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Violence in youth sport: Potential preventative measures and solutions

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Violence in youth sport: Potential preventative measures and solutions

by

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of the requirements for the

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PART I

Introduction

Youth sport events are part of a growing industry to which event venues are tailoring their policies, procedures, and designs. The competitive nature of the events and their participants have caused these venues to examine their existing policies and adjust them to increase security and safety measures for the athletes, coaches, spectators, game officials, and venue staff. Tempers at these events will flare, and in recent years violence is becoming increasingly more common. Parents and athletes have attacked each other, coaches, and game officials due to the intense nature of these events. The result of these acts could range from minor injuries to death.

The venue and event management teams at ESPN Wide World of Sports are some of the many that have had to adjust to this trend. These competitors are coming to the venue for one purpose, and that is to compete for a title in their respective sport. It is because of this that tensions are high from the moment the athletes walk through the gates, as opposed to the celebratory atmosphere of other events where attendees are primarily concerned with having an enjoyable time. This intense atmosphere is what may provoke the instances of violence, jeopardizing the safety of all in the venue. Taking the proper steps to ensure that these situations are dealt with efficiently without putting the rest of the participants and staff in a dangerous situation is a critical task.

Behavioral studies have been previously recorded in regard to these acts of violence; however this study focuses on the management of the sports venues and violent situations. The behavioral studies are referenced to examine the origins and reasons behind the incidents. The challenges faced and attempted solutions found in those reports are analyzed to form suggestions

in the areas of preventative measures and recovery actions for the event venues. These suggestions focus on providing a competitive and enjoyable environment for the sports activities, while remaining safe for guests, officials, and event staff.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to recommend potential preventative measures and solutions to manage violence in youth sport venues.

Objective

The literature review that follows will cite examples of violent acts and the behavioral studies that will provide a foundational understanding into these situations. It is necessary to have a working knowledge of the details regarding the acts of violence that can occur as well as the mental state of the offenders at the time of the violent acts when seeking an effective solution to the problem.

Justifications

The professional implications to the study are the preventative measures and solutions. These actions will have a direct impact on the operation of the event venues. The changes to the staffing, increased training courses, management techniques, and new policies all have operational and financial implications to the organization. The benefit to these implications lies in a safer environment for the employees and guests.

PART II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to devise a plan to protect youth sports event venue staff it is important to gain insights into the types of violence that is likely to occur as well as the driving forces behind them. The following literature review has documented situations during which athletes and parents have committed acts of violence during youth sports competitions and events. Possible causes for the violence follow the examples for each group. Understanding why these acts occur can help identify an effective solution. It focuses on the outside influences that impact behaviors, such as role models in professional sports, financial impacts such as money spent on training or potential rewards and scholarships, and the need for popularity and approval.

The final section details attempts at legislation that organizations, and communities have made toward combating violence at youth sports events. It provides examples of attacks on game officials and explains why these legislative acts were necessary to enact. It also details reviews of attempts communities and sports organizations have made toward combating violence within their own youth sport events.

Athlete Violence

Each circumstance of violence in youth sports can be fit into one of three categories; these include brawling, hazing, and foul play. Brawling is the primary cause of athlete violence that will have an effect on the event venue. This situation occurs when the athletes are involved in violent situations among each other, spectators, game officials, or coaches. It can occur during the games or in the time surrounding the game, and can often also place the venue staff into a dangerous situation (Fields, Collins, & Comstock, 2010).

Hazing will affect the athletes on the teams; however it is generally an internal issue among the team and therefore will not play a significant role in the venue's safety measures. Hazing can be found in the form of both verbal and physical abuse. It occurs among teammates, and has grown into a major challenge in high schools since the 1980s. According to a study by Eastern Illinois University, each year close to one million high school athletes are affected by hazing (Wood, 2010).

Foul play cannot be controlled through venue rules; however is it addressed within the rules of a game. These situations occur when the players inflict violent acts upon one another throughout the course of the game time. Generally these situations are controlled by game officials, yet the situations are ruled by how the game officials interpret the acts. These calls can lead to ensuing acts of violence if the athletes or fans feel as though a foul was either called unfairly, or not called when deserved (Fields, et al., 2010).

Brawling

Accounts of brawling in youth sports are frequently reported in the news. In August 2011, a group of middle school cheerleaders in St. Petersburg, Florida were arrested after becoming involved in a brawl following a game. The fight was sparked by threats made to the cheerleading coach and her 10-month-old daughter by the opposing team prior to the game. (Smith, 2011). The emotions had intensified until the cheerleaders approached the opposing coach, following her and the baby out to the parking lot.

Another significant brawl occurred in Swiftwater, Pennsylvania following a youth football game for players aged 11-13 in 1999. As the players gathered on the field after the game to shake hands as a sign of sportsmanship some began to taunt the others. This resulted in a fight as one of the children shoved another. Another child was hit over the head with a helmet.

The fight came to a climax as 50-100 athletes and parents gathered on the field, many in an attempt to break up the fight. The police arrived to handle the brawl, and three individuals were charged, including one adult and two children. Only two injuries were reported as a result of the fight (Nack & Munson, 2000).

In rare but serious situations these brawls can also turn deadly, as found in the case of two youth baseball players in Florida in 2005. A 13-year-old player killed a 15-year-old player when he struck him over the head with his baseball bat (Silverman, 2010).

Foul Play

Foul play is not generally a cause for concern on its own in relation to venue safety; however the threat of a resulting brawl can provoke additional security precautions. The resulting fights can either break out during or after the game. A fight that occurs following a game can be more challenging, as the players have completed the game while angry. Often these games have become increasingly tense as they have played out to completion. The players have committed additional fouls upon one another in reaction to the pressure to win. A much larger fight can be provoked due to the tension and anger felt by the athletes. Often the anger can be attributed to an athlete feeling they have received an unfair penalty. It can also occur when the athlete feels penalties have not been called on the opponents.

These retaliating fights can be directed toward either the officials or the opposing team. A 2005 study revealed that 38% of the athletes surveyed admitted to retaliating against an opponent who “plays dirty” (Shields, Bredemeier, La Voi, & Power, 2005). Those acts can be found in the form of either additional foul play or brawling. Players can see it as form of protecting themselves or as a way of issuing revenge to those who have wronged them (Fields et

al., 2010). Nine percent of the athletes surveyed admitted to cheating as well, which also has the potential to result in foul play and retaliation (Shields et al., 2005).

Causes of Athlete Violence

Pressure

Athlete violence can partially be traced to pressure from their parents and coaches to perform well in competition. Even media, as well as research and stories told by participants, show that children's behavior in sports is influenced by their parents (LaVoi & Stellino, 2008). These adults feel as though the athletes are constantly being watched by college and professional scouts. The athletes are pushed to perform and compete at levels beyond their skill, almost as though they are training for professional sports (Wood, 2010). This increased pressure can push the youth to their breaking point. If the children feel that they will only find approval from their parents if they beat others, they will feel the pressure to perform (O'Rourke, Smith, & Smoll, 2011). Some feel as though love from their parents will only be given to them if they are the highest performing athlete. This pressure can cause them to develop perfectionist attitudes, increasing the likelihood of a violent reaction if they do not perform to the standard they have set for themselves (Sapieja, Dunn, & Holt, 2011).

They are pressured to specialize in sports at younger ages because their parents see extreme skill as an open invitation to play for elite colleges and universities. It holds the key to education and prestige (Cox, 2001). Even the very young children aren't immune to the pressure. Parents feel that developing the children's skill will enable them to make the high school varsity team, setting them up for the best possible visibility for the college scouts (Fiore, 2003). The children respond to these beliefs in their abilities by reacting during their competition according to how they perceive they are viewed (Lavoie & Stellino, 2008).

It is also found that coaches and parents are placing a higher emphasis on winning than they are on performing well and showing sportsmanship (Wood, 2010). As a result the kids are approaching their games with an attitude that they need to win at all costs. They see the shortcuts of cheating as a better way to achieve their parents' goals. The athletes feel they are judged by how many games they can win as opposed to how they are winning or their performance and skill (Buford May, 2001).

Athletes also find pressure to win in situations where the coaches are paid depending on their team's win-loss record. They understand that they will only be put into the game if they are winning, and will do whatever it takes to achieve this goal (Christie & Wulforst, 1997). The results of the competitions are made public, and the coaches understand that they are under constant scrutiny to produce a winning team. This will in turn result in them pushing winning upon the children (Miller, Lutz, Jaeho, Fredenburg, & Miller, 2006).

Another pressuring situation for athletes is found when they are compared to their teammates. When a coach shows high praise to another athlete or compares ability and productivity, children feel the pressure to perform and become more motivated to win at any cost (Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2012). Studies have shown that this pressure to receive praise for their own ability has been found precede unsportsmanlike conduct (Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007).

The athletes become more competitive with each other when praise and admiration is shown by their peers. Their desire to receive the same praise and acceptance overpowers their moral code. This will affect their behaviors, often resulting in their willingness to do whatever it takes to receive the same praise (Ntoumanis et al., 2012). Studies show that the social impact and pressure to be popular, well-liked, and admired among their peers can often serve as a

predictor of the poor sport behavior (Shields et al., 2007). They focus on their ultimate goal with little to no regard of the consequences. This prompts them to act violently if they feel it will help them to appear more successful.

Sportsmanship

Coaches who place a higher emphasis on winning tend to ignore the importance of sportsmanship in youth sports. Sportsmanship has come to be regarded as a simple hand shake at the end of a game or match (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). The athletes aren't taught sportsmanship, so the fighting becomes a natural part of the game (Cox, 2001). This is when they are most likely to commit foul play within the game. Athletes will intentionally hurt a good player from an opposing team to prevent them from returning to the game, thus increasing their chances of winning (Fiore, 2003). It will also occur out of frustration if they are being outplayed, blocked or covered during the game (Chachkes, 2010). The lack of sportsmanship will also lead to fighting, as evidenced in the case of the youth football brawl that began with the winning team taunting the losing team (Cox, 2001).

Studies have shown that athletes respond to their parents' and coaches' actions. When sportsmanship is not shown to them, the young athletes will not see a need to use it. If they see their coach reacting in an unsportsmanlike way to the opposing team or coaches, they will do the same regardless of what the coach says (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreiness, 2009). It has also been found that a coach who ignores unsportsmanlike conduct but still praises the athlete for accomplishing a goal will promote poor sportsmanship in the athlete (Shields et al., 2007).

The adults in authority over the youth athletes can tend to forget how impressionable they are. They will almost expect them to make a decision that they have not yet had enough life

experience to make. For example, a coach who admonishes an athlete for an illegal act during the game, but then demonstrates a lack of sportsmanship by their own actions, is putting the athlete in a difficult position (Buford May, 2001). They become confused by the stark difference between what they are told and what is being demonstrated to them. The children will tend to react by doing what they perceive the coach values, often prompting unsportsmanlike conduct such as arguing, fighting, or other violent acts (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009).

Role Models

Poor influence from role models is another way in which youth athletes view violence in sports. These role models can include parents, coaches, and even professional athletes. The actions these children witness from their role models will shape their reactions. It shows them that the people they look up to find poor behavior acceptable, so they are free to do the same (Wells, Ruddell, & Paisley, 2006). Parents of successful youth athletes have admitted to questioning their children's actions that occurred during a game. Often as young as 13 or 14, these athletes have excused their behavior with the idea that inappropriate behavior is normal now in sports (Cox, 2001).

Parents are exhibiting these behaviors during youth sports games for all ages. Reports have placed it at events for teenagers all the way down to 5-year old tee ball games. Unfortunately kids are impressionable. They learn their behaviors from those around them. If they see negative behavior being portrayed from a person in a higher authority they will be likely to mimic this behavior (Lazzarotti, 2010). A previous study showed a direct correlation between the amount of negative parent and spectator behavioral occurrences, and the resulting increase of those behaviors in the youth athletes (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009).

Coaches as poor influences are becoming more common as well. According to a study done to survey coach, athlete, and spectator behavior, 26% of youth athletes reported being told by their coach that retaliating against an opponent was acceptable and being encouraged to participate in it (Shields et al., 2005). Coaches further increase the problem by encouraging this type of behavior as well as demonstrating poor behavior through their own actions. Poor sportsmanship is taught through these examples (Wood, 2010).

Coaches also become poor influences when their behavior demonstrates that violence is acceptable. Forty-eight percent of athletes surveyed in the 2005 project reported seeing their coaches arguing angrily in reaction to a game official's call (Shields et al., 2005). These reactions become extremely negative influences on the athletes. The coaches are viewed as role models for the youth athletes, and this behavior encourages more of the same from the children. When children look up to their coaches, the praise they receive from them is of high importance. Coaches do not always recognize that the time they spend with the youth athletes makes them only second to parents and guardians in terms of influencing the athletes (Miller et al., 2006). This makes them more likely to be influenced by their actions and words (Arthur, Woodman, Chin Wei, Hardy, & Ntoumanis, 2011). A study has shown that young athletes respond to all feedback given to them by coaches, and will react in a way that will conjure the same response from the coach as a previous occurrence (Luiselli, Woods, & Reed, 2011). Thus, positive feedback for negative behavior will be met with additional poor behavior in the future.

Professional Athletes and the Media

The media has taken a profound effect on our society as a whole. When one of the first cases of youth sport violence occurred in Kissimmee, Florida, over 35 years ago the news did not reach many outside of the local area. Now, with the advent of news devices such as the internet

or national news networks, stories relating to such events are widely broadcast (Heinzmann, 2002). The same can be said for pop culture media. The internet and sports networks bring live activity into our homes. Celebrities are used to endorse products and keep children in school. This, along with the way their lives are glamorized, has turned celebrities into people to be admired and emulated, even before family and other influential institutions.

Partially due to the influence of the media, professional athletes hold a high status and regard in American culture (Shakib, Veliz, Dunbar, & Sabo, 2011). Professional sports are laden with athletes focused on competition and winning, partially due to the egos involved. This pushes sportsmanship to the background, and shows youth athletes that the professionals value their record more than their reputations (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). A child who watched his or her sports idol participating in verbal and physical violence during a game will come to believe that it is part of the game (Wood, 2010). They try to emulate these athletes, partially because they think is the proper way to perform, and also because they think they will be viewed as those athletes are. The performance of professional sports athletes can have a direct impact on how youth athletes understand morals and ethics in regard to athletic competition (Feezell, 2005).

The media reports of professional athletes and sports events feature the hard hitting, violent actions that occur during the game. While the best plays are also shown, a fight that occurs over the course of the game is brought to the forefront and will be repeatedly highlighted on broadcasts. This is the constant exposure the children receive in relation to their idols' performance, which is part of what makes them find it to be so acceptable (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). The idolization of these sports professionals is reflected in the fact that, because of the high visibility afforded to them by the media, when questioned young males replied that

they would like to be remembered as an athletic star (Shakib et al., 2011). Sports hold a high influence in our culture, and the athletes involved in professional sports can influence the moral decisions of the youth athletes (Feezell, 2005).

When asked, many children have responded that their behavior was prompted by what they have seen on television. They are under the impression that it is acceptable because their professional sports idols are behaving in such a manner (Cox, 2001). Youth athletes learn their respective sports from a combination of both their coaches and the examples they see. This is why it is natural for them to emulate the behaviors and actions they witness their professional role models demonstrating (Feezell, 2005). Many professional athletes are not bad sports. The challenge lies in the acts that are being broadcast to the children. The newsworthy actions are the ones that display poor sportsmanship (Cox, 2001). If the adults directly influencing the children are not exposing them to the athletes that are good sports, the children will only learn from the ones who are not. This increases the chance of their behavior becoming unsportsmanlike and violent.

Lessons through Sport

Another factor behind athlete violence can be found in the actions leading up to the violent situation. It can often be in response to verbal or physical abuse directed toward other athletes, coaches, or game officials (Wood, 2010). This can cause the athletes to become defensive, or even prompt further abuse toward others. If the athletes see the others as being weak they could be more likely to react violently to achieve their desired results.

Part of the challenge youth sports leagues and events face with foul play comes from the athletes' perception of what is and is not acceptable during the course of play. One survey showed that 59% of high school athletes replied that different forms of intimidation, such as

shoving, pushing, rough play, and other contact that does not include physically hitting, is acceptable during a game (Fields et al., 2010). This can define the interactions they will have throughout the course of the game.

Another survey reported that 29% of athletes replied that they recognize “striking, punching, wrestling, and other forms of physical assault” as a consequence of playing (Fields et al., 2010). This belief increases the likelihood of an athlete turning to foul play and violence during the game. An athlete who accepts it as part of the game yet is still penalized for it could be inclined to retaliate.

Young athletes also tend to see that their parents’ response to cheating and foul play is one of approval, and will act accordingly. This is also true in regard to how they perceive their coaches’ opinion of cheating and aggression (LaVoi & Stellino, 2008). If the athletes see it as being not only acceptable, but accepted, they will tend to perform actions that demonstrate this belief.

Perception is also found within how the athletes view officiating. While rules are set in sports, different officials can perceive them to have different meanings. Each may also have a certain level of tolerance for a situation before they determine it to be an illegal action. These games are often called by different sets of officials each time, and differing interpretations of the rules could lead an athlete to perceive that they are being treated unfairly (Buford May, 2001). This leads to retaliation on the part of the athlete.

Parent Violence

Situations involving parental violence in sports are not new to the industry; however their frequency has significantly increased in recent years. There are some reports that claim these situations occur weekly. Each occurrence is documented by game officials. During the year

2000, the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) reported receiving notification of two to three acts of parental violence at youth sports events each week (Herbert, 2000). This coincides with a study done by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS). According to that study, between the years 1995 and 2000 the amount of parents losing their control at youth sport events jumped from 5% to 15%. This number still continues to grow (Nack & Munson, 2000). In an email communication with Greg Bach, Vice President of Communications for NAYS, he revealed that by 2008 the number had jumped to 29% of surveyed individuals admitting to having witnessed physical confrontations at youth sport events.

Large numbers of parents report witnessing other parents being verbally aggressive during youth sport events. These situations include derogatory comments being made toward their own children, children on both teams, coaches, officials, and other parents and spectators. Many also report witnessing severe physical interactions, such as fighting, among parents and other spectators. These behaviors range in severity. Some include verbal aggression, some are physical, yet nonviolent, such as mooning officials, and others are physically aggressive and potentially life-threatening (Omli & LaVoi, 2009).

Parents vs. Other Spectators

One of the most well-known stories of parent violence originates in Massachusetts in the year 2000. This situation occurred at a youth hockey practice. One father approached another who was supervising the practice complaining about the hard hits the children were using with each other. The supervising father referred to it as part of the game (Anonymous, 2000). The conversation escalated into a verbal disagreement and shoving match and the complaining father was escorted from the hockey rink. He later returned to pick up his son and in a fit of rage attacked the supervising father. The beaten father was unrecognizable due to the injuries he

suffered, and later died as a result of those injuries (Nack & Munson, 2000). This is part of what heightened awareness in regard to parental violence.

In Euless, Texas, in 2001 a parent was arrested during a high school hockey game for fighting in the stands with another parent. Several parents also were involved in a brawl in South Brunswick, New Jersey, in September 2000. This was after a soccer game for 8 and 9-year-old girls that had ended in a tie (Splete, 2001). These situations are similar to a case that occurred in June 2011 at a youth baseball tournament in Colorado. Parents of the 12-year-old boys playing in the tournament brawled following what they thought had been a bad call. Adults were even fighting with teenage spectators, resulting in the brother of one of the players being caught in a choke hold from one of the fathers. He was later diagnosed with a concussion, and three parents faced criminal charges for their parts in the fight (Ripley, 2011).

These situations can also be traumatizing for the children involved. A hockey official reported viewing two mothers in a fight after a game in Ontario. According to him the mothers kept pushing and shoving each other. They seemed almost oblivious to the reactions of their children, who were watching in terror and crying (Deacon, McClelland, & Smart, 2001).

Parents vs. Coaches

Another area of parental spectator aggression is directed at coaches. These situations can often be caused by what the parents perceive to be bad coaching, or unfair amounts of playing time. This was the situation at a football game in Philadelphia in 2006 where a father, upset with his six-year-old son's lack of playing time, began arguing with his coach before finally pulling a gun on him. Nobody was hurt, and no shots were fired; however the man was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, and reckless endangerment (Daniel, 2011). In a 2001 incident

in California a father was sentenced to forty-five days in jail after attacking the manager of his son's team after the son was benched (Cox, 2001).

Additional examples of parents attacking coaches occurred during the game. The founder and CEO of NAYS recalled being at a youth baseball game for his son and seeing a father from the opposing team become upset when his son was removed from the game. This father removed a bat from the dugout and chased the coach around the baseball field as his own form of protest (Engh, 2007). Another occurred at halftime of a football game. A father approached his son's coach because he felt his son was not being given the ball enough during the game. After arguing with the coach, the father and son each grabbed him and starting hitting him (Daniel, 2011)

An example of parents attacking coaches over perceived bad coaching can be found in Staten Island, New York, in 2000. A father hit his son's coach in the face with two hockey sticks, drawing blood. This was following a game for 11- and 12-year-old boys. The father was upset that his son had not yet improved during the season (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Parents vs. Game Officials

An additional commonly found occurrence of violence is between parents and game officials. These situations tend to get out of hand extremely quickly, as was found in the situation of a soccer mom at her son's eight and under soccer match. It was a semi-final match, and the mom confronted the 14-year-old referee over a call she did not agree with. When the referee's father intervened the mom punched him in the face. An off-duty police officer was in attendance at the match, and when he identified himself and tried to arrest the mom she resisted, and she and her husband both assaulted the officer. They were both arrested, and the coach removed his team from the tournament (Daniel, 2011).

Many of these violent situations still mirror the acts of violence upon other spectators and coaches, however. In 1999 in Virginia another mother at a soccer game slapped a 14-year-old referee when she disagreed with his call, knocking him to the ground (Butterfield, 2000). This situation ended after that act, and did not get as out of hand as the previously mentioned one. Another incident occurred which also caused damage to an official's personal property. A father was arrested in May 2001 following a situation where he hit a Little League umpire prior to slashing one of the tires on the umpire's personal vehicle (Splete, 2001).

NASO reports have shown a variety of situations involving parents attacking game officials at youth sport events. At a high school basketball game in Pennsylvania a parent reportedly body-slammed a referee after his wife was ejected from the gymnasium for verbal abuse. An Illinois high school football fan attempted to choke an official on the field during the game. The father of a seven-year-old attacked an umpire after his son's baseball game. The father threatened to kill the official while he had the official shoved up against a bathroom wall (Sullivan, 2009).

These situations can also have the potential to become exceptionally violent. At a tennis event for 10 and under boys an angry father pulled a gun on an umpire after what he felt was a bad call (Walsh, 2001). Corrections officers are trained to fight physically in order to defend themselves on the job. Combining this training with high tension situations can have drastic effects. An officer in La Vista, Nebraska punched a 16-year-old referee in the face at a six- and seven-year old boys' flag football game. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail for this offense (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Parents vs. Youth Athletes

Perhaps the most disconcerting example of parent violence occurs toward the young athletes. In a 2005 study, 5% of youth athletes admitted to being the victim of a physical attack by a spectator at their game. According to another portion of the survey, 17% of athletes replied that the behavior of a fan had scared them during their game (Shields et al., 2005).

Physical violence toward the children occurs in a variety of sports. A dad in Eastlake, Ohio, was charged with assault after punching and splitting the lip of a 14-year-old boy from the opposing team at his son's soccer game. The boys had wrestled for the ball and were each ejected from the game prior to the attack (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Another report is of a premeditated attack on the children. A youth football team was in the middle of a practice for a championship game that would be occurring later in the week when the players all suddenly began to run from the field. The eight 12- to 14-year-old boys were vomiting on the sidelines. After being rushed to the hospital, the parents and coaches were told that the boys had been poisoned (Fiore, 2003). Although situations such as these wouldn't be the responsibility of the venue, the potential for retaliation would have tensions high.

Other parents have attempted to enlist the help of the athletes in attacking the other children. In Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, a police officer paid a 10-year-old baseball player \$2 to hit the batter with a fastball when he was pitching during his game. He was arrested and convicted of corruption of a minor and solicitation (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Causes of Parent Violence

Emotional Attachment

There are many different factors that contribute to the problem of parent violence at youth sport events. The first is that parents are becoming more emotionally invested in the sports their children are participating in (White, 2003). They are more inclined to jump to their children's defense. The parents are not tolerant of any actions they feel are unjust, particularly if it results in their children performing at a lower level (Daniel, 2011). The stresses of their daily lives are constantly on their minds, and their emotions are on a much higher reaction level, prompting them to overreact at the games (Cox, 2001). These parents are also viewing anything that happens to their children on the field as a personal attack on them. This is more likely to prompt a violent response to the perceived unjust actions (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). As parents they also have a strong bond with their children. Their instinct as parents will take effect, and their desire to challenge anything that hurts their children will overpower their sense of what is and is not appropriate behavior. They want to protect their children (Fiore, 2003).

Studies have shown that the number of fans in attendance increases when a team reaches the finals or championship games at the conclusion of the season. This alone can cause a problem, as the fans that have been in attendance all season can tend to resent the bandwagon fans invading their space (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005). These dedicated fans that have been around for the entire season are the parents of the athletes. Parents of youth athletes tend to be fanatical and will identify themselves as being one with the team. Their children are a part of them, so when the children play they want them to succeed (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The tensions that are already carried by the parents because of the emotional connection to their children are only heightened by the fact that the team is now in the final stage of their

tournament (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005). Youth sports are intended to be enjoyable learning experiences. It is in these competitive situations, however, that winning takes priority over ensuring the athletes are all having an enjoyable time (Cox, 2001). A study has shown that there is a direct correlation between how far into a competitive atmosphere a game has progressed and the rational nature of the parents (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006).

At times parents may begin to view their children as substitution for their own former athletic lives. If they were star athletes but were unable to make it far into college and the professional leagues they will see the same dreams for their children. They almost expect the child to step in and continue on the path they started, as smaller representations of themselves. These parents will project their own identities onto their children (Daniel, 2011). This differs from the emotional attachment because the emotionally attached parents are connect through the physical and emotional bond, while the substitution parent connects through the common skill and love for the game. Many of these parents are trying to change where things went wrong in their own sports lives (Splete, 2001). Previous research has indicated that the parents will hold this connection and allow it to dictate their behavior. They also see their repeated attendance at the events as a connection to the team, giving them the right to react as emotionally as a member of the team (Armstrong, 2007).

Other parents are affected by substitution in an opposite way. Instead of seeing their children finishing where they left off, they see themselves in their children. They are almost getting the chance to play again, sometimes even correcting the mistakes they made when they played the sport. Some may not have played sports at all, but are now living out their desire to play through their children. Their victories will feel like their own victories, and the losses will also be a loss for the parent (Daniel, 2011). They will also fantasize about the futures of their

children, often projecting them to be the next superstar (Nack & Munson, 2000). Some may even go so far as to pretend it is them on the playing surface rather than their child (Fox, 2000).

Regardless of the motivation for substitution, ego is usually involved. They get carried away with visions of high performance and associate themselves with it. They tend to forget that they are at games for children as opposed to recreational opportunities for adults (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). Parents will also tend to brag when their child performs at a higher level. This can increase the tension as the remaining parents are irritated by the ego, particularly if their own children did not perform as well. This will also lead to higher tension, and often violence (Docheff & Conn, 2004). They identify themselves with the child's sports team, which research has shown will result in aggressive behavior at these events (Shields et al., 2007).

Financial Attachment and Investment

Since the recession adults have become more concerned with their money. They are concerned about how it is spent, the return on investments, and providing for their children. This also includes athletics. As a result many parents are realizing the finances spent on these sports, as well as the value of a scholarship and its effect on their children's education (Daniel, 2011).

The costs of playing youth sport are constantly rising. Equipment is rising in cost, and each team member must have uniforms, including personally purchased shoes and protective equipment. Parents may also spend money on private coaching or lessons to further develop a perceived talent (Walsh, 2001). Many teams and leagues are paying for a higher level of coach for the youth teams. The additional money spent by paying these coaches as opposed to utilizing volunteers is further cause for parents to feel higher tensions at games (Christie & Wulfrost, 1997). This puts pressure on the coaches which in turn puts additional pressure on the players.

The chain reaction will affect people involved at all levels involved in the game, increasing tension and aggression. This can affect their reactions if they feel their money is being wasted.

Money is also being spent on children playing at higher levels at younger ages. They participate on club and travel teams, and the money spent on the travel and participation fees is almost as extreme as the level of play (Nack & Munson, 2000). The amount of money spent on these components can often make the parent feel as though it is their right to step in when they do not agree with the way a game is being played, officiated, or coached. They feel as though they have also purchased the rights to express their discontent regardless of the method of expression used (Walsh, 2001).

The lure of a college scholarship also prompts the intensity at which these parents observe their children in sports (White, 2003). College costs are rising. Some parents assume that their best option to afford to send their child to a good school is for the child to win an athletic scholarship (Walsh, 2001). They are often willing to ignore the rules of the game and fight against what they perceive to be unjust calls and penalties in order to give their children the highest number of opportunities (Cox, 2001). These dreams of college scholarships can also lead to dreams of a career with professional riches (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). These situations arise when the parents are promoting the idea of winning by any means necessary. It can cause situations where even the parents are retaliating or plotting against the opposition (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005).

Lack of Knowledge

Much of the remaining acts of violence can be attributed to a simple lack of knowledge in regard to the sports and the acceptable behaviors associated with it. If parents are new to the sport they will not understand its culture and rules. This can increase the likelihood of

inappropriate behavior at the events (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005). Parents are greatly influenced by what they see in professional sports because they truly believe it is part of the game. The mass media has been their only exposure to sport, so that is the example they cite (Cox, 2001).

Many spectators are also influenced by the behavior of the coaches. Coaches don't realize that they are serving as role models not only to the athletes, but also to the parents. If the coaches are acting out, yelling at referees, or storming the court, the parents will see those actions as acceptable in the sports venue. Coaches specialize in their sports, so they are the ones who are best able to demonstrate the differences between what is acceptable in each individual sport's culture (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005). If they are not demonstrating the proper behaviors, the children and parents will both learn that violence is proper behavior and will act accordingly.

Parent violence is a significant threat to the safety of the event staff, coaches, and athletes. Their lack of knowledge for the sport, financial investment both in the present and in their child's future, emotional attachment, and ego, can each impact their reactions to what is occurring over the course of the game. This can also manifest itself as an attack on officials, compromising their safety and the integrity of the game.

Officials

Effects of Violence to Officials

Game officials are an important part of each tournament. They control the activity on the playing surface, and they are necessary to ensure a fair game is played. Unfortunately the acts of violence they are subject to are taking its toll. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find officials willing to staff youth sport events, particularly in smaller venues where security is not present. The officials are seeing a willingness on the part of parents and athletes to commit physical acts of violence against them. The lack of protection has caused the officials to fear for

their safety (Cox, 2001). While it had been common for sports spectators to yell insults toward game officials, the intensity of these situations has increased, and its effect can be detrimental to both the quality of competition as well as the safety in the venues (Nack & Munson, 2000). Violence toward game officials has become significant enough to prompt the NASO to offer assault insurance and provide legal advice to members who have been attacked (Butterfield, 2000). Further proof of the severity of the situation come through medical funding offered in the event of an assault. The issue was becoming so common that medical reimbursement began to be offered to officials who have been attacked on the playing surface (“Parent Violence,” 2000).

The problems with staffing officials aren’t limited to one specific sport. Adult soccer referees have been declining assignments for youth events, and high school referees are being used more frequently (Nack & Munson, 2000). Hockey referees in Canada were reported to have boycotted youth sport events until the problems could become better controlled (Deacon et al., 2001). Even younger officials are beginning to leave officiating more frequently, since their ages make them easier targets (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2005). According to a report from Manitoba, two-thirds of the soccer referees who are trained and certified to officiate quit before the end of their first year working as a referee (Deacon et al., 2001). These situations will affect the venues for these events because having fewer referees on the playing surface will equate to less control and security over the game’s progress. This could increase the likelihood of violence to occur in the venues.

Protecting Officials

Professional sports venues are controlled by a team of security personnel. This is not the case in youth sport venues. Youth sport venues provide the greatest threat to game officials. The parents are seated close to the games, and may even be permitted to stand on the sidelines. There

are limited barriers and security personnel between the parents and the officials. This causes a dangerous situation if the parents become unruly (Cox, 2001). The challenge extends throughout the facility at all times. Lack of secure locations can also affect the officials after game time, since their personal vehicles are often parked in exposed locations with the rest of the participants and spectators. Youth sport venues do not offer a safe way to exit both the competition area and the sports venue as a whole (Nack & Munson, 2000).

The lack of security can make officials and their belongings vulnerable. In a professional setting, security would escort an offending spectator or athlete from the venue. They would not be unsupervised until they had completely vacated the property. In youth settings the offender is often requested to leave, and will generally only be controlled within a short distance of the playing area (Cox, 2001). This leaves them with visibility of the timeframe of the game, and opens up the official to additional harassment once the game has ended (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Spectators have been known to cause damage to the official's property. It becomes much easier for an angry spectator to identify the personal items belonging to the officials and cause damage when they are parked in the same lot (Splete, 2001). This easy access also opens the opportunity for angry people to access the officials as they are trying to leave. They can be harassed both verbally and physically trying to leave the venues and reach their cars to go home (Nack & Munson, 2000).

The size of the venues also affects the safety of the officials if they are remaining for another game. Often youth sport tournament venues consist of multiple playing surfaces. These facilities will often provide locker room areas for the officials to use, but restrooms and food venues may be shared with the public. Leaving the playing surface at halftime or the end of a

tense game can prove to become challenging situations since the rest of the attendees have the same level of access available to them (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Many outside influences are causing athletes and parents to react violently while in their youth sport situations. This can be caused by a lack of sportsmanship shown by the coaches and other role models, influence of the media, financial implications for both parents and athletes, or even just a simple lack of knowledge in regard to what is and is not acceptable. It is also beginning to affect game officials, who are becoming less willing to work at games involving youth athletes out of fear for their own safety. Some local sports organizations, communities, and state legislatures have recognized this challenge and have begun to attempt solutions to ensure safety for all involved.

Attempted Solutions

Legislation

States throughout the US have responded with legislature to increase the levels of protection offered in response to the increase in frequency and the gravity of incidents of violence in youth sport. One of the first laws enacted to protect sports officials was created in the early 1990s in Pennsylvania. This law considers the assault of a sports official a misdemeanor, and under the guidelines of this law the penalties for the assault are up to five years in jail as well as a \$10,000 fine (Cholodofsky, 2007). Assault in Pennsylvania is defined as a situation where a person (1) attempts to cause or intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causes bodily injury to another; (2) negligently causes bodily injury to another with a deadly weapon; (3) attempts by physical menace to put another in fear of imminent serious bodily injury; or (4) conceals or attempts to conceal a hypodermic needle on his person and intentionally or knowingly penetrates a law enforcement officer or an officer or an employee of a

correctional institution, county jail or prison, detention facility or mental hospital during the course of an arrest or any search of the person (Penn. Gen. Laws ch. 27, § 2712, 1990). By 2009 the number of states that had developed this type of legislation had increased to include at least 21. These laws protect both youth sport officials and coaches from violent situations (Sullivan, 2009).

Rhode Island developed legislation to protect youth sport officials and players from both verbal harassment and any kind of physical harm inflicted upon them. This harm is considered assault. This bill considered assault on these parties to be a felony. The penalties for committing the crime of assault would be up to three years imprisonment, a \$1,500 fine, or both. The bill also protected these parties from harassment. A person who harasses one of these parties could be charged with a misdemeanor and receive a penalty of 30 days in prison, a \$500 fine, or both (Legislative Press & Information Bureau, 2007).

Laws protecting youth sport officials in Illinois were originally introduced in January 2004 and passed in March of that year. Under this law, verbal harassment of a game official or coach is considered a Class A misdemeanor. The penalty for this is 364 days in jail as well as a \$1,000 fine. Physical assault on a game official or coach carries with it a penalty of 364 days in jail, a \$2,000 fine, and the requirement of participation in classes for anger management (Schaumburg Athletic Association, 2008).

In New Jersey a law was passed that commands an aggravated assault charge against an individual found guilty of a physical attack against another individual during youth sport events (Fiore, 2003). Usually limited to violence including deadly weapons, severe bodily harm, or assault on an officer, this charge was expanded to include anyone at a youth sport event, regardless of how minor the physical act (NJ Gen. Laws 2c: 12-1). A bill signed in the state also

permits school boards and athletic organizations to develop their own code of conduct for their sporting events. Also included in this is the ruling if any attendee of these events, including fans, coaches, and players, lose their temper they will not be permitted to return to the games until an anger management course has been completed. A Massachusetts Governor's Committee implemented a parent code of conduct that all parents of athletes are required to sign prior to attending a youth sport event in the state (Fiore, 2003).

Youth Sport Leagues

Youth sport leagues are also taking action to combat the acts of violence. One method is for teams within leagues to implement a "Day of Silence." This method can be carried out in one of two ways. In one example parents are permitted to attend games, but must stay silent during the day's activities. The silence helps to decrease the likelihood of a comment or argument turning into a physical altercation (Cox, 2001). Others will exclude the parents from the playing area to avoid the tension as well as an uncontrolled outburst (Fields et al., 2010). Some areas will also forbid parents from attending practices or sitting on the same side of the athletes at a game. This reduces the opportunity for a violent interaction (Omli & LaVoi, 2009).

The idea of a Day of Silence has been challenged by critics. Many feel that the behavior of the spectators will influence the behavior of the athletes. While this may be true and prove beneficial in the area of negative behavior, it is also detrimental to the area of positive behavior. Days of Silence do not permit the fans to cheer or clap for the teams. This is eliminating the possibility for children to learn positive behavior at sports venues through positive examples (Fields et al., 2010). In further support of the idea of setting a positive example, the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) suggests publishing notes for parents to remind them that their actions have an effect on their children. They remind the parents in attendance that they

should accept the decisions of the officials without arguing or insulting them, the athletes, or each other. It reduces the stress of the environment, creating a more positive experience for the athletes and setting a positive example (Cox, 2001). This could be done through signage in the venues or through seminars for parents and coaches.

The challenge of violence in youth sport has become such a major concern that individual states are taking action to penalize offenders. Some are enacting programs to discourage parents from becoming violent and encourage them to behave with proper behavior. Youth sport leagues have attempted such solutions as Days of Silence, during which spectators are not permitted to make any noise, positive or negative. While some have found it to be beneficial, it has not always received the most positive response. Further research has been done on additional measures that can be taken to prevent violence in youth sport. These include various programs and policies that have been enacted as preventative measures against violence.

Attempted Preventative Measures

Positive Reinforcement

Just as it is important to provide an example of positive behavior, it is also beneficial to reward a positive reaction to a potentially dangerous situation. Studies have shown that children react well to positive reinforcement, so offering praise when an athlete reacts with good sportsmanship during a situation that has the potential to erupt into a fight can have a positive lasting effect (Stankovich, 2010).

Many organizations are also turning to rewards such as certificates or awards for positive behavior. Studies show that when players approach the game with a positive attitude they have more fun. When they are having more fun, they treat each other better. Providing them with an

incentive to make positive behavior occur turns into a win-win situation, since the children are having more fun and the parties involved in the event are safe (Wells, 2006).

Part of a conference held for sports events planners and organizers focused on the issue of violence in youth sport. Scott Kelley, the director of the Center for Sports Marketing at the University of Kentucky was a guest speaker on the subject. He promotes the idea, and feels that rewarding good behavior encourages children to make better decisions. He feels that rewards can act as incentives to make the right decisions (Martin, 2012). Groups that are forming codes and policies for their youth sport activity are even taking action to ensure that the wording is positive. Rather than simply stating what is not allowed, it encourages positive behavior by promising positive results (McMahon & Sharpe, 2006)

Positive reinforcement also is effective on eliminating pressure on the athletes. For example, a coach who recognizes that not all athletes have reached the same skill level should still encourage the ones who are not as skilled. Just as the coach will offer praise for the athletes who succeeds, recognizing a genuine effort from an unsuccessful athlete will make them feel less pressure (Herbert, 2000). Positive reinforcement is also reflected within teams. Coaches are encouraging their athletes to thank those who have helped them throughout the entire game. It creates a team effort and eliminates the pressure on one individual (Cox, 2001).

Zero-Tolerance Policy

One of the more debated methods of controlling violence is a zero-tolerance policy. Many areas have put these policies into use. A hockey association in Nova Scotia, Canada, developed their policy in 1994, and has reported a decline in the amount of harassment and assault cases reported (Deacon et al., 2001). Utilizing a zero-tolerance policy requires an immediate response with severe consequences. The consequences are designed so that the

individual remembers them and is discouraged from committing the same act again in the future. Under this policy teams and individuals are often banned from returning to the venue following offensive or dangerous behavior (Stankovich, 2010).

There are arguments as to the effectiveness of these zero-tolerance policies. Although the association in Nova Scotia reported a decrease in occurrences of harassment, another study performed found that most communities did not report the same effect (Fields et al., 2010). Other arguments regarding the zero tolerance policy find that children respond to the consequences by acting out further since they tend to see these consequences as a personal attack rather than as a disciplinary action. It also argues that children will lose their trust in the adults around them if they feel they have been singled out, which will further increase the likelihood of repeating the offense (McMahon & Sharpe, 2006).

Increased Staffing

Other communities and venues have attempted increasing staffing in the venues to respond to the situations. These staff members in the venues have received courses on conflict resolution and mediation in order to improve their response to the altercations. They are trained to respond before the conflict reaches a dangerous level (Noah, 2009). They are often placed strategically throughout the venue to monitor the behavior of the spectators and athletes (Wolohan, 2002). These employees are also tasked with the responsibility of issuing warnings when the behavior is beginning to approach an unacceptable status (Engh, 2007).

A stronger force of increased staffing can be found in other areas. Some venues are choosing to request a police presence at their events. This can deter the parents and athletes from acting in a violent manner. Unfortunately the verbal harassment is often ignored by the police, so the incidents will still increase in tension (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005). Some will hire off-duty

police to remain at the venues throughout the entire event. While this can be an expensive measure, a potential solution would be to include part of the cost of the security into the registration fees paid by the teams (Engh, 2007).

Codes and Facility Policies

One method tried by many venues and organizations is to establish a code of conduct. This method attempts to ensure that all participants and spectators are aware of which types of behavior are acceptable. For example, it is important to stress to coaches that questioning a call is permissible; however it must be done in a respectful manner. Interactions should never be forceful or vengeful (Silverman, 2011). Publishing the codes enables the venues and organizations to hold the participants and spectators accountable for their actions. In a venue these have been most effective when placed at the entrance where it is visible to all who are in attendance (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2005). Other organizations have required the participants and spectators to sign the code (Deacon et al., 2001). It has also been proven effective to sign a pledge against violence in addition to the general codes of conduct (Silverman, 2010).

One group in Minnesota, the Northfield Youth Baseball Association (NYBA), also displays their hierarchy of discipline. This is published along with the code of conduct to give spectators and participants knowledge of the consequences for their actions. This is a three step process, beginning with a warning given to the coaches of the teams involved. This gives the coaches an opportunity to control the situation before it escalates. The next step is to give the disruptive individual a warning. The final step is to stop competition until the disruptive individual leaves or is escorted from the venue. The second step is skipped if the behavior has escalated to a dangerous point. The goal of this process is to control the violent behavior before

it begins while still giving the parents and athletes the opportunity to experience the event (White, 2003).

Many venues will enlist the assistance of the spectators and officials to identify potentially disruptive or dangerous fans. They post text messaging numbers to which these individuals can send anonymous tips. They also publicize the location of a safety and security area where others can report concerns. This ensures that the spectators and participants all realize that their behavior is being monitored, regardless of who is present. Reporting disruptive behavior early can help to control a situation before it gets out of hand (Wakefield & Wann, 2006).

Seminars

A final method attempted is to provide seminars to the parents, coaches, and officials. Each takes a different approach while still attempting to control the challenge of violence at the sports events.

Seminars for coaches and officials primarily focused on identifying and controlling parent and athlete behavior. The National Foundation Against Violence in Youth sport (NFAVYS) has created videos for coaches and officials to be shown at seminars. These videos demonstrate different behaviors for parents and athletes that are considered unacceptable and that should trigger a warning (Lynch, 2006). The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has collaborated with NAYS to develop seminars for coaches to certify them in reducing violence. These seminars are two hours in length. Parents and coaches alike have responded positively to the seminars and the empowerment and accountability given to the coaches when controlling the situations among their own parents and athletes (Fiore, 2003).

The seminars for parents include a variety of different topics and can be presented through various methods, including speakers, videos, and brochures. The NFAVYS uses videos to demonstrate both acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for a sports venue. They also create pamphlets that can be kept after the seminar as well as distributed at games (Lynch, 2006). A study has also been done that suggests the use of an anger-awareness portion of the seminar. This would also incorporate the education on relaxation techniques as a way to control rage (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). These methods are suggested due to a study conducted that found similarities between rage at youth sport and road rage. These techniques have been found to help in road rage, so attempting to use them in the case of sports rage could also be beneficial (Daniel, 2011).

A video was created for use in seminars for parents of youth tennis athletes. This covers behavior from all stages of the match, including prior to competition and immediately after the match. The video is paused each time a different scenario is played out to give the parents an opportunity to respond to it. The organizers find this method very effective, as the parents are able to visually comprehend why the behavior is unacceptable without being personally called out for having committed the wrongdoing (Walsh, 2001).

The first athletic association to mandate parent participation in the programs was the Jupiter-Tequesta Athletic Association in Florida (Fiore, 2003). Many youth sport organizations are also requiring the participation of parents in these seminars as a condition for their children to be permitted to compete. A youth football league in New Castle, Delaware, required this participation before the children were permitted to receive their equipment (Toporek, 2011). One seminar program in El Paso, Texas, includes mandatory participation so that parents may

also learn the rules of each sport and how they differ for youth as opposed to college or professional sports (Splete, 2001).

The organizations as well as private surveys have recorded improvements in regard to parent behavior in the locations requiring participation in seminars. After the first 6,000 parents completed the course in Jupiter, Florida, the association noted a marked improvement with no immediate code violations (Fiore, 2003). A survey was conducted in regard to a program developed by NAYS found athletes, coaches, and parents in agreement that the seminar programs were effective. Eighty-five percent of coaches, 76% of parents, and 57% of the athletes noted an improvement in parents' behaviors. The surveys also found that over 80% of both parents and coaches preferred to continue the requirement of attending the program (Bach, 2002). The success of these programs was so immediate and evident that 175 other communities promptly implemented their own programs as early as the year 2000 (Anonymous, 2000).

Youth sport is becoming significantly more prone to violent situations, particularly in the competitive realm of a tournament. Athletes have been involved in brawls that have both stopped games and occurred after them. Some fighting has led to the arrest of the youth athletes because of the violent nature of them. Foul play can also lead to brawling due to the retaliation efforts of those who feel they have been wronged.

The causes of these situations can be attributed to many factors, including poor influence from parents, coaches, and other role models. The youth athletes tend to model their behavior from an adult they admire, so if those adults are poor influences the children will not react in a positive way. Many are feeling pressure from their parents and coaches in terms of their performance levels, and others may react to a perceived insult or unfair situation.

Parents have been involved in a number of violent situations, with some resulting in death. These situations can be acted out toward each other, sports officials, coaches, or athletes. Many react through the desire to protect their children, or because of the connection felt to them. Others act as a result of reliving their youth, while others may react with an opposite motivator from their lack of knowledge since they have never played the sport.

Many of these situations have resulted in a lack of officials being willing to work in youth sport venues. These officials are not given as much security as a professional sports venue could provide, so they are under a constant threat of being assaulted or having their personal items damaged or destroyed. Legislation has taken many steps to protect these officials by punishing offenders with high fines and jail time.

Many communities and organizations have taken steps to combat youth sport violence. These methods include days of silence, positive reinforcement and rewarding, zero-tolerance policies, increased staffing, instituting codes of conduct, and requiring seminars. Each of these programs generally has a positive result, although some have found challenges with being completely effective. Seminars for parents, coaches, and officials have proven to be the most effective in youth sport events.

PART III

Professional Implications

The project started with a literature view which has explored the types of violence involved in the youth sport atmosphere, the motivators for these acts. The paper also explored attempted solutions to combat these situations. These reports have shown a need for an action plan for youth sport event venues in order to protect their staff and guests in the extreme situations. The reported effectiveness and feasibility for a sports event venue will be considered. Finally, this analysis will be used to develop both preventive and reactive plans for violent situations in youth sport venues.

Feasibility of Options

While Days of Silence have been found to be effective in limiting aggressive behavior among spectators and athletes, it has also been challenged for its inability to provide positive reinforcement. A Day of Silence does not allow for clapping or cheering at the events, so the children do not get to receive any praise. The children are then unable to learn positive behaviors to display at youth sport events since they have no example to follow (Fields et al., 2010). Positive behavior has an effect on youth, just as negative behavior does. Children tend to feed off of the praise awarded to them (Stankovitch, 2010). They could also receive the opportunity to witness and learn from positive behavior if the parents were to clap or praise them or the other team. Allowing spectators to exhibit sportsmanlike conduct toward the athletes and spectators of the other team, all coaches, and officials will stand out in the minds of the children. They are impressionable and all behaviors are affected by the behavior they see demonstrated by those they look up to.

Days of Silence are also not necessarily feasible in a youth sport venue. The type of environment involved is typically larger than the one court or field that will be used for school athletic events. The sheer number of attendees involved could make it more difficult to police for complete silence as opposed to just negative behavior.

Positive reinforcement is a beneficial act to take to remind youth athletes that sportsmanship is encouraged. Whether it's in regard to their performance on the field or in response to them dealing in a sportsmanlike manner to an action that had the potential to be volatile, positive reinforcement will show them that good behavior is the preferred action to take. This can include good words and reactions, as well as rewarding teams or individuals for showing sportsmanship throughout a game or tournament. The effects of rewards and positive reinforcement have overflowed into how much enjoyment the athletes are getting out of the competition (Wells, 2006).

This can be implemented in a sports venue; however it would be directly from the event staff. Parents and spectators can be encouraged to provide positive reinforcement, but mandating that they do is difficult to enforce. This can be done by the event staff by announcing an award for sportsmanship prior to the start of the tournament. The athletes can be voted on by the event staff and coaches, or teams that demonstrate sportsmanship can be awarded points throughout the duration of the event and receive an award at the conclusion.

Zero-tolerance policies are effective, yet difficult to define. The effectiveness has been proven in the community who reported a decline in the amount of harassment and assault cases since the enactment of theirs (Deacon et al., 2001). While the name alone would suggest that no negative acts would be tolerated, the policy would need to determine where that begins. Casual conversation between parents about the officiating or poor performance would not seem to pose

a risk to become a violent situation; however if an athlete were to overhear the conversation the situation could have the potential to escalate. Additional violent outbursts have been reported to be possible, since some children may lose their trust in the adults around them if they feel they have been singled out. At that point they do not turn to the adults to help them with their situations, but rather take things into their own hands. (McMahon & Sharpe, 2006). It can also cause challenges when the situation is reported, but not witnessed by staff.

It is feasible for an event facility to enforce a zero-tolerance policy. The policy would need to be clearly defined and communicated. It should include what acts are included in the policy, as well as what the repercussions will be for those caught acting outside of those guidelines.

Increasing staffing is an effective way to respond to acts of violence. This can be done with both additional employees and security staff. Increased staffing can also be effective in identifying the potential for a volatile situation and reacting before it escalates provided the employees have received proper training. Communities have reported success by adding staff that have been specially trained to handle conflict before it reaches dangerous levels (Noah, 2009). It is also beneficial to utilize off-duty law enforcement officers as added security for events that have the reputation of becoming intense or in situations where known rivals with histories of confrontation are involved in a competition. Both of these staffing increases have proven to be beneficial when the staff members are placed strategically throughout the venues to monitor high risk areas and respond to or report any potentially violent situations (Wolohan, 2002).

This is feasible for an event venue to implement for its competition procedures. While it would require a training session for all new employees, as well as for existing employees to

remain current on policies and procedures, it would be an easily implemented practice. It would also be beneficial to provide off-duty police officers for situations known to have the potential of being particularly volatile. The cost for this could be worked into the event registration and ticket prices.

Establishing codes of conduct and facility policies are effective; however they must be communicated clearly. It enables the venue to hold participants and spectators accountable for their own behavior. A group in Minnesota also displays their hierarchy of discipline along with their codes to ensure all in attendance understand the repercussions for violent acts (White, 2003). They have also been effective when displayed prominently at the facility, and when communicated to the coaches and athletes upon registration. These have been reported to have been most effective when placed at the entrance where it is visible to all who are in attendance (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005).

These codes are also effective when the guests have the ability to report poor behavior they are witnessing. Some venues publish text messaging numbers for the purpose of providing anonymous tips. Showing the participants and spectators that they are being monitored at all times has the effect of making them more conscious of the decisions and behaviors. They also publicize the location of a safety and security area where others can report concerns. These reporting methods help in preventing a situation early enough to keep it under control (Wakefield & Wann, 2006).

This would be feasible in an event venue provided the codes were prominently displayed at the entrance to all venues. It would be best communicated to the coaches and athletes at registration, and they could be required to sign a contract with their participation waivers stating that they have received the rules and are aware of the consequences should they break the code

of conduct. It has also been proven effective to have all participants sign a pledge against violence when they sign the code of conduct (Silverman, 2010).

Seminars are effective in communicating with a greater amount of parties involved in the youth sport event. Eighty-five percent of coaches, 76% of parents, and 57% of the athletes noted an improvement in parents' behaviors after attending these seminars. They were so effective that over 80% of both parents and coaches would choose to continue the requirement of attending a program (Bach, 2002). Offering seminars for game officials as a requirement for their being scheduled to work the event helps to ensure that they are properly trained in identifying aggressive behavior and knowing the procedures involved in reporting and controlling the situation. Mandatory seminars for coaches have been proven effective in reducing the amount of athlete and spectator violence, as it empowers the coaches to be responsible for their team's and fans' behaviors. It also helps to teach the coaches techniques for controlling aggression, which could help them to better control the athletes.

Parent seminars have been found to be effective among local youth sport organizations. Many of their seminars will feature videos that provide them to enact what they have learned and apply it to a real situation. These are usually very effective since they are given a visual aid to see where the wrongdoing has occurred without being singled out for demonstrating that behavior (Walsh, 2001). Others will utilize videos that demonstrate positive and negative behavior for the venues. Brochures and pamphlets are distributed at both the seminars and games to remind the parents of the lessons they have learned at the seminars (Lynch, 2006).

Another study linked the reaction to road rage to the reaction to sports rage (Daniel, 2011). Studies also suggest the use of an anger-awareness segment to incorporate in the seminar. It teaches the participants different methods and techniques to control their rage (Goldstein &

Iso-Ahola, 2008). The use of these techniques have proven effective for road rage, the study suggests that applying it to youth sport circumstances will have the same effect (Daniel, 2011).

Seminars are feasible within youth sport venues in a tailored capacity. Mandating that coaches and officials attend separate seminars on registration day would ensure that all attend and receive the information. It would not be feasible to track parent participation in a large event venue, so creating literature to be distributed to the parents either by the coaches or upon entrance to the venue could help to communicate the message to them. The seminars used have been so successful, that studies have shown that committing to using them to prevent violence will decrease occurrences of it (Ellis, 2006).

Based upon the literature and analysis of the options available for responding to and preventing violence in youth sport venues, the only solution that would not be feasible would be Days of Silence. The ability to ensure that all spectators in a large sports venue remained silent for the entire day would not be easily guaranteed. It also has not been proven to be completely effective, as it does not allow for praise.

Venue Specific

The first step that could be taken to assist in controlling violent situations would be to increase staffing in the venue. As evidenced by the studies cited in the literature review, increasing staffing would guarantee there would always be an employee of the venue at each playing area to quickly and effectively report or stop a rising conflict. Increasing staffing would be the first step toward providing a safe environment. Providing additional staff and security would increase the response and reaction times when a violent situation begins. They will require training on the proper procedures for reporting, including the hierarchy of who to call for specific situations and the process involved in reaching those personnel. Security and event staff should

also receive training in conflict resolution and safety protocol to ensure that all situations are handled quickly, effectively, and safely. They will also need to be trained on evacuation procedures if a violent situation escalates before help can arrive. This would assist them in ensuring the remaining guests exit the area quickly and safely.

Provided background knowledge of the event, its characteristics, and its known challenges are realized, utilizing off-duty police officers as a portion of the increased staffing would be beneficial during high-tension times. These individuals are trained to handle violent situations that go beyond the scope of what is anticipated in a normal competitive environment. The management at the event venue should research the event to discover where the potential for increasingly volatile situations lies. They should know if there will be elimination rounds in the event that will increase tensions, or if there is a situation where rivals with a history of disagreements will be competing against one another. They can then use this information to determine whether or not additional, stronger security will be required. When deemed appropriate and necessary, the event venue should make it a priority to hire off-duty law enforcement officials to patrol the games and control the violent situations.

Educating Individuals

The remaining options could each be tailored to work appropriately within the youth sport event venue. As noted within the previous research, seminars tend to be the most effective way to prevent violence in youth sport. This is why the primary option would be to hold short seminars for officials and coaches during which codes of conduct, policies, conflict resolution techniques, reward systems, and identifying factors would all be communicated. These seminars would basically combine all attempted techniques to use the best practices from each. Holding the seminars guarantees that all participants receive the same information. Each independent

venue would have rules that pertain to their specific operational needs and standards, yet the seminars would be a uniform way to communicate important information to keep staff and guests safe in a competitive environment.

The coaches and officials should be required to attend seminars as a condition of their involvement in the event. Each coach and official would need to be required to sign in at the beginning of the seminar. Coaches should be required to sign a contract at the end of the seminar to agree that they understand and will abide by the rules and regulations presented to them. This will also assist in tracking whether or not the coaches remained at the seminar for its entirety. Officials should not receive their finalized game schedules until they have completed the course, which will serve as a way of tracking which officials have completed the seminars.

The use of videos, speakers, and collateral at the seminars would work to ensure that all general behavior and sport specific guidelines remain the same regardless of the venue. The videos will demonstrate different rules and behaviors that are deemed acceptable or unacceptable for the competition's environment. For example, a video regarding sportsmanlike conduct at a basketball game, specifically addressing the rules for fair play and foul play, would be universal. This would educate officials and coaches from different events and venues with the same general information.

The speakers will review the information provided in the collateral, which will include a guide to the basics of the particular sport, the codes of conduct and policies of the venue, and the positive reinforcement reward system that will be in place for the duration of the tournament. This will explain in detail how each situation will be approached, and the consequences for poor behavior. It will also detail the process involved for choosing the team or individuals who will receive the awards for sportsmanship. The coaches will additionally receive brochures to

distribute to the parents of their athletes. They should also be made aware of the locations of the posted codes of conduct at the venue, as well as the availability for the parents to receive additional collateral in regard to the policies at the entrance to the venue.

The success of these attempted seminars inspires the idea of creating a generalized training seminar for all who touch the event, including employees. The same conflict resolution, identification techniques, and codes of conduct could be introduced to the staff, particularly once it has been increased. This would help the staff to identify the same standards and behavior as is communicated to the coaches and officials. This would help in eliminating miscommunication regarding what is appropriate for the venue, and would better prepare the staff to handle irate guests and athletes in a safe and efficient manner.

There are additional topics that would be covered at the specific seminars for each group. The seminars for officials should additionally cover conflict resolution techniques, as well as techniques for identifying situations that are about to become out of control. They should be trained on the safety procedures for the venue, and should also be made to understand that they are the authority within the game, but if they have lost control of the situation to a point where reinforcement is called in they will relinquish that power to security, staff, or law enforcement specially trained in controlling guest and staff safety and violent situations.

The coaches should also be given collateral to bring back to their athletes, and should receive the message that they are the ultimate influences on the playing area for their athletes. They should understand that the children will act according to what they are seeing, and not just upon what they are told. They should leave with the understanding that they can shape the type of athlete the children will be in regard to morals and sportsmanship.

The use of seminars with the generalized information will help to ensure that all parties involved are presented with training that does not conflict with what another party is learning. It is still important, however, to tailor the remaining information to each particular group so they understand how they individually will impact the athletes and the competition environment. This teaches them what responsibilities are theirs and empowers them to act appropriately.

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