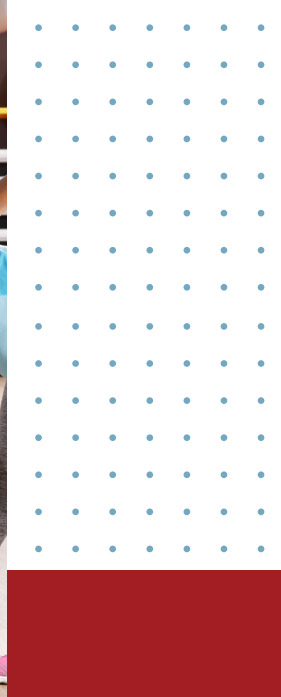


2019



# STATE OF PLAY

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS  
IN YOUTH SPORTS



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
**PROJECT PLAY**

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# Introduction

*"I'm here to announce my retirement from sports. The pressure that it takes to play at my age is just too much. I said I'd play this game as long as I'm having fun, and now, it's time to call it quits."*

These are the words from 9-year-old Derek on a commercial in August that kicked off Project Play's "Don't Retire, Kid" parent engagement campaign. Another child athlete, Spring, offered similar remarks for her retirement in a separate commercial. Derek and Spring are fictional characters. But they represent the reality that too many kids quit sports at young ages or never even start in the first place, including many who can't afford to play.

Only 38% of kids ages 6 to 12 played team or individual sports on a regular basis in 2018, down from 45% in 2008, according to data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. "Don't Retire, Kid" is designed to drive public awareness of youth attrition in sports. It's a crisis — a word we don't choose lightly — because of long-term health implications.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health, only 24% of youth ages 6 to 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, down from 30% a decade earlier. Boys (28%) are more likely than girls (20%) to meet this daily physical activity recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Kids who are physically active are one-tenth as likely to be obese. They're more likely to go on to college and less likely to suffer chronic diseases. Retiring from sports at a young age can reduce the chances of these benefits.

Our *State of Play 2019* report offers the latest update on how well stakeholders are serving all children, regardless of zip code or ability. In presenting data and key developments over the past year, we hope this report helps clarify gaps and, more importantly, identifies opportunities to drive progress. Among the findings in this report:

- **Kids from lower-income homes face increasing participation barriers.** In 2018, 22% of kids ages 6 to 12 in households with incomes under \$25,000 played sports on a regular basis, compared to 43% of kids from homes earning \$100,000 or more. Kids from the lowest-income homes are more than three times as likely to be physically inactive.

The logo for Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), consisting of the letters "HSS" in white on a blue square background.

Thank you to our partner, Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), which sponsored the State of Play 2019 report.



- **On average, families spend \$693 per child for one sport each year.** The average child spends less than three years playing a sport and quits by age 11, usually due to lack of enjoyment.
- **Parents report that the highest source of pressure that their child feels comes from coaches,** with coaches in wrestling, field hockey, tackle football and basketball scoring the most pressure.
- **Multisport play is making a slight comeback.** But it may be because kids are playing multiple sports in the same season — and still sticking with one sport year-round, against the advice of medical experts.
- **Less than 30% of youth coaches have been trained in the past year** in CPR/basic first aid, concussion management, general safety and injury prevention, physical conditioning, sports skills and tactics, or effective motivational techniques.

The “Don’t Retire, Kid” campaign recognizes that parents and caregivers are key agents in creating sustainable solutions in sports, just as they are with

other aspects of their child’s life. Many start their children in youth sports with the best of intentions, but they end up stressed and confused about how to create a positive experience for them. Many parents want to get off the pay-for-play treadmill, but understandably fear that doing so will hurt their child’s chances of playing high school sports, much less reaching the longshot dream of college sports or the pros.

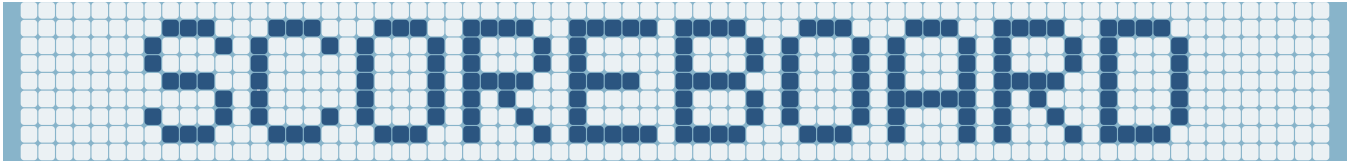
But the tens of millions of parents with kids in sports can ask the right questions of themselves, their child, their coach and their sport providers. Parents can prioritize quality access and activities that align with the needs of children. Parents can carve out an appropriate role to communicate with coaches and league organizers, increasing the chances of turning their child into a lifelong athlete and not a 9-year-old who retires way too soon.

And yes, parents can also look inward. They need to openly acknowledge the mistakes we have made with our kids in sports and how to be better.

That conversation has been started, aided by our PSA campaign. Progress depends on any behavior shifts that flow from it.



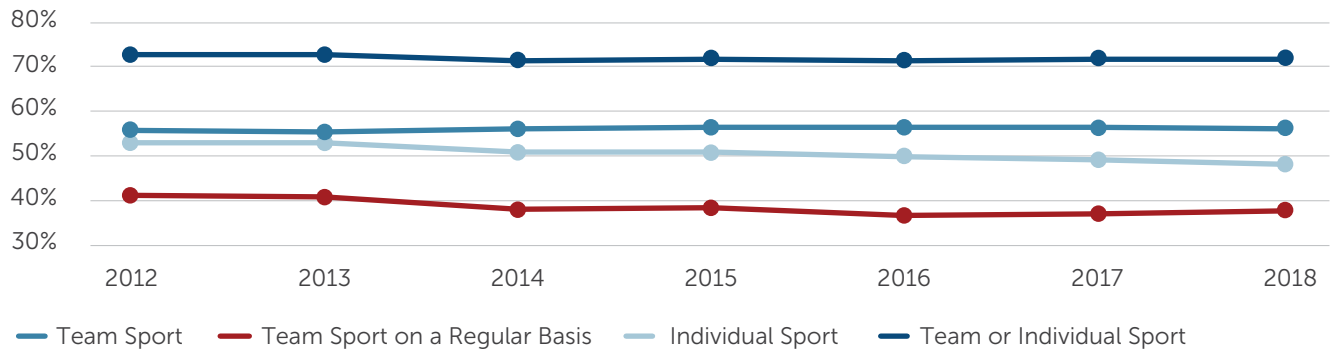
# THE STATE OF PLAY IN THE U.S.



Unless otherwise noted, sport participation and other data below were provided to the Aspen Institute's Project Play initiative by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, which in 2018 commissioned an online survey of 20,069 individuals through Sports Marketing Surveys.

## TOTAL SPORT PARTICIPATION RATES

Percentage of children ages 6 to 12 who played at least one day during the year

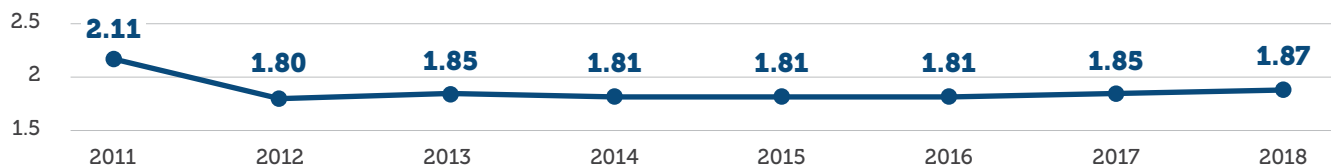


TYPE OF SPORT	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Team Sport	55.8%	55.5%	56.2%	56.6%	56.5%	56.5%	56.2%
Team Sport on a Regular Basis	41.4%	41.1%	38.2%	38.6%	36.9%	37.0%	37.9%
Individual Sport	52.9%	52.9%	50.8%	50.8%	49.8%	49.3%	48.2%
Team or Individual Sport	72.9%	72.7%	71.5%	71.7%	71.5%	71.8%	71.8%

Team sports include: baseball, basketball, cheerleading, field hockey, football (flag, touch, tackle), gymnastics, ice hockey, lacrosse, paintball, roller hockey, rugby, soccer (indoor, outdoor), softball (slow-pitch, fast-pitch), swimming on a team, track and field, Ultimate frisbee, volleyball (court, grass, sand), and wrestling. Individual sports include tennis, golf, martial arts, roller skating, skateboarding, running, and cycling (road, BMX, mountain bike). A participant is anyone who played a sport at least one day during the year, in any form and either organized or unstructured. A "core" participant is anyone who participated on a regular basis, a number of times per year that varies by sport, as defined by SFIA. A "core" participant usually includes a level of organized play. Whether participants play on one team or multiple teams, they are only counted once.

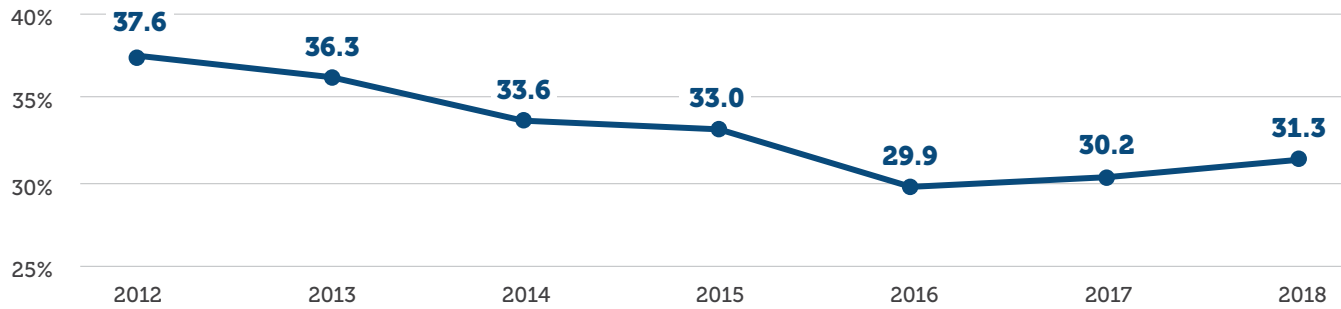
## SPORT SAMPLING

Average number of team sports played ages 6 to 12



## ACTIVE TO A HEALTHY LEVEL

Percentage of kids ages 6 to 12 who regularly participated in high-calorie-burning sports

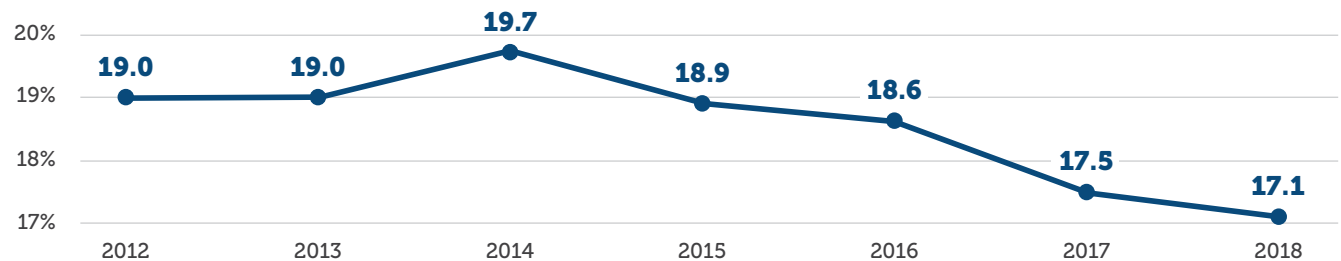


Sports considered by SFIA to be high-calorie-burning include: bicycling (BMX, mountain, road), running/jogging, basketball, field hockey, football (tackle, touch), ice hockey, roller hockey, lacrosse, rugby, soccer (indoor, outdoor), swimming (on a team or for fitness), track and field, badminton, racquetball, squash, tennis, cross-country skiing, martial arts, wrestling, stand-up paddling, climbing (sport, traditional), trail running, triathlon, boxing, dance, step, and other choreographed exercise to music. The list also includes several activities more associated with teens and adults.

**Note:** Data in 2018 differs from previous State of Play reports because SFIA changed the definition of Active to a Healthy Level in 2018. It's now defined as someone who participates in one of the high-calorie-burning sports 105 or more times a year. The definition used to be 151 or more times a year. Percentages for previous years have been adjusted on this chart based on the new definition.

## PHYSICALLY INACTIVE CHILDREN

Percentage of kids ages 6 to 12 who engaged in no sport activity during the year



	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Average</b>	19.0%	19.0%	19.7%	18.9%	18.3%	17.5%	17.1%
<b>By Household Income</b>							
<b>Under \$25,000</b>	24.4%	26.0%	28.4%	28.7%	32.5%	32.4%	33.4%
<b>\$25,000 to \$49,999</b>	22.0%	23.5%	23.4%	24.2%	24.3%	24.9%	24.5%
<b>\$50,000 to \$74,999</b>	17.1%	17.8%	20.1%	19.3%	19.3%	18.7%	17.4%
<b>\$75,000 to \$99,999</b>	16.5%	17.1%	16.1%	16.2%	16.3%	15.6%	15.0%
<b>\$100,000+</b>	14.4%	13.9%	13.4%	12.6%	10.9%	10.6%	9.9%

## AVERAGE ANNUAL FAMILY SPENDING ON ONE CHILD (AGES 1-18)

SPORT	TOTAL COSTS	REGISTRATION	EQUIPMENT	TRAVEL	LESSONS	CAMPS
Baseball	\$660	\$166	\$121	\$175	\$106	\$100
Basketball	\$427	\$86	\$74	\$114	\$61	\$88
Bicycling	\$1,012	\$120	\$504	\$247	\$29	\$106
Cross Country	\$421	\$130	\$87	\$147	\$22	\$31
Field Hockey	\$2,125	\$409	\$521	\$934	\$86	\$132
Flag Football	\$268	\$74	\$68	\$58	\$27	\$36
Tackle Football	\$485	\$91	\$110	\$83	\$116	\$76
Golf	\$925	\$81	\$364	\$238	\$88	\$113
Gymnastics	\$1,580	\$152	\$111	\$763	\$422	\$104
Ice Hockey	\$2,583	\$634	\$389	\$829	\$389	\$302
Lacrosse	\$1,289	\$411	\$280	\$281	\$68	\$231
Martial Arts	\$777	\$82	\$86	\$107	\$467	\$25
Skateboarding	\$380	\$20	\$109	\$81	\$24	\$141
Skiing/Snowboarding	\$2,249	\$168	\$1,174	\$434	\$281	\$56
Soccer	\$537	\$158	\$125	\$107	\$66	\$73
Softball	\$613	\$141	\$159	\$187	\$66	\$53
Swimming	\$786	\$116	\$59	\$388	\$154	\$68
Tennis	\$1,170	\$115	\$122	\$352	\$471	\$95
Track and Field	\$191	\$51	\$47	\$49	\$20	\$14
Volleyball	\$595	\$242	\$66	\$170	\$53	\$54
Wrestling	\$476	\$102	\$59	\$172	\$62	\$54
<b>All Sports</b>	<b>\$693</b>	<b>\$125</b>	<b>\$144</b>	<b>\$196</b>	<b>\$134</b>	<b>\$81</b>

Note: Additional expenses calculated as "Other" were also counted but are not shown on this graphic.

Source: Aspen Institute/Utah State University 2019 National Youth Sport Survey (1,032 youth sports parents).

## AGE CHILDREN QUIT REGULARLY PLAYING A SPORT (AGES 3-18)

SPORT	AVG. AGE OF LAST REGULAR PARTICIPATION	AVG. LENGTH IN YEARS OF PARTICIPATION
Baseball	10.5	3.3
Basketball	11.2	3.2
Bicycling	9.5	2.5
Cross Country	12.7	1.7*
Field Hockey	11.4	5.1
Flag Football	10.4	4.1
Tackle Football	11.9	2.8
Golf	11.8	2.8
Gymnastics	8.7	3.0
Ice Hockey	10.9	3.1
Lacrosse	11.2	2.2
Martial Arts	9.2	2.6
Skateboarding	12.0	2.8
Skiing/Snowboarding	12.1	4.3
Soccer	9.1	3.0
Softball	10.4	2.8
Swimming	10.2	3.2
Tennis	10.9	1.9
Track and Field	13.0	2.0*
Volleyball	12.3	2.0*
Wrestling	9.8	1.6
<b>All Sports</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>

\* These sports have low average lengths of participation due to kids starting these sports later.

Source: Aspen Institute/Utah State University 2019 National Youth Sport Survey (1,032 youth sports parents).

## CORE SPORT PARTICIPATION BY DEMOGRAPHIC

Children ages 6 to 12 who played a sport on a regular basis

	2012	2018
Male	49.1%	38.6%
Female	33.5%	31.4%
Household Income Under \$25,000	33.8%	21.6%
Income \$25,000 to \$49,999	36.0%	30.7%
Income \$50,000 to \$74,999	42.4%	39.4%
Income \$75,000 to \$99,999	46.1%	41.0%
Income \$100,000+	48.8%	42.7%
African American/Black	38.9%	34.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	34.8%	36.8%
Caucasian/White, Non-Hispanic	44.1%	39.7%
Hispanic	38.5%	33.1%

## CORE PARTICIPATION IN SELECT SPORTS

Percentage of kids ages 6 to 12 who participated on a regular basis

	2008	2013	2017	2018	2017-18 CHANGE	# KIDS IN 2018
Baseball	16.5%	14.2%	13.1%	13.6%	+3.3%	4,100,000
Basketball	16.6%	16.0%	14.1%	14.1%	-0.3%	4,200,000
Bicycling	27.7%	19.8%	16.0%	15.7%	-2.2%	4,700,000
Cheerleading	n/a	1.8%	2.2%	2.6%	+18.2%	775,000
Field Hockey	n/a	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	-7.8%	118,000
Flag Football	4.5%	2.8%	3.3%	3.3%	-0.3%	989,000
Tackle Football	3.7%	3.5%	2.9%	2.8%	-4.0%	839,000
Golf	5.0%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	0.0%	1,400,000
Gymnastics	2.3%	2.9%	3.1%	3.4%	+8.5%	1,000,000
Ice Hockey	0.5%	1.1%	1.2%	1.1%	-12.3%	324,000
Lacrosse	0.4%	0.8%	0.9%	1.0%	+4.7%	296,000
Soccer (Outdoor)	10.4%	9.3%	7.7%	7.4%	-3.3%	2,200,000
Softball (Fast-Pitch)	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	+4.9%	359,000
Swimming (Team)	n/a	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	+1.6%	417,000
Tennis	n/a	4.1%	4.1%	4.3%	5.1%	1,300,000
Track and Field	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	-10.0%	307,000
Volleyball (Court)	2.9%	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%	+5.5%	846,000
Wrestling	1.1%	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	+14.2%	218,000





# THE 8 PLAYS

+  
**Key developments in the past year within the eight strategies  
for the eight sectors that touch the lives of children**

- Ask Kids What They Want
- Reintroduce Free Play
- Encourage Sport Sampling
- Revitalize In-Town Leagues
- Think Small
- Design for Development
- Train All Coaches
- Emphasize Prevention



# 1

Challenge: Youth sport is organized by adults

## The Play: Ask Kids What They Want



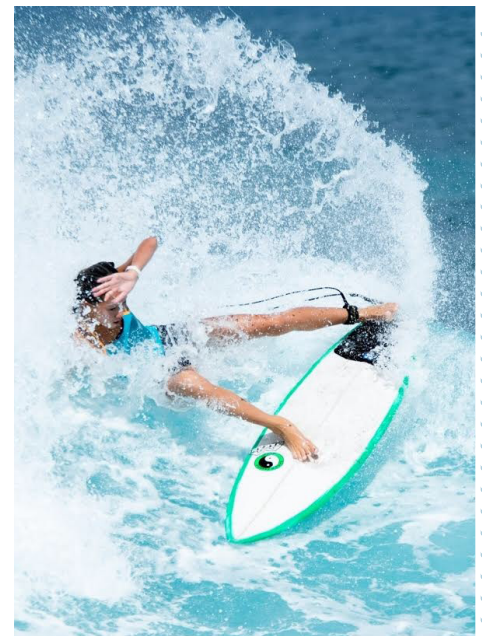
### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Esports, now a huge moneymaker, is creating a feeder system of young kids.** Esports pros often peak in their early 20s, but the United States is deemed to have a weaker talent pool than countries like South Korea, where elite players are identified before middle school. Organizations like Bravous Youth Esports and Super League have created competitive esports leagues for elementary-school-aged U.S. kids. Executives of these organizations say they want to create the Little League for esports.<sup>1,2</sup> At a Boys & Girls Club in Newport Beach, California, the fees are \$150 for kids to participate in one game and one practice per week, and all gaming equipment is provided by Bravous. At least seven state high school associations are offering esports at a varsity level, and New York and New Jersey are exploring it.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of esports is partially because they counter traditional youth sports' mistakes of leaving behind so many kids due to specialization, high costs and negative experiences. By professionalizing players at younger ages, esports may start to resemble more traditional youth sports.

**Further evidence emerges that kids are interested in sports typically not offered in their community.** In Hawai'i, the top sports kids say they want to try are skiing and snowboarding, according to our *State of Play Hawai'i* report. It's evidence of a sense of adventure and desire for experiences beyond what their home can provide. They're not alone. In our *State of Play Seattle-King County* report, kids told us they most want to try martial arts, boxing, surfing, parkour and lacrosse — none of which are among the top five sports currently played. We saw a similar trend last year when kids in Harlem, New York, told us they want to try ice hockey and fencing. As the country's demographics change, new sports have the potential to emerge.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

To get and keep kids involved in sports, build the voice of children into the design of activities.



**Young boys start to wear USA women’s soccer jerseys.**

The American team’s run to another World Cup inspired a new audience, with many boys wearing the jerseys of Alex Morgan, Megan Rapinoe and others. “It’s not a coincidence that Nike now sells a U.S. women’s team shirt in men’s and boys’ sizes,” Sports Illustrated soccer writer Grant Wahl said. “That never used to happen much.”<sup>4</sup> Nike reported that its USA women’s home jersey became the top-selling soccer jersey, for both men and women, ever sold on the company’s website in one season. Jersey sales were up 200% compared to during the 2015 World Cup season. This signals a shift in boys’ attitudes toward sports.

**The hazards of youth serving as umpires and officials have become more apparent.**

Though kids just want to play games and have fun, some adults ruin it by verbally abusing umpires and officials, resulting in an officiating crisis that’s even reaching professional sports. The officiating problem was on full display when a baseball game of 7-year-olds in Colorado turned into a brawl among adults after the 13-year-old umpire warned both teams’ fans to stop complaining about calls. “It was kind of weird,” teen umpire Josh Cordova said. “I shouldn’t have to tell a grown man how to act around little kids.”<sup>5</sup> One solution: Triple Crown Sports, which manages about 300 youth sporting events around the U.S., launched the Protect the Game initiative.<sup>6</sup> It provides free training, uniforms and equipment to veterans in order to help them become youth sports officials.

**Playing more sports or spending more hours on a sport is linked to kids feeling greater pressure.**

A 2019 survey by the Aspen Institute and Utah State University Families in Sport Lab asked parents to identify how much pressure their child feels in sports and the source of that pressure. It found that the more time a child regularly played multiple sports or played for many hours, the more likely a parent attributed the child feeling pressure from parents, siblings, peers, coaches, sport organizations and society. The highest source of pressure was attributed to coaches, especially in wrestling, field hockey, tackle football, basketball and flag football. According to parents, kids felt the least amount of coaching pressures in skateboarding, skiing/snowboarding, martial arts, golf and swimming — all individual sports.



**The most important thing for parents is establishing an element of fun and imagination. I think that’s really key.”**

**KOBE BRYANT**

*NBA legend*<sup>7</sup>



+ **2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE** | **D**

+ Last year’s grade: D+

# 2

Challenge: Overstructured experiences

## The Play: Reintroduce Free Play



### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Researchers suggest that doctors should write “prescriptions” for physical activity.** A new study by Nationwide Children’s Hospital shows that just 5% of youth get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>8</sup> The study examined children seen at outpatient pediatric sports-medicine clinics and also found that 40% were getting either too much exercise or too much on some days and too little on others. Researchers said the study indicates a need for physicians to screen for physical activity, not unlike how they treat height and weight as vital signs during doctor visits. Doctors could have conversations with families about the right amount of physical activity and, when necessary, offer specific programs that could provide more healthy activity. One tool that doctors could use when prescribing activity: The Aspen Institute’s Healthy Sport Index ([healthysportindex.com](http://healthysportindex.com)).

**Arkansas passes a new law extending recess.** Elementary schools in the state must now provide at least 40 minutes of recess a day, drawing upon research showing that kids need physical activity to help focus in the classroom and develop good social skills and healthy lifestyles.<sup>9</sup> The law mandates that recess must include opportunities for free play and vigorous physical activity and must occur outdoors when weather and other relevant conditions permit. Teachers are recategorized as on “instructional duty” during recess, a change from their past classification of “non-instructional duty,” which includes duties such as supervising students during school meals or before or after school. To make up for the extra recess time, the North Little Rock School District is extending the school day by 20 minutes in 2019-20.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Make sure there’s room for not just organized play but experiences that children can own.



**The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends daily free play to develop motor skills for organized sports.**

A 2019 report by the organization reviewed the benefits and risks of organized sports plus the roles of schools, community organizations, parents, and coaches. Among the key recommendations: “Children learn skills needed for organized sports through active play that is fun and developmentally appropriate. Given the right developmental environment, many of these skills are learned through free play, such as running, leaping and climbing. Ample opportunity for free play is necessary, especially in the preschool and elementary school years, when the basic skills needed for organized sports are being developed and combined.”<sup>10</sup>

**Congress permanently authorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) — but funding remains a debate.**

In spring 2019, President Trump signed a public lands package that included reauthorizing the LWCF, which expired in 2018 after being a law for 53 years. The LWCF is the largest source of federal funding for close-to-home parks, playgrounds and other projects that help kids have access to nature and physical fitness opportunities. As of July 2019, however, the president’s budget had no funding for land acquisition; instead, it uses LWCF money to cover national park maintenance backlogs across the country. The House countered with a bill that would provide full funding of \$900 million annually to the LWCF, but there is debate within Congress about the appropriate level of funding and how it should be allocated. From 2014 to 2018, Congress appropriated \$1.9 billion to the LWCF — about half of that money went to federal land acquisitions and the other half went to state and local public lands and waters projects.<sup>11</sup>

**Kids in Buffalo get library fines waived — if they borrow sports equipment.**

Project Play Western New York launched the Play Down Your Fines pilot program in Buffalo, offering kids sports equipment at libraries in order for them to stay active over the summer.<sup>12</sup> Kids ages 17 and under can borrow soccer and lacrosse equipment for up to three days. When they return the equipment, the library fines are completely erased. The pilot program, created with funds from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, will be analyzed to learn how the project can be used for larger future efforts to share sports equipment.



**We have a health crisis in our society, and access to sport can address that. And if we can expand access to free-play opportunities, we can expand the creativity and problem-solving skills of the next generation. This is about civilization and developing leaders moving forward. It’s much bigger than I thought it was.”**

**DAVE EGNER**

*President and CEO,  
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation*<sup>13</sup>

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE</b> | <b>D+</b> |
| Last year’s grade: D+           |           |

# 3

Challenge: Sameness and specialization

## The Play: Encourage Sport Sampling



### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Multisport play continues to make a slight comeback. In 2018, children ages 6 to 12 played an average of 1.87 team sports.** It's the second straight year with a slight improvement, up from 1.85 team sports in 2017 and 1.81 in 2016. Still, the most recent sport-sampling number remains well below the level of 2011, when the average child played at least two sports (2.11). However, new research by the University of Washington shows that parents' interpretation of what a multisport athlete means can be problematic.<sup>14</sup> Sports providers in Seattle are seeing kids increasingly play multiple sports at the same time, an approach that could drive youth to eventually burn out. It's possible that kids are sampling more sports but still playing one sport year-round, against the advice of medical experts due to the risk of burnout and overuse injuries.

**National organizations commit to sport-sampling policies.** Multisport play has been a major focus of Project Play and organizations that have engaged with it. As of July 2019, 23 national sport organizations had completed a nine-question Project Play checklist on sports sampling — the results of which are published at [www.aspenprojectplay.org/aces](http://www.aspenprojectplay.org/aces). Learn which organizations do or don't take a position on the recommended ages to not specialize in sports, including training resources on encouraging coaches to promote multisport play and other important checklist items. For instance, U.S. Lacrosse, USA Cycling, USA Field Hockey, USA Hockey, USA Swimming, USA Volleyball and USA Triathlon discourage national championships and rankings for children (ideally through age 12). The U.S. Tennis Association, USA Baseball, USA Curling and U.S. Sailing do not. National championships and rankings can incentivize adults and kids to have children play only one sport in order to succeed.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Resist early sport specialization that limits overall development. Grow the menu of sport options, create better connections to vulnerable populations, and more athletes-for-life will emerge.



**Unique sports are becoming popular in more-diverse parts of the country, such as Seattle.** According to our *2019 State of Play Seattle-King County* report, Ultimate frisbee is the third-most-played organized youth sport in the region. Youth participation in the sport there has increased 61% over the last three years. Twenty-nine percent of the participants are Asian or Asian-American. This is telling because King County, Washington youth who do not speak English at home are almost three times more likely to have never participated in organized sports or recreation than children who speak English at home. The popularity of Ultimate is an example of a community embracing a new sport that has high participation rates across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

**The divide between private- and public-school athletics in Hawai'i is among the starkest in the country.** That was a key finding in our *2019 State of Play Hawai'i* report. The state's private schools are models of excellence, especially in sports. For many families, getting their children into a private school is the ultimate goal. That, in turn, has ramped up pressure for kids to join expensive clubs and specialize in one sport, even before age 10, and has led to a similar divide between community sports programs and clubs. The focus on private schools leave public schools with fewer advocates and fewer parents with a stake in making the public system better.

**Lacrosse, growing in popularity, is taking steps to promote multisport sampling.** Among the 14 team sports evaluated by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association for this report, in 2018, lacrosse had the highest percentage of newcomers and return participants (54.9%) among kids ages 6 to 12. Lacrosse lost 36% of its players from the previous year, leaving the sport with a net gain (18.9%) that was higher than any other sport, surpassing track and field (16.4%) and wrestling (10.8%). Even with this newfound growth, U.S. Lacrosse has been a leader in promoting multisport sampling. In 2019, U.S. Lacrosse teamed up with USA Field Hockey for Stick2Sports, a dual-sport clinic for boys and girls to try both sports at one price (\$50). The two-hour introductory clinic includes field hockey and lacrosse sticks and balls, as well as a one-year membership to both USA Field Hockey and U.S. Lacrosse.



**We are encouraging no specialization until 14 or 15 years old. ... The superstar sixth-grader may not be the superstar ninth-grader. I think it's incumbent on all that are involved in sport to be on the same page and understand that specialization for our children is really hurting their fun and their ability to be elite."**

**SUZY WHALEY**

*PGA of America president and former pro golfer<sup>15</sup>*

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE</b> | <b>C-</b> |
| Last year's grade: C-           |           |

# 4

Challenge: Rising costs and commitment

## The Play: Revitalize In-Town Leagues

### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Families in the U.S. spend on average \$693 annually per child in one sport.** This information came from a 2019 national survey of youth-sports parents conducted by the Aspen Institute and Utah State University Families in Sport Lab. The largest average costs are for travel (\$196), followed by equipment (\$144), registration (\$125), lessons (\$134), and camps (\$81). Twenty-one sports were evaluated. The most expensive sports were ice hockey (\$2,583), skiing/snowboarding (\$2,249), field hockey (\$2,125), gymnastics (\$1,580) and lacrosse (\$1,289). The least expensive: track and field (\$191), flag football (\$268), skateboarding (\$380), cross country (\$421) and basketball (\$427). Some parents reported spending in excess of \$20,000 a year in one sport (gymnastics, swimming, tennis and ice hockey). The amount parents spend can vary by region. For instance, preliminary research suggests that parents in Seattle paid an average of \$825 per year in one sport, compared to \$732 by a family in Hawai'i.

**Kids from lower-income homes face increasing participation barriers.** The gap continues to widen between the haves and have-nots. In 2018, 22% of kids ages 6 to 12 in households with incomes under \$25,000 played sports on a regular basis, compared to 43% of kids from homes making \$100,000 or more. That 21-point gap keeps growing; it was 15 points in 2012. A new study by the Women's Sports Foundation found that 42% of lower-income families cited cost as the reason their children do not play sports, compared to 26% for higher-income families.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, in data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, smaller percentages of Hispanic kids have regularly played sports in each of the past six years. The rate declined from 39% in 2012 to 33% in 2018.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Provide community-based, low-cost leagues and programs that are accessible to all kids — not just youth with the resources and ambition to participate on travel teams.





**Soccer participation continues to decline.** While the two most popular sports for kids ages 6 to 12 either grew participation in 2018 (baseball) or only slightly decreased (basketball), the number of kids in that age bracket that played soccer dropped by 3%. It's even worse for soccer when taking the long view. The sport lost 474,000 kids ages 6 to 12 in five years. More kids have stopped playing soccer than the combined number of newcomers and returning players to the sport. In a change from a decade ago, soccer's participation rate is now closer to that of tennis, the fourth-most-played team sport, than it is to baseball's and basketball's.

**Pro leagues and teams are helping to save rec leagues.**

For example, 25 of the 30 Major League Baseball clubs offer local, low-cost programming for baseball in low-income areas. They're guided by the league office, though sometimes these programs face frustration from traditional youth sport organizations that charge more. MLB's RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) program, designed to provide youth in underserved communities the chance to play baseball and softball, had 155,000 registrations as of halfway through 2019 — already more than in all of 2018. By far, the San Francisco Giants had recorded the most RBI participants, followed by the Los Angeles Dodgers and Philadelphia Phillies. Finding more minority youth participants is a challenge for baseball, where only 4% of college players are African American.<sup>17</sup> Other leagues are also revitalizing low-cost youth programs, sometimes using different methods and models.

**The Archdiocese of Detroit eliminates sports on Sundays.**

Metro Detroit youth sports games and practices within the Catholic High School League (CHSL) and Catholic Youth Organization will shift to a Monday through Saturday schedule. The decision impacts approximately 13,500 athletes. Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron, the spiritual leader of Metro Detroit's 1.3 million Roman Catholics, said the focus is to "reclaim Sunday." The decision was met with mixed reactions. Some parents said they appreciated having a day freed up without scheduled sports events and driving children to practices; others expressed concern that one day off could make it harder to fit sports activities into busy schedules.<sup>18</sup>



**I believe the only solution (to disparities in youth sports access) is to help public officials understand the value that sport and recreation and activity levels play in future health and economic outcomes. If we don't provide public officials with data that they trust, we'll see no shifts in how we're allocating public resources to sport and recreation."**

**DEV PATHIK**

*CEO, Sports Facility Advisory and The Sports Facilities Management*<sup>19</sup>

+ **2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE** | **C**  
+  
+  
+ Last year's grade: **C+**

# 5

## Challenge: Not enough places to play **The Play: Think Small**

### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Physical education can be taught much better.** A review by the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance found that only 0.2% of examined U.S. schools were implementing all seven essential components of physical education outlined in the CDC’s School Health Policies and Practices Study.<sup>20</sup> Sixty-five percent of the schools implemented two to four of the policies. Minority students have been disproportionately affected by cuts to school PE programs during the past two decades. Meanwhile, a working paper that analyzed the Texas Fitness Now program — a \$37 million state initiative that required middle-school PE every day in order to improve fitness, academics and behavior — concluded the opposite happened. The program, which ran from 2007 to 2011, resulted in a 16% increase in disciplinary actions.<sup>21</sup> The spike was attributed to the program not offering holistic PE education, such as nutrition and healthy-living classes, parent education, and frequent opportunities for unstructured play. A key conclusion: Typical gym classes more often simply meant more opportunities for unathletic or overweight kids to be bullied.

**Sign of the times: Dead mall becomes a youth sports complex.** The St. Louis Outlet Mall in Hazelwood, Missouri, cost \$250 million to build in 2003. High-end tenants were promised, and the mall even hosted a St. Louis Blues training facility. But malls are dying, so by 2016, this one sold for only \$4.4 million.<sup>22</sup> Now the mall is being renovated into a \$63 million youth sports complex to open by spring 2020. The space will include nine beach volleyball courts, 22 regular volleyball courts, 10 pickleball courts, three full-size NCAA basketball courts, five three-on-three basketball courts, and eight turf fields, three of which are indoor underneath a 120-foot-tall dome and another inside a 2,200-seat stadium.<sup>23</sup> A second phase to open in 2021 will include a large dance and cheer competition area, plus 20 team dorm rooms. NBA All-Star Bradley Beal is part of the ownership group.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Large sport centers are great — but people living within a mile of a park are four times more likely to use it than those who live farther away. Be creative in the use and development of play spaces.



**The NHL, New York Rangers and Project Play bring street hockey to Harlem.** In the *State of Play Harlem* report published in 2018, youth reported having a high interest in trying ice hockey. Ice hockey was popular among females, males, African Americans, Hispanics and elementary-school-aged kids. Starting in the 2019-20 school year, all District 4 and 5 elementary and middle schools will have a street hockey program in PE, impacting more than 40 schools and 13,000 students. The curriculum will be created in partnership with the New York City Department of Education, and all PE teachers will receive a training session. It's an example of listening to what kids want and then creating a space to provide it to them.

**Baltimore will open all 43 city recreation centers on Saturdays.**

In the 1980s, Baltimore had more than 130 recreation centers that provided safe, nearby places that children could walk to after school and be introduced to sports under the supervision of adults. Two-thirds of those rec centers are now gone. In 2018, Baltimore had 342 murders and the fifth-highest homicide rate per capita in the country — more than 10 times the U.S. average.<sup>24</sup> Recognizing the need to have safe places for youth, Baltimore will spend \$2.6 million to open rec centers on the weekends for the first time since the late 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Baltimore's spending comes from its new Children and Youth Fund and will also include \$560,000 to fix up at least a dozen basketball and tennis courts. In 2017, Project Play's *State of Play Baltimore* report recommended, in part, that the Children and Youth Fund devote money to youth play spaces.

**Small-sided games are being embraced in many sports.**

Simple, small-sided games and miniature fields can do wonders for kids, especially in urban communities. In soccer, the Philadelphia Union Foundation and Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer announced a \$3.5 million program to build 15 mini-pitches and two signature fields in Philadelphia parks over the next five years.<sup>26</sup> All of the pitches will be built at existing Philadelphia Parks & Recreation sites, and they will be a mix of tile, turf, grass and blacktop surfaces based on community need and facility conditions. In field hockey, USA Field Hockey introduced a small-sided game called Game On that includes skill development and the introduction of leadership roles.<sup>27</sup> It's part of USA Field Hockey's adoption of the American Development Model.



**Funding is a big issue. ... In fact, 24% of public high schools today do not offer sports programs. That's catastrophic for our kids and communities."**

**ED STACK**

*DICK's Sporting Goods*<sup>28</sup>

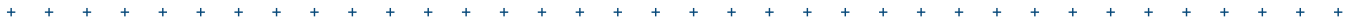


+ **2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE** | C  
+  
+  
+ Last year's grade: C-

# 6

Challenge: Too much, too soon

## The Play: Design For Development



### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**U.S. Olympic Committee changes its name to recognize Paralympians.** Paralympic athletes enthusiastically embraced the new name: U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC). "It shows that the USOPC is truly ... including them and celebrating them and embracing Paralympic athletes as an important part of Team USA as a whole," four-time Paralympian Oksana Masters said.<sup>29</sup> The USOPC becomes one of the first national Olympic committees in the world to recognize Paralympians in its name. In 2018, Team USA increased monetary awards for U.S. Paralympic medalists to match those earned by Olympic athletes. Now, perhaps this greater recognition can produce more opportunities for youth who have disabilities. They are 4.5 times less active and have obesity rates that are 38% higher than other youth.<sup>30</sup>

**President Trump disavowed Special Olympics cuts after his administration spent three days defending them.** The Trump administration's initial proposed 2020 budget removed all of the organization's roughly \$18 million in federal funding. Congress was unlikely to ever pass the cuts. But the president's budget is generally taken as a statement of administration priorities, and these cuts drew widespread criticism. Testifying on Capitol Hill, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos argued that the Special Olympics doesn't need federal backing, because it's a private organization that raises money from donations.<sup>31</sup> DeVos said she was not personally involved in the decision to propose eliminating funding. President Trump then announced he had "overridden" DeVos' budget and that the Special Olympics would be funded as usual. The Education Department later said that the White House budget office had pushed for the cut.

**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Six is not 16. Offer programming that is age and developmentally appropriate, while tailored to the population served and needs of the individual child.



**A 13-year-old girl soccer player turns pro.** Olivia Moultrie turned pro by signing a multiyear endorsement deal with Nike believed to be worth more than \$300,000. Moultrie moved with her family to Portland to train with the city's franchise in the National Women's Soccer League, though she's not old enough yet to play in games. Growing up, Moultrie's parents installed a turf field in their backyard and homeschooled their daughter so she could train eight hours a day. Said U.S. women's soccer team star Megan Rapinoe: "I don't think she's anywhere near the level to be on or train with a professional team. I don't think we're at a position in women's soccer to have the systems and structures set up to facilitate the growth of such a young player in the professional environment."<sup>32</sup>

**USA Football released the Football Development Model.**

The stated goals are to build recommended stages of development for players as they grow through football and to help coaches and parents gauge the process of a player's skill level and game readiness. The model doesn't make a recommendation on what age youth should start tackling. Said USA Football CEO Scott Hallenbeck: "My son started playing tackle football at 7, and I still wonder if that was the best thing to do. ... You can learn how to play football without contact."<sup>33</sup> New research shows that 63% of parents support age restrictions for tackle football, with the majority of mothers (63%) and fathers (58%) in favor of setting a starting age.<sup>34</sup>

**Searching for an edge, elite basketball prospects are repeating a grade while in middle school.** Reclassing — the practice of redoing a school grade level in order to improve one's chances for a college scholarship — has existed in many sports since at least the 1990s. But it's now becoming increasingly common in boys basketball, including kids across all demographic and financial backgrounds and starting as early as elementary school, according to The Washington Post.<sup>35</sup> In Washington, D.C., some coaches estimate that half of all the Division I-bound men's basketball players reclassified in middle school or younger. Families feel pressure to reclass so kids keep up with their peers. Educators say reclassing by fourth grade and on can often harm children socially or academically.



**We recently learned just how important parents can be as change agents. According to the survey that we conducted, more than 90% identified themselves as the primary decision-maker when it comes to enrolling their children in organized sports. ... Data like this gives us a sense of just how much parents are advocates for their children and how much influence they have over sports-related decisions."**

**LOU SHAPIRO**

*CEO, Hospital for Special Surgery*<sup>36</sup>

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| + <b>2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE</b> | <b>C</b> |
| + Last year's grade: C            |          |

# 7

Challenge: Well-meaning but untrained volunteers

## The Play: Train All Coaches



### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Less than 30% of youth coaches have been trained in the past year.** According to 2018 data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), coaches are going extended periods of time without being trained in CPR/basic first aid, concussion management, general safety and injury prevention, physical conditioning, sports skills and tactics, and effective motivational techniques. About four in 10 coaches have never been trained in these areas. Head coaches are more likely to receive training than assistant coaches.

**Women remain an underutilized source for coaches.** Female coaches are viewed by programs as key to girls' participation and retention, but it's challenging to recruit them. In 2018, only 27% of youth sports head coaches were female, according to SFIA data. That's up from 23% in 2017, but still low. According to a 2019 study by the Women's Sports Foundation,<sup>37</sup> female coaches are overrepresented (85% and above) on sports viewed as more feminine, such as gymnastics, dance and cheer, and on all-girl teams (66%). But female coaches are highly underrepresented (35% or lower) on sports viewed as more masculine, such as baseball, softball, basketball, soccer and martial arts. Girls provided more positive ratings for females (82%) than males (73%) as coaches, citing the ability to more easily identify with a female as a mentor and role model.

**Project Play releases a new resource to help coaches develop personal growth in their players.** *Calls for Coaches*, developed in partnership with the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic

#### **From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report**

Coaches can create athletes for life — or wreck their enthusiasm for sport altogether. Get them trained in key competencies, including safety, sport skills and general coaching philosophy.



Development and commissioned by the Susan Crown Exchange, calls on sports providers to integrate social and emotional learning into their programs. Winning and skill development can't be the ultimate goals for young athletes. The brief (available at [as.pn/callsforcoaches](https://www.as.pn/callsforcoaches)) highlights simple strategies that coaches can use to create safe and supportive environments as well as to forge quality relationships with and among their athletes. "The most important thing we do is build lasting relationships between children and adults," former tennis pro Andy Roddick wrote in the *Calls for Coaches* foreword.

**Forty percent of surveyed coaches in King County, Washington, coach more than one sport.** The average number of sports coached in that community by one coach is 1.64.<sup>38</sup> While these aren't national numbers, they offer a rare glimpse at how frequently the same adults are relied upon to coach. Knowing this speaks to the importance of training coaches not just on sport-specific skills, but also on concepts, such as youth development, communication and leadership, that are transferrable across sports. This finding also suggests that programs might be wise to partner with each other to provide training for efficiency of both time and funding — both of which are barriers to coach training. One way to train coaches: Visit [HowtoCoachKids.org](https://www.HowtoCoachKids.org), a free resource inspired by Project Play 2020.

**New Orleans recreation center department eyes college athletes as coaches.** In an attempt to boost declining sports participation numbers, the city's new rec department chief laid out a plan to forge partnerships with colleges to help fill a coaching shortage.<sup>39</sup> City officials attributed the decrease in youth participation to several possible factors, including too few qualified volunteer coaches. College athletes are another untapped source for coaches. They are often highly motivated and knowledgeable about their sport. Nationally, only 3% of youth sports coaches are 24 years old or younger.<sup>40</sup>



**Coaching is a massive responsibility. We have to make sure coaches understand that they are going to influence the minds of young people. The question is, how are they influencing them?"**

**SASHO CIROVSKI**

*Men's soccer coach,  
University of Maryland*<sup>41</sup>



+ **2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE** | **C-**  
+  
+  
+ Last year's grade: C-

## YOUTH COACHES WITH TRAINING BY SUBJECT

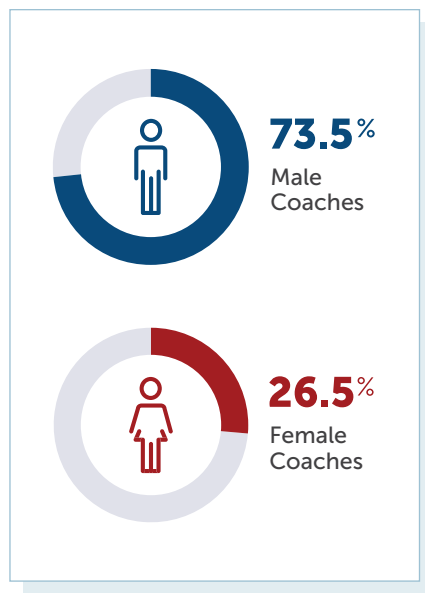
Percentage of 2018 coaches who say they received specified training

|                                      | LAST 12 MONTHS | LAST 1-2 YEARS | LAST 3+ YEARS | NEVER RECEIVED TRAINING |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| CPR/Basic first aid                  | 25.7%          | 26.2%          | 14.0%         | 34.1%                   |
| Concussion management                | 24.5%          | 16.7%          | 9.4%          | 49.4%                   |
| General safety and injury prevention | 29.3%          | 18.0%          | 9.7%          | 42.9%                   |
| Physical conditioning                | 26.2%          | 19.7%          | 10.3%         | 43.8%                   |
| Sports skills and tactics            | 27.0%          | 17.8%          | 19.3%         | 35.9%                   |
| Effective motivational techniques    | 28.0%          | 15.7%          | 13.2%         | 43.1%                   |

**Note:** This data differs from past State of Play reports because SFIA changed the phrasing of the question in 2018.

**Source:** Sports & Fitness Industry Association

## YOUTH HEAD COACHES BY DEMOGRAPHICS



| AGE            |       |
|----------------|-------|
| 24 and younger | 3.0%  |
| 25-34          | 36.9% |
| 35-44          | 21.3% |
| 45-54          | 21.8% |
| 55-64          | 10.0% |
| 65+            | 7.0%  |

| HOUSEHOLD INCOME     |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| Under \$25,000       | 10.2% |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999 | 14.6% |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999 | 12.6% |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999 | 18.0% |
| \$100,000+           | 44.6% |

**Source:** Sports & Fitness Industry Association



# 8

Challenge: Safety concerns among parents

## The Play: Emphasize Prevention

### FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

**Congress proposes legislation that could lead to a fundamental overhaul of the U.S. Olympic movement.** In the wake of the USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal, Sen. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) and Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) announced similar bills for a commission to study the structure of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and individual sport national governing bodies.<sup>42</sup> In July 2019, the Borders Commission released recommendations for the USOPC, including amending the Amateur Sports Act to explicitly state that the organization oversees only elite amateur athletes, not the whole youth population.<sup>43</sup> Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) then proposed a bill that focused largely on sexual abuse issues, with scant consideration of holistic sport system challenges. Speaking at the Aspen Institute in May 2019, USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said she is not opposed to congressional input, but “if it doesn’t happen, it’s not going to stop us from making the changes we need to make.”<sup>44</sup>

**President Trump said football is a “dangerous sport” and wouldn’t steer his son toward it, but also wouldn’t stand in his way.** Trump said equipment has improved, “but it hasn’t solved the problem.”<sup>45</sup> A 2019 study showed that youth flag football players sustain less-frequent head impacts at higher rotational accelerations than tackle football players.<sup>46</sup> Communities in Massachusetts<sup>47</sup>, South Carolina<sup>48</sup> and Maine<sup>49</sup> considered various laws or policies in 2019 to ban tackle football under certain ages. California passed a law limiting youth football teams to no more than two 30-minute full-contact practices a week during the season and no full-contact practices in the offseason.<sup>50</sup> New Jersey and Michigan passed bills that significantly reduce full contact at high school practices.<sup>51 52</sup> Looming as a threat for all levels of football: Insurance companies are increasingly reluctant to cover football and other sports associated with traumatic brain injuries.<sup>53</sup>

#### *From the Sport for All, Play for Life report*

Children deserve environments that limit injuries and offer protections against emotional, physical and other forms of abuse. And today, many parents demand as much.



**Football, bicycling, basketball and soccer are the sports most likely to send kids to the ER for traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).** The findings came from a CDC study of emergency room data from 2010 to 2016.<sup>54</sup> Overall, the rates of TBIs in children have leveled off since 2012, but boys receive them at twice the rates of girls. Children between 10 and 17 have the highest rates. Contact sports such as football, soccer, basketball, lacrosse, ice hockey and wrestling resulted in twice as many ER visits for TBIs as did noncontact sports and four times as many as recreational activities, such as playing on a playground.

**Youth sports are linked to lower levels of depression.** New research shows that playing team sports as a child can significantly reduce the likelihood of depression and anxiety later for people with childhood trauma.<sup>55</sup> But there's a catch: The cost of youth sports means that those kids who need sports the most aren't accessing the opportunity. Researcher Molly Easterlin and her colleagues analyzed data from about 5,000 teens who reported one or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They were first assessed in 1994-95 while in the seventh to 12th grades and then reassessed or tested for symptoms in 2008. Kids who participated in team sports were significantly less likely to have depression or anxiety. Sports protected kids with ACEs against depression better than nonathletic school clubs, such as drama and orchestra.

**NBA players are arriving with broken bodies due to their youth careers.** ESPN.com documented how basketball players are physically broken down by the time they reach the NBA.<sup>56</sup> There are more orthopedic injuries than in the past. One Nike youth basketball official estimated that someone who plays consistently between ages 7 and 19 could easily play more than 1,000 organized games — or the equivalent of 12 NBA seasons. A longtime youth basketball coach compared U.S. basketball to the Soviet Union's days of intensively training kids for years in one sport. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said the issue is "the highest priority for the league — and I think both in terms of the health and wellness of the players in the NBA, but also the larger category of millions of players, boys and girls, not just in the United States, but globally."

“  
**We, the Olympic community, collectively failed our athletes. It's a terrible situation. ... The reality is, we cannot have an environment or a culture where an athlete doesn't feel 100% comfortable speaking up, doesn't know where or how to speak up, and an organization that doesn't know what to do with that information when it is given.”**

**SARAH HIRSHLAND**  
*CEO, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee*<sup>57</sup>

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>2019 STATE OF PLAY GRADE</b> | <b>B-</b> |
| Last year's grade: C+           |           |

# Call for Leadership

Never in the history of sports have leading organizations — including competitors from sectors as disparate as technology and philanthropy — come together to identify opportunities to collaborate in service of getting and keeping more children active through sports. Doing so, through Project Play 2020, was above all an act of faith:

Faith that moving in service of common cause would bear rewards. Faith that mutually reinforcing actions could be introduced, and fast. Faith that trust could be developed to take shared actions as well.

A theory of change was developed in 2017, with Project Play 2020 member organizations organizing efforts through the eight strategies, or “plays,” identified in the Project Play framework. Train All Coaches and Encourage Sport Sampling were selected as initial priorities, and by 2018, members had introduced key resources, including the first free coach-training resource in youth sports ([www.howtocoachkids.org](http://www.howtocoachkids.org)).

At the same time, members recognized that parents are the most influential actors in the landscape. Once you have a child, your favorite athlete is no longer that superstar you admire on TV; it’s your own child, the athlete under your roof whom you’re raising. That’s who you are most invested in emotionally, timewise and, increasingly, financially. And sometimes, as anyone who has spent time on youth sports sidelines knows, all that energy can manifest itself in counterproductive ways.

So, in its most ambitious activation to date, Project Play 2020 members waded into that charged space in 2019. The media campaign, “Don’t Retire, Kid,” launched on ESPN in August with a raft of



public service announcements and other content designed to draw attention to the adult-created pressures and cost barriers that are causing kids to fall away from sports. But the strength in the campaign was the collective.

Nearly all 20 member organizations in Project Play 2020 are making contributions to “Don’t Retire, Kid.” Major League Baseball, Amazon and others that televise or stream games have committed to placing in their media rotations the PSAs, all of which drive to [www.ProjectPlay.us](http://www.ProjectPlay.us), where parents and caregivers can find useful resources created or supported by Under Armour, Hospital for Special Surgery, U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, PGA of America, DICK’s Sporting Goods Foundation, Target, and NBC Sports’ SportsEngine.

Atop all of that donated media and product investment, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is spending more than \$3.5 million extending the campaign in its regional markets of focus. The goal is culture change in Southeast Michigan and Western New York, where, guided by Project Play reports landscaping those regions, the foundation has already issued more than \$57 million in grants to bolster youth sports since 2015 and committed another \$200 million for parks, trails and greenways.

The momentum of the collective has, in turn, drawn other organizations into its orbit. The Detroit Lions and Los Angeles Dodgers agreed to run the PSAs in stadium and provide social support, respectively. Athletes contributed, such as Kobe Bryant, who kicked off the campaign with a SportsCenter studio interview, and Albert Pujols, who elevated key messages within his robust network. And national governing bodies of sport, such as the U.S. Soccer Federation, agreed to align its youth development efforts with the Project Play strategies.

Project Play 2020 inspired the creation of Project Play Champions to extend the network of organizations aligning efforts. Each year, Aspen recognizes 20 new organizations as Champions for making new, specific and meaningful commitments to action. Many work at the community level, smaller in size than the national players at the center of Project Play 2020 but no less important as activation agents.

The backbone support provided by Aspen to Project Play 2020 members also created the capacity to elevate opportunities to impact policy. Over the past year, in partnership with the Association of Chief Executives of Sport, 23 organizations with a national footprint have committed to participate in a program to grow sport-sampling policies and practices using a Project Play checklist. The argument: No single organization alone can change the trend toward early sport specialization. Telling kids to try other sports, and potentially losing them as they age up, cannot be an act of unilateral disarmament.

In the disjointed landscape that is youth sports in America, moving the key performance indicators that Project Play 2020 is most interested in will take time. The percentage of children ages 12 and under who play sports nationally, and even the percentage of coaches trained in key competencies, are challenging numbers to move, especially as technology becomes an ever-greater competitor for the time and attention of children, and parents are asked to work ever-longer hours to support their families. But we are seeing some

early signs of progress in sport sampling and regular team-sport participation (see Scoreboard on page 3). Most important, the foundation has been laid for industry collaborating to drive progress.

We see it in the Healthy Sport Index ([www.healthysportindex.com](http://www.healthysportindex.com)), in which the Hospital for Special Surgery was motivated to add sport-sampling content to sync with the priorities of Project Play 2020. We see it in the work of the Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management, which advises municipalities on the building of sport centers and now recommends setting aside prime usage hours for low-income children. We see it in the investments of the National Hockey League, which worked with Project Play Harlem to introduce floor hockey to East Harlem schools.

Collective-impact methodology requires a mindset shift of its actors, from assessing the impact of a specific intervention to assessing multiple parts of a complex system, including its components and connections. It requires finding your lane of influence, knowing other organizations are diving deep on other key pieces. It encourages a bias for action, a tolerance of trial and error, and a sharing of knowledge, resources and purpose. It begs that we speak to our better angels.

The members of Project Play 2020 have done that, with more to come.



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## Figures

All data represented in the charts and graphs in this report are based on data provided by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association and Utah State University at the request of the Aspen Institute.

## Photos

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The mission of the Sports & Society program is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue, and inspire solutions that help sports serve the public interest. The program provides a venue for thought leadership where knowledge can be deepened and breakthrough strategies explored on a range of issues.

[SportsandSociety.org](http://SportsandSociety.org)

## About Project Play

An initiative of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, Project Play develops, applies and shares knowledge that helps stakeholders build healthy communities through sports.

[ProjectPlay.us](http://ProjectPlay.us)

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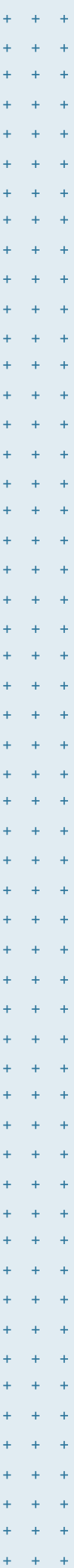
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Video, news coverage and materials from past Project Play Summits can be found at [www.ProjectPlay.us](http://www.ProjectPlay.us). Our website also includes new and existing youth sports resources for parents, coaches and community leaders.



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