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The Power of Sports

Sports have played an immense role in American culture for centuries and continue to contribute to the development of many kids. Playing a sport allow children and adolescents to stay fit, while being involved in healthy competition. Over the past few decades, there has been many studies and polls completed, suggesting that the percentage of youth between the ages of 13-17 meeting his or her exercise requirement per week has greatly declined. This percentage is only projected to plummet in the next few years because many parents are not informed about the plethora of benefits kids receive when involved in a sport. Adolescents and children should play a sport when developing because they massively contribute to better health physically, academically, psychologically, and emotionally, while helping families financially.

Sports are a healthy addiction that will benefit a kid's physical health throughout their life. According to Sports and Development, "physical activity contributes to developing healthy bones, efficient heart and lung function as well as improved motor skills" ("The Health Benefits"). With stronger muscle and bones, kids are less likely to develop several chronic conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and obesity. As the entire American population decreases their amount regular exercise, many of these conditions are rapidly becoming more prevalent then ever before. For example, "1.7 million new cases of diabetes were diagnosed in the U.S. adults in 2012,

and the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes is on the rise” (Santos-Longhurst). Type 2 Diabetes is not hereditary; the leading causes of this disease are physical inactivity and malnutrition. Americans can prevent the increasing pervasiveness of Type 2 Diabetes by starting to exercise regularly and encouraging kids to get involved in a sport at a young age.

Teens who partake in sports and stay active lessen their chances of developing a severe or terminal illness. In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that the leading cause of death in America is heart diseases (“Leading Causes of Death”). Heart diseases has drastically increased in the past years because people continue to not meet their minimum requirement of exercise needed weekly. By playing a sport habitually, a person is able to keep low blood pressure, increase HDL cholesterol levels, and escalate insulin sensitivity, ultimately lessening a person’s chance of developing a heart disease. Furthermore, Dr. Jonathan Myers performed a study for the American Heart Association and compared adults’ risk of death by gradients of physical fitness. Surprisingly, Dr. Myers discovered that the most important aspect of determining a person’s risk of death was their activity level in previous years of their life (Myers). Adults with the lowest scores in their fitness level at a young age had a mortality rate approximately 4.5 times more than those who were the most fit. The adults who scored the highest fitness level had the lowest predicted mortality rate because their heart and lungs developed strong muscle and tissue around those organs, from exercising, to maintain their health. Involvement, at a young age, in a sport, structured or unstructured, will improve a person’s health as an adult and decrease their chances of dying at an early

age. A child's participation in a sport could be the difference between a long life and an early death.

An increase in teen's involvement in sports will help combat the growing obesity epidemic prevailing in America since the 1970s. According The Aspen Institute, America is ranked first in the prevalence of overweight/obese children ages 5-17 years old at an overwhelming 37.25%, where our biggest industrial competition, Japan, is at 15.3% (Lee). America's percentage is so astonishing because of the lack exercise these kids get and the decreasing number of adolescence who are less physically active through sports. Most Americans rely on transportation devices that do not involve any exercise, such as cars or buses, rather than working their leg muscles while riding a bicycle to their intended destination. Additionally, physical education is becoming less enforced throughout schools in the United States. Only five states in America require students to enroll in physical education kindergarten through twelfth grade, yet "only one in three kids are physically active everyday" ("Physical Activity"). By playing a sport, kids can burn the unhealthy calories quickly, ultimately reducing their body weight and body mass index. Involvement in a sport would also make up for the lack of physical education throughout the United States and eventually decrease the percentage of overweight/obese children prevalent in America.

Besides the physical benefits, being involved in sports can enhance teens' academic performance and cognitive skills. In 2009, University of Michigan performed a study and "determined students who participated in vigorous sports did 10 percent better in their state's Science, English, Math and Social Studies test overall compared to other students" (Barkhorn). Student-athletes know how to study efficiently because of their

tight and strict schedules, forcing them to prioritize. Athletes develop excellent time management, allowing them to perform better than non-athletes on timed test. Additionally, many schools require athletes to maintain a certain GPA in order to be allowed to play their sport. For example, Culver City High School requires high school athletes to maintain a 2.0 GPA to play their sport. This system forces student-athletes to do well in their classes and to study the material in order to pass exams. By enforcing a minimum GPA, student athletes are able to do well in the classroom and on the field, making them well-rounded, high achieving students.

Sports can motivate students to attend school and stray them away from involvement in dangerous activities. For example, University of Kansas discovered that student-athletes have a higher overall attendance to class and “higher graduation rates: 98 percent of athletes in Kansas’s class of 2012 graduated, compared with 90 percent of non-athletes” (Barkhorn). Sports encourage students and give them a reason to attend school, even if that reason is non-academic. With a graduate degree, those student-athletes can either continue in their sport professionally or find a job in which their major would help them thrive. Furthermore, sports can motivate students to make wiser decisions and prevent involvement in violence and drugs. According to the Women’s Sports Foundation, “female high school athletes are 92% less likely to get involved with drugs and 80% less likely to get pregnant” (“Youth Sports Statistics”). Sports give teens a beneficial activity to do outside of school. With athletes’ strict schedules, their downtime decreases, giving athletes less time to participate in illegal and dangerous activities outside of their sport and school. Rather, they dedicate their open time to studying to pass their classes and to graduate on time.

Adolescents learn many physiological and mental techniques, such as goal setting, that assist them in being successful on the field, at school, and in their future. In sports, goal setting is “something that (the athlete) wants to achieve or accomplish, and they direct their energy in that specific direction” (Duggan). This technique allows athletes to gain a sense of control in their actions and to move past their fears to reach their goal. Kids also continue to progress while attempting to conquer a goal, becoming a higher performing and more valuable player to their team. Reaching an athlete’s goal, however, is not spontaneous and easy; the athlete must “remain flexible enough to adjust (their) goals as needed” (Karageorghis). Learning how to alter/tweak his or her training in difficult situations enables athletes to continue to try and never give into failure. At a young age, kids have the ability to attain a life skill that is crucial for students in school and adults in their workplace. Whether the goal is ever accomplished or not, the athlete will gain the knowledge necessary to set goals and develop a plan to improve his or her skill level in and out of the sport.

Sports assist with the development of kids’ self-confidence and sportsmanship. For example, when a little league baseball player hits a homerun to win the game and receives the game ball, his confidence level increases. Because of his homerun, the player will turn his “sporting potential into superior performance” in the following games (“Sportsmanship”). By hitting that homerun, the kid’s self-confidence rises, thus making him want enhance his performance and attempt something slightly more difficult during his next game. Winning gives kids motivation to improve their skills in order to remain on top and perform their personal best at every game or competition. Realistically, however, athletes do not win every game or award, but they can always triumph with

their sportsmanship. For instance, during professional sports, “tennis players leap over the net to shake hands with their opponents hand after a hard-fought match” and “football players shake hands after four quarters of knocking each other around” (“Sportsmanship”). Sports allow kids to learn how to graciously handle defeat and humbly accept victory. Additionally, sportsmanship help athletes view losing as a part of their development in the sport and motivates them to intensify their training to get back on top. Athletes develop sportsmanship as he or she continues in a sport and encompasses everything that makes an athlete an excellent team player on and off the field. Winning is not everything, but an athlete’s character is developed by how they learn to handle success and failure through their sport.

Playing a sport provides kids with opportunities to develop leadership and communication skills. For instance, when playing a team sport, the team has to devise a winning strategy that attacks its opponent’s weaknesses (Duggan). The team captain delegates a certain task to each player and everyone has to do their part for the team to reach its ultimate goal. Communication skills allow a leader to be successful and for a team to achieve victory. Leadership and communication are necessary life skills for an adult to have in the workplace. According to Millennial Money, only “59% of (college graduates) said they were well prepared to apply their knowledge to the real world” and “just 23% of employers said so” (Mulhere). This percentage would increase if more students started playing a sport and developing important life skills at a young age. Being able to work with others in the workplace can positively influence group projects and employee engagement in their particular assignment. With leadership and communication, a team’s overall success will rise and improvement will be seen whether

demonstrating these skills in sports, school, or the workforce. Playing a sport is one of the most beneficial and effective ways to develop communication and leadership, both being important skills needed throughout a person's life.

The current generation is filled with technology, makes students less active and diminishes kids' involvement in sports. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, "kids and teens 8 to 18 spend nearly 4 hours a day in front of a TV screen and almost 2 additional hours on the computer and playing video games" ("How TV Affects Our Children"). For example, in 2004, Nickelodeon created an annual event called the Worldwide Day of Play. With the expansion and advancements in technology, America needs to take steps to encourage students to join a sport and become more active on a daily basis ("Worldwide Day of Play"). For a several hours during that day, Nickelodeon did not broadcast any television shows and told viewers to put down their cell phones, turn off the TV and go outside and play. Although this is a yearly event, it forced kids to do something other than stare at an electronic screen all day. More of these days should be implemented and on various channels such as Disney Channel, PBS Kids, and Cartoon Network. Additionally, more video games should be created that are physically interactive and offered on multiple gaming consuls. For instance, *Just Dance*, *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Fruit Ninja* allow kids to play video games and move their bodies to get exercise. To win the game, they have to follow the moves on the screen. This is a simple solution for kids to still enjoy exercising and burn calories quickly.

If a child does not meet their level of exercise necessary per week, they are more susceptible to medical conditions, which can hurt a family financially. For example, the estimated cost for diabetes treatments in the United States in 2012 was 245 billion dollars

and “people diagnosed with diabetes incur an average medical expenditure of about 13,700 dollars per year. People with diagnosed diabetes, on average, have medical expenditures approximately 2.3 times higher than what expenditures would be in the absences of diabetes” (“National Diabetes Statistic Report”). Many families cannot afford the medicine each year, which corresponds to the rising amount of people dying from this disease each year. Additionally, if children would enroll in sports, the United States expenditures on diabetes would decrease, allowing the government to use their money elsewhere, such as education. Involvement in sports will reduce a kid’s chance of developing a chronic medical condition, ultimately saving families from a huge financial burden.

More children need to participate in a sport because of the multitude of benefits and to improve their health. The life skills kids will learn throughout their sport will assist them in their present and future endeavors, such as college and professions. Additionally, children’s chances of developing a chronic condition or terminal illness decreases, and would save parents from the financial burden of paying for medical treatments. Parents need to encourage their kids to get involved in a sport because their kid will benefit in all aspects of their life and become an all-around healthy and successful athlete, student, and employee.

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