Keep 'em Playing: Strategies for Building Positive Youth Sport Experiences

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New Hampshire's Youth Sports Coaching Education Program

Introduction

- Declining team sport participation rates
- Up to 30% of youth drop out of sport each year
- Drop-out process begins at age 9, accelerates after age 11

Reasons:
- ✓ Lack of enjoyment
- ✓ Lack of perceived competence
- ✓ Stress
- ✓ Negative team dynamics
- ✓ Negative relationship with a coach
- ✓ Pressure
- ✓ Lack of time

Youth Obesity ⬆

Rates of physical activity ⬇

Falling Sport Participation Rates

Some of the most widely practiced sports in the U.S. were seeing major declines in participation due to organized sport programs centered around the most talented, well-resourced athletes.

Decline in Participation Rates Among Children ages 6-12 between 2008-2013

Basketball (3.9%)

Baseball (14.4%)

Soccer (10.7%)

Softball (31.3%)

Football (28.6%)

2008 Team Sports **44.5%**
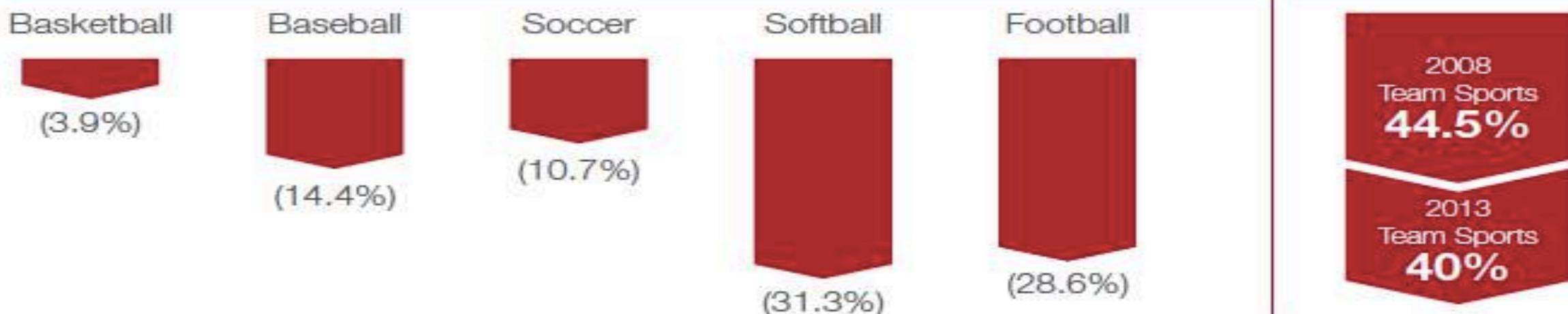
2013 Team Sports **40%**

According to Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), children ages 6 to 12 who played team sports regularly fell from 44.5 percent in 2008 to 40 percent in 2013.

Obesity Crisis

x3

Childhood obesity rates nearly tripled. The percentage of obese children ages 6-11 increased from 7 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 2010. Among children ages 12 to 19, that figure grew from 5 percent to 18 percent (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015*). One study found that among 17 developed nations, **the U.S. had the highest rates of childhood obesity among those ages 5-19** (*National Academy of Sciences, 2013*).
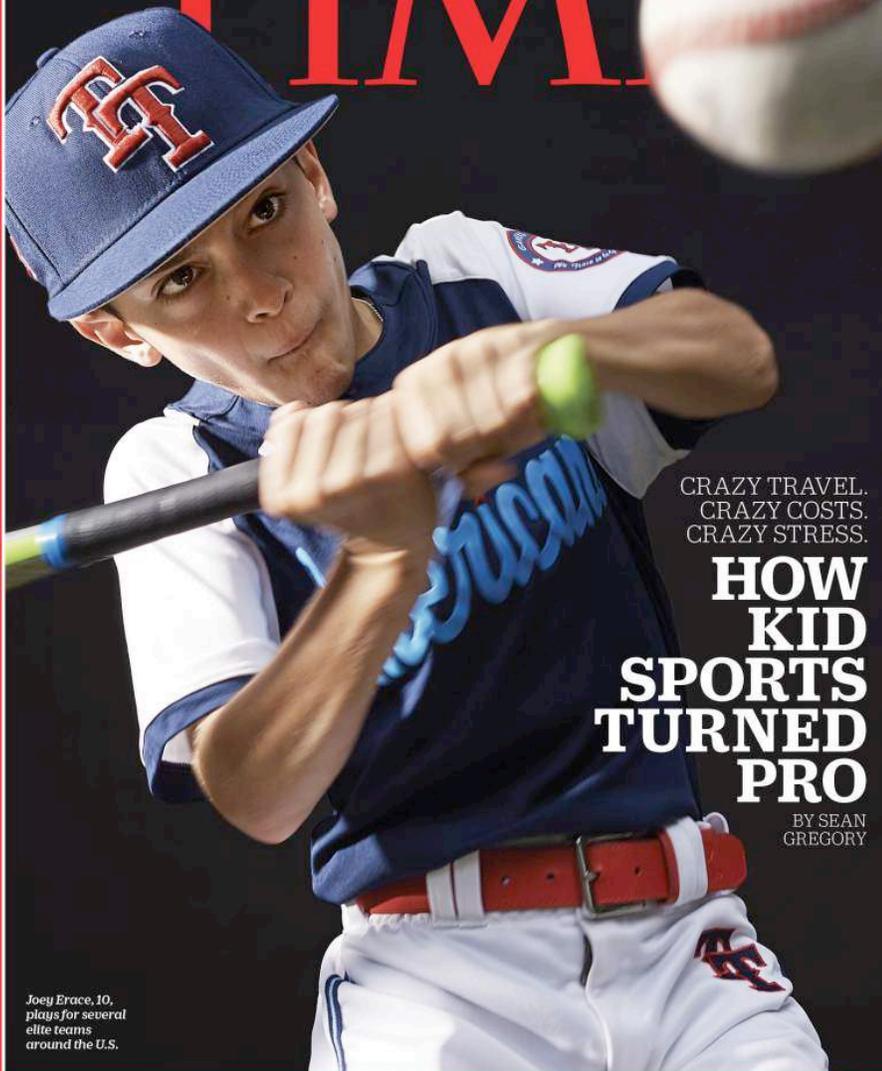
TIME

CRAZY TRAVEL.
CRAZY COSTS.
CRAZY STRESS.

HOW KID SPORTS TURNED PRO

BY SEAN GREGORY

Joey Erace, 10, plays for several elite teams around the U.S.

Complexity!

Financial costs to participate
Sport specialization
Growth of private sport clubs
Focus on travel and comp sport
Pressure to play on multiple teams

Overtraining
Stress
Lack of recovery time
Staleness
Burnout

Sport Organization

Youth

Sport Coaches

Sport Parents
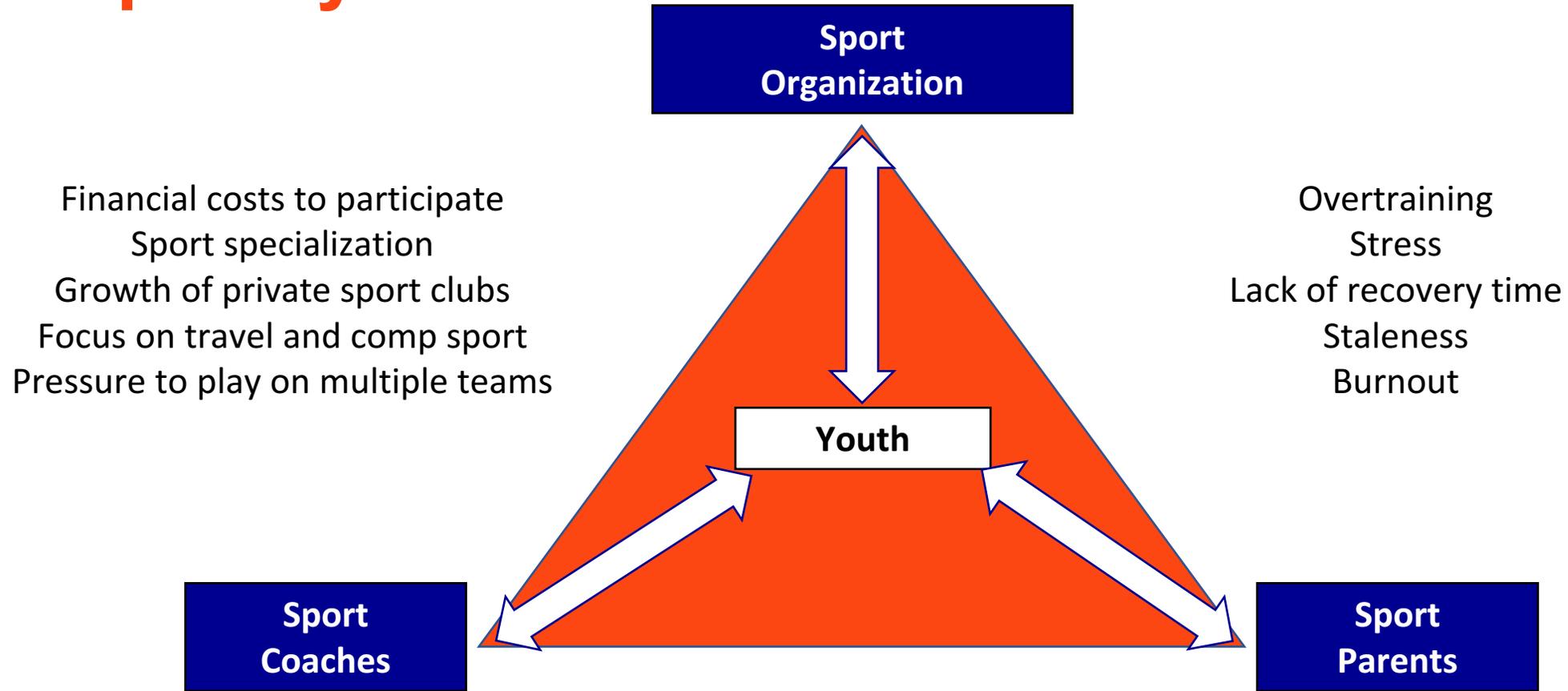
And for most of you - add private youth sport organizations to the mix!

The Good News?

We can do something to positively influence almost ALL of the reasons for sport dropout!
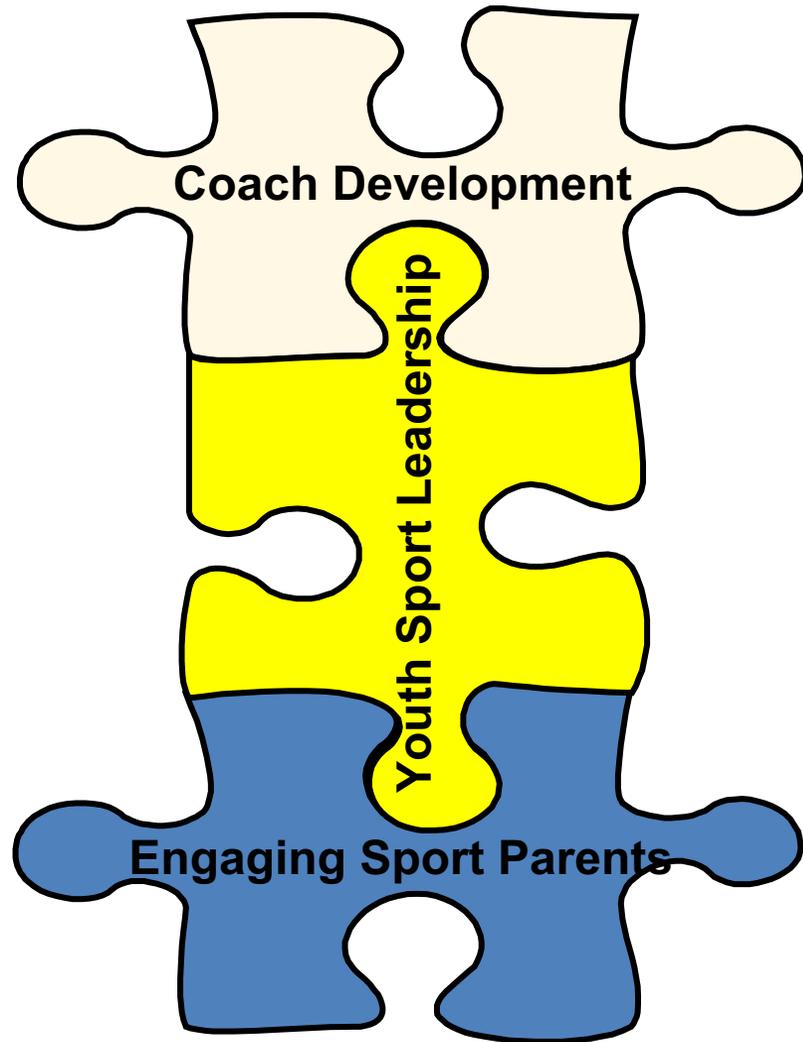
A Youth Sport Philosophy

Developing
Positive Push

Enhancing Sport
Enjoyment
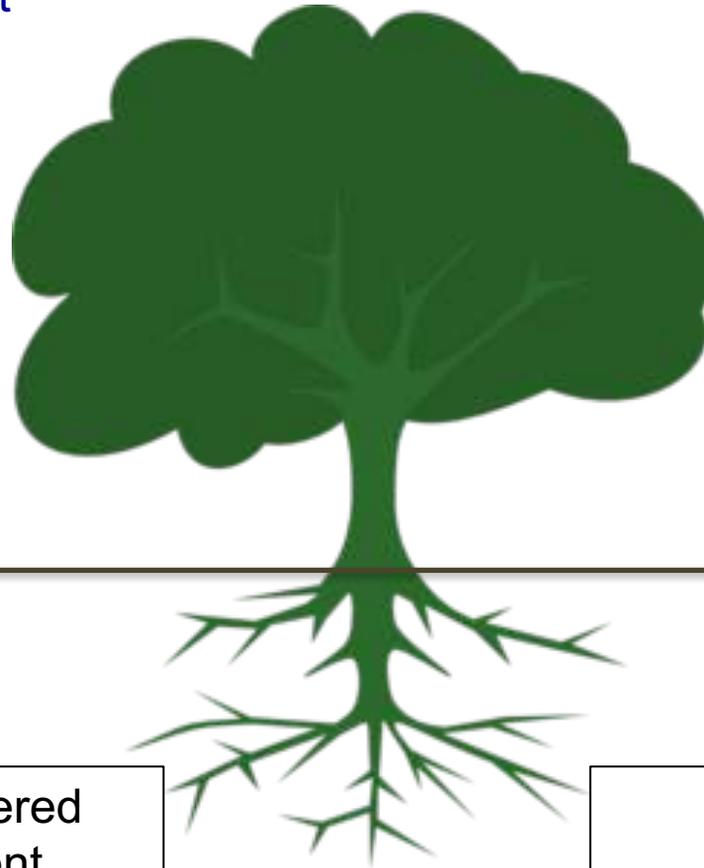
Cultivating
Relationships

Athlete-Centered
Development

Positive Sport
Experience

Strategies for Enhancing Sport Enjoyment

Photo courtesy of US Army Youth Sports and Fitness

Lack of enjoyment is the most frequent reason given for dropping out of youth sport particularly for youth between the ages of 7-15 (Crane & Temple, 2015; Gardner et al., 2016).

Strategies for Enhancing Sport Enjoyment

✓ Create policies and contexts that maximize **inclusive opportunities**
✓ Design practices to **increase physical activity**
✓ Foster **pro-social behavior**
✓ Teach through **games**
✓ Reward **positive coaching** behavior
✓ Talk to athletes about what they **enjoyed** about practice/games

Photo courtesy of US Army Youth Sports and Fitness

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Strategies for Developing a Positive Push

Optimal push is the ability to read one's child's and one's own emotional needs, consider the goals of sport participation and development, and provide an appropriate balance of structure and expectations (Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010).

Strategies for Developing a Positive Push

✓ Build a **mastery climate**

✓ Reward behavior that is in line with **program philosophy**

✓ Develop appropriate game and practice **goals**

✓ Provide and inquire about **feedback** relative to **goals, not outcomes**

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Strategies for Cultivating Relationships

For a well-structured sport system, it is important for the coach to develop positive relationships across sport constituents. This includes building positive relationships among parents, athletes, coaches, and administrators (Collins & Barcelona, in press).

Strategies for Cultivating Relationships

- ✓ Hold people accountable to **clear expectations**

- ✓ Show athletes you **care**

- ✓ **Listen** to concerns

- ✓ Give athletes **a voice**

- ✓ Provide **contact points**/be visible

- ✓ Keep **parents informed** and reinforce positive behavior

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Challenges with Sport Parents...

"I'm uncomfortable dealing with parents in various ways. When they feel their child is better than they are. When they want to see more playing time. When they do not take responsibility for getting their child to practices/games on time. When they feel a coaching method is not appropriate. Soccer is a great game – if we could just get rid of the parents."
– *Youth Sport Coach*

Case Study – Putting Strategies in Action

NYBA: Norwood Youth Basketball Association

Specific Scenario: Consider the following. Coach Sullivan seeks your advice. S/he is coaching a team in the recreational in-house league for grades 5-7. The players on this team did not make the travel league and therefore are playing in the house league. Based on the number of players available, athletes in 5th, 6th, and 7th grade are all playing together. Coach Sullivan currently has 12 players on the roster. Of the 12, three (3) are seventh graders, four (4) are six-graders, and five (5) are 5th-graders. Coach Sullivan is struggling because the team represents a diversity of skill-level and commitment. What advice will you give Coach Sullivan relative to developing a specific strategy for each of the following:

1) Enhancing Enjoyment; 2) Developing a Positive Push; 3) Cultivating Relationships?

Conclusion

- Drop out is rooted in a **complex** set of factors
- We can address many of them in **program design**
- Start with a philosophy rooted in **athlete-centered** development and **positive sport experience**
- Use the three strategies – **enhancing sport enjoyment, developing positive push,** and **cultivating relationships**
- We must be willing to **take action**!

Quality sport
based on Long-Term Athlete Development is...

safe and inclusive

developmentally appropriate

well run

...leading to
individual excellence and optimum health

image courtesy of Sport Canada