

Children in Competitive Sport: causes for concern?



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Sport is good for children

“Sport in early childhood and adolescence has a considerable impact on physical, psychological, social and intellectual development: it promotes responsible behaviour, forms character and identity and enhances overall well-being. In addition, sport contributes to the mental balance of each and every individual and unites apparently contradictory aspects of community life through a social dimension. It instils a sense of competition and solidarity, readiness to perform and the ability to work in a team.” (The EU Magazine, 2004)

“When young people participate in sports or have access to physical education, they can build up their health and self-esteem, use their talents to the fullest, learn the ideals of teamwork and tolerance and be drawn away from the dangers of drugs and crime.” (Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, 2005)

“Emphasise(s) the unique role of Physical Education in culture, health and development, the education of children and young people and the promotion of peace throughout the world.” (Maglingen Commitment, 2005 - endorsed by UNESCO, IOC, GAISF and WHO).

Sport is good for children

Recent reviews:

Bailey, R.P. (2005) *Sport in Education: the Place of Physical Education and Sport in Schools (the world-wide review)*. Berlin: International Council for Sport Science and Physical Education.

Bailey, R.P. (2006) 'Physical Education and Sport in Schools: a review of benefits and outcomes'. *Journal of School Health*, 76(8), pp. 397-401.

Bailey, R.P., Armour, K., Kirk, D., Jess, M., Pickup, I. and Sandford, R. (in press) The Educational Benefits Claimed for Physical Education and School Sport: an Academic Review. *Research Papers in Education*.

The problem of pedagogy

Is *all* sport good for children?

“Most of the kids don’t actively choose the pressures of top-flight football. I mean, they do at the start, but that’s really a dream they’re buying. They turn up when they are seven or eight saying ‘I want to be like Beckham or Gerrard’, but they don’t know what it means. How can they? They are only babies. Next thing they know, they’re being pushed to give up their education and to do everything for football. And the irony is we know that most will never make it.” (Premiership Football Club Youth Coach, 2007)

Is *all* sport good for children?

“To be competitive at a high level requires training regimens for children that could be considered extreme even for adults. The ever-increasing requirements for success creates a constant pressure for athletes to train longer, harder, more intelligently, and in some cases in an earlier age.” (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000)

“Most of the injuries I see are over-use injuries. Young players come with elbow, shoulder and back problems .. Kids never used to get these kinds of injuries in the past. These are new diseases we have created for children.” (Director of the Boston Children’s Hospital)

“Today young girl of nine train four hours a day. It’s scandalous!” (Martina Navratilova)

“Magic Number 10,000”

Is *all* sport good for children?

Little Girls in Pretty Boxes, by Joan Ryan (1995)

“He could be so cruel to the children, calling them ‘fat’, ‘you idiot’. I used to think, ‘what’s this going to do to my daughter when she starts dating? Will she choose an abusive partner?’ She was always trying to please this abusive man .. It’s disgusting, all these men with their huge egos dealing with little girls.” (Mother of US elite gymnast)

“It was part of the game .. I always felt as a coach I couldn’t leave any stone upturned ..

The basic goal was: this athlete expresses a desire to be successful. And if positive motivation will do it every single time, that easy. It takes no energy from me. But if it didn’t work, I would try to do whatever I could to turn around that situation.” (Rick Newman, Gymnastics Coach)

“We’d practice our figure eights in strips on the ice and the girl next to me had terrible figure eights and she’d get screamed at, hit and her hair pulled. The behaviour wasn’t considered abusive; it was considered discipline. And we won.” (Anonymous Olympic figure skater)

Is *all* sport good for children?



Is *all* sport good for children?

In response to Olympian Matthew Pinsent's claim that young Chinese gymnasts were being physically abused ..

"While it is not for us to condone what might not be acceptable, you also have to look at the cultural factor. I don't need to remind you of the fact that physical punishment was still in use in English public schools until, I believe, the 1970s ... They do not put electrical wires on their bodies. I don't agree with any physical abuse, but let's not blow up this issue. This is not the torture of young children, even if we say excesses have to be stopped." (Jacques Rogge, 2005)

A young girl in a cheerleader outfit is the central focus, with her right arm raised high and a joyful expression on her face. She is wearing a dark-colored top with a logo that includes the word 'TEAM'. The background is filled with other cheerleaders, their forms blurred to create a sense of motion and energy. The overall lighting is bright and slightly overexposed, giving the scene a dreamlike or celebratory quality.

'behind the veil of ignorance'

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 1 - Definition of a Child: A child is recognized as a person under 18

Article 2 - Non-discrimination: All rights apply to all children without exception.

Article 3 - Best interests of the child: All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests. The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.

Article 6 - Survival and development: Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development.

Article 11 - Illicit transfer and non-return: The State has an obligation to prevent and remedy the kidnapping or retention of children abroad by a parent or third party.

Article 12 - The child's opinion: The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.

Article 13 - Freedom of expression: The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information, and make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers.

Article 17 - Access to appropriate information: The State shall ensure the accessibility to children of information and material from a diversity of sources.

Article 18 - Parental responsibilities: Parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, and the State shall support them in this. The State shall provide appropriate assistance to parents in child-raising.

Article 19 - Protection from abuse and neglect: The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or other responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

Article 24 - Health and health services: The child has a right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable.

Article 27 - Standard of living: Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. Parents have the primary responsibility to ensure that the child has an adequate standard of living. The State's duty is to ensure that this responsibility can be fulfilled, and is.

Article 28 - Education: The child has a right to education.

Article 31 - Leisure, recreation, and cultural activities: The child has the right to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

Article 32 - Child labour: The child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his or her health, education, or development.

Article 33 - Drug abuse: Children have the right to protection from the use of narcotic and psychotropic drugs.

Article 34 - Sexual exploitation: The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Article 35 - Sale, trafficking and abduction: It is the State's obligation to make every effort to prevent the sale, trafficking, and abduction of children.

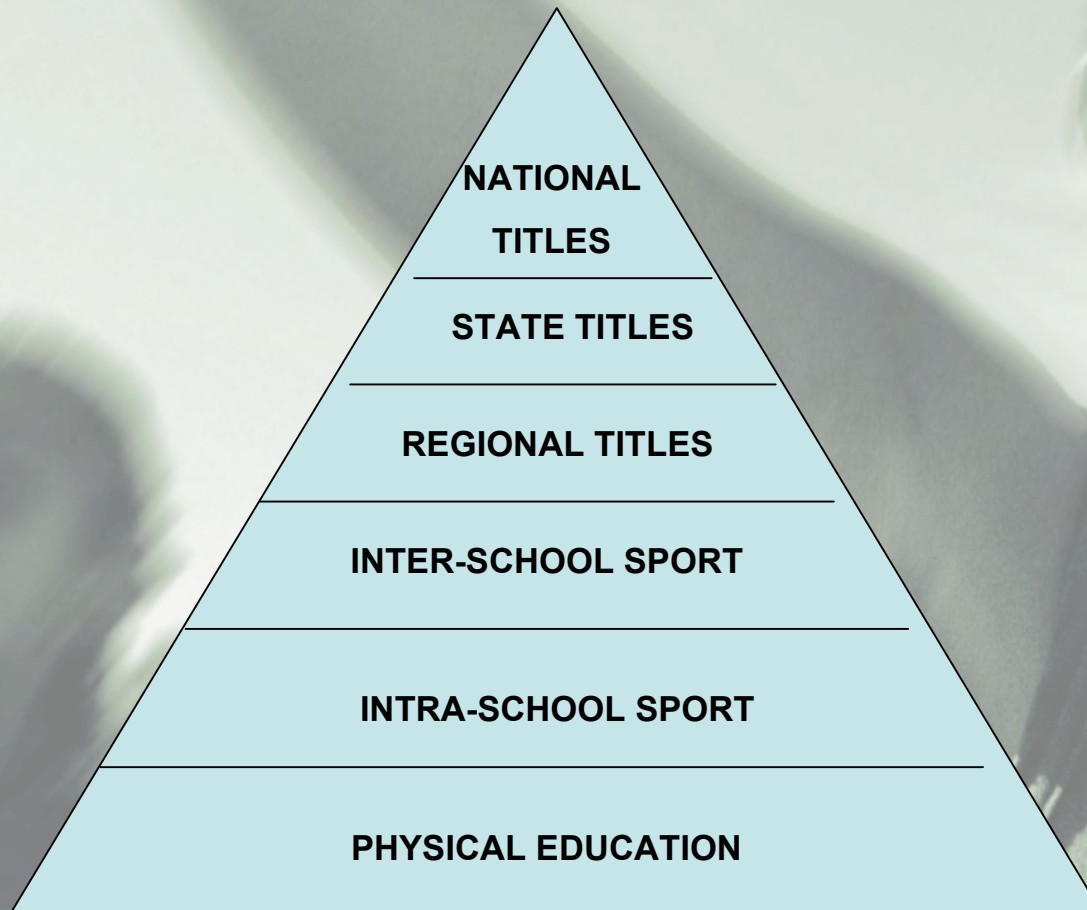
Article 36 - Other forms of exploitation: The child has the right to protection from all forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare not covered in

Child rights violation & elite competitive sports

(Adapted from David, 2005)

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Convention on the Rights of the Child</u>	<u>Estimated no. of children affected yearly</u>	<u>Empirical base</u>
Health risks of over-training	Article 24	Thousands	Since 1970s
Physical abuse	Article 19	Thousands	Scarce, only since 1990s
Psychological abuse	Article 19	Thousands	Scarce, only since 1990s
Sexual abuse	Article 19	Thousands	Increasing data since 1990s
Violence	Article 19	Unknown	Scarce, only since 1990s
Doping	Article 24	Tens of thousands	Increasing data since 1990s
Economic exploitation	Article 32	Unknown	None
Trafficking and sale	Article 35	At least 1,000	Very limited
Right to education	Articles 28 & 29	Unknown	None

Levels or types of sport?



Levels or types of sport?

"Elite youth sport often claims to respond to the needs and wishes of children. Far too often, however, it exists largely to satisfy adults." (Paulo David, 2005)



Adult's sport

Children's sport

Causes for concern

CONTEXT 1

Elite sport is created by and primarily for adults. Its performance criteria are those of adults. Adult success is the usual intended outcome.

CONTEXT 2

Children are not mini-adults.

There is an inherent tension between these two contexts which seems irresolvable.

One context needs to change.