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Establishing Adaptive Sports Programs for Youth with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

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Children with disabilities are at increased risk of health risk factors including obesity, often because of low levels of physical activity and limited participation in sports. However, organized adaptive sports programs are increasingly available for individuals with disabilities. This article provides recommendations for establishing successful adaptive baseball and soccer leagues for children and youth with disabilities in schools and other community-based recreational facilities. In addition, the authors describe lessons learned from 8 years of experience with a university-community partnership in baseball and soccer for individuals with disabilities.

Keywords: adaptive sports, therapeutic recreation, baseball, soccer

Obesity has become an alarming health risk for youth across the nation. Over the course of the past generation, childhood obesity rates have skyrocketed among U.S. youth across all age groups, including toddlers (5.0% to 10.4%), children (6.5% to 19.6%) and adolescents (5.0% to 18.1%; Ogden & Carroll, 2010). Individuals with moderate to severe disabilities are particularly at risk because they are less likely to exercise or participate in organized sporting activities. Studies have shown that in comparison with their non-disabled peers, individuals with intellectual disabilities have decreased muscle strength (Fernhall & Pitetti, 2000), higher body mass index and other obesity values (Frey, 2004). Similar health concerns have been reported across disability categories, including cerebral palsy (Fowler et al., 2007), Down syndrome (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998), and autism spectrum disorders (Janiewicz et al., 2006). These children's health impairments often impede their participation in organized sporting activities with their nondisabled peers, which, in turn, places them further at risk for obesity (Fragala-Pinkham, 2008). This lack of physical activity contributes to serious health issues, such as those commonly found among individuals with Down syndrome, in which half of all males (45%) and females (56%) suffer from obesity (Whitt-Glover, Oneil, & Stettler, 2006). For many individuals with disabilities, inequities in various areas of life have resulted in poor health, limited community participation, and a reduced quality of life (Groff, Lundberg, & Zabriskie, 2009). A recent review of the literature (Tsiros, Coates, Howe, Grimshaw, & Buckley, 2010) reported that obese children were significantly more likely than were their healthy weight peers

to experience (a) activity restrictions through their inability to perform physical activities or to a degree similar to their peers, (b) a lower quality of life (defined as physical, mental, and social well-being), (c) reduced cardiorespiratory fitness levels, (d) poor balance and gait, and (e) increased musculoskeletal (e.g., back) pain.

What aggravates matters further is the fact that children with disabilities often have limited opportunities to engage in either recreational or athletic activities. Over the past several decades researchers have shown children with disabilities lack the typical recreational and physical activity experiences that their nondisabled peers regularly participate in (Taub & Greer, 2000). A combination of factors including social isolation from peers, limited organized sporting activities, and physical limitations have commonly resulted in children with disabilities more often becoming observers of sports than participants. These factors continue to contribute to the poor social and health outcomes for individuals with disabilities, given these children have fewer opportunities to develop friendships and engage in a healthy lifestyle.

Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, students with disabilities are entitled to special education and related services in order to receive a free appropriate public education. Participation in physical education is integral in the effort to afford a student with a disability free appropriate public education. Provisions of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act stipulate that students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate to the best of their ability in the regular physical education program that is available to same-age peers. In addition, school districts are required to provide nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, which could include sports. In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, districts must ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to

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participate in physical recreational sports in a manner equal to that of their same age peers.

Benefits of Exercise and Adaptive Sports Programs

Sporting activities are an important aspect of life for children and adolescents, and the benefits of participating in sports are similar for children with and without disabilities. Research suggests that children and adolescents who do not participate in sports might experience limited community engagement and an overall lower quality of life (Groff et al., 2009). Physical activity and exercise are associated with physical and psychological benefits (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), including decreased risk of diabetes, less depression and anxiety, better mood, and improved overall psychological well-being. In particular, recent research has demonstrated strong health benefits for individuals with disabilities who engage in sporting activities. Studies have shown significant improvements across nearly all measures of body composition and physical fitness levels from participation in physical activities ranging from mixed aerobics (Elmahgoub et al., 2009), to walking (Pitetti, Rendoff, Grover, & Beets, 2007). Furthermore, physical activity and sports participation has significant mental health benefits for children, helping reduce levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Fox, 2000).

Although the physical benefits of adaptive sports programs have only recently begun to be studied, it appears that the physiologic changes associated with regular training are the same as those in nondisabled athletes (Birrer, 2004). For example, oxygen consumption has shown to increase with the intensity and duration of training. In addition, regular training improves the cardiovascular fitness levels of individuals with intellectual disabilities to levels equal to noncognitively delayed individuals (Fernhall et al., 1999). Overall, research has shown that athletes with disabilities readily adapt to a regular physical activity program provided through adaptive sports programs, including competitive meets and contests such as Special Olympics and Challenger Baseball (Birrer, 2004).

Sport Opportunities for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Despite the recent emphasis for increased levels of inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education academic environment, there have been limited opportunities for many of these children to participate in traditional sports programs, especially outside the confines of school (Gehring, 2005). In a statewide survey of 317 special education teachers, only 25% of teachers reported their students participated in community sports (Kleinert, Miracle, & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Reasons for nonparticipation ranged from limited communication skills, lack of transportation, limited funding, lack of knowledge regarding how to integrate children with disabilities, and a lack of programs. Furthermore, the presence of a physical disability, or the presence of additional disabilities including behavioral issues severely limited the participation of these

youth in organized sports outside schools (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010).

Adaptive Sports Programs

Seven common adaptive models enable individuals with disabilities to participate in sporting activities (Nixon, 2007). These models include Special Olympics, Paralympics, Mixed Paralympics, Reverse Integration, Marathon, Minimally Adapted Mainstream, and Mainstream type sports. Differentiation among these models is based on (a) disability requirement for participation, (b) level of athletic skill required, (c) level of adaptation or accommodation allowed, (d) level of competitive intensity or seriousness, and (e) degree of interaction between athletes with and without disabilities. Regardless of the model implemented, four essential elements are necessary to ensure appropriate involvement of students with disabilities in team sports. Specifically the game should be challenging, safe, and easily implemented while maintaining integrity of the sport (Block, 2007). Simple game modifications should not cause undue burden on the participants or coaches.

Many different sporting programs are available today to children with disabilities across the United States. Table 1 shows popular national adaptive sports programs ranging from being very sport specific such as wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis to broader programs such as United States Association for Blind Athletes or the Dwarf Athletic Association of America. However, many of these programs tend to focus on one disability population or more elite-level athletes (see Block, 2007, for more information on these programs). Today, there has been an increasing demand for locally based adapted sports programs that include children with moderate to severe disabilities. Two of the most popular adaptive sports programs today include baseball (e.g., Challenger Baseball, Miracle League) and soccer (e.g., The Outreach Program for Soccer [TOPSoccer], Very Important Players Soccer [VIPSoccer]). These leagues provide opportunities to enhance the quality of life and overall health for persons with disabilities. Team sporting activities are designed to improve self-esteem, confidence and social integration, while advocating full participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. Organizing athletic activities that enable athletes with disabilities to participate requires an understanding of the many differences among people with disabilities and their different capacities to compete in sports of different kinds and levels (Nixon, 2007). In subsequent sections of this article, we provide an overview of adaptive baseball and soccer programs for children and youth with disabilities. Then, on the basis of the past 8 years' experience, we provide recommendations for successfully establishing school- or community-based baseball and soccer leagues for students with disabilities.

Adaptive Baseball

In adaptive baseball (e.g., Challenger League), the emphasis is on participation, development, and fun rather than on

Table 1. Popular National Adaptive Sports Programs for Athletes With Disabilities

Organization	Website	Description
Special Olympics	http://www.specialolympics.org	Provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in 30 Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.
Paralympics	http://usparalympics.org	Provides opportunity for youth and adults to participate up to 47 individual and team sports on the basis of athlete disability.
TOPSoccer	http://www.usyouthsoccer.org	Community-based training and team placement program designed for young athletes with disabilities.
VIPSoccer	http://soccer.org/flex_programs/vip.aspx	Program provides a quality soccer experience for children and adults whose physical or mental disabilities make it difficult to successfully participate on mainstream teams.
Challenger Baseball	http://www.littleleague.org/learn/about/divisions/challenger.htm	Enables boys and girls with physical and mental challenges, ages 4–18 years, or up to age 22 years if still enrolled in high school, to enjoy the game of baseball.
Miracle League Baseball	http://www.miracleleague.com	Provides children with special needs the opportunity to play baseball.
CXC Adaptive Program	http://www.cxcskiing.org/site_pages/adaptive/about.htm	Provides opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in cross-country skiing on the recreational or competitive levels.
Challenged Athletes	http://www.challengedathletes.org	Provides postrehabilitation support and mentoring to individuals with physical disabilities.
Wheelchair & Ambulatory Sports	http://www.wsusa.org	Provides multisport and recreation opportunities for people with physical and visual disabilities by facilitating, advocating, and developing a national community-based outreach program, providing resources and education, conducting regional and national competitions, and providing access to international competitions.
World TEAM	http://worldteamsports.org	Enables children and adults with disabilities to participate in a variety of athletic endeavors (e.g., mountain climbing, biking).

competition (Little League International, 2012). Athletes are given the opportunity to do warm-up activities and then practice specific skills (e.g., throwing, catching, hitting) at stations with the support of a volunteer “buddy” with whom they are paired, and under the guidance of a coach. No score is kept, each player bats every inning, and everyone plays the entire game which usually consists of three innings. Each athlete is assigned a buddy who ensures the safety of the player on and off the field, and helps the player bat and make plays. The standard of integrity ensures the game is not substantially modified from its original format so that youth with disabilities can enjoy and maximize their full potential in the game. Accommodations are made for each child’s skill level, and players are encouraged to participate in a manner that they feel most comfortable. Numerous assistive technology devices are available based on individual athlete needs. For example, players whose arm or hand strength prevents them from holding a bat can use a special batting device that enables them to hit independently (see Figure 1), and athletes with visual impairments use beeper balls that emit loud electronic sounds that provide auditory cues (see Figure 2). These simple

modifications ensure the safety and enjoyment of participating youth with disabilities is maximized. This program helps the players learn the rules of baseball, work together as a team and helps develop gross and fine motor skills.

Adaptive Soccer

Another easily adapted team sport in which children with disabilities can readily participate is soccer. Adaptive soccer programs (e.g., TOPsoccer, Complete Soccer Academy Adaptive Soccer) are designed to meet the needs of children and young adults who have physical and/or intellectual disabilities (Lavay & Semark, 2001). Similar to adaptive baseball, the primary goal of adaptive soccer programs is to provide athletes with disabilities the opportunity to play and develop skills at their own pace, as opposed to emphasizing competition. Adaptive soccer programs consider the effect of athletes’ disabilities and ensure the athletes’ success in a friendly non-threatening environment while developing their soccer abilities. Athletes participate in practices and scrimmage activities



Fig. 1. Batting device that swings when lanyard is pulled by athlete. Photo © Dwayne Fennell (color figure available online).

learning the skills and basic rules of the game. Athletes are given time to practice these skills with a buddy and under the guidance of a coach. Procedures for physical warm-ups and skill development are based on the three phases of the warm-up and recommended workout procedures outlined in the anatomy of a workout in *Successful Coaching* (Martens, 2004), which is used by university's athletic leadership program to certify coaches. Recommendations for working with

athletes with disabilities are based solely on the authors' cumulative experiences from running adaptive sports programs over the past 8 years. Typically, sessions include a warm-up, which includes jogging around the field and stretching exercises. Next, the athletes rotate between different skill stations with their respective buddies. Stations include (a) a dribbling station where the player dribbles the ball through cones (see Figure 3); (b) a shooting station where the player



Fig. 2. Athlete with visual impairment practicing catch with a beep ball. Photo © Dwayne Fennell (color figure available online).



Fig. 3. Athletes performing skills drill under the guidance of a coach. Photo © Dwayne Fennell (color figure available online).

shoots the ball into the goal; (c) a conditioning station where the player does sit-ups, jumping jacks, and push-ups; and (d) a passing station where the player passes the ball with their buddy. Teaching and practice of functional skills are necessary to play the basic game without the use of technical language or terminology.

Athletes are provided with the basic required equipment (e.g., soccer balls, shin guards) as well as other needed supports necessary to participate. For example, if a child has difficulty running on his own, his buddy might help provide physical support as needed during the game. Adaptive soccer practices are very flexible, and if athletes do not want to engage in a particular activity, they are provided the opportunity for an alternate activity. At the novice levels, buddies could help position the athlete on the field of play and assist with performing skills. However, with more advanced athletes, buddies play more loosely and might even stay on the sideline providing verbal and/or gestural prompts to their athletes to enhance their play.

Establishing Adaptive Sports Programs

Roles of Team Members

Organizers

Ideally, there should be one or preferably two organizers to run an adaptive sports program effectively. The organizer is the person responsible for orchestrating the league's efforts including (a) recruiting athletes, (b) processing registrations, (c) recruiting buddies, (d) pairing buddies to athletes, (e) ordering uniforms, and (f) checking-in buddies and athletes each practice. Organizers should not take on the responsibilities of being a coach. The responsibilities will typically overlap and cause confusion during critical periods. For example, one of the most hectic times of any practice is checking in the athletes and matching them with their buddies when they first show up. Confusion quickly arises if the athlete's buddy has not shown up yet. Hence, it is always a good idea to have several extra substitute buddies each season. If everyone is present the subs can either double up with one of the more demanding athletes or a less experienced buddy. This orchestration takes time and energy, and the coach should already be on the playing field providing instructions to the buddies and athletes warming up.

Coaches

Ideally, the assistance of a professional, certified physical education teacher, or coach is necessary to assist the organizer with coach recruitment and training. The physical education teacher or coach also provides an additional adult available to supervise each week during the adaptive sporting event. Other ideal candidates to serve as coaches include college students studying exercise science, recreational therapy, physical education, and/or coaching, given that these individuals are often prepared to teach basic sport skills and are likely certified in first aid, CPR, and automated external defibrillator (AED). Preseason meetings with organizers, coaches, and buddies are important to discuss various situations that are likely to occur and other critical information to prepare coaches to teach modified sport skills. It is best to have one head coach to organize and plan the adaptive sporting event for the entire season which runs approximately 8 weeks. Additional assistant coaches are assigned various duties with sport skills stations, team leadership, and as permanent pitcher and catcher (baseball); goalie supervision (soccer). From our experience, the more coaches you have to assist, the safer the environment and the more individual instruction will be available for athletes and buddies. Depending on the level of athlete performance and ability, skill stations can serve as a tool for participation. It is important that coaches are trained in the safe use of equipment, and are able to communicate this with buddies and athletes. Coaches ensure that equipment use by athletes is directly supervised by buddies at all times. Coaches should continuously scan the field or playing area for safety reinforcement during all activities. The responsibilities of coaches begin as soon as they arrive with equipment preparation. Effective coaches demonstrate an upbeat attitude, remain engaged with the buddies and athletes throughout the evenings' events, and conclude the session by putting equipment in a safe storage area.

Table 2. Expectations for Buddies

Responsibility	Expectations
Be dependable	Show up for all practices 15 min early and let coach/parents know ahead of time of any absences.
Know your athlete	Contact athlete's parents before first practice to identify specific capabilities and limitations of your athlete.
Emphasize safety	Ensure your athlete is wearing proper equipment and notify a coach immediately whenever you see a safety concern. Be alert at all times to the location of the ball and other athletes so you can do what is necessary to ensure the safety of your athlete.
Encourage participation	Many athletes may become discouraged at first. Buddy support is critical for recognizing individual efforts.
Be a positive role model	Model good sportsmanship and prosocial behaviors at all times.

Buddies

Perhaps the most critical component of running an organized adaptive recreation league is recruiting a sufficient number of buddies. The organizer has to ensure the program has enough volunteers and coaches for the program to succeed. From our experience, sufficient time is needed to recruit volunteers. About 1 month before recruiting athletes, the organizer should begin advertising for buddies to help run the soccer and baseball programs. Buddies are volunteers (e.g., classmates, older students, adults) that are paired one on one with each athlete to help them play ball, explain rules, and give general directions to the player during the game. Buddies remain with the same athlete throughout the season. Feedback from our buddies over several seasons is consistent; they routinely recommend maintaining the buddy/athlete pairing throughout an entire season to help increase the bond and enjoyment of the experience. Research has shown peer support for individuals with disabilities is often a win-win scenario, benefiting children with and without disabilities. These pairings enhance the social skills of children with disabilities by increasing their opportunities for interaction with general education peers, which provides them with an increased number of opportunities to acquire age appropriate social skills. Similarly, peer buddies benefit by gaining an enhanced awareness of various types of disabilities, and are afforded the opportunity to better know peers with whom they would not have otherwise socialized (Copeland et al., 2002). Because buddies are the heart of the program, it is important that they uphold several critical expectations shown in Table 2.

Parent Volunteers

Given the numerous responsibilities that arise, parents are highly encouraged to volunteer to help run the program. Parents could help in meaningful ways such as by organizing snacks, serving as photographer or webmaster, making phone calls, and participating in any other way to benefit the league.

Responsibilities of Team Members

Recruiting Athletes

When starting a new program, it is often easier to begin with a small number of athletes (e.g., 12–15), which will make the

initial season more manageable and fun because, in doing so, communications, logistics, and volunteers will be easier to coordinate. Regardless, it is important to begin promoting a program about 2 months before the start of the season to ensure parents and teachers know about it. Many inexpensive and effective methods can be used to promote a program such as posting flyers at local stores and contacting local newspapers and radio stations for free advertisement. Perhaps the easiest and most efficient manner of promoting a sports program is through special education coordinators or special education teachers at local schools. Identifying single points of contact at several schools can ultimately reach the homes of several hundred potential athletes. It is also helpful to create a web site¹ from where parents and teachers can download registration forms, schedules, directions, and other materials. Registration needs to be thorough and concise. Information gathered through registration should include parents' or caregivers' phone number or other contact information so they can be notified of cancellations or other situations, the child's uniform and hat size, and especially critical is the child's medical history and any limitations or special considerations related to the athlete's disability.

Organizing Teams

Team organization and make-up is another important consideration for successful adaptive sports programs. Teams should be organized according to the skill level of the athletes whenever possible. Team organization is dependent not only upon the disability but the physiological development, behavioral concerns, and skill level of the athletes. Teams should be matched as evenly as possible for a safe, effective experience. Typically, the first two sessions of the athletic season result in additional athletes signing up to participate. It is suggested that those initiating adaptive sports programs remain flexible in establishing teams while working to keep them as even as possible. In the situation in which the number of athletes allows for three teams, two teams typically play their game on the field and the third team works on skills. After each inning/period, each team rotates to a subsequent role. The team

¹See <http://sites.google.com/site/clemsonchallenger>

Table 3. Critical Components of an Effective Practice

Component	Description
Checking in	All athletes and buddies should check in with the organizer upon arrival.
Gear check	Buddies should ensure all athletes wear proper safety equipment.
Warm up	After checking in, athletes and buddies should socialize/warm up with their buddy in a designated area of the field.
Jog	All athletes and buddies should take two laps around the practice field to facilitate blood flow to major muscle groups.
Stretching	Coach should lead athletes and buddies in group stretching drills.
Skill drills	Athletes break up into small groups (5–6 athletes) that rotate through 10–15-min skill stations (e.g., hitting, fielding).
Scrimmage	Players break up into teams based on abilities for scrimmage.
Camaraderie	Immediately following each game athletes and buddies line up to shake hands demonstrating sportsmanship and respect for each others' efforts and success.
Warm down	Athletes and buddies come together to perform group stretching exercises.
Announcements	Coach passes along any important information to athletes and parents.

who has batted rotates to the skills stations, and the team playing in the field moves to the dugout for their batting session. The team who was working on skills moves to the fielding positions.

Conducting Practices and Games

One of the primary goals of an adaptive recreation league is to make the experience a positive one for each player while remaining flexible based on the needs of the individual athletes. Coaches and buddies provide accommodations so that each athlete's skill level is addressed while encouraging player participation to the degree to which each player feels most

comfortable. The typical progression for a practice is shown in Table 3. Upon arrival athletes check in with the organizer, find their buddy, don safety equipment, and head for the field to warm up with informal skill practice. Formal warm-up starts with a jog around the perimeter of the field followed by basic, simple stretches and conditioning exercises led by coaches and counted out loud by all. At this point, athletes along with their buddies divide into teams for the evening's activities and play. At the end of practice, coaches call the athletes and buddies together to perform a group stretch and cool down, and end the evening with a team cheer they have created that is simple for all.

Table 4. Safety Considerations

Component	Description
Appropriate gear	All athletes need to wear appropriate safety gear (e.g., batting helmets for baseball; shin pads for soccer). If an athlete cannot wear safety equipment because of medical conditions, buddies must pay particular attention to ensure their safety while participating in athletic activities.
First aid	Recommend all organizers and coaches be certified in first aid/CPR, and maintain a first aid kit and cell phone on-site.
Insurance	All athletic programs need to carry insurance for their athletes. Recommend coordinating with local youth sports league to see if your program can be carried under their insurance rider to minimize costs.
Fluids and hydration	Athletes should be encouraged to bring water bottles to all practices, and coaches should provide sufficient breaks, and encourage athletes to hydrate. Coaches and buddies should be trained to recognize signs of heat exhaustion/stroke.
Facilities	The playing field should be wheel chair accessible from the parking lot. Before each practice, coaches should inspect the field for holes, damage, stones, glass and other foreign objects. Dugouts and bat racks should be positioned behind screens.
Documentation	All injuries should be documented to track types and location to identify trends.
Preventing common injuries	Throwing/kicking/batting should only be permitted in designated areas.
Horseplay	Buddies should be diligent to ensure their athletes pay attention to all of the coaches' instructions and minimize horseplay. Avoid the display of equipment that may entice athletes if safety is a concern.
Inclement weather	Games should be called whenever lightning is within 10 miles of the playing field, which is typically less than 30 s between lightning and thunder.

Table 5. Eight Easy Steps to Starting Your Own Adaptive Sports Program

Step	Description
Step 1	Contact one of the national adaptive sports organizations (see Table 1) for ideas and potential funding opportunities.
Step 2	Contact the special education department at your local college to recruit “buddies” interested in working with athletes with disabilities.
Step 3	Contact the Athletic Leadership program at your local college to recruit “coaches” to teach skills sessions and lead practices.
Step 4	Create a “Leadership Team” to recruit athletes and buddies, and seek financial sponsors from the business community to purchase/donate equipment.
Step 5	Contact your city or county community recreational center to secure a playing field.
Step 6	Recruit athletes by advertising with your school district as well as neighboring districts, and parent organizations.
Step 7	Schedule a volunteer meeting before the season at the practice site to review specific buddy responsibilities (see Table 2), check-in/practice procedures (see Table 3), and overall safety procedures (see Table 4).
Step 8	Continue to emphasize safety, fun and good sportsmanship each practice.

Other Considerations

Safety

Although safety should always be everyone’s concern, coaches and organizers are ultimately responsible for the safety of the athletes while using equipment and playing on the field. Coaches and organizers are responsible for establishing a culture of safety on and off the playing field. One recommendation is to identify a safety officer whose duties include (a) completing all team insurance forms, (b) ensuring athletes have a medical consent form, and (c) helping prevent injuries rather than merely reacting to them. Specific areas of concern for organized schools or communities interested in starting a sports league are shown in Table 4. Before the coaches or buddies meet with the athletes they must attend a mandatory safety meeting to review practice and safety procedures, as well as expectations for conduct. Buddies and coaches should never be alone with an athlete. Although this sounds simple, it can quickly become complicated as many athletes require assistance with changing and using the restroom. In these examples, two buddies should accompany any athlete for such duties. If a second buddy is not available, the parent or guardian should accompany the athlete. Another common issue that often arises is parents’ request that a buddy drive their children to the games. This situation is not permitted given the potential physical and legal risks. Several workarounds exist such as requesting rides from other parents or carpooling. In one situation, a special education teacher and paraeducator earned their professional bus drivers licenses and were granted school district permission so they could personally drive, on their own time, nearly a dozen athletes on a school bus from an outlying county to practice each week.

Uniforms and Trophies

Uniforms are an optional, yet important part of children playing organized sports. The athletes love wearing their ball caps and jerseys to the games, and when permissible to school on game days to show off to their classmates. These young athletes are very proud to be participating on a sports team, and

uniforms provide them an opportunity to display their pride. Teams that are cost conscious should consider purchasing high quality ball caps, but less expensive uniform items (i.e., pants, shirts) which athletes are less likely to wear after the season is over.

Fees

One quickly learns that a critical component of organizing events means collecting dues. Because everyone in our league is a volunteer, the cost for families to participate is limited to equipment costs (e.g., baseballs, bats), athlete uniforms, and end of season trophies. After establishing costs required for equipment, uniforms, and trophies, organizers might consider adding a minimal amount to the fee to allow the flexibility to provide scholarships for those families who cannot afford registration costs.

Funding Opportunities

The cost for these programs should be low and affordable for the families. Small start-up grants are available for adaptive sports programs through US YOUTH SOCCER, and Little League Challenger Division as well as local charitable agencies. In addition, interested individuals could also provide donations to this worthy cause.

Benefits of University-Sponsored Programs

Although schools, community recreational facility personnel, and interested individuals establish and maintain these programs, colleges and universities are uniquely suited to establish and run these programs with benefits that go beyond those associated with the student athletes to buddies and coaches. Universities are increasingly promoting community-based service learning which is a teaching and learning methodology that integrates meaningful community service with deliberate classroom instruction using performance standards and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, social skills, and strengthen the school and community relationship. Organizing and running an adaptive sports

program not only allows college students to immerse themselves in their communities and enjoy service learning opportunities, it also provides field-based experiences that complement those in schools, particularly for students studying special education, kinesiology, and education in general. In addition, research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students might be available across a variety of skill areas.

Given these experiences and related practice considerations, it is possible to have these types for program districtwide whether on a particular school premises or in a community-based recreational facility. In such a situation, organizers (typically teachers) draw from high school students to serve as buddies and from baseball/soccer coaches and varsity players in these sports for coaches as well as a nearby university if available. Table 5 provides a quick overview for how you can start an adaptive sports program in your area today.

Conclusion

Participation in sports activities not only decreases individual health risks such as obesity, but increases the overall quality of life by promoting friendships and community involvement for those involved in sports, which, in turn, might lead to more successful postschool outcomes. Adaptive sports programs have a long history of providing the infrastructure and support to expand the opportunities for participation to individuals with disabilities. Adaptive sports programs are designed particularly to allow individuals with moderate to severe disabilities the opportunity to participate in and enjoy team sports while considering their unique needs. Adaptive sports programs such as baseball and soccer greatly enhance the emotional, physical and personal development of individuals with disabilities. Maintaining a successful adaptive sports program depends on the quality of all its volunteers including its caring cadre of coaches, buddies, parent volunteers, athletes, and organizers who focus their combined efforts for the benefit of these young athletes.

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