

Volume 1. Sports Challenges Series

Oppose The Warrior Mentality

**How to Resist Contentious
Sports Practices**



DAVID CANNING EPPERSON, PH.D.

Oppose
The
Warrior
Mentality

*How to Resist
Contentious Sports Practices*

DAVID CANNING EPPERSON, PH.D.

Alliance Publications
Sugar Land, Texas

Copyright 2007 by David Canning Epperson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of the Publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Epperson, David Canning 1932

Oppose the Warrior Mentality –1st ed.

p. Cm

ISBN 0-9672854- -

1. Sports. 2. Family Life I. Title
2007

This booklet is available in quantity at special discounts for your group or organization. For Information contact:

Alliance Publications
19855 Southwest Freeway, Suite 220
Sugar Land, TX 77478

Phone (281) 207-1070

Fax (281) 207-1071

Designed by



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** (*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.

Contents

1. Soccer Moms: Midwives for a Revolution in Sports for Children	1
2. Defeating the “Greats of Wrath”	5
3. Amplifying the Voices of Good Sports	10
4. Seeking an Alternative to “In-Your-Face” Sports	17

1

Soccer Moms: Midwives for a Revolution in Sports for Children

“In-your-face” sports tend to deaden the heart in the service of enlarging the ego, the egos of athletes, coaches, promoters, and zealous fans.”

The appearance of young women on the playing field, moms coaching from the sidelines and bleachers filled with well informed and enthusiastic women of all ages provides us with reason to celebrate. The new generation of women is clearly more in tune with the expressive and expansive possibilities that sport holds than were previous generations, especially the men of earlier eras. Unfortunately, pre-gender revolution men have been the crafters of many of today’s sports policies and practices. It is still the warrior mentality of past generations that is shaping the direction of sports for today’s boys and girls. It is the young women of today who have inspired me to reexamine my views on sport. My experiences have caused me to look to “soccer moms” and their enlightened partners to spearhead sports reform.

Over the past thirty years I have listened to the voices of women, young and old, and have found their language to resonate with possibilities for the future of sport. These caring voices, reflecting an expansive mentality, have been sending messages that offer hope that they will be able to serve as midwives for the birth of a new era in sport, one guided by aesthetic appreciation, caring values, and an understanding of the power of ritual to inspire and connect.

RECOMMENDATION # 1

Listen to today’s women.

They can serve as midwives for the birth of a new era in sports

If sport is to renew the human spirit, which I view to be its major purpose, we need to adopt new language, images and metaphors to guide our thinking about sport. We need to place higher value on connecting

than on ranking. And we need to create convivial communities of sports that promote and celebrate connectedness.

“Well-orchestrated sports rituals renew our spirits and nourish our communities. They breathe life into our souls and strengthening the bonds among us.”

Too often sports participants become careless and mean spirited in the pursuit of victory. “In-your-face” sports tend to deaden the heart in the service of enlarging the ego, the egos of athletes, coaches, promoters, and zealous fans. Too many of today’s sports practices provoke self-absorption, outrageous conduct, disrespect, and divisiveness. They diminish the prospects of sport being able to contribute to the creation of a commonwealth of compassion. In-your-face sports begins at the top in our sports system. Mark Cuban, the fiery owner of the Dallas Mavericks, who has been fined numerous times by the league office for his intrusive courtside conduct was quoted as saying “I don’t care what anybody thinks about me. It’s all about the W’s.” He is, indeed, the consummate warrior – albeit a rich and influential one at that. He makes it clear that where you stand in the pecking order is all that really counts. Too often this mentality prevails all the way down to sports programs for our youngest children. Far too many parents, athletes, and coaches share this warrior mentality. Unfortunately, Mark Cuban is not a genuine maverick, for his approach to sport is shared by the mainstream sports culture.

RECOMMENDATION # 2

Place emphasis upon connecting, not ranking.

Find ways to create convivial and compassionate sports communities.

I am convinced we can create sports rituals that are connective rather than divisive. Well-orchestrated sports rituals renew our spirits and nourish our relationships. They breathe life into our souls and strengthen the bonds among us. When athletes get into the souls of their sports mates, rather than into their faces, it allows them to rise above the rules of the game, high above the scoreboard. It permits them to connect with their world in ways that renew their spirits. Renewal rites allow them to disconnect from sources of discontent and reconnect with sources of enchantment and awe that were such a natural part of their early childhood experiences.

RECOMMENDATION # 3

Create meaningful rituals.

Take time to orchestrate sports rituals that renew everyone's spirits and nourish their relationships .

Only recently have I learned to allow sport to perform these functions in my life. For most of my life a warrior mentality served as a barrier to learning to apply the language of the arts to sport. Even though I was introduced to both the world of the arts and the world of sport, it was not until recently that I allowed the spirit of the arts to infuse sport with new meaning.

It is when my mind is in flight and my soul is soothed by sports experiences that I am inspired to invite others to share those special moments with me. It has taken me more than a half century to begin to liberate myself from the tyranny of the warrior images I learned on Jupiter. John Gray may be right to invite us to think that "men are from Mars and women are from Venus." However, I have come to conclude that it may be useful to carry that metaphor one step further and observe that "Jocks are from Jupiter," that hostile habitat where men are transformed into warriors. The world of sports is where most men learn to become warriors, that is, to become "real men" who can defend their tribe on the playing field as well as on the battlefield.

RECOMMENDATION # 4

Free yourself from the warrior mentality.

Make use of new images to inform your perceptions and choices.

Too often it is impossible for others to join me on my journey from the outback of male consciousness. Their minds are filled with Cult of Dominance images that blind them to the beauty of the moment. They are often unable to make use of the new images that are now informing my perceptions and choices. I want them to be freed from bondage to the warrior mentality so that they can share in the joy and satisfaction I am experiencing on my excursions into enchantment. I want to invite them to transform their mindset so that they will be able to use an expansive mentality in approaching sports, an outlook that allows them to go beyond an obsession with W's. In order for warriors to be open to becoming more expansive in their approach to sport they need to come to a clear understanding about themselves.

RECOMMENDATION # 5

Use sport to learn about yourself.

Take notice and the very essence of your soul will be revealed.

The rituals of sport can be structured in ways that help us elaborate, refine and clarify who we are. Our way of viewing the world, made up of images and stories that guide our conduct, is what dictates how we chose to connect with those around us. In other words, sport puts us in situations where we are forced to reveal our fundamental nature, that is, the very essence of our being, our souls. If we pay careful attention to how we respond in the sports situation we can learn things about ourselves, especially about how we respond when our egos are challenged in a competitive situation. This insight can help us prevent the natural aggression of sport from turning savage.

RECOMMENDATION # 6

Stay under control

Prevent natural aggression from turning savage.

Parents need to take the lead in restoring sanity to sports. They are the ones with the biggest stake in making sports a good place for children to be energized, empowered, and connected. Without initiatives from parents it is highly unlikely that the sports establishment will take the necessary steps to restore sanity to sports. And without bold moves by sports moms to bring their values to bear on how games are played it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to transform the culture of sport in America.

2

Silencing the “Greats of Wrath”

“A parent-led Opportunity Expanding Sports Movement can usher in a new era in sport, where the welfare of children and their families become the guiding beacons for the creation of a new vision of sport.”

Bobby Knight, Mike Ditka, O.J. Simpson, Mike Tyson, Rod Carruth, and the “Greats of Wrath” of past eras like Billy Martin and John Mc Enroe, have pushed many of us to the point of saying “enough is enough.” A close look at the “poster boy of sideline insanity,” Texas Tech basketball coach, Bobby Knight, who in 2007 became the most “successful” coach in NCAA history by exceeding the winning record of coaching legend, Dean Smith, helps identify how he and other high profile “out of control” sports personalities are impacting the quality of sports experiences for everyone, you and your children included.

Bobby Knight: Poster Boy for the “Greats of Wrath”

He demonstrates a lack of respect for those with whom he is working. This combative warrior’s lack of respect is demonstrated each time he is challenged by anyone, an athlete, referee, college president, NCAA official, fan, student, or sports commentator. His responses to challenges have typically been “If you don’t like what I do, “you can kiss my ass.” This is not the response we want children in sports to emulate.

He reflects a total absence of civility. His lack of civility is revealed in his insensitivity to the way his outrageous conduct ruins sports experiences for athletes, referees, opposing coaches, player parent’s, and the millions of spectators who have been subjected to his boorish behavior over the years. Bellowing boors need to be silenced if sport is to enrich the lives of our children.

He fails to promote responsibility in his athletes. His failure to allow his athletes to take charge of their lives is reflected in his total disinterest in allowing them to participate in decisions that affect their lives in sports. His athletes live by his insights and his schedule. It is clearly “his way or the highway.” This pattern of conduct denies athletes the opportunity to take charge of their own lives in sports. And by incessantly shouting directions from the sidelines he communicates a lack of trust in them to know what to do. He denies them the opportunity to make choices and live with the consequences. In fact, his actions on the sidelines seem to be saying that he does not even trust his own ability as a teacher to have prepared his team well enough for competition. His compulsive need to prompt his athletes during competition and to stay in control denies his athletes opportunities to “show their stuff.” Responsibility is not one of the virtues he is willing to promote with his players. However, responsibility needs to become a basic character trait that sports for children promote.

He fails to allow sport to create a sense of family and community. Bobby Knight demonstrates no interest in using sport as a vehicle for strengthening families or communities. The game is all about Bobby Knight and his need for control and recognition. By establishing himself as the center of the universe with his athletes he denies them the opportunity to use sport to strengthen their relationships with their families or communities. By controlling their daily lives with his “command and control” military methods, he does what drill sergeants at boot camp are charged with doing. He separates his athletes from their normal sources of social support, their families and friends, for purposes of developing loyalty to him and his basketball program. His techniques are not unlike those used by personality cult leaders who demand absolute obedience from their followers. Those young college men who survive his screening and screaming become loyal deferent subjects. Many of Knight’s players responded to his 2000 firing at Indiana in a manner similar to Charles Manson’s followers when he was imprisoned for the brutal murder of actress Sharon Tate. They went to his defense. It is difficult to develop a sense of community in a program where the focus is on the persona of an intimidating coach and where athletes are pitted against him and against one another to “toughen them up” for “battle.” His combative, contentious techniques of divide and conquer may be appropriate on the battlefield, but they do little to provide good sports experiences for young athletes. Children in sports do not need to develop adversarial relationships with their coaches and teammates. “If these

boors were not also winners, would they still be the objects of admiration? Of course not.”

The ugly conduct of Bobby Knight and other “greats of wrath” would be of much less concern to me, if the mainstream culture of sport were not so admiring and forgiving of him and his many imitators, who thumb their noses at standards of respect, civility, responsibility and community. The sports world, that celebrates gentle giants like legendary coach John Wooden, and tennis great Arthur Ash, oftentimes express disapproval of disruptive displays of anger and aggression and announce their support for good sports standards. However, their cheers for raging winners typically far outweigh their jeers, communicating a far different message about what sports fans truly value. If these boors were not also winners, would they still be the objects of admiration? Of course not.

RECOMMENDATION # 7

Oppose the mainstream culture of sport.

Resist supporting “in-your-face” sports that deaden the heart in the service of enlarging the ego.

The community of sports fans, that includes a large percentage of sports parents, has come to tolerate far too much from those who deface the playing fields with their browbeating, taunting, violence, profanity and general boorish behavior. During the 2001 NBA playoff’s between San Antonio and Dallas, Antonio Daniels of the Spurs, speaking to the press, announced “This is an angry Spurs team. We want to put our foot on the throat of the Dallas Mavericks.” This type of language is not uncommon in the professional sports ranks. And while “put our foot on the throat” is only a figure of speech, it communicates a spirit of sport that is combative rather than simply competitive. Too many high profile sports figures, athletes and coaches alike, capture the front pages and the evening news with outrageous statements about all manner of issues that demonstrate disrespect, incivility, irresponsibility and lack of interest in the welfare of the family and the community. Newsweek writer, Jonathan Alter, referring to anti-Semitic comments by the New York Knick’s Charlie Ward, observes “These guys are poorly educated basketball players, not theologians. Why do we pay attention to anything they have to say? The sad answer, of course, is that sports stars and other major entertainment figures have disproportionate influence.”

“The time seems right to invite those parents, with a different vision as to what sport can become, to invest in making sport a

better place for their children and their families. It is time for parents to let their voices be heard.”

Most alarming is the toll this high profile craziness is taking on sports for our children. Those of us who love sports and who want the new generation of athletes to take sports to a higher level possess a real sense of urgency to silence those coaches, athletes, and parents who demonstrate a lack of self-control. I realize, however, it is extraordinarily difficult to create G rated sports in an X rated world. It is, however, most encouraging that there now appear to be growing number of parents throughout the nation who are disenchanted with the current climate in mainstream sports. The time seems right to invite those parents, with a different vision as to what sport can become, to invest in making sport a better place for their children and their families. It is time for parents to let their voices be heard. Dedicated parents can lead a movement to silence the “greats of wrath.” A parent-led Opportunity Expanding Sports Movement can usher in a new era, where the welfare of children and their families becomes the guiding beacon for the creation of new designs for sports.

RECOMMENDATION # 8

Let your voice be heard.

Invest in making sport a better place by becoming an activist in your children’s sports communities.

Too often parents feel they are alone in their discontent with the values being promoted in high profile sports. They do not realize that other parents are also concerned when a shoe company chooses to make a commercial with the NBA’s remarkable MVP, Allen Iverson, projecting him as a defiant celebrity showing up at a nightclub in a convertible with scantily clad women. Parents are often fearful of being considered prudish or racist if they publicly condemn these displays of bravado by sports superstars, especially when the athletes are African-Americans. This sleazy celebration of defiance by a swaggering, narcissistic superstar covered with “look-at-me” tattoos is not what most parents want their children to idealize.

If parents are going to impact the values sports promote, they need to become activists in the Opportunity Expanding Sports Movement by challenging the judgment of advertisers and the superstars they have under contract. Since the sports establishment all too frequently fosters insanity on the playing field, on the sidelines, and in the bleachers, it is

essential that professional league management and their superstars be reminded of their responsibility to those who are allowing them to live lavish life styles. They forget that it is the families of America who buy tickets, their signature sports gear and bestow high ratings on their TV broadcasts.

Sports parents, some 40 million strong, can make a difference if they have the resolve to work at restoring sanity to sports. Beyond challenging the advertisers and the superstars all parents have avenues for promoting good sports values right in their own neighborhoods, that is, in their children's sports programs. Parents who become active in their children's sports lives can help restore sanity to sports in those programs that are most important to their children's welfare. If only 5% of the nation's sports parents took a modest good sports initiative with their children's youth or school sports programs, they would be taking the first steps toward restoring sanity to sports. This is the goal of the Opportunity Expanding Sports Movement.

3

Amplifying the Voices of Good Sports

“Those of us committed to restoring sanity to sport have a responsibility to amplify the voices of the giants of good sports.”

Every era in sport has its giants as well as its spoilers. The giants take sports to a higher level. Through their resolve, skill, and character they travel the high road. They are not tempted to give in to the fads that compromise the possibilities that sport holds for young athletes, their families and their communities. They are the exemplars of good sports. The programs they administer become the model that other sports leaders can aspire to emulate. They become the ideal for one of three reasons, either because of their success in winning championships, their strength of character, or because of the ways they have impacted their athletes. Those of us committed to restoring sanity to sport have a responsibility to amplify the voices of the giants of good sports.

The Spoilers, on the other hand, while every bit as motivated as the giants, lack the strength of character to be able reign in their egos long enough to emulate the standards the giants have established for sports. Unfortunately, they are the ones who capture the headlines and receive a disproportionate amount of attention.

Former UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden’s winning ways on and off the basketball court are legendary. He is one of those few coaches in sports history to be able to win championships and at the same time be uncompromising in his insistence that he and his athletes uphold the highest standards of conduct both on and off the court. I am not referring simply to his ability to abide by NCAA rules. Instead I am referring to his commitment to insisting that his athletes become good people, not just good athletes. John Wooden is from an era in sports that was more concerned with processes rather than outcomes. His focus was on executing a game plan, confident that if his athletes did all the right things they would win more than their fair share. He has earned the admiration of even the most focused warriors. They cannot deny him credit for amassing one of the most impressive winning records in sports history. But John Wooden achieved this distinction without resorting to browbeating, intimidation, incivility, or disrespect. He is the consum-

mate ambassador of good sports.

One of the qualities John Wooden brought to sport was an enduring commitment to family. In his endorsement of our book *Beyond the Bleachers* he observed “Since I believe that *parenting is the most important profession in the world*, I am excited to see someone has finally written the definitive ‘playbook’ for sports parents.” (italics mine) When co-author, George Selleck, and I interviewed Coach Wooden the day before his 90th birthday in the fall of 2000 we were impressed with what he had to say about sports parenting. More importantly, we were overwhelmed by what a quick perusal of his small apartment told us about the man.

His living room was filled with dozens of pictures of his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. One had to look hard to find evidence of any of the many trophies and awards he has received. The moment I cherish most about that visit with this giant, is when, as we were about to depart, he insisted on showing us one of his most prized possessions. His great-granddaughter had prepared him a picture book with personal commentary that portrayed her cherished relationship with him. For this giant of good sports, who is in the Basketball Hall of Fame both as a player and a coach, family relationships ranked higher than any of his sports achievements.

What is it about this man that caused me to choose him an exemplar for the Opportunity Expanding Sports perspective I am developing? It is clear that John Wooden has made every effort to be guided by the pillars of good sports: respect, empathy, civility, nurture, creativity, communion, civic duty. He is able to put sports achievements in perspective and he clearly understands the role of family in developing good people. The amazing thing about this man is that he won championship after championship taking the high road in his relationships with players, referees, fellow coaches, and spectators. It is sad indeed that so little attention has been paid to the achievements of sports personalities who embrace John Wooden’s perspective on sports.

In presenting my case for parent initiatives for creating good sports I will paint a portrait John Wooden as a means of accentuating the positive, and demonstrating that winning does not require coaches to become raging bulls.

John Wooden:

An Ambassador for Good Sports

He demonstrates respect for all those with whom he is working. This master coach demonstrates respect for others each time he steps out of bed in the morning, with his family, his colleagues, his athletes, and the community. He has always been a true “gentleman” in the very best sense of the word. While he has been demanding of his athletes and his fellow coaches he has always shown great respect for everyone, even when he disagrees with them,

He reflects a total commitment to civility. While coaches were chasing their players and the referees up and down the sidelines shouting ugly challenges, John Wooden remained on the bench rolling his game program in his hands while planning his next strategic move. When I played for Stanford against his teams in the early 50’s I was always impressed with the style and class he brought to the game. He set the tone for his athletes and everyone else in the gym.

He promotes responsibility in his athletes. While he was a “take charge guy” who made it clear what his expectations were for his athletes, he gave them opportunities to take charge of their own lives. While he communicated his high expectations, it was up to his athletes to assume responsibility for their conduct on and off the court. When we asked him in the interview to comment about the conduct of today’s players he reported that at the beginning of his career he had many rules and few suggestions. But as his career progressed he said he had fewer rules and more suggestions. At the end of his career he said he had only three rules: be on time, no profanity, and be considerate. I believe that it is the last rule that is central to his very being. His “on time” rule clearly reflects his belief in the importance of keeping one’s commitments. And his “no profanity” rule communicates his commitment to the importance of exercising emotional control as a means of demonstrating respect for your sports partners.

He allows sport to create a sense of family and community. John Wooden does not need to be the center of the universe for his athletes, his friends, or for his family. The paradox is, however, that so many of his athletes, friends, and family have placed him at the center of their universes and have looked to him for guidance in how to live their

lives with care and consideration. Bill Walton, with whom he clashed many times when Bill was protesting against the conventional life in the 70's, phoned him every day from Sidney during the 2000 Olympics to give him a personal update. John Wooden exemplifies the sportsman who takes his responsibilities to others and to the sport seriously.

RECOMMENDATION # 9

Be competitive, but not contentious.

Within the framework of mutually agreed upon rules, allow for the expression of ones competitive spirit. Avoid becoming quarrelsome or divisive.

John Wooden is a giant in the world of sports, not simply because his teams won championships, but because he has shared with us his path to good sports. He demonstrates that sport can become a partnership among athletes, coaches, and parents. He insisted that sport be a sanctuary from the ugliness of everyday life. Care, consideration, and high expectations of his athletes were what insulated his enclave of excellence from those forces that have been perpetuating insanity on the playing field, on the sidelines, and in the bleachers. And he understands that sport is a "time out" for the sports fan. When spectators come to a sporting event they do not need to be reminded of the mundane and sordid things they may have left behind at work. As much as anyone else in the world of sports he understands that the playing field can be a classroom where young men and women learn valuable life lessons that will enrich their lives far beyond their playing days. And finally, he understands the centrality of the family and community in everyone's lives in sport. He appreciates the benefits of the sense of community that sports can provide. He understands that good people are essential to creating good sports. But he also appreciates that good sports can create good people. The image of John Wooden, ambassador of good sports, should accompany every sports family as they pass through the world of sports. The next generation of sports parents does not need to "reinvent the wheel." They simply need to learn how to adapt John Wooden's values to today's world. Thanks, John Wooden, for the legacy of good sports you have left us. You have given us the courage and hope to develop an approach to sports for children that requires the creation of collaborative parent-athlete-coach teams guided by the cornerstones of good sports. We have taken the values you live everyday and have applied them to today's world of sports for children. Hopefully, we can stay on the path that you have set for us. It is the sports parent's responsibility to identify

and celebrate with their children those sports personalities who exemplify the best that sports have to offer. Parents cannot wait for the media to put these exemplars on the front page. They need to seek out heroes who can counter the impact of the ugliness that is displayed by those who are bent on spoiling our sports experiences.

RECOMMENDATION # 10

Celebrate disciplined sports heroes.

Select heroes who help us domesticate
the dark forces that reside deep within our souls

John Wooden has helped us appreciate the benefits of what I am calling Opportunity Expanding Sports. Expansiveness is reflected when sports lovers know and honor what has gone on before them. Their experiences are enriched if they are connected with the history of their sport so that they are able to achieve a sense of continuity and rootedness. While sinking in their roots they can feed on the nurturing soil of compassion and charity. They must be introduced to stories of caring and sacrifice as well as traditional tales of overcoming adversity and achieving victory that are so fondly embraced by the mainstream culture of sport. Sports personalities from the past and present, who reveal an expansive mentality, who are open to their surroundings, to persons, beliefs, and life possibilities, need to be celebrated so that our children get a glimpse of how opportunity expanding sports can enrich their lives. Expansiveness is also revealed in acts that enrich the lives of those who follow. It is a soulful act when one reaches out to the next generation and offers them the gift of oneself. While projecting oneself beyond the moment, through acts of generosity and kindness, sports parents can inspire future generations to carry on their caring manners and traditions. In this way they ensure their immortality while building a community of caring sports lovers.

RECOMMENDATION # 11

Honor the past.

Discover a sense of continuity and rootedness in the history of sport.

The only way that your children can develop an appreciation for what has gone on before them is for you to become intimately involved in their lives in sports. If you do not invest in your children's sports communities you will be missing out on exceptionally good opportunities to make a difference in the lives of your children.

RECOMMENDATION # 12

Stay involved in your children's team communities.

Sport provides an effective arena for parents to influence their children.

One of the tasks that savvy sports parents undertake is to get themselves into a position to exercise influence over their children's coaches and sports administrators. Coaches and sports administrators are major players in the youth sports world. They need to be recruited to the Opportunity Expanding Sports Movement, for they are the ones with the expertise to teach the sports skills you want your children to learn. But moms and dads need to be involved in shaping the values that are going to be promoted in the world of children's sports. President George W. Bush, after the Columbine tragedy is quoted as saying

“Of course there is going to be reactions – pass a law. The big law is the universal law – how do mothers and dads do their jobs. The fundamental question is going to be can America rededicate itself to parenting as the No. 1 priority for all of us.”

We all know that we cannot avert tragedies like Columbine and Santana without addressing the problems associated with the peer culture, the culture of violence in the larger society and the easy access to firearms. But the first line of attack needs to be to strengthen family relationships as Bush has stated. Sport has the potential of strengthening family relationships. We need to allow sport to realize its potential in the lives of American families.

RECOMMENDATION # 13

Use sport to strengthen family relationships.

Allow sport to realize its potential in your family.

While coaches need to be given plenty of room to conduct sports training without parental interference, it is the parents who need to work with their children to shape the values that sport promotes. Since sport has the potential for empowering athletes, strengthening families and enlivening communities, parents need to be urged to make sure that sport performs these functions. In addition, sport needs to be one of the components in establishing preventive measures for the frightening trends we witness every day in the youth culture -substance abuse, crime, reckless sex, violence, unwed mothers and irresponsible teenage fathers. Parents not only can use sport as a means of strengthening their relationships

with their children. They can establish sport as one of the major fronts in the big battles against those social forces that are competing with the values of harmony, wisdom, family, and friendship that parents say they want to promote.

Unfortunately the current mainstream culture of sport is not always embracing the values that are essential for the Good Life. Sport can be a central feature in the creation of the Good Life, if parents take full advantage of what sport can become. It can become a powerful force in countering the over-valuing of riches, popularity and beauty at the exclusion of other values that are essential for both Good Sports and the Good Life.

4

Seeking an Alternative To “In-your-face” Sports

“Sport can become a place where we are reconnected with the sense of wonder and awe we experienced as children.”

Even though the mainstream culture of sport seems to be tolerating, if not promoting, “in-your-face” sports, it does not have to be that way. Sport can become a place where we are reconnected with the sense of wonder and awe we experienced as children. It can become a context in which we strengthen our relationships with our families and friends. Also sport can become a means of establishing a common ground with those in the community with whom we typically have little contact. We need soulful sports, not heartless sports, if we are to build convivial and compassionate communities that can heal the fractures our cultural and economic diversity have created. And most importantly, sport can become a treasured vehicle for reinvigorating the soul.

RECOMMENDATION # 14

Create soulful sports, not heartless sports.

Build a convivial and compassionate sports community.

Soulful sports can uplift the spirits of you and your children. They can help you and your children develop a “can do” outlook on life. They can also help you and your family connect with the world around you and allow you to develop a sense of obligation for one another’s welfare. Soulful sports help establish your identity as a competent and caring person who is not afraid to take the risks that are essential for getting the most out of sports experiences.

RECOMMENDATION # 15

Establish a common ground through sports.

Use sport to bridge the distance
between you and those different from you.

Military images of triumph can be tempered by images from the arts and symbols and language from sacred and secular rituals that amplify the beautiful movements and tender actions that occur on the playing field each and every day. These special moments can nourish the soul and enliven our relationships. As orchestrators of “rites of enchantment” we can blanket the natural aggression of sport with care, compassion, and community so that sport is not allowed to inflict pain on any participant. We can discover heroes who help us domesticate the dark forces that reside deep within our souls. And we can create a hospitable climate for developing “soulfulness,” that is, the ability to be inspired and enchanted by the magic of everyday sports experiences.

RECOMMENDATION # 16

Orchestrate rites of enchantment.

Blanket the natural aggression of sport
with care, compassion, and community.

By creating routines that connect parents, athletes, and coaches to one another in their sports programs, structure is provided that controls the level of excitement so that it is pleasant, rather than aggravating. At the same time, these rituals provide recognition to the participants so that they are not suffering from stroke hunger. And finally the rituals offer structure that builds boundaries around sport, making it a safe place to take risks.

When sports lovers commit themselves to embracing the values of humility, civility, compassion, charity, generosity, and kindness, the outcome will, without a doubt, renew the spirits of all participants. Needless to say, that is a lofty goal, but, in my view, it is what sport is all about and is a dream worth pursuing.

Well orchestrated artistic rituals can inspire us to establish relationships that are mutually energizing, where everyone’s spirits are uplifted, regardless of who wins the competition. These rituals can remind us about how much we depend upon one another. They allow us to celebrate our differences. They can provide a common language and a common ground upon which to build relationships with those different from us.

Of course, when sport is re-formed according to expansive principles the healing of fractures is achieved in the context of only one of society's many institutions. Similar refashioning needs to take place in all of our social institutions, the home, the school, the church, and the workplace. Even if we are unsuccessful in refocusing the efforts of our other institutions, if we succeed only in the world of sport it will become a welcomed sanctuary where our souls are nourished so that we can successfully face the challenges of everyday life.

“Opportunity Expanding Sports allow for the expression of ones competitive spirit within the framework of mutually agreed upon rules, without becoming contentious or divisive.”

Opportunity Expanding Sports, which serve as a foundation for this manifesto, offer empowering and enchanting rituals that build unity, reduce conflict, honor diversity, establish equality of opportunity, and promote fairness and justice. Opportunity Expanding Sports allow for the expression of ones competitive spirit within the framework of mutually agreed upon rules, without becoming contentious or divisive. Architects of expansive rites of enchantment can orchestrate sports experiences with the elegance of an artist and the passion and care of a lover. These rituals need to be conducted in an atmosphere of civility and conviviality in order to renew the spirits of participants and enliven their relationships with their fellow men and women.

“As ‘orchestrators’ of rites of enchantment we can blanket the natural aggression of sport with care, compassion, and community so that sport is not allowed to inflict pain on any participant.”

First of all, sports mates must help one another become the best they can be. They must embrace one another's dreams. It is quite natural for individuals to seek to place themselves in the limelight. But that is not enough. While reaching toward the sky, they need to breathe in the fresh air of humility and civility and extend a helping hand to their fellow competitors.

RECOMMENDATION # 17

Embrace the dreams of your sports mates.

Breathe in the fresh air of humility and civility and extend a helping hand to your fellow competitors.

When parents use military metaphors to organize their thinking about sport, such as viewing competition as “battles for dominance,” the full range of benefits of sport can elude them. They will remain focused upon the outcomes of the competition, namely winning, awards and recognition, rather than upon making the most of their sports experiences. Focusing exclusively on the outcomes of competition limits the benefits available to athletes, coaches and parents. When parents embrace a restricted definition of success it puts undue pressure on their children to deliver what they see that their parents value. By thinking of sport as an “excursion into enchantment” instead, parents and their children can discover more opportunities to benefit from their sports experiences. They are able to find ways to benefit from the processes of competition as well as from the preparation and follow-up activities in their team communities.

RECOMMENDATION # 18

Redefine the character of sport.

Develop strategies for transforming sport from *battles for dominance* into *excursions into enchantment*.

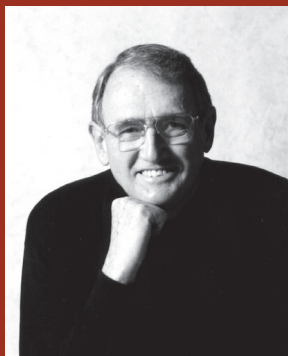
Conclusion

By reviewing the recommendations that have been advanced in this booklet you will be better equipped to identify actions you can take to oppose the warrior mentality. It is not only necessary for you to identify those sports policies, practices and traditions that reduce the benefits of sports for athletes, coaches and parents. It is also essential that you fashion a vision of those opportunities you can help create that increase satisfaction and growth for all members of your children's team communities. Sports can become opportunity expanding if, and only if, you and your family resolve to take initiatives to make the most of your sports experiences. Is it worth the investment in time, effort, courage, commitment and patience to oppose the warrior mentality? I feel confident you will not choose to stand by and allow the mainstream culture of sport to rob you and your family of the boundless possibilities that are available. Instead, you can become a pacesetter in your children's team communities by leading *excursions into enchantment* rather than following others into mindless *battles for dominance*.

Oppose The Warrior Mentality

How to Resist Contentious Sports Practices

Comparisons in the approaches of college basketball coaching legends Bobby Knight and John Wooden are offered as a way of illuminating how the world of sports is conflicted about the ethics of interpersonal relations.



DAVID CANNING EPPERSON, PH.D.

THE OPPORTUNITY EXPANDING SPORTS COLLECTION
Volume 1. Sports Challenges Series

ALLIANCE US \$6.95 CAN. \$8.95