

Volume 1. The Sports Possibilities Series

Realize Sport's Possibilities

**How to View Sports Through an
Opportunity Expanding Prism**



David Canning Epperson, Ph.D.

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Opportunity Expanding Prism**

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The Opportunity Expanding Sports Collection

This is one in a series in the Opportunity Expanding Sports Collection. Each volume addresses issues related to the challenges of creating opportunity expanding team communities. These booklets are aimed at accomplishing three objectives:

- To inspire you to reflect on whether your current way of playing your sports parenting role is having the desired results.
- To provoke discussion between you, athletes, coaches, and other parents about how you can work together to create an opportunity expanding team community.
- To challenge you to consider taking actions that will lead to the pay-offs you seek from your investment in your children's life in sports.

Most parents have not yet considered the full range of benefits to their children and their families from their sports programs. They have not been challenged to expand their consciousness, values, attitudes and skills so that they can become savvy sports parents. In the main, parents have not been inspired to:

- Engage in self-assessment to discover the level of development of their ability to manage the inevitable frustration and anger that arises in the normal course of athletic competition.
- Explore alternative solutions to common challenges in their team community that take attention off individual performance and place it instead upon achieving benefits for everyone - parents, athletes and coaches
- Complete an analysis of those factors that interfere with their own ability to become deeply involved in what they are doing in their team community,
- Develop a plan of action for facilitating the dreams of their sports mates - the parents, athletes and coaches on their children's team.
- Develop a design for a team community that can open up opportuni-

ties for parents, athletes and coaches to be inspired, empowered and unified through their relationships with one another and by commonly overlooked growth-enhancing features of the sports scene.

- Develop a plan for promoting mutual support among parents, athletes and coaches in their team community.
- Identify those features of today's team communities that need "fixing" and take actions to repair the "defects."
- Develop strategies for initiating reforms in school and youth sports that will enhance the sports experiences of everyone who follows.

It is necessary for those with a vision of contentious-free and opportunity expanding sports to discover strategies that inspire parents to invest in equipping themselves to become involved citizens in their team communities. These outcomes will only occur when the consciousness of parents is awakened about what they need to do to prepare themselves to become savvy sports parents.

This collection of booklets has been prepared to help parents:

- A. **Understand And Seek Solutions To Today's Youth Sports Challenges** (*The Sports Challenges Series*)
- B. **Maximize Possibilities For Athletes, Coaches, Parents, Teams, Schools, Families and Communities** (*The Sports Possibilities Series*)
- C. **Develop The Habits Of A Savvy Sports Parent** (*The Parent Development Series*)
- D. **Support The Professional Development Of Coaches And Sports Administrators** (*The Coach Development Series*)
- E. **Promote The Development Of One's Own Children And Their Teammates** (*The Athlete Development Series*)
- F. **Actively Contribute To Team Development** (*The Team Development Series*)
- G. **Become Activists In The Enhancement Of School And Youth Sports** (*The Sports Enhancement Series*)
- H. **Develop an Opportunity Expanding Perspective On School and Youth Sports** (*The New Perspectives Series*)

The values and principles of an opportunity expanding vision of sports guide the analysis and recommendations found in this collection. By gaining an appreciation of how you can contribute to the enrichment of school and youth sports you will be better equipped to be a contributing citizen in your children's team communities.

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Introduction

Establishing an Alternative

This booklet provides a brief overview of a perspective on sport that is being advanced as an alternative to the approaches that guide current school and youth sports practices. Like many observers, I have concluded that the culture of sport for children should be less contentious and better able to realize its full potential for enriching the lives of athletes, coaches and parents.

Calling for Change

Everyone agrees that reducing mindless emotional violence and eliminating squandered opportunities are worthy objectives. This approach calls for athletes, coaches and parents to work together to create a mutually supportive climate in which the boundless possibilities of sport can be realized.

Reducing Toxic Influences

This approach to school and youth sports is an effort to offer an alternative to sports programs for children that have been unduly influenced by what I am referring to as Entertainment Sports. Over the years professional and college sports leaders have accommodated public demand for edgy and dramatic performances on the playing field. Contentiousness is not only tolerated, but is often encouraged by the producers of entertainment sports spectacles. While this apparently has been a good business decision for franchise owners, college fundraisers and the media these changes have had unintended toxic effects on school and youth sports.

Avoiding Lost Opportunities

Most would agree that seldom do schools or sports clubs take full advantage of the opportunities that participation in team communities offers athletes, coaches, parents, families, schools and communities.

Sketching a New Vision of Sports

In the pages that follow I am providing a sketch of an approach to sports that places emphasis upon orchestrating contentious-free and opportunity expanding experiences for athletes, coaches and parents.

Stimulating Enrichment Initiatives

Hopefully this overview will provoke serious conversation among athletes, coaches and parents about what sport can become and what steps need to be taken to realize sports possibilities.

Launching Reforms

Reform initiatives need to be launched that lead athletes, coaches and parents on a path to a sports future that enriches the lives of participants while strengthening teams, schools, families and communities.

Viewing Parents as Partners

Parents must become vital partners of athletes, coaches and administrators in helping sport realize its full potential. Parents cannot allow opportunities to be squandered for athletes, coaches and parents to benefit from their shared sports experiences. Parents, who are the primary stakeholders in school and youth sports, need to become active in changing the face of sports programs for children. Parents need to be seen as a part of the solution rather than being part of the problem faced by school and youth sports.

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1. Changing the Face of Sports – Contrasting Perspectives

Criticism of today's school and youth sports occurs across a broad spectrum of viewpoints.

- o Reactionary critics want sport to better reflect the values of the past. They are nostalgic about sandlot sports (s-sports) that were the mainstay in the “good old days” when children were unfettered by the ambitions and interference of their parents and adult organizers.
- o Conservative critics seek changes that will make school and youth sports a more effective feeder system for the entertainment sports industry (e-sports) that is, college and professional sports.
- o Progressive critics, on the other hand, want to initiate change in sports policies and practices so that sport better serves the needs and interests of today's, athletes, coaches and parents, while strengthening schools, families and communities (o-sports).

2. Choosing a Progressive Solution

Opportunity Expanding Sports represent a progressive solution to the failures of school and youth sports. This approach focuses as much on errors of omissions, that is, failures to take full advantage of sport's possibilities, as upon errors of commission, such as poor sportsmanship. This progressive critique advances inspiring, enabling, empowering and life changing sports practices.

3. Establishing a Mission

The mission of Opportunity Expanding Sports is to create team communities where parents, athletes and coaches are able to benefit from the support they receive from one another while working together to achieve the shared goals of their team community.

4. Challenging Contentious Sports

When the mission of Opportunity Expanding Sports is accomplished parents, athletes and coaches are better able to resist influences from the entertainment sports industry that are infecting school and youth sports with the Contentious Sports Syndrome. Enclaves of Opportunity are established to “replace browbeating, smack and jeers with guidance, high fives and cheers.”

5. Assuming Rights and Responsibilities

In Enclaves of Opportunity (or Dream Teams) all parents, athletes and coaches are provided with the support they need to realize their potential as citizens in their team communities. They earn their citizenship rights by developing the skills necessary to exercise their responsibilities to one another.

6. Creating a Framework

Enclaves of Opportunity are guided by the principles of Opportunity Expanding Sports. This framework for establishing sports policies and practices is a radical departure from the model that guides today’s increasingly contentious school and youth sports.

7. Selecting Guiding Values

The behavior of parents, athletes and coaches in these sports enclaves is guided by principles rooted in the pillars (or values) of Opportunity Expanding Sports. These pillars have been embraced by civil societies for centuries and serve as the foundation of the world’s great religions: respect, responsibility, civility, nurture, creativity, communion and civic duty.

8. Adopting the New Golden Rule

The primary guiding value suggested by these seven pillars is that of consideration for others or more accurately, the New Golden Rule of Opportunity Expanding Sports, “Respect and uphold the guidelines your team community has established as you would have fellow team members respect and support the realization of your personal sports dreams.”

9. Establishing a Partnership Approach

This rule supports a partnership approach to sports that is rooted in a nurturing worldview with an emphasis upon responsibility to the communities to which one belongs. This worldview assumes that children learn through their attachments to adults – which, ideally, are secure and caring. The world of sports provides an arena in which athletes can connect with a parent community that can provide the safety they need to take the risks required to realize their potential as athletes and as persons.

10. Raising Consciousness

A partnership approach to sport guides parents, athletes and coaches from the outback of Conquest Consciousness where the natural aggression of sport often turns savage to a community in which Kindred Consciousness prevails where sports experiences inspire mutual support, empower all participants, and nurture the ties that bind teams, schools, families and communities. Nurturing growth-enhancing relationships among parents, athletes and coaches become the primary focus of those who possess kindred consciousness.

11. Initiating Change

Team communities that promote kindred consciousness have been created in part to reduce mounting contentiousness in school and youth sports. But more importantly they have been formed as a vehicle to challenge parents, athletes and coaches to take initiatives to inspire schools and clubs to put into place opportunity expanding policies and practices.

12. Redefining the Parent's Role

Parents can learn to assume opportunity-expanding roles in their team communities when they put themselves in a position to ensure that the principles of Opportunity Expanding Sports are being used to guide life in their children's team communities.

13. Learning New Habits

Parents can promote the principles of Opportunity Expanding Sports

individually and collectively by learning the habits of the Savvy Sports Parent.

14. Learning New Attitudes, Values and Skills

Parents develop these habits by learning specific attitudes, values and skills that allow them to become contributing citizens in their children's team communities.

15. Learning New Inner Scripts

Parents develop these roles, habits, and skills in part by forming inner scripts that promote the development of the Complete Sports Parent.

16. Changing Mindsets

Parents can learn to change their mindset from the one they adopted growing up while being bombarded by an in-your-face culture of sports. Instead, they can employ a possibility-expanding mindset that promotes opportunities for parents, athletes and coaches, both in and out of sports.

The mindset of athletes, coaches and parents is composed of a viewpoint, that is, the values that filter their perceptions, the angle of vision from which they choose to view sports, the motives that drive their sports behavior, and the images they employ to order and to give meaning to their sports experiences.

17. Opposing Toxic Influences

The inner voices that guide the behavior of most parents, athletes and coaches have been formed by influences from an entertainment sports industry. The media and the popular culture have planted images of contentious sports practices in the minds of today's parents, athletes and coaches. These powerful influences make it difficult for families and sports educators to take full advantage of what sport has to offer.

18. Overcoming Protective Powerlessness

By mastering savvy sports parenting roles, habits and skills, adopting an opportunity expanding mindset and following faithfully nurturing inner scripts, parents are able to overcome the sense of protective

powerlessness that results from wanting to keep their children safe and to ensure that they are being provided with the best opportunities for success. Because of the remote nature of their relationship with what is occurring on the playing field all parents are condemned to experience a sense of powerless at some level. It goes with the territory. The challenge for parents is to learn how to manage feelings of powerlessness in ways that do not fracture potentially supportive relationships in their team communities.

19. Satisfying Parent Needs

Parents can equip themselves to satisfy many of their basic needs by learning to perform supportive roles in their children's team communities. They are best able to perform supportive roles when they have developed the roles, habits, skills, inner scripts and mindsets that allow them to become effective citizens in their sports communities.

20. Reaching Agreements

When parents learn the roles, habits, skills, inner scripts and mindsets that satisfy their basic needs it is easier for them to reach agreements with their sports mates that allow them to become members of mutually supportive team communities (an Enclaves of Opportunity).

21. Overcoming Barriers to Change

When taking initiatives to establish team communities that are guided by the principles of Opportunity Expanding Sports there are many barriers, much resistance and inevitable discouragement that need to be overcome by those parents, athletes and coaches who assume leadership roles in implementing reform initiatives.

22. Equipping Team Communities with Tools for Change

To change the face of sports requires the development of opportunity expanding tools that team communities can use to take full advantage of sport as a vehicle for enriching the lives of individuals, and strengthening teams, schools, families and communities. These include the following types of tools:

- o Prescriptive tools (to affirm principles and give advice);
- o Relationship management tools (to develop strategies for avoiding and solving relationship problems);
- o Insight-development tools (to forecast consequences of various actions)
- o Skill development tools (to develop problem solving skills)
- o Consciousness raising tools (to examine critiques of current practices and evaluate alternative approaches to sport);
- o Self-awareness tools (to explore the roots of one's perspective on sport);
- o Agreement-reaching tools (to reach agreements about team policies and practices);
- o Activities-management tools (to plan and administer team-building activities).

Further Reading

A more detailed description of each of the concepts introduced in this booklet can be found in my *The Making of a Dream Team: An Introduction to Opportunity Expanding Sports*.

A comprehensive review of the barriers to realizing sport's possibilities and the tools that can be used to overcoming these barriers can be found in my *Challenging In-Your-Face Sports: Overcoming Barriers to Realizing Sport's Possibilities*.

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