

youth sport

SHAPED BY THOSE WHO LEAD

For professors Rickabaugh and Lydum, youth sport leadership plays an important role in coaching and recreation

by Debbie Richard, '02, '04, Assistant Director of Marketing

Youth sport today is overtly competitive and comes equipped with parents who have created the stereotypical "sports parent" in the news. In many areas, sports are exclusive, require sign-up fees or cut less talented athletes from teams by the time they reach their early teens.

"Sport is ubiquitous. No matter where you go in the world, people gather for organized physical activity," says Matt Lydum, assistant professor of education and assistant track and field coach. "To understand why youth sport in the U.S. has become so competitive, we must consider factors such as media portrayals of sport and

encourage kids to have more fun when playing sports and allow all kids who want to play to have an opportunity to participate until at least their early teens."

Both Rickabaugh and Lydum feel there are changes coming with regard to coaching and recreational leadership. "Few public school districts require coaches to obtain a coaching license," says Rickabaugh. "Until recently, most Ohio public schools did not require a coaching license, only proof of an injury prevention class."

"The issue with untrained coaches is that they often don't know what to focus on or what the correct guidelines are for working with youth," says Lydum.

The National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education is considering offering an alternative option for coaches looking for licensure. Prospective

coaches would take courses at local colleges and graduate with coaching credentials. Rickabaugh and Lydum both feel the additional training would be very beneficial for coaches and the youth they will work with.

After serving as head coach of the San Francisco State Gators for eight years and United States Olympic Committee representative at the International Olympic Academy, Lydum has some very firm ideas about sports.

"We teach our students to look at the bigger picture when it comes to youth athletics," says Lydum. One of the first projects Defiance College sport science students work on is a service learning project for the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of The 100 Black Men. The group consists of leading African American men in business, government, technology and public affairs

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commercialism. Hyper competitive youth sport is not congruent with the original intention of the Olympic movement or the function of sport in school."

While countries, communities and schools are trying to find the best of the best, many kids and teens are turned off by sports either because of the competitiveness or because they just don't enjoy it.

"Seventy-five percent of kids who choose to be part of organized sports, drop out by age thirteen," says Dr. Tim Rickabaugh, professor of exercise science. "The way we approach U.S. youth sport is often counterproductive. We should



Professor Matt Lydum works with local elementary students.



Dr. Tim Rickabaugh and students work with youngsters in a physical activities class.

dedicated to helping African American youth by providing scholarships and mentoring.

The organization has a Youth Movement initiative within which they collect information from, on average, 200 children in the Bay Area. The information is sent to Defiance College students for input into a spreadsheet and returned to the organization. The DC students are also able to use the information to form statistical models on youth organic skills –such as running, jumping, throwing, etc.

From this information and information they collect locally and compare with the Bay Area information, students can begin thinking about and discussing the basic physical literacy of youth – child obesity and ability to access childhood sports.

“We also teach the students that they will need to create a variety of physical activities for youth. Not every school or organization they are placed in will have access to sports equipment,” says Lydum. “It is in these situations that our students will need to be leaders - places where it is most needed, not where it is easiest.”

“DC doesn’t have a major or minor in coaching,” says Rickabaugh, a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University who previously taught in the Central Michigan University Health Science division. “Because of changes to the physical education curriculum to meet national requirements, only a small amount of time is spent on coaching education, and the focus is primarily on educational theory. I don’t want to change the focus of physical education, and would like us to offer

coaching education outside of the physical education curriculum.

“We have recently changed our Sport Science program to Exercise Science,” says Rickabaugh. “This allows the program to establish a more accurate identity. Exercise Science will focus on health, fitness and wellness, but not health education or physical education. It is within this program that a coaching certificate program could be available.”

While developing a coaching education concentration, Rickabaugh tries to reach current Exercise Science students and teach them there is more to coaching than game strategy and administration. “Youth sport leadership is an important area

within Exercise Science. Students need to understand that youth will face many issues when entering sports – whether it’s from parents, other youth, coaches, or even the early specialization process.”

One tool Rickabaugh uses is the *Youth Athlete Development Model* (Wuerth, Lee, and Alfermann, 2004, and Hestrom and Gould, 2004) which proposes three developmental stages to show how youth should be introduced to sports. Stage 1 is for ages 6-12 and is called the “Romance Stage.” In this stage youth are encouraged to have fun and develop a love of the sport. In Stage 2, the “Precision Phase,” youth ages 12-15 focus on developing sport-specific skills. The final stage, called the “Integration Phase,” is for ages 15 and up and has an intrinsic focus on athletic performance. This is where the student takes primary control over his or her own athletic development.

Students are often surprised to start with development models, but this forms the basis for which the Exercise Science program wants students to be focused – on youth and how to best work with and encourage them to have fun. To see if it was working, a survey was given to students graduating from 2004 thru 2006, which showed that 88 percent of DC Exercise Science students felt a strong obligation to provide youth sport leadership upon graduation.

There are sure to be more changes in the future. Sports are an American pastime, and youth physical fitness is becoming more of a concern, not only for athletes but for all children. The recent changes in Exercise Science are just another step in the development of quality majors available at Defiance College. ♦



Pam Borton '87, University of Minnesota head women's basketball coach, met members of the DC basketball team during a game in Ann Arbor in March.