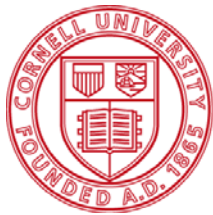


POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND NUTRITION IN SPORTS

Study Report by:



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
New York City

*Funding for this study was made possible through a generous grant from
The After School Project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*

2005

About Cornell University Cooperative Extension—NYC (CUCE-NYC)

The Cornell Cooperative Extension system enables people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that link the research of Cornell University to the issues of our communities. The Cornell Cooperative Extension Program in New York City has been providing direct assistance to citizens in all the Boroughs for over fifty years with a staff in excess of sixty-five. The Manhattan Campus of Cornell University includes the Weill Medical College, Industrial Labor Relations Extension, Theory Center, and Cornell Cooperative Extension providing a broad array of education and research services.

The practices of CUCE-NYC programs and technical assistance are driven by the expressed needs of the communities of New York and reflect the best of what research has to offer. We work in collaborative partnerships with public and private organizations at the city, state and national levels.

CUCE-NYC has extensive experience in the areas of family and youth development, nutrition and health, and the urban environment. Currently, extension educators are providing education to thousands of residents of New York in topics including; AIDS Education, Parenting Skills, Personal Finance, Work Force Preparation, College Preparation, Food Security, Nutrition, Obesity, and more. CUCE-NYC is a close and valued partner among many of the most known and respected youth and family serving agencies in New York City.



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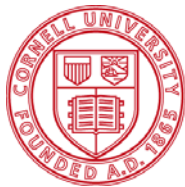
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Harlem RBI
Harlem PAL
NY Jr. Tennis League
Long Island Trotters
MNI Sport
Police Athletic League (PAL)
South Jamaica PAL
Sports and Arts in Schools
Sport in Society
Team Up for Youth
The After School Corporation
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YMCA of Greater NYC
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YMCA of South Jamaica
YMCA of Staten Island

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(E. Ichinose)

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Executive Summary



(T. Briganti)



(E. Ichinose)

Why look at youth development and nutrition in sports?

Overweight and obesity of children have reached epidemic proportions, leading to unprecedented health consequences.^{1,2} Poor nutrition, insufficient physical activity, and excessive time spent in sedentary activities are some of the contributing factors to this problem.

Approximately forty million youth participate in various sports programs, with about 56% of 5-10 year-olds engaging in sports.³ Youth become involved in sports because they are interested in developing and demonstrating physical competence, gaining social acceptance and support, and having fun.⁴ Unfortunately, up to 70% of youth who play sports will stop by age 12, reportedly because they are no longer having fun, experience too much pressure, or do not like the coach.⁵ Yet, research shows that physical activity that continues into young adulthood is a preventive measure for obesity and poor health.⁶

Strategies are needed to encourage youth to stay involved in sports programs through adolescence into adulthood. Positive youth development principles and practices have effectively engaged young people in a variety of program settings. Incorporating these principles and practices within sports programs serve to improve the well-being of youth and may help retain them in sports activities. Once young people are engaged in sports programs, opportunities exist for introducing nutrition concepts and healthy eating practices.

An increasing number of researchers, practitioners and policy makers are recognizing that sports programs exist in a larger context and are looking at youth and sports in the context of families, schools, and the community. Through their knowledge and beliefs, modeling, shaping, and by making healthy foods and physical activity accessible, parents and families significantly affect their children's nutritional and physical activity practices.⁷ Similarly, the environment of the community can and does shape the family's opportunities to choose healthy foods and to lead an active lifestyle.^{8,9}

Sports programs are a logical venue to reinforce the well-being of young people. Since so many youth engage in these programs, improving youth development and nutrition practices in these settings can have wide-reaching and long-lasting consequences. Coaches are vital to the successful implementation of this approach, making it essential that they are trained to incorporate positive youth development, nutrition and hydration practices effectively into their work.

The purposes of this study are:

- to gain insight about the extent to which current youth sports programs in a variety of settings include positive youth development and nutrition information and practices; and
- to learn about the content of a select group of large-scale, established coach training programs and the gaps that exist in current training initiatives in relation to positive youth development and nutrition.

In this study, the term "positive youth development" describes an approach that focuses on youth's strengths, which are utilized as the basis for action. Youth development can also apply to an organized set of activities that facilitate a young person's capacity to grow.¹⁰ In this report, the terms "positive youth development" and "youth development" are used interchangeably. "Nutritional practices" are defined as maximizing healthy eating and hydration options.¹¹



(E. Ichinose)

About Cornell University Cooperative Extension—NYC

This study was conducted by Cornell University Cooperative Extension-New York City (CUCE-NYC). The mission of the Cooperative Extension System is to enable people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and research knowledge to work. CUCE-NYC has extensive experience in the areas of both nutrition & health and family & youth development.

CUCE-NYC is uniquely situated in the neighborhoods of New York City. Through its Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), indigenous paraprofessionals are employed to provide practical nutrition education to limited resource audiences. Typically the paraprofessional educators are hired from the communities they serve and then are trained in nutrition content and educational techniques.¹² For over 40 years, the indigenous paraprofessional model has been used for program delivery in many human service programs. Indigenous paraprofessionals have more credibility with participants as role models and sources of practical information because they:

- share similar values,
- possess greater empathy and understanding, and
- have better rapport and communication.¹²

CUCE-NYC's Family and Youth Development programs support youth and families by providing opportunities for both youth and adults to reach their full potential. The Youth Development program is part of the national youth development network known as 4-H. In settings throughout New York City, such as afterschool programs, community agencies, classrooms, clubs, and youth councils, youth strengthen their leadership, citizenship and life skills through participation in hands-on, experiential activities. Emphasis is placed on preparing youth workers, volunteers, teachers and community agency leaders to work with youth. Through CUCE Family Development programs, workshops are offered to agency leaders and parent groups in order to strengthen parenting and communication skills.

CUCE-NYC is highly qualified to design and conduct research, and to disseminate the results of this study because of its:

- link to faculty and researchers at Cornell University,
- experience and collaborative relationships with NYC community leaders, and
- network of partners with county, state and national Extension offices.

How did we study youth development and nutrition in sports?

Data for this study were collected using multiple approaches:

1. Self-administered surveys were completed by directors, coaches, youth and parents at ten mega and seven large youth sports programs in New York City and Long Island. ("Mega" organizations are defined as nationally-affiliated agencies with a presence in most, if not all, of the five boroughs of New York City. "Large" organizations are defined as locally-affiliated programs that serve broad communities within at least one borough.)
2. Focus groups were held with directors and coaches of youth sports programs.
3. Informational interviews were conducted with leaders of national youth coach training organizations.
4. The coach training curricula of national organizations were analyzed according to the eight domains of the National Standards for Athletic Coaches (NSAC).

Surveys

Forty-two coaches and directors, 102 youth and 95 parents from New York City and Long Island youth sports programs participated in surveys. The programs were selected based on the number of young people served, type of sport offered, location

of the program, number of sites, age group of the participants, and national or local affiliation. The sports included in the study were basketball, football, boxing, baseball, gymnastics, softball, karate, swimming, tennis, soccer, and track and field.

The data collection tools were designed to assess the extent to which six categories of youth development were practiced in the program. These categories include:

- physical and psychological safety and well-being,
- supportive relationships between young people and staff,
- opportunities to belong,
- opportunities for skill building,
- support for efficacy and mattering, and
- opportunities for recognition.¹³

In addition, questions were asked about the type of foods provided for snacks and celebrations, and about nutrition education and hydration practices. Directors and coaches were asked about coach training.

Focus Groups

Nine directors and coaches participated in the focus groups. The categories of focus group questions included program goals, program impacts, coach recruitment and training, relationships with parents, awareness of nutrition and hydration practices of players, barriers to implementing positive youth development and nutrition practices, and recommendations.

Informational Interviews

Informational interviews were conducted with leaders of five models of national coach training programs. Questions included inquiries about the current practices of the programs, knowledge of national and local coaching practices, and visions for coach training.

Coach Training Curricula Review

Using the eight domains of knowledge and ability of

the NSAC, fourteen national coach education training programs were reviewed and analyzed to determine the extent to which the curricula include youth development, nutrition and hydration practices. The programs were selected based on the survey responses of directors and coaches, feedback from informational interviews, and peer referrals from coach education programs.

What did we learn and what does it mean?

- **Most youth and parents indicated that the youth “always” felt safe at their sports program. They also indicated that most youth felt as if they “always” fit in with their team, were able to make and keep friends, and received praise from their coach when they try and work hard.** This comfortable and trusting environment serves as a solid foundation for introducing youth and their families to additional information and practices related to health and well-being.
- **Most coach training curricula include limited information related to nutrition, hydration and the essentials for healthy youth development.** This is significant because coaches are important messengers and teachers who can reach youth and communicate positive messages for healthy development.
- **Many directors and coaches were not familiar with the language of positive youth development.** While they reported receiving training in youth development, the training they described focused on such topics as injury prevention, safety and child abuse. Although in most cases youth development practices were being used, the coaches and directors of the participating organizations did not have the shared language to identify and discuss their youth development practices. This may limit the ability of coaches to effectively utilize these practices in their sports programs and train colleagues.

- **Good coaching methods focus on the youth, in the context of the sport.** These methods engender physical and psychological safety and well-being, opportunities for youth to belong, opportunities for youth to build skills, support for youth efficacy and mattering and opportunities for youth recognition. Ensuring that coaches incorporate these practices into their programs will have long-range benefits for youth participants.
- **In order to retain more young people in physical activity beyond age twelve, sports programs need to consider shifting the focus from primarily offering competitive sports to promoting a life-long pleasure in engaging in physical activity.** Winning, which is inherent in competitive sports, does not need to be forfeited at the expense of a youth's sense of well-being.



(T. Briganti)

- **Coaches were knowledgeable about hydration requirements of youth; however, they were less knowledgeable about the youth's hydration habits, as well as their nutritional needs and practices.** Sports programs need to be more cognizant of and

focus more on the nutritional intake and hydration of young athletes. This implies the need for more nutrition education in coach training and perhaps expanded roles for coaches. Players who are not adequately nourished and hydrated are not able to maximize the advantages of engaging in physical activity.

- **Formal communication with parents regarding nutrition and hydration is limited.** Feedback from study participants revealed that limited information (e.g., letters, handouts, videos, workshops and newsletters) related to nutrition and hydration needs of their children are communicated to parents. This is significant because parents play a major role by modeling and encouraging their children to develop healthy lifestyles.

Recommendations

Recommendations of the study pertain to coach training, youth, parents and families, community, policy makers, and further research. They include:

Sports Programs/Coach Training

- Provide coach training that includes information about nutrition education, hydration and positive youth development.
- Provide incentives to expand coach training to incorporate youth development, nutrition, and hydration into the existing essential concepts of sports.
- Encourage coaches to integrate the teachings of healthy lifestyles, including proper nutrition and hydration practices, into sports education and parent communications for optimum health and sports performance.
- Create an organizational culture of wellness. Align policies, procedures and practices to reflect an environment of healthy eating, hydration and active lifestyle.

Youth

- Offer opportunities for young people to learn about the value of healthy eating and hydration, particularly as it relates to improving sports performance and healthy lifestyles. Include experiential strategies, such as cooking and community gardening to provide opportunities to learn about how food is provided and prepared.
- Find means to engage youth in sports beyond age 12 and into adolescence. Promote a life-long pleasure in engaging in physical activity, especially for those who are less athletic or competitive.
- Increase youth's understanding of the value of physical activity for health and wellness across the life cycle.

Parents and Families

- Provide information for parents, including onsite demonstrations and samples of healthy foods.
- Provide creative resource materials on healthy nutrition and youth development practices (e.g., refrigerator magnets, recipes, and portable reminders of healthy behaviors). Offer information on topics such as choosing healthy fast foods, supporting children in sports, and sportsmanship.
- Help parents develop an understanding of the value of active lifestyles, providing nourishment for effective performance, and role modeling good eating and physical activity.

Community

- Engage local businesses in promoting the message of positive youth development and nutrition in sports.
- Disseminate messages about positive youth development and nutrition in sports at community events and local venues (churches, schools, libraries, agencies, businesses).
- Advocate for food retailers to offer fruits, vegetables and other healthy food choices.
- Provide access to healthy foods, for example, by bringing farmers' markets to local communities and encouraging community gardening.

Policy Makers

- Support adequate funding for the promotion of sports programs as a vehicle for positive youth development and healthy lifestyles, including funding for research and evaluation of these efforts.
- Review and revise, if appropriate, the National Standards for Athletic Coaches (NSAC) to ensure inclusion of positive youth development, nutrition, and hydration standards.

Researchers

- Conduct evaluation studies on the impact of coach training programs on actual coach practices, and on existing programs that incorporate positive youth development and/or nutrition education.
- Study and recommend public policy practices and issues that determine the food offerings of local food retailers.
- Identify factors that would motivate coaches to include more youth development and nutrition practices in their programs.

Summary

Unprecedented numbers of young people are overweight and obese, leading to major health consequences. The causes of these conditions are rooted in complex, interrelated environmental factors. Youth sports programs are logical places to instill practices of positive youth development and nutrition. These practices serve to improve the well-being of youth and may also help to keep young people interested in sports activities. However, this study found that coaches have limited knowledge of positive youth development concepts, and even less regarding nutrition and hydration. A review of coach training curricula found limited coverage of these topics. In order to capitalize on the strengths of youth sports programs, coaches need to be knowledgeable about positive youth development, healthy eating and hydration practices. Parents and the community also need to be better informed, and become partners in addressing overweight and obesity through youth sports programs.

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