as an ideal model to develop the 'what' aspect of this framework. The activities that are undertaken have a direct result on whether it is a positive sports outcome or not, and indicate that, as per the DMSP model, sampling is a critical aspect of developing personal assets (both across sports and within sports). They also emphasise the importance of deliberate play in this context.

Lerner (2002), as cited in Côté, et al. (2014), indicates the integral role of "interpersonal relationships as key drivers of individual development" in sport. Whilst discussing the Personal Assets Framework with Jean Côté, he highlighted the importance of transformational leadership, and the important role that it plays in relationships between the participant and the coach, the participant and the parent, and the participant and their peers. Côté continues to research this aspect of transformational leadership and the role that it plays in sport development and the long-term retention of youth participants in community sport.

Côté, et al (2014), cite Bass and Riggio (2006), in regards to transformational leaders being identified according to four dimensions:

- Idealised influence – leaders foster trust and respect and are role models for their followers,
- Inspirational motivation – leaders inspire and challenge their followers,
- Intellectual stimulation – leaders encourage their followers to be innovative and creative,
- Individualised consideration – leaders display genuine concern for individuals' development and achievement."

The relationship that exists between the participant and the coach is critical to youth retention, and this has been highlighted in this report as part of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention'. It is suggested by Côté, et al. that if a coach is a transformational leader (through the above characteristics), then this "coaching style may be particularly effective in fostering positive youth development".

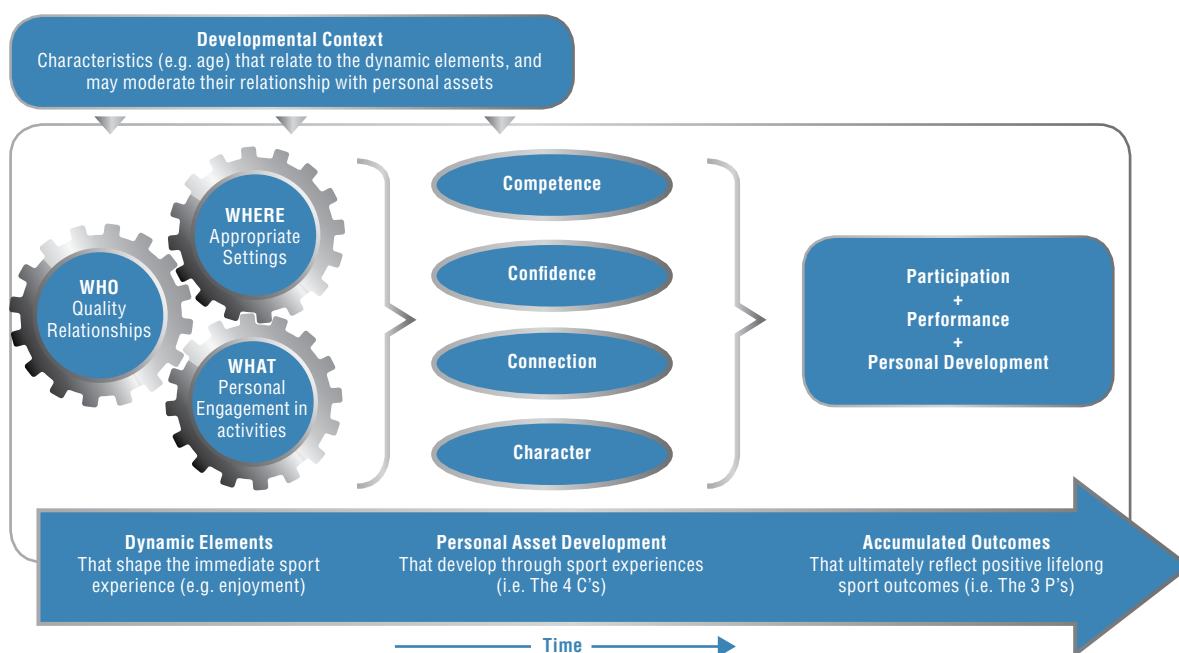
The participant and parent relationship (highlighted again as part of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention') is a critical one and if the parent models transformational leadership then there is a strong correlation to the participant exhibiting these characteristics through their sports participation. The third key relationship that Côté, et al. describe is that between the participant and their peers. As discussed, playing with friends is a critical reason as to why kids play sport; hence this relationship is a critical one in terms of youth retention. "Effective peer leadership among adolescents was associated with higher levels of task and social cohesion and collective efficacy" (Côté, et al.).

Finally, the 'where' aspect of the Personal Assets Framework is critical as it describes the setting that the participant engages within. Côté, et al (2014) talks extensively regarding the 'birthplace effect' (i.e. growing up in a smaller city or a regional town and how this shapes a participants development). They suggest that smaller communities "provide children with more space for unorganised physical activity and playing sport with peers and from a behavioural perspective, smaller cities may provide integrative approaches to sport participation".

The other important aspect to consider in this is the quality of the sports environment that is created. If there is a positive game day environment that exists, then there is more likelihood that the participant will develop the assets of competence, confidence, connection and character, and alternatively it is extremely unlikely that these would be developed if there were a poor environment. This again highlights the importance of adults (coach, administrators and parents) ensuring that the game day environment is a positive one for all participants in order to ensure youth retention.

In terms of the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention', the Personal Assets Framework for Sport could sit comfortably in a number of the nine components. It would be positioned well in both the participant and the coach components, however given the connection to the DMSP model and the importance of the 'what' and 'where' aspect, it was determined that for the purpose of this report it should be situated in the structure of sport.

Understanding the influences and context of the 'what', the 'who' and the 'where' as key aspects of the Personal Assets Framework for Sport, will ultimately lead to an participant developing the assets outlined as the 4C's. Through the development of these qualities and individual can achieve the positive sport outcomes of participation, performance and personal development. Côté, et al (2014) propose "by shaping each of these dynamic elements in ways that promote personal assets development, coaches, parents, and sport organisations will ideally promote positive sport experiences and longer term outcomes – both in sport, as well as in other domains of life".



Personal Assets Framework for Sport. Côté, et al. (2014)

Development of Alternative Products

Sports have really started to look at developing alternative formats of their game to try and meet the evolving requirements of participants. Sports such as cricket (20/20), Netball (Fast5), Tennis (Fast4) and Rugby (7's) have developed alternative delivery models to meet a diverse range of participants and a changing consumer base. It is important that when sports look at introducing alternative products, that they first consider the motivations and requirements of the participants. If youth participants are suggesting that the reason they play is to 'have fun with their friends' then how do we structure sport to address this requirement? This should be the premise behind any alternative format of sport.

Anecdotal feedback from participants suggests that they do not necessarily want to participate in traditional formats of sport, delivered in traditional timeslots, with traditional rules, over a traditional period of time, with traditional adult/umpire involvement. Understanding the importance of deliberate play and unstructured environments sport could utilise this as a positive starting point.

As part of my Churchill Fellowship, I had the opportunity to travel to Melrose in Scotland, to investigate an early example of a sport introducing an alternative product (*see Modify the Game case study*).

Sports must be strategic in their approach in introducing new alternative products, and not just introduce them, as it is the latest trend in sport. It must meet the needs and motivations of participants.



Modify the Game

Melrose Rugby Football Club, Scotland

One of the earliest examples of modifying Sport to better meet the needs of the participants and the club, the Melrose Rugby Football Club was the birthplace of Rugby 7's.

In 1883, Ned Haig (a player at the time) suggested to the club to modify the game to 7 a-side (as opposed to the traditional 15 a-side), and reduce the game from 80 minutes to 15 minutes (7 minute halves). At the time, this modification was primarily used for tournaments as a way of engaging more players on one day (and as a club fund raiser), but the concept quickly spread and now is played worldwide.

Both the Melrose Rugby Football Club and Ned Haig are recognised in the International Rugby Board (IRB) Hall of Fame as the founders of Rugby 7's.

Multi-Sport Clubs

The establishment of sport clubs that participants register with and then experience 4-5 sports throughout a year, with one set registration fee, could serve as a model to enhance sports sampling, reduce overuse injuries, reduce player burnout, promote deliberate play, reduce transition, and registration issues. The opportunity for sports to work together to monitor player welfare and effectively map out a participants sports participation for a year, could be a positive step forward that places the participant at the centre of the decision making processes as opposed to sports taking an approach of self interest.

Additionally, this could be an ideal program that introduces multicultural participants, or migrants new to Australia, into a sporting club environment that promotes inclusion, connectedness, empowerment, ownership and developing positive community relationships.

The question that we must ask though is that how do we ensure that this concept remains relevant for the kids that are engaged in it? How do we ensure that as they move through a sports pathway that a multi sport club model still meets their individual needs?

Sport Education Model for Schools

Whilst this report is primarily focused on understanding retention strategies for youth participants in community sport, it is still important to note the connection between community club and school sport. A number of participants will ultimately play sport both in a community and a school context and it is important from a player welfare perspective that both parties (clubs and schools) work proactively together to address issues of player welfare and reduce potential overuse injuries. Traditionally, schools and clubs, generally have a poor working relationship whereby each thinks they are more important and take a line of self-interest, particularly when it comes to talented participants. Ultimately, there must be a player first mentality when it comes to schools and clubs working together. Any school sporting structure should compliment the community sporting structure and vice versa.

The Sport Education Model, developed by Siedentop (1994) is a useful model to create authentic and meaningful school physical education programs. The lessons mirror that of a community season where the students are placed in teams and take on the role such as the coach, team manager, sports trainers, journalists and members of a sports council. The benefit of this model is that it replicates community sport, and can serve as an introduction to community participation. It also highlights the other imperative volunteer roles required for sport – not just the participant, and seeks to develop the skills of these positions in the students. Through this model, Siedentop seeks to develop students that **competent** (satisfactory skills and an understanding of game strategy), **literate** (understand the values and traditions of sport) and **enthusiastic** (participates and behaves appropriately).

Developing an understanding, and passion for sport, within a school environment can assist in transitioning a participant from school to the community. Positive experiences in school physical education lead to greater retention rates in community sport. Developing physical literacy within a school environment can lead to greater levels of competence in community sport. Deliberate play in a school context can develop greater levels of intrinsic motivation in a community environment. This however, is reliant on the school and the teacher to have an understanding of these principles and the important role that they play in retaining participants in community sport. Physical educators and generalist primary school teachers, through their tertiary education (or through professional development) should learn about the factors that retain youth participants in sport, the long term benefits that this provides to the individual and the community, and the important role that they can play in achieving this goal.

An additional aspect of school sport worth considering, is to be mindful of creating a singular stream of ‘school only participation’ (with no community competitions) as it potentially creates a system that caters for the elite and high socioeconomic participants at the expense of those that do not go to the perceived ‘better schools’ and once established the ‘gap’ will continue to widen between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. A singular stream is dangerous as it potentially removes any control from state sporting organisations or governing bodies, as the determining factor of engagement is not the participant, but the school or the teacher. A dual streamed model is preferred where both systems work to compliment each other.

This notion was discussed with BC Hockey whereby they are at risk of losing some of their competitive community teams and competitions as private schools, or highly successful public schools, are attracting the better talent, at the expense of the lower socioeconomic areas. This leads to a weakening of the entire system and ultimately could become a situation where some kids miss out on competition because they don’t go to or simply cant afford to go to the right school.

Pathway Documents for Participants

It is important that every participant in sport is aware of and understands their pathway opportunities, and it is imperative that sports develop, produce and widely circulate pathway documents. Visual pathway documentation serves to ensure that all participants are aware of their next step or progression in the sport and will ensure that no participants drop out as they are unsure of where to go next. Participants also must be aware of how to re-enter sport at different times throughout their life. Sports must be clear on how participants can reengage, at a level that suits their needs.

“Children need a better pathway in sports than up or out” Project Play

Research, Data and Insights

Organisations need to invest in research, data and insights to guide their decision-making processes and to act, not on intuition, but based on evidence. Evidence based decision making is critical for an organisation to grow, develop and ensure a return on investment.

Research, data analytics and insights can drive strategic change, support decision-making and identify gaps in delivery to better meet the evolving needs of participants. Understanding the participant/customer is critical for any industry, including the sports industry. Conversations with all sporting organisations through the Fellowship highlighted that the innovative and progressive organisations were significantly investing in this element of their business to gain better overall business and participatory outcomes. On average there was an approximate 8% - 10% spend of total budget on undertaking research, data and insight work, and looked at everything from understanding the participant, through to participation trends, drop out or churn rates, participant tracking and game segment insights. This was definitely an element that sport in Australia could certainly be doing better in. It is a recommendation of this report that sports look to increase their investment in this area as it is traditionally an area that is either totally lacking or is done quite poorly.

Review of Programs

Governing bodies, including national and state sporting organisations, when assessing the level of success or failure of specified participation programs or pathways, often look to the sport outcome of performance as the primary point of reference or measure. Côté and Vierimaa (2014) state the success of sport programs for the development of elite performers continues to be measured, in many countries, by the performance of a fraction of young athletes who reach elite levels of performance in adulthood—with little attention being provided to the more than 99% of young athletes who participate in these sport programs without going on to elite performance”.

This narrow view of youth sport often makes organisations quite reactionary to opinion or suggestion that is not evidenced based and, in all honesty, is focused purely on less than 1% of those involved in sport. This approach does not enhance the development of youth sport, and sports need to focus on the proposed three outcomes of sport – performance, participation and personal development. Making decisions, or basing opinion, based on less than 1% of an entire pathway equates to poor business.

The review process of sport programs should occur on a continual basis, and should endeavour to ensure that a participant first mentality is adopted, and their views and opinions sought. Any evaluation should seek to improve the overall quality of what is offered, and also meet the participants needs.

Pete Ackerley (The FA) talked extensively about the fact that the structure of sport into the future must meet the needs of the participants. It must have a customer focus that asks the participant what they want from their sports experience. The traditional format of the game may not meet the future needs of participation and as such sports and clubs may need to be flexible in their delivery in order to retain participants. Ultimately, it has to be on their terms.

Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2006) suggest that we must develop policies and programs “to assure that all youth have the opportunity to engage in sports and to develop their talent to its potential. Providing opportunities to all children to participate in various informal and organized recreational sports should be the focus of sport programmers. In order to achieve this, funding efforts must make a shift back to grassroots levels rather than focusing only on elite levels”.

Out of the Box

Scottish Rugby is investigating the concept of a possible alternative competition fixture structure. They are interested in piloting a ‘squash style’ competition structure where you challenge a team above you to determine your fixture as opposed to set fixtures. If you win you take their place and they take yours. It could serve to add interest in their competitions as opposed to a traditional fixture format.

Recommendations

- Understand the outcomes of youth sport; these being participation, performance and personal development.
- Gain an understanding of the relevant sport development models and adopt the most appropriate one to suit the needs of your organisation in order to guide and direct decision making processes. Note: Australia currently utilises the Junior Sport Framework, however if I was to recommend one it would be the Development Model for Sport Participation as this is more appropriate for retaining participants in community sport.
- Highlight the importance of sports sampling at primary school age for all participants.
- Promote deliberate play to all participants, coaches, parents and clubs.
- Do not start to specialise in one sport until age 13 or 14.
- Sports, governing bodies and clubs need to focus on 99% of the participants (community participants) as opposed to focusing on the 1% (elite pathway). Funding should also be reflective of this focus.
- Adopt Côté's ten recommendations for community sport programs:
 - Regulate length of season to 3 or 4 months, with a maximum of 6 months.
 - Limit lengthy travel to organized competitions.
 - Introduce 'grass-roots' sport programmes that focus on trying different sports.
 - Do not implement a selection process of more 'talented' children until the specialisation years.
 - Provide healthy competitive opportunities, but do not overemphasize winning and long-term outcomes such as championships.
 - Discourage early specialization in one sport.
 - Allow children to play all positions in a given sport.
 - Promote deliberate play within and beyond organized sport.
 - Design play and practice activities that focus on fun and short-term rewards.
 - Understand children's needs and do not 'over coach'.
- Understand and adopt Côté, et al. Personal Assets Framework for Sports.
- Understand the importance of the 4C's – Competence, Confidence, Connection and Character.
- Adopt a transformational leadership approach for participant-coach, participant-parent and participant-peer.
- Determine the need and requirement to adapt and introduce alternative sport products into the market.
- Investigate the possibility of introducing multi-sport clubs to better cater for the needs of participants.
- Encourage schools and physical education specialists to adopt a Sport Education Model into their teaching curriculum.
- Understand the importance and strength of having both a school stream and community stream for sports participation outcomes.
- Develop and distribute clear and accurate participation pathway documents for all participants.
- Participants must be aware of how to reengage in participation pathways for sports that delivers them into a sporting context that meets their needs and requirements.
- Invest in data, research and insights in your organisation, club or sport. Utilise this to drive your decision-making processes.
- Review all programs on a regular and ongoing basis to ensure that they are meeting the participant's needs.
- Understand and promote the principle of 'on their terms'.
- Organisations should review and determine are they spending an appropriate amount on grassroots participation programs as opposed to talent or elite programs. In other words are you catering in terms of expenditure on the 99%, as opposed to the 1%?



TALENT DEVELOPMENT

“The overly structured, competitive and adult driven aspects of organised sport and deliberate practice in childhood can lead to negative outcomes such as early exclusion of late maturing athletes and the increased prevalence of overuse injuries and dropout, all of which can potentially limit the talent development pool for certain sports” Jean Côté & David Hancock (2014)

The structure and long-term impact of a sports Talent or Elite Pathway are increasingly being reviewed and redefined as an important means of retaining a greater number of participants in the game. Proactive sports and sporting organisations are reshaping the way that they look at talent development with a focus on retaining a greater number of skilled players in the game across all levels.

Through discussions in Canada, the USA and the UK, there are a number of examples that could be considered best practice as they are challenging the status quo of traditional formats of talent development. There are also examples of programs in Sweden and Finland that were identified as innovative ways of addressing player retention through the talent development system. There is recognition that the Talent Pathway plays an important role in not only those that become elite players, but also in regards to developing a wider base of skilled players across all levels of the game.

Players that are cut from talent development squads are increasingly walking away from sport, primarily due to ineffective talent development processes that focus on ability as opposed to talent identification, and a lack of understanding of the individual participant and their motivations to play sport.



Cutting of Players

The Halland and Skåne Districts in Sweden serve as an example where the cutting of players in Soccer has become a thing of the past and was highlighted as an innovative methodology to talent development. They have undertaken an approach whereby every player that wants to will be involved in 'talent development' will be involved through a means of not excluding anyone. The notion of talent identifiers only seeing a player's current ability along with the desire to not exclude (but retain) youth is at the core of the decision.

Similarly, in Swedish Ice Hockey, one of the shining lights is a club called Skelleftea that does not cut players until after age 17 (and they play only six months a year – highlighting the Sport Sampling argument). This club has produced three first round NHL draft picks since 2009.

The Finnish Ice Hockey system is very similar with a large intake at the bottom end of their talent pathway (where almost every youth player is invited to development events where the focus is on developing the fundamentals of the game). Finland changed their entire development structure to not only focus on these fundamentals, but also introduce small sided games cross ice, reduce the amount of deselection that occurs, reduce the amount of competitive games until age 13/14 in order to reduce burnout, and invested significantly in facilities. Sweden and Finland continue to perform successfully at international events and getting players drafted to the NHL.

Finnish Ice Hockey

2016 NHL Draft

3 Finnish players in Top 5

2016 World Championships

Gold Medal - 2016 IIHF World Junior Championship
 Gold Medal - 2016 IIHF World Under-18 Championship
 Silver Medal - 2016 IIHF World Championship

There are thousands of examples in Australia, and worldwide, of players involved in talent development squads or teams that have been ‘cut’ and have effectively walked away from that particular sport, or even more alarming sport and physical activity all together. The best players at the age of 10, 12 or 14 often aren’t the best available players at 16 or 17, and it is extremely unlikely that any talent scout or player development manager will be able to select a child at 10 – 12 that they are certain will make elite ranks. This was very clear when speaking to researchers such as Jean Côté in Canada in that there is no evidence supporting the early identification of elite players in most sports. Côté and Hancock (2014) state “reviews of the talent detection and identification literature in sport, however, show that long-term prediction of talented athletes is unreliable, especially when detection of talent is attempted during the pre-pubertal or pubertal growth periods”.

So the question that should be asked is; who is developing players in those formative years? All sports would agree that these development years are so crucial to a player’s long term development, so why then would a sport or a team cut a player and effectively turn them over to someone else to develop?

Sports in Australia need to address the current philosophies of ‘cutting players’, not only to simply retain community players, but also to retain talented players in the pathway that may not have the size, strength or perceived ability at that particular moment of time. The cutting or deselection of players is a process that can negatively impact on an athlete’s identity.

Brown and Potrac (2009) highlight the “emotional disturbances that accompanied (a player’s) deselection”. They discuss how a participant’s identity is shaped and revolves around their particular sport of choice (becoming in a sense one dimensional) and that when the player was deselected “they lacked alternative roles, activities, interests and identities to turn to”.

Generalising, clubs are often extremely poor at the process of deselecting players and do not provide the player with additional support structures to assist with their transition and ultimately retention in sport. Brown and Potrac (2009) suggest that players often receive very little in terms of “social support from the club ... and in particular they (the players) expressed feelings of anger and betrayal”. Jones et al. (2005) as cited in Brown and Potrac (2009) argue, “Coaches need to develop athletes with multiple identities and ensure that their self worth is not solely dependent upon successfully filling the role of athlete”. They go on to highlight the importance (and obligation) of coaches to develop the whole person as opposed to just an athlete.

This strongly correlates with the importance of character or life skill development as outlined in the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’, and is also supported by the component of Participant Motivation. The motivation of a player will ultimately impact on the reaction of that player if they are deselected. If they are an ‘ego oriented’ person (Achievement Goal Theory) or have a strong inclination in regards to their perceived competence, then they could react negatively to being deselected and be “motivationally fragile when they doubt their own competence” (Spray, et al. 2006). Ultimately, if the process of talent identification is significantly improved then no participant needs to be cut or deselected.

Quality of Talent Development Programs

The quality of any environment will ultimately impact on the participant’s long-term retention in sport. Ensuring that talent programs still meet the requirements of participants and the reasons why they participate in sport is crucial. The program must still be based on fun and enjoyment (the most important reason that they play sport) and if the participant is not seeing some benefit from the program then they are again likely to walk away from the sport or the program.

Talent programs should have a focus on the fundamentals of the game and reinforcing these as a key approach to long-term athlete development. All sports will be able to isolate the 3-5 key fundamental skills that are required for successful participation, and ultimately these should be the focus of the talent development program.

The Finnish Ice Hockey program focuses upon the fundamentals of the game in small-sided games on half ice in order to emphasise stick and puck handling skills in contested situations. Similarly, when discussing small-sided games with the Football Association in the UK, they also have a focus on small-sided games for talent development. Likewise, English Rugby League in youth and younger levels has adopted a 4 a-side game to really allow players to develop through multiple touches of the ball in smaller fields.

Australian researcher and Associate Professor from Flinders University, Shane Pill, highlights the importance of utilising a Game Sense approach to player development (which was developed by the Australian Sports Commission and the work of Rod Thorpe). This approach not only assists with players enjoying what they are doing, but also significantly improves a players decision making in critical moments of the game. Game sense training can be in the form of small-sided games as discussed earlier in this paper, and whilst aspects can also be developed through deliberate play (Côté), Pill often discusses 'Play with Purpose'. Pill (cited in Blog www.thephysicaleducator.com) suggests that there are some key features of a Game Sense approach, these include:

- Purposeful teacher use of questioning to guide student discovery and then understanding of game performance.
- Purposefully teaching for transfer between games within a category and across game categories.
- Purposeful design of games as learning contexts, contexts focusing on developing skill performance, with individual, team and class engagement in cognitive, physical and relational "team" game development.
- Understand that sports possess a cognitive complexity.

A game sense approach provides participants with an opportunity to develop and learn through guided discovery, and purposeful questioning. "Sports are dynamic and non-linear in their moment-to-moment configurations of play and therefore coaches should ensure that teaching and skill learning are also dynamic and non-linear so that transfer from practice to game environments is facilitated" (Zuccolo, et al. 2014).

Developing the Individual – Not just the Player

The National Football League's (NFL) High School Player Development (HSPD) program is an interesting approach to developing the whole player as opposed to purely the athlete. It is a comprehensive program that seeks to develop players both on and off the field and provides education for both coaches and players involved in their High School football programs.

Focusing on an on-field perspective, the program primarily seeks to develop the fundamentals of the game and is based on a principle of not excluding individuals. Every player will develop the fundamental skills to play every position on the field. Jerry Horowitz (NFL) says, "You are going to get a chance. You will play every position – not matter your ability, your size, your shape or your speed". Horowitz indicates that at this age there is no way of knowing who will make it and what position you will end up playing, so it is important to develop fundamental skills across all aspects of the game.

The program also focuses on the development of a small number of fundamental strategies or set plays that they have every player learn and develop to ensure that there is a degree of consistency in understanding. The on-field program also heavily focuses on using a reduced numbers approach (small sided games), and incorporates competition as a key element (both in a team and as an individual). The other aspect that Horowitz discussed was the importance that for 15-20 minutes they simply let the participants play – no adults, no adult imposed rules – and the coaches simply observe. He stated that this is where "the leaders of the group really shine".

The off-field component of this program focuses on character and life skill development and involves the teaching of aspects such as anger management, conflict resolution, drug and substance abuse education, job interview skills, leadership skills, financial management skills and positive decision making. The other key aspects of this program is the role that peer mentors play in the development of others, and the notion of serving or giving back to your community.

It is important that talent development programs focus on the fundamentals of the game, but it is also equally important that the focus on more than just the sport. They must develop the person as well as the athlete. It is through this combined approach that players can get the full potential from their involvement in talent development programs and ultimately prepare them for life outside of sport. This is how you develop the whole person as opposed to just one aspect or 'one identity' as suggested by Brown and Potrac (2009).

Players Maturity Rating vs. Age Grouping

Bio banding is a concept that is being currently trialled by the Premier League in the UK through a number of tournaments where the players are grouped not by age, but by maturity levels. This incorporates the underpinning philosophy of 'Stage not Age'.

Utilising the **Khamis-Roche Method** of determining maturity, which calculates their level of maturation, based on a child's height, weight and the height of both parents. Another non invasive measure that can be utilised is the **Prediction of Age of Peak Height Velocity** (Mirwald, et al.)

Players are then banded either within the 85-90% of predicted adult height range or the 90-95%. This allows for players who are physically early or later maturers to participate against players of similar maturity levels, and is a way to potentially address Relative Age Effect.

Bio banding also places the emphasis on skill development as players can no longer dominate based on size and strength, thus potentially developing a greater number of better all round players. Ultimately, with the goal of retaining greater numbers of players in the game, it's a method to potentially gain higher numbers moving through the development pathway.

One aspect that bio banding does not address is the emotional capabilities of the participants and whether they are at the appropriate level of their emotional development. This is a factor that could potentially negatively impact on the bio banding trial, however it is still worth exploring in terms of physical development with individuals being considered on a needs basis.

Talent Development Managers, and those involved in talent programs (i.e. coaches), must not underestimate or downplay the role that they play in Youth Retention. Through their programs, their processes and their philosophies they can have a huge impact on the number of participants that either stay involved in sport or drop out. The decisions that they make can have a life long impact on participants. They need to be aware of the factors that impact on youth retention such as sampling v specialisation, the deselection of participants, participant motivation, the importance of play and ultimately they must remember why kids play sport – to have fun with their friends.

Recommendations

- Sports need to develop a long-term talent identification process as opposed to selecting players on current ability or level.
- Development programs should only be instigated for participants that are 14 years and older. Prior to this players should be sampling all sports as opposed to specializing in one.
- Sports should introduce a fundamentals approach to talent development programs, with all players learning to play all positions and all players having equal opportunity to game time.
- Sports need to limit the deselection (cutting) of players and the negative impact that this can have on participants.
- Sports must look at the player feedback processes that are in place to ensure that a player first approach is utilised that provides relevant comment, direction and support for the individual.
- Develop athletes that have multiple identities and have established skills both on and off the field (character and life skill development).
- Introduce small-sided games to enhance the participants experience, learning and development.
- Introduce a game sense approach to learning and development for participants.
- Sports need to focus on and enhance the quality of their talent development programs.
- Sports should investigate alternative models of talent development (such as bio banding) to better meet the needs of participants and to ensure that all participants are catered for.



OPPORTUNITY & ACCESS

“Right Time, Right Place, Right Price, Right Style, Right Coach”

James Gregory (Street Games)

By offering sport “at the right time, in the right place, at the right price, in the right style and with the right coach” will make a significant difference to reducing kids dropping out of sport. This is the ‘Doorstop Sport’ philosophy that Street Games promotes, but it is a philosophy that all sports should adopt to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to participate and benefit from playing community sport. This attitude is all about putting the participant at the heart of every decision, a true player first mentality.

It is important that governments, governing bodies, sports and clubs seek out innovative ways to enable access to sport (and its associated benefits) for everyone. It is about enabling those from low socio economic backgrounds the opportunity to engage, it is about enabling participants from diverse and multicultural backgrounds the opportunity to engage, it is about enabling single parent families, regional participants, and both genders the opportunity to engage. No matter if you are on an elite pathway to play professionally or you are a community grass roots participant, sport must be fun, fair and inclusive – and it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure that this is the case.

Accessible for All

Youth sports must be accessible for all; both in terms of being able to participate (including those from diverse backgrounds and those with different physical abilities) and also ensuring that those who are registered to play have an opportunity to actually play. Kids want equality in a sports experience, they do not want to be the player that sits on the bench and doesn't get game time, and they don't want their friends sitting on the bench either. Coaches have an important role to play in ensuring that all players (regardless of ability) get equal game time, and that they learn to play all positions. They shouldn't be hidden away in the game in positions that see little play, but should be exposed to all positions to enhance learning and development. In Amanda Visek's work on Fun Maps one of the 81 determinants of fun that was identified by kids was 'learning to play different positions'.

Sports and clubs must adopt strategies that enable equal game time for all participants, no matter if they are involved in their first year of grassroots sport or involved in talent development programs. An equal player rotation policy must be adopted, and coaches who fail to play certain participants (often due to a win at all costs mentality) must be held to account by parents, the club, the league and the governing body. There is simply no place in youth sports for coaches that fail to provide a fair and equitable environment for all participants. Visek's work on the Not Fun Maps highlights that 'coaches that favour some kids', or a coach that 'puts too much importance on winning' turn kids away from sport and often leads to player attrition. A coach that only plays the talented kids, or develops 'Super Teams' by recruiting (either directly or passively), contribute to youth sport participants dropping out of sport and creates a situation where teams or competitions fold or are merged.



over 90%

of kids would rather PLAY on a losing team than SIT ON THE BENCH in a winning team

Josephean Institute Research

This is not only relevant to a community level, but also impacts on the Talent Development aspect of sport, as it creates a narrowing of the base of a talent system. There are fewer kids potentially moving through the system, which then ultimately weakens the overall talent strength. More often than not the coaches that don't play everyone equally, or develop super teams are those that have previously been a coach in talent development systems, and ultimately should know better. These coaches have a responsibility to the game in understanding the bigger picture of youth retention for all participants, and not purely those on a talent pathway.

The Rising Costs of Youth Sport

Sport continually gets more expensive for families and the financial barrier can potentially prevent kids from engaging in sport, or lead to an increase in player dropout as families simply can't afford the costs to play. Mark Hyman (George Washington University) highlights the rising costs in his book *The Most Expensive Game in Town: The Rising Cost of Youth Sports and the Toll on Today's Families*, whereby the financial imposts to families continues to increase due to growing registration costs, equipment costs, travel costs and often parents are at the centre of this as they are wanting to provide the 'best opportunity' for their kids (or in fact their perception of what they think is the best opportunity for their kids).

Rightly or wrongly, there is an increase in the entrepreneurship notion of (and around) youth sports. Parents with aspirations for their kids have difficulty in showing restraint in giving their kids the latest gear, best shoes, the best coaching, an opportunity to play in the best tournaments, as parents want their kids to have a perceived advantage. Amanda Visek's FUN MAPS research has 'swag' listed towards the importance of what is fun for kids, again highlighted that the increased expenditure from parents is often unnecessary. Quite often in the US, this is driven by the lure of college scholarships and a prospective career as an elite player. Hyman suggests that parents should see the primary objective of their kid's engagement in sport being "an experience, that is so positive, that they carry a love of being physically active into adulthood". Unfortunately, this is not the case in a majority of circumstances with the focus on goals that only hold a very slim chance of ever being achieved.

Hyman, in an article posted on *The Conversation*, suggests, "most children who play organized sports won't be great athletes. They won't play for their college teams. (*In most sports, fewer than 5% of high school athletes will have that opportunity*). And they certainly won't go on to earn millions of dollars as professional athletes. (*The odds against that are longer than hitting the lottery*). For the overwhelming majority of children, playing sports is about acquiring skills that, as they age, will carry over to other aspects of their lives: learning to be a good teammate, gaining self-confidence and dealing with adversity. It's important to remember that those things do not require the latest, most expensive piece of equipment".

Travis Dorsch (Utah State University) whose research *The Impact of Family Financial Investment on Parent Pressure, Child Enjoyment, and Commitment to Participation in Organized Youth Sport*, in a *New York Times* article suggests that "spending on sports has grown so high — up to 10.5 percent of gross income is being spent on it and that it is hurting family harmony". He goes on to indicate that kids are aware of this expenditure and it places unwanted pressure on the participant and takes away their enjoyment or fun of the sports experience.

The costs of 'travel teams' in the US place a significant cost factor on families travelling to carnivals, events or tournaments. Similarly, involvement in talent development teams can come with a significant cost impost on the participant and their family. This can potentially limit a participant's opportunity to participate, and could potentially impact future opportunities. Sports must be aware of the circumstances facing their participants and ensure that strategies are implemented to ensure access and opportunity for all. The cost of travel for teams based in either Western Australia or the Northern Territory could also be raised as a concern, that could potentially limit involvement for some participants.

Sports also need to consider the costs that they place on a child's involvement, and ensure that it is delivered at cost price. Clubs and leagues should not be making exorbitant profits and realistically the funds raised through fees should be spent on the children that paid those fees in that particular year. The gap unfortunately continues to widen between the haves and have nots and we do not want a situation whereby only the rich can afford to participate in youth sport.

The Role of Government

Governments (Federal, State and Local) can all play a role in making sport affordable and accessible for all participants no matter their background. There have been some excellent examples of Governments introducing innovative strategies to assist families that have kids participating in sport.

- **KidSport** – is an outstanding program that seeks to provide financial support to children (and their families) that come from a low socio economic background. In Western Australia, KidSport provides \$200 per annum to any child participant from a low socio economic background to cover the costs of sports registration. The only criteria is that the applicant must be aged 5-18 years, the family must have a Health Care Card or Pension Concession Card or be referred by a recognised referral agent, and the applicants primary place of residence must be in the local government area.

Canada has a very similar KidSport program in place and I was fortunate to meet with Pete Quevillon of KidSport BC, an organisation that has a mission ‘to remove the financial barriers that prevent some children from playing organized sport’. Canada currently has 1 in 3 kids who cannot play sports due to financial barriers. Starting in British Columbia, Canada in 1993, the KidSport organisation and concept now extends across Canada, and in 2015 provided in excess of \$1.8 million in the BC area in grants to assist kids in accessing sport and in excess of \$6 million nationally (with 70,000+ kids receiving funding). The difference between the Canadian and the Australian models of KidSport is that the Canadian version is largely philanthropic with the majority of the funds raised through donations and contributions from individuals and organisations. Pete Quevillon also highlighted that in Canada the KidSport program is “very much volunteer based and that the money stays in the local community where it was raised”. Quevillon noted the concept of that “it takes a village to raise a child” and that the local organisations are now very self sufficient and sustainable. The BC Government contributes approximately \$400,000 per annum and only \$1 in \$3 of total funds raised is government funded. Quevillon noted, “that local communities are extremely generous and there is a real sense of community ownership of supporting local kids, but it is important to have a local champion”. The ‘community chapter’ concept of KidSport BC is having some significant benefits, and certainly something that can be further explored in an Australian context.

Clubs and sports need to be part of the solution to the financial barriers that exists. If concepts such as KidSport can be part of the solution, then sports need to meet them half way, and ensure that no child misses out that wants to participate, by bringing them into the club environment. Sports should develop a philosophy that they don’t deny a registration to a kid that simply can’t afford it and sports should potentially look to put a grant scheme in place to cater for this ideal.

Government funded KidSport programs such as the one that is in operation in Western Australia, must be future proofed to ensure that the program is sustainable for future generations, and not reliant on political will or direction. Different ways of funding the model need to be explored and the Canadian philanthropic approach can be part of the solution.

- **Voucher System** – The Northern Territory currently has a sports voucher system operational that provides every child with 2 x \$100 vouchers per year to spend on registering to participate in sport. This helps to offset the costs associated with sports participation. Similarly, South Australia has a voucher system whereby primary school aged children receive a \$50 voucher per annum to participate in sport to assist in covering registration costs. This system not only supports families but it makes sport accessible to everyone no matter their socio economic background. Sports and clubs must also take an ethical approach to this type of system and simply not put up their costs just because a voucher system is in place.
- **Taxation System** – in Canada, the national government has a scheme whereby families can claim a reimbursement of sports fees as part of their tax system. “You can claim fees paid for the cost of registration or membership for your or your spouse’s or common-law partner’s child in a prescribed program of physical activity. You can claim a maximum of \$1,000 of eligible fees per child” (Canada Revenue Authority). This is an outstanding initiative that provides families with an opportunity to basically be reimbursed for the registration costs of participating in youth sport. Proactive governments will see this, as an opportunity to positively impact on the health of the population, and through this practical approach will potentially save millions of dollars in directly attributed health care costs. Tom Farrey (Project

Play) talks about the importance of Youth Sport being recognised as part of the health system (and being recognised as part of the health solution) as it has the potential to significantly reduce lifestyle associated illnesses and diseases.

Organisations that invest, donate or financially support youth sport programs should be able to claim that investment or donation as a taxation concession (similar to charity taxation concessions that currently exist in Australia). Investment in grassroots sport is an area that still requires significant development and a proactive measure that encourages organisations to invest and support youth sport would be hugely beneficial not only in keeping costs down, but also in supporting the health of the nation.

Rightly or wrongly, gambling on sports continues to be a significant growth area, with increasingly more corporate bookmakers entering the market. In Scandinavia, the proceeds from taxing sports gambling are all invested back into sports growth and development. This should be the case in Australia with a significant percentage on any sports gambling taxation being invested back into youth sports via the respective State Departments of Sport and Recreation. Ultimately, it comes down to the point that if the money is generated from sport, then it should be reinvested back into sport. From a Western Australian context, Racing and Wagering Western Australia (RWWA) contributes a percentage of their margin to the WA Department of Sport and Recreation to invest back into sport. Unfortunately, this reinvestment back into the system does not happen with 'corporate bookmakers'. This is an area that governments could potentially investigate as a current anomaly in the sports betting market. National leagues (NRL, AFL, Cricket, etc.) currently all charge licence fees to bookmakers to allow them to set markets and bet on their competitions. Potentially the issue with the current model of sports gambling in Australia is the lack of transparency as to where and how the funds (government taxation or licence fees) are actually invested back into sport and recreation.

Governments can play a significant role in reducing the financial costs to participants and enable all those that want to be involved in youth sports with the opportunity to benefit from the experience. It will take innovative and proactive ideas and initiatives, but it will pay significant dividends longer term through the associated health benefits from having active youth aged and adult participants, which will ultimately positively impact the health budget expenditure.

A secondary consideration for governments could be the introduction of a youth sports 'card' or app that tracks and monitors a participant's engagement in and across sport, whilst promoting and encouraging physical activity. A system like Bounts (<https://www.bounts.it/>) could be introduced through sports (and a youth sports card/app), that enables participants to gain rewards that can be spent with partners or sponsors. Organisations such as the Lawn Tennis Association are utilizing this technology, but consideration on whether this negatively impacts on a participant's intrinsic motivation to participate must be considered, given it introduces external rewards for participation.

A Place to Be

Youth sport facilities and the environment that is created at youth sports play a critical role in engaging and retaining youth participants in community sport. How do you create an environment or a location where youth want to be and engage with or even just hang out in? This was a question that The FA has been exploring and has started an upgrade program of all facilities that has been primarily driven by their community clubs.

The FA wants club facilities to be a welcoming environment for youth to engage with and feel safe and secure in. They have encouraged clubs to not necessarily refit their facilities, but upgrade the aspects of the facility that engages youth. One of the strategies is about providing free Wi-Fi to youth aged participants that they can access when they are at the club facility. Through creating a login requirement this will allow the clubs to be able to identify key users, but also create the ability to develop a database of users. In a social media context, clubs could provide hash tags for the participants to utilise that will help you to widely promote the club / facility. It is also recommended to provide recharging facilities for smartphones and tablets.

Out of the Box

A number of the Street Games centres provide social media breaks or timeouts in their programs both at training and throughout games for youth to check and/or update social media.

Encourage them to tag or mention that they are involved at your club or in your programs.

The capability to provide a safe 'hang out' space for youth aged participants that meets their needs is also an important aspect that could be considered by clubs. To create an area that has very little adult interaction that the youth are empowered to take ownership over provides a user-friendly zone for youth aged kids.

Often when sports and governing bodies undertake facility audits (or similar) they tend to be focused on the tangible assets such as the number of toilets or number of change rooms, whereby if the approach is altered to also include a focus on the aspects that attract and potentially retain participants then the benefit could be far more meaningful and constructive from a retention perspective.

Technology

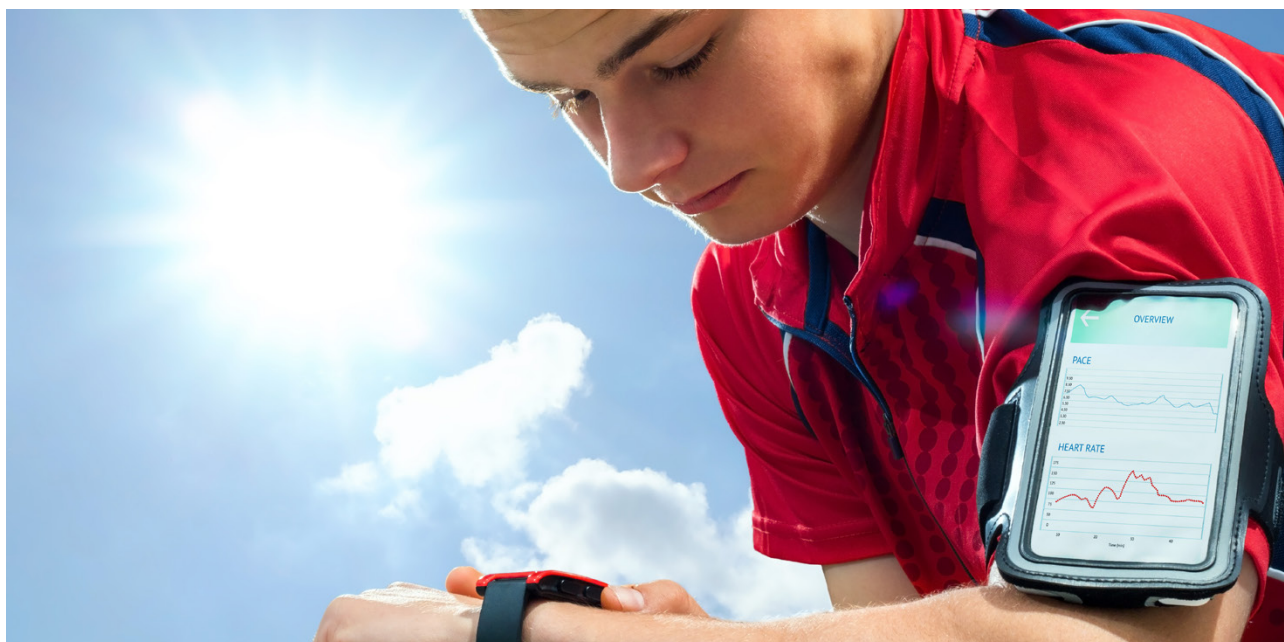
The increasing development of technology in the world of sports can be a mechanism that can be utilised as a means of enhancing youth retention. The rise of wearable technology that tracks and monitors physical activity is on the verge of being accessible to most, at very least currently through the use of smart phones. The accessibility and opportunity for participants to utilise this technology will only improve into the future.

There is the potential for this technology to assist in motivating and driving physical activity and sports engagement in youth participants. The ability to track distances, speed, achievement, game stats and time participating can all serve to assist in participant motivation. Organisations will need to be receptive to change and embrace innovation in this emerging area of sport.

The Lawn Tennis Association is an organisation that is aiming to utilise technology to enhance participation. They have established a partnership with Bounts (<https://www.bounts.it/>) that seeks to encourage and reward participation by its members through the use of technology that monitors how long they are engaged in tennis activities for. This time is converted into points, which then can be utilised to make purchases with a number of different partners or sponsors.

Technology is also being utilised to enhance the data and research that is being undertaken to support youth sport. Through the development of online tools that conduct surveys of participants, to the online mapping of participants to monitor growth and development potential the use of technology is limitless. Sports need to work closely with technology developers to design suitable programs or applications to support retention strategies and objectives, and sports must also be willing to move with the times and utilise and implement wearable technology or other technology mediums as a means of motivating and engaging participants in community sport.

Technology can be seen as a means to achieve the objective of better youth retention rates, but it could also be a huge barrier to equitable participation if it becomes financially out of reach of lower socioeconomic participants. Technology developers need to work with sports to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to utilise technology as opposed to just a select few.



Community Benefit

In addition to ensuring that facilities meet the needs of youth participants, it is critical that there is ultimately enough green space and playing fields for kids to play on. The rising costs of access to recreational facilities is an ongoing concern from all corners of the globe, and was certainly an issue that was raised in Canada, the US and the UK alike. Local councils must look at the bigger picture when it comes to the costs that are passed on to sporting clubs, and it would be recommended that the costs of youth sport from a facility usage perspective be kept as close to \$0 as possible. There is significant research that highlights the benefits of youth engaging in sport whether it is from a health, an education, a community or from a crime reduction perspective, and local councils (or facility providers must keep costs to a minimum in order to enhance these potential outcomes.

Crime reduction, through the introduction of diversionary programs was discussed with a number of sports particularly in the UK including The FA, Rugby England and the Rugby Football League. Street Games was also an organisation where this was examined at length and through creating safe and secure environments where the kids wanted to be provided an opportunity for them to engage in positive physical activities as opposed to making poor life decisions and engaging in crime. Sport is not the sole answer to combating crime, but it is a great starting point to empower and reconnect the youth back to their community. This connection serves as a deterrent to criminal behaviour. Programs in Australia such as NightFields (AFL) and Midnight Basketball are fantastic programs that are having positive outcomes as they serve to empower and connect at risk youth through their passion and love of sport. The ability to connect inter agency support (i.e. police, health) through these programs is vital and goes a long way to developing positive lasting relationships.

Targeting and reducing violent extremism through sport was also discussed with a number of sports as part of my Churchill Fellowship, and although it is an area that most sports haven't been fully engaged in yet, most do see it as a potential future part of their remit. The notions of ownership, empowerment, connectedness, fostering teamwork, developing maintaining and improving self esteem and instigating role models and mentors were all areas that sport can serve to help address this potential community issue.

Connection, or connectedness, is a reoccurring theme when it comes to either staying involved in youth sport and gaining the associated benefits that sport can provide, or whether it is in reference to youth crime, or countering violent extremism. If an individual feels connected to a sport, a team, a club or a community then they are more likely to stay engaged and not transgress into anti social behaviour.

Sport provides significant community benefit and the Social Return on Investment (SROI) is substantial. Recent studies both in Australia and Internationally point to the positive benefits that sport provides the local community through health, educational, reduced crime rates and enhanced social capital.

In meeting with The FA, they noted that The Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) based at Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom had recently completed a study looking at SROI and point to sport generating social and health related benefits equating to £44.75 billion pounds from an investment of £23.46 billion pounds. This equates to a SROI of £1.91 pounds for every dollar invested. Further information can be accessed via:

http://www4.shu.ac.uk/_assets/pdf/research/sirc/Final-SIRC-SROI-England-Web-report.pdf

From an Australian context, La Trobe University has also recently conducted a similar SROI study looking at Community AFL Football Clubs and found that for every \$1 invested there is a SROI of \$4.40. This is a significant finding that highlights the value of sport to the local community. La Trobe go on to highlight some additional benefits:

SOCIAL OUTCOMES	HEALTH OUTCOMES	COMMUNITY OUTCOMES	ECONOMIC OUTCOMES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Football clubs provide an environment where people are more socially connected at every age group compared to other Victorians. 2. Football clubs are 3 times more useful for developing social networks than work, education or other community group networks. 3. Football clubs provide club members greater social support than through their other social networks. 4. Football clubs help people develop skills in public speaking, problem solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, and dealing with people from diverse backgrounds. 5. Football clubs provide individuals, particularly those aged 15 to 24, with significantly increased chances of securing employment via the social networks provided by the club. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Football clubs are important and effective vehicles for delivering health and safety campaign messages for young people. 2. Individuals associated with a football club have a greater level of self-reported wellbeing at every age group compared to a sample of the Victorian population. 3. Individuals associated with a football club have higher levels of self-reported physical and mental health at most age groups compared to a sample of the Victorian population. 4. The self-reported mental health of people aged 18-24 associated with a football club is substantially higher than the general population; given the higher incidence of mental health issues among young people, it could be argued that 'football clubs help those at greatest risk of poor mental health'. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Football clubs harness the collective energy of players, coaches, administrators, volunteers and supporters to not only deliver sport and social activities for members, but for their respective communities. 2. Football clubs are increasingly engaged with their communities, delivering a range of services such as school holiday clinics and health awareness programs in schools, while supporting other community groups' events and fundraising efforts, supporting health awareness and education campaigns, and supporting socially disadvantaged members of the community participate in football. 3. A football club's reach is significant and extends beyond its players, coaches, administrators and volunteers; for every 1 player, football clubs reach 10 people in their community, generating increased civic pride. 4. Football clubs are considered the hub of a community, particularly in rural and regional areas, are a focal point for community efforts in times of crisis and celebration, and are considered by club and community members as central to shaping the identity of a township or area. 5. Sponsors typically support community football clubs to assist them deliver community benefits rather than for commercial gain. 6. Football club leaders, on and off the field, are considered community role models. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As highlighted under social outcomes, football clubs create direct employment opportunities for their communities. 2. Football clubs are large consumers within their own communities, supporting local businesses such as bakeries, cafes, hotels, butchers, restaurants and local trades people. 3. The average community football club in Victoria makes an annual economic contribution of \$630,000 (Street Ryan Economic Contribution Assessments of Australian Football).

AFL Victoria & La Trobe research: <http://www.aflvic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Latrobe-Value-of-a-Community-Football-Club-Final-PDF.pdf>

True Sport, in Canada, also highlights the benefits of participating and volunteering in sport and the True Sport Report suggests, "Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital". The report goes on to state, "Youth who participate in sport are less likely than non-participants to engage in delinquent behaviour, and have lower rates of criminal arrest and anti-social behaviour. This relationship tends to be strongest among disadvantaged youth and athletes in minor sport".

Game Day Environments

The environment that is created on game days has a powerful impact on whether a participant will be retained in sport, and this environment, whether positive or negative, is created by adults (primarily by the coach or the parents). Kids have a right to access an environment that is positive, safe, supportive and fair and it is simply unacceptable for parents to be creating negative environments that are not welcoming and encouraging to all participants. The environment must be conducive to engaging kids and it must be about and for the kids. As soon as adult emotions and ambition become involved then the chances of creating a negative environment are increased. We have all seen or heard stories of abuse and violence in junior sport created by adults, and when these scenarios occur it is no wonder that kids are dropping out of sport. As adults and parents we must be better than this. As a society we must be better than this. Surely we did not want our kids involved in negative environments when we signed them up to play.

Everyone involved in youth sport must take an active role in creating positive game day environments. We must outline what we stand for and what we simply will not stand for. We must make club environments (whether home or away) welcoming for parents and families but most importantly we have to make them positive and welcoming for the kids themselves. We all have a role to play.

To and From the Game

Transport, or a lack thereof, continues to be a barrier for some participants to engage in sport. Through sports fixturing home and away matches, it creates a potential travel barrier for some kids who may come from a low socio economic background, or even from single parent families. Kids simply can't get to training or the game. Clubs and sports must develop strategies that look to breakdown this barrier either through the introduction of transport initiatives such as car pooling, team/club bus that picks up players or alternatively through the fixturing of games either in a single location or along key public transport routes. The other option is to have training sessions or games at the local school – often these venues are in the local area for kids that may be part of a club environment. Sports don't need to do this alone as there are a number of different agencies that can support families, but it is definitely something that should be considered and addressed in order to enable access to the sport for everyone.

The Family

There are a number of factors that impact on youth recruitment or youth retention that are based on the circumstances of the family or situations that the family faces that sports need to consider and address in order to reduce youth attrition. Some of these include:

- Single Parent Families – it is significantly more difficult for single parent families to engage in sport and to also be retained in sport particularly when there is more than one sibling. The cost of sports play a role in dropout, as well as simply not being able to get to multiple venues on the same day at the same time. Clubs should look at ways of reducing the stress that some parents face in regards to these factors.
- Dual Working Parents – often leads to kids in childcare for longer periods of time, or less time for parents to commit to physical activity with their kids. After school kids either are inactive, in organised care or without supervision and direction in terms of sport engagement.
- Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) Families - can also fall into this category at times primarily due to when one parent is away from home for extended periods of time it makes it increasingly more difficult to get kids to sporting fixtures. This also has a potential role in reducing volunteer numbers at clubs, which can also be a contributing factor to dropout.
- Siblings – often having more than one child can be a contributing factor to drop out as often it is limited in which sport kids will have a choice of participating in, the financial investment from parents is increased and if one child is on a 'talent pathway' then this can potentially limit the opportunities for other siblings. Some sports and clubs do a reasonable job in combating this by having reduced fees for families and these are really good strategies to adopt.
- Geographic Location – often plays a role in the opportunity that kids have in regards to sport. At times some sports may not be available to them or simply due to lack of numbers teams and/or clubs fold. In saying that though there is some research conducted by Jean Côté that looks at the 'Birthplace Effect' when it comes to developing talented athletes. "The results of this study provide strong support for the view that smaller cities provide early opportunities for talent

development in sport that are not matched by larger cities” (Côté, et al. 2006). There is evidence to suggest that if you come from a smaller city (but not a smaller town where opportunities are limited) then you are more likely to “receive more social support, have higher self-efficacy, and experience less conflict with others than those from larger cities. These psychosocial characteristics have been associated with sustained involvement in sport (and) It is probable that the more intimate and informal environment of smaller cities is more conducive to experiencing early success, which, in turn, intrinsically drives propensity for more training” (Côté, et al. 2006).

- Professionalism of Parenthood – Project Play suggest that there are increasing “social pressures to create super achieving kids” through schooling and academics and as such many families (and certain cultures or ethnicities) don’t prioritise physical activity or sporting club involvement.

Gender

There are still a number of gender barriers that exist within sport that have the potential to cause dropout of participants. Gender balance and access in sport is probably an entire paper in it’s own right, but there are some important aspects that need to be noted as part of this research. “Gender differences in sport experiences start early in life and have been shown to be associated with parents’ stereotyped gender beliefs and parents’ beliefs in their child’s sport abilities” (Wilkes & Côté, 2010), and as such parents play a significant role in shaping their child’s sports experience. This again highlights the positioning of the proposed ‘Interconnected Model of Youth Retention’ and as why parents have a significant role in regards to access and opportunity.

Through discussions with James Gregory (Street Games) he highlighted the success of their ‘*Us Girls*’ program, which combines physical activity, dance and education about healthy lifestyles it was able to have a significant beneficial outcome for its participants. The Street Games website also highlights why ‘*Us Girls*’ has been so successful:

- **Us Girls is at the right time of life:** when teenage girls are in danger of dropping out of sport and activity, they need something different that fits with their new priorities
- **Us Girls is at the right time of day:** teenage girls and young women have busy lives with lots of demands on their time. To increase the chances of getting girls active, sessions fit within their everyday lifestyle
- **Us Girls is at the right place:** girls want to go to a local facility that’s easy to get to, is indoors and away from the male gaze. Humiliation is one of a teenage girl’s biggest fears.
- **Us Girls is at the right price:** girls are savvy shoppers and love a bargain. Loyalty cards, two for one deals and prizes are great incentives to recruitment – and the price sessions can have a significant influence on whether or not a young woman is active
- **Us Girls is in the right style:** it’s all about fun, fitness, music and friendship.

Female Friendly facilities are a critical factor when it comes to retaining female youth participants in community sport. So many current facilities (particularly in traditional male dominated sports) are totally inadequate to engage and retain females, who are at times body conscious, in sport. A serious investment is required to upgrade facilities to ensure that they are suitable for female participants, and all new facilities should meet the needs of females in sport.

There are a number of factors that assist in retaining participants in sports and ensuring that sport is accessible to everyone. All sports and clubs should have this as their prime objective. Ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to play and engage in a manner that suits his or her needs and their motivations is critical to the long-term success of community sport in Australia. Sport, is not just for the elite or those on a talent pathway, and in fact 99% of participants are not on a elite pathway, and simply want to engage for the benefits that we know sport can provide.

Sports have the opportunity to partner and connect with charities that can provide support such as sports equipment to those that require it, and there are ample philanthropic opportunities for companies to support community sport and ensure that sport is accessible to all. It is simply not good enough that in today’s times, there are still existing barriers that prevent youth aged participants from engaging in community sport.

Recommendations

- Sports and clubs must consider and offer programs “at the right time, in the right place, at the right price, in the right style and with the right coach”.
- Ensure that sports and clubs have an underlying philosophy (that translates into practice) of fun, fair and inclusive participation.
- Ensure that all participants (no matter of ability levels) receive equal game time across all positions in the sport, and a club and team rotation policy exists which is clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
- Strong action is taken against coaches who fail to rotate their players (and provide equal game time) or coaches that set out to build ‘super teams’.
- Encourage parents to show restraint in terms of sport equipment purchases. Kids don’t require high-end sports equipment to participate.
- Sports and governing bodies must limit the necessity for ‘travel teams’ and reinforce a focus on community-based competitions.
- Sports and clubs must ensure that registration fees are kept at a reasonable level and are there to cover the costs of participation.
- State governments and Department of Sport & Recreation bodies to ‘future proof’ outstanding programs such as KidSport.
- Investigate further the philanthropic approach of KidSport BC and determine how effective this will be in an Australian context.
- The State Governments to introduce a voucher system (as is the case in the Northern Territory) to support Youth participation in community sport.
- The Federal Government to introduce tax concessions or rebates for families that have children participating in community sport.
- The Federal Government to introduce tax concessions or rebates for organisations that donate funds to support community sport.
- The Federal Government to invest sport gambling proceeds and taxes back into the grassroots community sport structures, and provide transparency of this funding.
- Investigate the introduction of a youth sports card/app that utilises a program such as ‘Bounts’ to reward participation. Weigh up the pros and cons of such an approach and if it negatively impacts on the intrinsic motivation of the participant.
- Clubs and sports to create free Wi-Fi locations at community facilities (including recharging capabilities) to make it more welcoming for youth participants.
- Clubs to ensure that youth aged participants feel welcome at community sport facilities and a ‘hang out’ zone is created for participants.
- Governing bodies facility audits to include assets that attract and retain participants (i.e. Wi-Fi capability) as opposed to purely physical assets (i.e. number of change rooms)
- Utilise technology to enable and enhance youth retention through utilising examples such as wearable technology, GPS, online survey tools, and participant mapping tools whilst ensuring equitable access for all participants.
- Local Councils need to reassess the oval hire costs that they are currently charging for junior and youth participants. This fee should be minimal to encourage participation.
- Sports must develop and introduce diversionary programs that connect with other agencies to reduce criminal and/or antisocial behaviour of youth aged kids in local communities.
- Sports should widely promote the Social Return on Investment (SROI) that sport provides to the local community.
- All stakeholders must promote positive game day environments and create positive expectations for these environments. Clubs must quickly deal with any negative game day environments.
- Clubs and sports to investigate strategies that remove potential transport barriers for participants in community sport.
- Clubs and Sports should look to develop a ‘Family Friendly Club’ strategy that meets the needs and provides access to all families from the community no matter their background and circumstances.
- Investigate innovative models such as Street Games ‘Us Girls’ program and adapt to an Australian context to engage a greater number of female participants.
- The Department of Sport and Recreation in conjunction with Local, State and Federal Governments work towards ensuring that all community-sporting facilities are ‘female friendly’.
- Sports should partner with charities and philanthropic organisations to provide access and opportunity to all participants.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When focusing upon youth retention and the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' there are a number of external factors that can impact (positively or negatively) on achieving this outcome. These factors will be briefly touched upon in this report but could be further expanded and explored as part of further research into this topic.

Public Open Space

The ability to influence and work closely with Local Government Authorities (LGA's) and land developers to ensure that all residents have access to suitable locations and venues to recreate and participate is critical to the ability to retain participants in community sport. Sports need to work with LGA's and developers to ensure that current and future developments meet their need. Through creating facilities that enhance opportunities for play and sport participation and are safe and accessible will go a long way to reducing attrition rates in community sports.

Roads and Traffic Flow

I am sure that many adults can reflect back and remember playing sports in the streets with their friends. Whether it is a game of basketball, cricket or simply kicking a ball the opportunity to be involved in these street based games are sadly becoming a thing of the past and this is negatively impacting on the free play opportunities for today's kids. Planners, developers and LGA's can look to enhance opportunities for 'street play' by designing cul-de-sacs, as opposed to thoroughfares for traffic. This can also enhance opportunities for children playing outdoors or even riding a bike and being physically active. LGA's can play a role by, at times, blocking of streets and roads to traffic and providing opportunities for street games to occur. Examples of this currently exist in the UK whereby some communities can apply for their streets to be closed for up to three hours a week in order to enhance outdoor play opportunities for kids. Review a newspaper article on this topic at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/children/10654330/Streets-are-alive-with-the-sound-of-children-playing.html>

Use our School

School facilities are currently only used approximately 30% of the day which effectively means there are significant opportunities for community groups to utilise schools to engage in sport and recreational pursuits, if a partnership can be agreed to by the school, the department of education and the local community. The benefits of shared use include; sharing of expertise, decrease in antisocial behaviour at schools after hours, reputation of school in the wider community, and improved community health to list but a few.

'Use our School' is a Sport England initiative that has developed a number of resources, templates and case studies for schools and local communities to highlight the benefits of allowing community access to school facilities. There is an opportunity for schools and local communities in Australia to look to adopt a similar concept to enhance participation and ultimately retention in community sport. Further information can be accessed via <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/use-our-school/>

Research, Data and Insights

Although this component was addressed in the component of The Structure of Sport it is important to reinforce its ongoing importance and relevance for community sport going forward. Organisations such as Departments of Sport and Recreation and other state agency bodies, should look to create an 'innovation unit' to lead innovative work which ensures we are responsive to the changing lives of young people, whilst creating research and insights for the wider sports industry.

These additional considerations all require further research and exploration in regards to youth retention in community sport, but no doubt can play a significant role in enhancing outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUN	PLAY	PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION	THE PARTICIPANT	THE COACH	THE PARENT	THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT	TALENT DEVELOPMENT	OPPORTUNITY & ACCESS
<p>Fun and a participant first mentality have to be at the centre of all decisions in relation to kids playing sport. Fun has to be the key component to kids sport.</p> <p>Parents, coaches and administrators understand what fun is to kids through adopting the Fun Maps and sharing these through their respective networks.</p> <p>Parents, coaches and administrators adopt the behaviours and create environments outlined in the Fun Maps and eliminate behaviours in the Not Fun Maps.</p> <p>All adults holding each other accountable for behaviours that put at risk kids not having fun at sport, and appropriate consequences introduced and applied if people contravene this principle. As outlined we simply cannot have parents hijacking youth sport.</p>	<p>The importance and benefits of unstructured or deliberate play need to be widely promoted by organised sports. Promote the role of play and simply let the kids play.</p> <p>Organised sports need to find the right balance between structured and unstructured environments.</p> <p>Organised sports need to develop coaching resources and education programs that provide coaches with the skills and knowledge to cater for deliberate play.</p> <p>Educate coaches on the importance of asking participant questions as opposed to telling them the answer or telling them what to do, which effectively changes the coach's approach from coach directed to athlete focused.</p>	<p>Develop an understanding of motivational theories that impact youth participants in order to enhance their experience in youth sport.</p> <p>Understand the individual participant and the factors influencing their specific motivational requirements.</p> <p>Sports need to understand the unintended consequences of policies, philosophies and practices that ultimately impact on a participant's engagement in sport, and be decisive in their approach to minimising factors that have a negative impact.</p> <p>Understand the motivational factors that make computer games appealing to youth, and seek to implement these key learning's into a sporting context.</p> <p>Empower youth to own their youth sports experiences and provide them not only the ability to make and influence decisions, but also consistently and regularly ask them 'what they want from their sports experience'.</p>	<p>Sports and clubs need to develop strong relationships with all of their participants to enhance retention.</p> <p>Sporting organisations need to develop authentic and meaningful opportunities to empower and provide ownership to youth participants over their sports experience. They should provide opportunities for youth advocacy, advisory councils and inclusion on boards and panels including mentoring opportunities. This could include events like youth summits.</p> <p>Adopt the principles and philosophies of True Sport into an Australian context and outline the role that clubs, sports, leagues, governing bodies and government agencies can play in promoting and adopting these.</p> <p>Clubs and coaches should seek opportunities to explicitly teach character or life skills to their participants and provide guidance on how to transfer these into other domains outside of sport.</p>	<p>Clubs, leagues and governing bodies must develop a coaching philosophy that has an athlete development focus.</p> <p>Coaches must develop a coaching philosophy that has an athlete centred and development focus.</p> <p>Coaches should strive to develop autonomy in their athletes or participants in order to enhance learning and developmental outcomes.</p> <p>Clubs and leagues must adopt clear structure in relation to the selection of coaches.</p> <p>It is important that everyone understands what kids want from a coach – this being respect and encouragement, a positive role model, clear and consistent communication, knowledge of the coach and someone who listens.</p> <p>All sports must introduce mandatory coach accreditation processes.</p>	<p>Every person involved in youth sport must understand the power in simply saying to kids 'I Love Watching You Play'.</p> <p>Parents should work collaboratively with the club and the coach to fully support them and not seek to undermine them through behaviours or actions.</p> <p>Sports should introduce comprehensive parent education processes that both educate and inform parents about their responsibilities at youth sport and their role in supporting their child in order to retain them as a life long participant in physical activity.</p> <p>Clubs and coaches must hold pre-season parent meetings to outline expectations and responsibilities of all parties for the season ahead. Outline what you stand for and what you won't stand for.</p> <p>At these pre-season meetings coaches should introduce an opportunity to compare the expectations of both the child and the parent in order to ensure that the expectations from sport are appropriately aligned.</p>	<p>Understand the outcomes of youth sport; these being participation, performance and personal development.</p> <p>Gain an understanding of the relevant sport development models and adopt the most appropriate one to suit the needs of your organisation in order to guide and direct decision making processes. Note: Australia currently utilises the Junior Sport Framework, however if I was to recommend one it would be the Development Model for Sport Participation as this is more appropriate for retaining participants in community sport.</p> <p>Highlight the importance of sports sampling at primary school age for all participants.</p> <p>Promote deliberate play to all participants, coaches, parents and clubs.</p> <p>Do not start to specialise in one sport until age 13 or 14.</p> <p>Sports, governing bodies and clubs need to focus on 99% of the participants (community participants) as opposed to focusing on the 1% (elite pathway). Funding should also be reflective of this focus.</p>	<p>Sports need to develop a long-term talent identification process as opposed to selecting players on current ability or level.</p> <p>Development programs should only be instigated for participants that are 14 years and older. Prior to this players should be sampling all sports as opposed to specializing in one.</p> <p>Sports should introduce a fundamentals approach to talent development, with all players learning to play all positions and all players having equal opportunity to game time.</p> <p>Sports need to limit the deselection (cutting) of players and the negative impact that this can have on participants.</p> <p>Sports must look at the player feedback processes that are in place to ensure that a player first approach is utilised that provides relevant comment, direction and support for the individual.</p>	<p>Sports and clubs must consider and offer programs "at the right time, in the right place, at the right price, in the right style and with the right coach".</p> <p>Ensure that sports and clubs have an underlying philosophy (that translates into practice) of fun, fair and inclusive participation.</p> <p>Ensure that all participants (no matter of ability levels) receive equal game time across all positions in the sport, and a club and team rotation policy exists which is clearly communicated to all stakeholders.</p> <p>Strong action is taken against coaches who fail to rotate their players (and provide equal game time) or coaches that set out to build 'super teams'.</p> <p>Encourage parents to show restraint in terms of sport equipment purchases. Kids don't require high-end sports equipment to participate.</p> <p>Sports and governing bodies must limit the necessity for 'travel teams' and reinforce a focus on community-based competitions.</p> <p>Sports and clubs must ensure that registration fees are kept at a reasonable level and are there to cover the costs of participation.</p> <p>State governments and Department of Sport & Recreation bodies to 'future proof' outstanding programs such as KidSport.</p> <p>Investigate further the philanthropic approach of KidSport BC and determine how effective this will be in an Australian context.</p>

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	<p>Organised sports need to develop resources that inform parents of the benefits of deliberate play, and highlights to them that engaging in unstructured play at organised sport is a good thing. These resources should also provide parents with the skills and knowledge to provide unstructured free play in the home setting.</p> <p>Sports should also explore strategies through small-sided games that allow participants to self manage or self govern themselves during play, thus removing the need for referees or umpires (and effectively removing an external locus of control).</p> <p>Look for opportunities to allow participants to self-umpire or self-referee to enable cooperation through competition. It provides an opportunity to enhance the development of life skills.</p> <p>Sports should develop initiatives such as Play Ball or Just Play that allows casual participants to turn up and simply play their game.</p>	<p>Promote the development of physical literacy through both deliberate play and through a coordinated international teaching of fundamental movement skills. Adopt the strategies outlined by Project Play in regards to developing and enhancing physical literacy.</p> <p>Sports need to introduce strategies to address the concerns of overuse injuries by mandating game limits for players of particular ages, and encouraging periods of rest and sports sampling.</p> <p>Sports must minimise the want/need to extend their season to allow for youth participants to participate in other sports.</p> <p>Sports need to proactively address the concerns of concussion by limiting physical contact until the age of 13 or 14 and also implement strong policies around managing concussions and return to play.</p> <p>All children prior to the age of 13/14 should be encouraged to sample a wide variety of sports.</p> <p>All players learn to play all positions of a particular sport as opposed to being categorized or assigned to a particular position.</p>	<p>All sports must introduce ongoing coach education to enhance participant development that meets the needs of coaches in the most appropriate environment.</p> <p>Coach accreditation and education seminars for junior or youth coaches must concentrate on child management and child engagement strategies and philosophies to ensure that coaches have an excellent understanding of kids, their motivations to play sport, and ultimately how to retain kids in sport.</p> <p>Introduce modules to coaching courses that address specific target areas for coaches to meet their individual needs and requirements.</p> <p>Sports, leagues and clubs must ensure that the price point for accreditation and education is appropriate for all stakeholders.</p> <p>All coaches, clubs, leagues and governing bodies should understand the principles of effective coaching.</p>	<p>Sports, club and coaches must embed game environment initiatives into all aspects of youth sport. The focus on creating positive game day environments must be held to a higher focus than that of winning the game. Every single person involved with youth sport has a critical role to play. Programs such as The FA's Respect initiative are extremely valuable, but must be embedded in every aspect of the sport in order to become the norm.</p> <p>All parents to sign relevant Codes of Conduct to reinforce their knowledge of behavioural expectations associated with youth sport.</p> <p>Leagues, Clubs and Governing Bodies to introduce signage that reminds parents of their behavioural expectations.</p> <p>Further longitudinal research and exploration around parenting styles to determine which style has a greater positive impact on youth retention is required.</p>	<p>Adopt Côté's ten recommendations for community sport programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulate length of season to 3 or 4 months, with a maximum of 6 months. - Limit lengthy travel to organized competitions. - Introduce 'grass-roots' sport programmes that focus on trying different sports. - Do not implement a selection process of more 'talented' children until the specialisation years. - Provide healthy competitive opportunities, but do not overemphasize winning and long-term outcomes such as championships. - Discourage early specialisation in one sport. - Allow children to play all positions in a given sport. - Promote deliberate play within and beyond organized sport. - Design play and practice activities that focus on fun and short-term rewards. - Understand children's needs and do not 'over coach'. <p>Understand and adopt Côté, et al. Personal Assets Framework for Sports.</p> <p>Understand the importance of the 4C's – Competence, Confidence, Connection and Character.</p> <p>Adopt a transformational leadership approach for participant-coach, participant-parent and participant-peer.</p>	<p>Develop athletes that have multiple identities and have established skills both on and off the field (character and life skill development).</p> <p>Introduce small-sided games to enhance the experience, learning and development.</p> <p>Introduce a game sense approach to learning and development for participants.</p> <p>Sports need to focus on and enhance the quality of their talent development programs.</p> <p>Sports should investigate alternative models of talent development (such as bio banding) to better meet the needs of participants and to ensure that all participants are catered for.</p>	<p>The State Governments to introduce a voucher system (as is the case in the Northern Territory) to support Youth participation in community sport.</p> <p>The Federal Government to introduce tax concessions or rebates for families that have children participating in community sport.</p> <p>The Federal Government to introduce tax concessions or rebates for organisations that donate funds to support community sport.</p> <p>The Federal Government to invest in sport gambling proceeds and taxes back into the grassroots community sport structures, and provide transparency of this funding.</p> <p>Investigate the introduction of a youth sports card/app that utilises a program such as 'Bounts' to reward participation. Weigh up the pros and cons of such an approach and if negatively impacts on the intrinsic motivation of the participant.</p> <p>Clubs and sports to create free Wi-Fi locations at community facilities (including recharging capabilities) to make it more welcoming for youth participants.</p> <p>Clubs to ensure that youth aged participants feel welcome at community sport facilities and a 'hang out' zone is created for participants.</p> <p>Governing bodies facility audits to include assets that attract and retain participants (i.e. Wi-Fi capability as opposed to purely physical assets (i.e. number of change rooms)</p>	

FUN	PLAY	PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION	THE PARTICIPANT	THE COACH	THE PARENT	THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT	TALENT DEVELOPMENT	OPPORTUNITY & ACCESS
			<p>All sports (including National Sports Organisations, State Sport Organisations and State Departments of Sport and Recreation) should openly encourage the sampling of sports through the Primary School years (5 – 12 Years) to ultimately assist with overall retention in sport participation.</p> <p>It is recommended that a marketing campaign be developed that promotes sports sampling, similar to the example provided through Project Play and the US Tennis Association, that is endorsed by all major sports.</p> <p>Sports should encourage their participants to sample other sports during their off season, and connect kids to the relevant sports and/or clubs through cross promotional activities.</p> <p>When kids 'drop out' of a sport a generic communication be distributed to them that provides the contact and registration details of all the other sports (perhaps with a reduced fee entry to encourage re-engagement in physical activity). This should be supported by the state based Departments of Sport & Recreation.</p>	<p>Coaches and sports should look to introduce small-sided games as a means of engaging participants and enhancing participant development.</p>	<p>Leagues, clubs and governing bodies must seek to understand the potential stressors on parents when involved with youth sport and seek to develop strategies that can seek to minimise these concerns. A focus on elements such as fixturing, financial imposts, and seeking to develop healthy lifestyle habits of parents should be an area of concern for clubs, leagues and governing bodies to address.</p>	<p>Determine the need and requirement to adapt and introduce alternative sport products into the market.</p> <p>Investigate the possibility of introducing multi-sport clubs to better cater for the needs of participants.</p> <p>Encourage schools and physical education specialists to adopt a Sport Education Model into their teaching curriculum.</p> <p>Understand the importance and strength of having both a school stream and community stream for sports participation outcomes.</p> <p>Develop and distribute clear and accurate participation pathway documents for all participants.</p> <p>Participants must be aware of how to reengage in participation pathways for sports that delivers them into a sporting context that meets their needs and requirements.</p> <p>Invest in data, research and insights in your organisation, club or sport. Utilise this to drive your decision-making processes.</p> <p>Review all programs on a regular and ongoing basis to ensure that they are meeting the participant's needs.</p> <p>Understand and promote the principle of 'on their terms'.</p>		<p>Investigate the possibility of introducing multi-sport clubs to better cater for the needs of participants.</p> <p>Encourage schools and physical education specialists to adopt a Sport Education Model into their teaching curriculum.</p> <p>Understand the importance and strength of having both a school stream and community stream for sports participation outcomes.</p> <p>Develop and distribute clear and accurate participation pathway documents for all participants.</p> <p>Participants must be aware of how to reengage in participation pathways for sports that delivers them into a sporting context that meets their needs and requirements.</p> <p>Invest in data, research and insights in your organisation, club or sport. Utilise this to drive your decision-making processes.</p> <p>Review all programs on a regular and ongoing basis to ensure that they are meeting the participant's needs.</p> <p>Understand and promote the principle of 'on their terms'.</p> <p>Utilise technology to enable and enhance youth retention through utilising examples such as wearable technology, GPS, online survey tools, and participant mapping tools whilst ensuring equitable access for all participants.</p> <p>Local Councils need to reassess the oval hire costs that they are currently charging for junior and youth participants. This fee should be minimal to encourage participation.</p>

FUN	PLAY	PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION	THE PARTICIPANT	THE COACH	THE PARENT	THE STRUCTURE OF SPORT	TALENT DEVELOPMENT	OPPORTUNITY & ACCESS
			<p>Understand the transitional phases of sport and develop relational strategies to address each of these phases in a protected manner.</p>			<p>Organisations should review and determine are they spending an appropriate amount on grassroots participation programs as opposed to talent or elite programs. In other words are you catering in terms of expenditure on the 99%, as opposed to the 1%?</p>		<p>Sports must develop and introduce diversionary programs that connect with other agencies to reduce criminal and/or antisocial behaviour of youth aged kids in local communities.</p> <p>Sports should widely promote the Social Return on Investment (SROI) that sport provides to the local community.</p> <p>All stakeholders must promote positive game day environments and create positive expectations for these environments. Clubs must quickly deal with any negative game day environments.</p> <p>Clubs and sports to investigate strategies that remove potential transport barriers for participants in community sport.</p> <p>Clubs and Sports should look to develop a 'Family Friendly Club' strategy that meets the needs and provides access to all families from the community no matter their background and circumstances.</p> <p>Investigate innovative models such as Street Games 'Us Girls' program and adapt to an Australian context to engage a greater number of female participants.</p> <p>The Department of Sport and Recreation in conjunction with Local, State and Federal Governments work towards ensuring that all community-sporting facilities are 'female friendly'.</p> <p>Sports should partner with charities and philanthropic organisations to provide access and opportunity to all participants.</p>

CONCLUSION

By introducing an interconnected approach to youth retention, and understanding how one component directly impacts and influences another, sport can have a positive impact on the number of kids that are benefiting from participating in youth sport. It isn't going to be easy, and the transient nature of sport with new parents, coaches and participants every year can mean that the 'game may never be won', but there are some cultural and structural changes that can be made that will certainly impact future generations of youth sport participants.

Côté and Vierimaa (2014) state "early sport diversification, high amounts of deliberate play, child-centred coaches and parents, and being around peers that are involved in sport, appear to be essential characteristics of environments for young children that encourage their later investment in structured practice activities".

Through understanding fun and its meaning to kids, to finding the balance between structured and unstructured play and introducing deliberate play into sports environments. From understanding the aspects that motivate participation and how these interrelate with the role of coach and the parent, to gaining an appreciation of the influences impacting a participant or the structure of sport, along with the nuances effecting talent development whilst ensuring opportunity for all. These nine components form the basis of youth retention and achieving some significant outcomes.

Sports need to work together on a number of these components to address this concern of youth retention, and rather than work in isolation or silos they need to work towards the same objective of youth retention. They should not see themselves as competitors when it comes to retaining greater numbers of participants in community youth sport. A player first mentality is critical and if we place the participant at the heart of our decision-making processes then we have taken a positive first step.

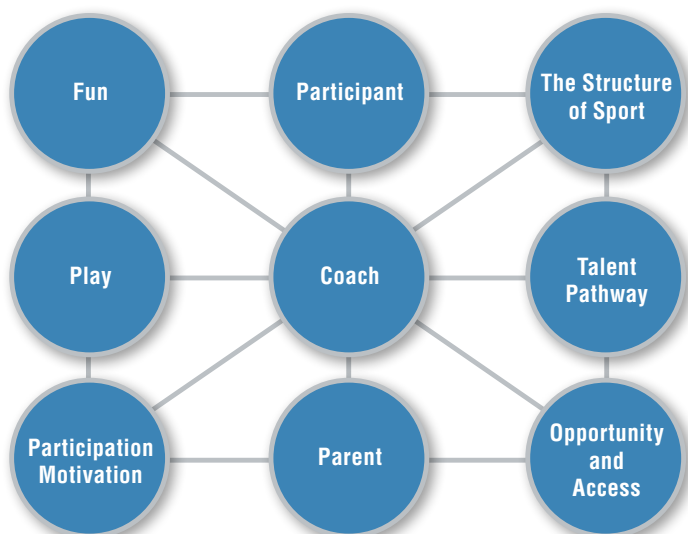


Figure 1: An Interconnected Model for Youth Retention

The opportunity to travel and meet so many incredible organisations and individuals as part of my Churchill Fellowship has provided me with insight and the establishment of long-term relationships and networks, which can benefit sport in Australia. I see my role in disseminating this information and contacts across the industry. It was encouraging to see that Australia does lead the way in a number of aspects when it comes to youth sport retention, but it is also invaluable to learn from international examples of best practice.

This learning journey for myself is by no means over at the conclusion of my Churchill Fellowship; in fact it has only really just begun. My objective is to continue to explore and develop my understanding around youth sport retention and refine and enhance the proposed 'Interconnected Model of Youth Retention' through discussion, debate and assessment with some world leaders in this important area that impacts upon youth participation in sport. Youth sport can have so many wonderful benefits for kids, but we just need to get it right.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“As you set out for Ithaka hope the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery” C. P. Cavafy

Thank you to the Sir Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia, their board and staff for all your assistance, advice and guidance. What an amazing opportunity and adventure that I have been afforded and for that I will be eternally grateful.

To the WA Branch, including President Shelda Debowski and the WA committee; The knowledge and advice that you provided was invaluable in the planning of the fellowship, throughout my travels, and on return in writing the report.

To the other 2015 Western Australian Churchill Fellows; your support and friendship has been much appreciated. The ability to share stories, ideas, frustrations and successes about our journeys (or intended journeys) has been much appreciated. I look forward to continuing these friendships together as Churchill Fellows.

To the West Australian Football Commission; thank you for supporting me in my endeavours in undertaking my Churchill Fellowship. To the commissioners, executive and staff I say thank you for your ongoing passion and drive to make football (and the experience for stakeholders) better than it was yesterday.

To the Western Australian Department of Sport & Recreation; for your support and guidance in identifying some key personnel that assisted in setting up meetings, helping provide clarity of purpose and challenging me to ensure that I make the most out of this amazing opportunity.

All the organisations I met with, and the staff in particular, who were so gracious with their time and so open and willing to share information, strategies, resources, stories and approaches to enhancing youth retention in sport. Sport is in good hands with you at the helm. I look forward to keeping in touch with you all, and striving to make youth sport the best it possibly can be.

Finally, thank you to my wife Kellee, and my children Torah and Flynn, who accompanied me on this adventure. Your love, support, passion and drive not only inspires me, but it makes me want to ensure that we continue to make life full of adventure and discovery.

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