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Theorizing Sport as Social Intervention: A View From the Grassroots

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Sport and recreation-based approaches to the social problems of "at-risk" urban youth have become very popular in recent years. Yet the lack of a proper theoretical understanding of these initiatives threatens to minimize their effectiveness and could generate a backlash against them. To begin to fill this void, this paper presents a case study—based upon several years of intensive fieldwork—of a Chicago teacher, coach, and grassroots activist and the community-based sports-oriented organization he heads. An examination of this sustained, grassroots attempt to use sport to keep urban youth in and interested in school and education is used to sketch the outlines of a deeper, more multifaceted theory of the possibilities and challenges of using sport as a mode of social outreach and intervention.

From small, trial programs within a single school or housing project, to prison boot camps, late-night basketball leagues, and citywide summer projects, sport and recreation-based programs have become popular tools for social outreach, intervention, and prevention among "at-risk" urban youth and young people in the U.S. in recent years.[1] Reliable national numbers are difficult to come by, but anyone working in and around youth sport and recreation knows well of the trend. Dozens of such programs and initiatives serving literally hundreds of thousands of kids exist in every major metropolitan area in the country. Longstanding youth services have adopted both the intervention and risk prevention rhetoric and the public-private partnerships by which such initiatives are increasingly funded and supported. In 1997, the official publication of the national parks and recreation association identified some 621 separate programs focusing on "at-risk" youth. It is what Pitter and Andrews (1997) call the "social problems industry" that has changed the face of urban sport and recreation provision since the 1990s (see also Schultz, Crompton, & Witt, 1995; Witt & Crompton, 1996).

In spite of their prominence and popularity, however, very little is known about these programs, especially in terms of the extent to which they are actually

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effective in terms of achieving the broader social ends they are touted to achieve. In the case of crime prevention, for example, the most comprehensive and rigorous survey of the social scientific literature (Sherman et al., 1998) lists only one scholarly study that focuses explicitly on recreation-based programs, and its findings about community-based after-school recreation programs are limited and contradictory at best (Howell, 1995).[2] In an examination of the literature on athletic boot camps, Mark Correira (1997) concludes that these programs fail to affect arrest records, recidivism rates, or probation results among participants; to the extent that boot camps can claim positive impacts, these results seem to be limited to participants likely to have benefited from programmatic interventions of any type (see MacKenzie 1990, & McKenzie, Wilson, & Kider, 2001 for supporting studies). Midnight basketball leagues, the most prominent and most controversial of all such programs—Pitter and Andrews (1997), describe them as "paradigmatic" of the entire field (see also Hartmann, 2001)—have received virtually no systematic attention. Existing studies of midnight basketball (Farrell et al., 1996; Derezotes, 1995) tend to be essentially descriptive, mainly single-program based process evaluations conducted primarily for purposes of funding and development. None of this is to suggest that sport and recreation-based programs don't work. Rather, it is to say that we do not have the empirical, social scientific evidence to say with certainty that they do.

Many challenges stand in the way of generating a better understanding of the effectiveness of sport-based outreach and social intervention initiatives (Baldwin, 2000). Perhaps the most basic and fundamental is that we lack a clear and coherent theoretical conception of these programs, an understanding of how and why such programs might be expected to work (and how they should be implemented accordingly). The ideals upon which these programs are typically based have mainly to do with traditional, idealistic conceptions of sport as a site for self discipline and character building. Scholarly examples would include DeBusk and Hellison's (1989) "self-responsibility" model; the "life skills" framework of Steven Danish and his colleagues (1993, 1997, 2002); or Martinek and Hellison's (1997) emphasis on self-esteem and "resiliency." These can be further subdivided, following the noted sociologist of sport Jay Coakley (2002), into those utilizing a social control and deficit-reduction model and those focused more on social opportunity and privilege promotion. The problem with such individualist and essentially optimistic orientations, according to Coakley, is that there is little evidence that such approaches are successful and some suggestion that they can sometimes do more harm than good.

In light of these empirical shortcomings and the continued popularity of sport and recreation-based youth intervention programs, Coakley suggests the need for a new, more cautious and critical understanding of sport. Key to Coakley's alternative vision is an emphasis on the social and institutional (or community) context within which sport-based programs are deployed and the social ends toward which such programs are aimed and developed. This fits well with some of the writing that has recently emerged gesturing toward a fuller understanding of the possibilities of sport as a form of social intervention (Baldwin, 2000; Correira, 1997; Witt & Crompton, 1997; Lovell & Pope, 1993). What each of these reflections share is the insight that if such sport-based programs will be able to achieve concrete outcome effects, it will only be to the extent that they are used in

combination with a variety of other programs and in the context of a larger, more comprehensive outreach or treatment strategy such as that suggested in the work on youth intervention by life course specialist Frank Furstenberg (1999).

This paper is an attempt to make a contribution toward this continued theoretical development. Heeding Olympic anthropologist John MacAloon's (1992) call for a more grounded, meaning-centered study of sport, the paper takes an ethnographic approach—which is to say, it uses formal, participant observation and intensive interviewing as the means for gathering insight and information. More specifically, this paper presents a case study of a community-based teacher/sports activist named Larry Hawkins and the consortium of sport, education, and community outreach programs that he founded and presides over on the south side of Chicago. It is based in the premise that a detailed exploration of this sustained, day-to-day, educationally-based effort to use sport in service of social intervention suggests a more sophisticated, multidimensional way of theorizing the relationships among sport and social outreach and intervention. Local knowledge and practical experience here supply the basis for clearer conceptualization and theoretical development.

I worked for Hawkins and his program in various capacities full-time for a year and a half after my graduation from college and before entrance into graduate school (spring 1989–summer 1990). Since that time, I have maintained regular contact with Hawkins. I have attended several meetings and conferences he and his organization sponsored, returned to spend two full summers working with them in Chicago, and maintain regular phone consultation. In addition to field notes based upon these experiences, I have conducted numerous interviews with people participating in all aspects of the program (parents, staff, students, coaches, teachers, reporters, board members, etc.) and collected a large set of newspaper clippings, pamphlets, brochures, and official documents. Hawkins also authorized my complete access to his largely unorganized but substantial personal files compiled over a 25-year period and sat down to a series of interviews confirming and filling out certain aspects of his life history and his understanding of the relationships among sport, race, education, and society. I should also note that I have not used Hawkins' personal recollections on factual matters (dates, events, and the like) except when I could confirm them against independent outside sources. My primary objective is to articulate and elaborate the understanding of the power of sport as a form of social intervention put into daily practice in this program. It is a vision of sport as a powerful tool for social outreach and intervention that puts education at the heart of the matter.

The Program

Perhaps the best way to introduce Larry Hawkins and the vision of sport as a form of social outreach and intervention I think his work embodies is by going back to the time and place where he got his formal, institutional start. It was in the summer of 1968 when Hawkins served as the chief architect and administrator of what was called, in the words of the only newspaper story that seems to have been written about it, a "youth help program, a kind of day-camp focused primarily on getting inner-city kids interested in and prepared to attend college" (Hawkins files, *Chicago Tribune*, 20 October 1968).

The program involved 75 students ages 12 to 19 who "participated in a 'group learning experience,' designed to expose them to college-level courses, the city and independent study" (ibid). The students, who were all African American, were neither outstanding nor deficient but regular, average kids who entered the program of their own (or their parents') volition. They came from 21 different Chicago-area schools and were divided into several groups according to age, interest, and ability. They were assigned teachers and teaching assistants who directed all courses and activities. The teachers themselves were high school and college instructors. Two soon-to-be college freshmen worked as tutors, and faculty members from the University of Chicago (the host campus) served as guest lecturers and speakers. A typical day began at 8:30 in the morning with testing, lectures, and class work (all groups studied history and English during the course of the day, but other courses depended upon the interests of the students) and ended at 4:00 after some sort of physical activity. Over the course of the summer, teachers and students also visited the city's museums and theaters. They spent the final three weeks of the program camping on the shores of the George Williams College campus in nearby Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

All of this made for an intensive, interactive educational experience, an approach to teaching and learning that was probably much more unusual and innovative back in 1968 than it may appear to us now. But there is one aspect of the program that stands out still today—and that makes it appropriate for this study: It was run by one of the best-known and most highly respected high school basketball coaches in the city, staffed largely by coaches (who worked in the classrooms), and attended mainly by youngsters who fancied themselves to be athletes or future athletes. Sport, in other words, provided the organizing and animating principle of the entire educational experience.

"It is our thesis," a young Larry Hawkins would write several months later in an attempt to attract participants and garner funding for the following summer, "that in order to influence non-academically oriented Black high school students, particularly males, the most natural alley is the athletic coach."

> [O]ur program starts with what the youngster prefers doing, for example, playing basketball. We then provide for his interest but urge participation in some other sport like tennis or track. Finally, we move the youngster to the traditional classroom subjects. We cannot claim that he enjoys English more but with his coach as the "persuader" we know he will go to class.

"The implementation of this notion," according to Hawkins, was "reflected in all phase(s) of the program" (Undated newspaper commentary, Hawkins Files, Spring 1969). This was not to be a one-shot deal. Even before the summer program was initiated, the University of Chicago had offered Hawkins (who had originally come to prominence in Chicago as the first Black high school basketball coach to lead an all-Black team to the state championship in 1963, the year *after* his greatest player ever, All-American Cassie Russell, had graduated) the opportunity to run an after-school and weekend version of his program year-round, even while he held down a full-time position as a teacher and coach with the Chicago Public Schools. The offer was made as part of an overall community outreach effort undertaken by the university in the spring of 1968 in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s

assassination and in the face of rising community unrest and hostility in the Woodlawn and Kenwood neighborhoods that surround the campus (*University Record*, vol. 3, (3), 1-5, Hawkins files). The next summer, after attracting additional funds from outside granting agencies, the program served over 300 participating students on the same basic model it used the previous year (and uses still today), and in 1970, 32 of the 34 year-round program "graduates" had enrolled in college (Newspaper clipping, Hawkins files).

Today, Hawkins' experimental summer program has grown into a consortium of agencies, activities, and social networks that includes the University of Chicago's Office of Special Programs, a nonprofit community-based organization called Big Buddies Youth Services, and the Institute for Athletics and Education. Together, these various offices and organizations—all presided over by Hawkins—operate a sometimes staggering and confusing array of educational programs and activities. These range from actual high school classes held 2 days per week on the University of Chicago campus (a longtime pilot enrichment program for promising disadvantaged students), to counseling and tutorials through an Upward Bound grant, enrichment activities, a full summer school program, and a range of miscellaneous social intervention and community development projects and activities. Though each of these three agencies and all of the various programs and activities exist for separate and distinct purposes and serve theoretically distinct groups of students, they also share staff, facilities, resources, and even program participants freely. In fact, the overlap between programs, facilities, and staff is so great that one is never quite sure who one works for or which program is under the auspices of which agency, as reflected by the fact that those familiar with Hawkins and his activities simply refer to this all as "The Program."

And just as the conviction that sport could be a powerful outreach and intervention tool was what made the program stand out in 1968, that same idea remains the one force, indeed the one constant (besides Hawkins himself), that seems to hold it all together. "We believe," as a brochure that was used in the 1990s says, "that interscholastic sports programs in elementary and secondary schools, properly understood, organized and implemented, can make significant contributions toward the educational aims of these institutions." Indeed, in 1972 after several years of successful year-round operation, Hawkins created the Institute for Athletics and Education (the IAE) specifically to develop, refine, publicize, and promote this vision for larger professional and public audiences. The IAE, by its own description, is "a national, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to expanding the educational opportunities of low-income, disadvantaged urban students" by "advocating community interest and involvement in education through sport" (IAE membership brochure, late 80s, early 90s). Though it focuses largely on school sport, the Institute can be understood as a lobbyist, watchdog, and clearinghouse for all manner of youth and grassroots sports concerns. It does this in a variety of ways: by offering tutorials, counseling, and test preparation courses for athletes; hosting periodic workshops and conferences; sponsoring several semiindependent lobbying groups made up of parents, coaches, urban athletic directors, and students; issuing occasional press releases, position papers, or public commentaries; publishing (somewhat sporadically) a magazine called *School Sport and Education*; supporting various research and development programs aimed at demonstrating, documenting, and developing the positive educational impacts of sport.[3]

Before we move on, I should be clear that Hawkins' understanding of the social value of sport does not refer to health, recreation, fitness, or physical education as it might immediately suggest for many of us. Indeed, Hawkins is very critical of his athletic colleagues and their national organizations for having allowed the relevance of sport and recreation, especially in schools, to be narrowed and marginalized into the physical education that we know today. Neither is it primarily about the character-building or life lessons that come so quickly and easily to the lips of athletes and coaches when asked to speak about the social virtues of sport (cf. Guttmann, 1988; Macleod, 1983; Cavallo, 1981). When Hawkins and his IAE staff talk about the educational power and potential of sport, they mean education in the broadest, most academic sense, including the full range of social, developmental, and fitness needs of young people.

The Power of Sport: Athletics as "Hook"

Some of the experts who know Hawkins and his operation best—such as the professors of education and sociology that sit on the board the oversees the Office of Special Programs at the university—think that his success as an educator and an organizer has little or nothing to do with his use of sport and athletics. His approach works, their thinking goes, because of all the other things Hawkins' program does in combination with sport and the intensity and duration of this engagement. The program provides students with proper educational resources, a social support system, appropriate role models, counseling, tutoring, and all of the other substitutes for cultural capital underprivileged students need in order to be successful in mainstream and elite institutions of education. Perhaps most important of all is Hawkins' own personal charisma and his extraordinary will and work ethic: He simply does whatever it takes—working 60 and 70 hour weeks, spending his own money if necessary—to make sure his kids get an education. As one professor of education and public policy at Chicago suggested to me when I first got involved with Hawkins, "What Larry does works because of Larry himself and the unique social system that he has set up. It is not easily modeled or institutionalized" (fieldnotes, Summer 1989)—especially, it almost goes without saying according to this view, in its sport-oriented aspects. And when Hawkins talks about sport and athletics (as is often the case), he is treated by his colleagues somewhat like a quirky, eccentric old uncle: He is tolerated and respected for what he does but always secure in the belief that he doesn't quite understand the real reasons why he is successful. Indeed, for many of them what Hawkins does is successful not *because of* but *in spite of* his interest and involvement in sport.

There is, of course, a good deal of truth in the importance of all of these nonsport factors. Hawkins is a remarkably passionate and committed educator whose sheer force of will and dedication are crucial to the success of everything he does. He is also a resourceful administrator who knows how to pull together people, command student respect, piece together scarce resources, and use them to full effect. And there are also selection effects as well that cannot be overlooked as elements of the program's success (both for students and for parents). But Hawkins' own view is, of course, quite different. In direct contrast to those who see sport as either an indulgence or a distraction—some of whom are actually his closest professional friends on campus and his biggest, most consistent supporters—Hawkins

counters that sport is in fact the key to everything he has done and continues to do in education.

> Sport is the way I reach out to people, parents, and children alike. It is the hook, the carrot, the delivery system we use to attract the attention of kids and turn them into serious, committed students. Without sport—or something of equivalent interest—I would have no way of talking to kids, no way of communicating with them and convincing them of the importance of education and the hard work and overwhelming commitment it actually involves. (Personal interview, August 3, 1993)

Sport is, in short, the starting point, the foundation on which all his other educational skills and resources depend—a form of what policy scholars call "outreach" (Leviton & Schuh, 1991).

It is not incidental that Hawkins was drawn to sport as an answer to community organizing and revitalization. Raised by a single, unwed mother in housing projects on the south side of Chicago in the 1930s and 40s, Hawkins—like many successful African American men of his generation—got his first opportunities in life in and through sports. Though he was not a great athlete, he was a pretty good one, good enough to support himself through college on a combination of academic scholarships and money earned barnstorming with Abe Saperstein's Brown Bombers and legendary Harlem Globetrotters. Hawkins attended George Williams College, one of the two schools in the country that specialized in training inner-city social workers on the YMCA/YWCA model at the time. After graduation, he took a job with the Chicago public school system as a teacher and coach at tiny and all-Black Carver Public High School (located where the Dan Ryan Expressway today intersects Interstate 57). All during this time, Hawkins—having been trained as a kind of activist teacher/social worker by A.H. McDade and Alfreda Duster (two important local figures, Duster the daughter of Ida B. Wells)—became increasingly involved in various forms of youth outreach and community, organizing in both the high school and in the nearby Altgeld Gardens public housing projects. And what Hawkins came to realize through these experiences was that the way to reach otherwise alienated, dislocated young people was to appeal to their interest and their passions—in other words, to use popular activities such as sports and recreation as a tool for outreach and engagement.

This, I would argue, is one of Hawkins' primary insights into the theory and practice of education (not to mention the making of social change in general): Working with young people—whether to educate them, coach them, or get them to do anything—must begin with their interest and familiarity. This argument, which is by now second nature to scholars of popular culture (Lipsitz, 1990; Mukerji & Schudson, 1990), marks a significant challenge to authoritarian, disciplinarian, educational theories of old by putting first the task of reaching out to students, building a community of students who want to learn, who are excited and fully committed to being in the classroom, and who are active and voluntary participants in the educational process. It is what is sometimes called a "learner-centered" approach to education and pedagogy (Barr & Tagg. 1999; see also Giroux & Simon, 1989).

This vision of the social force of sport is expressed nicely in the following excerpts from an IAE position paper, which Hawkins himself used when testifying

in front of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Selection Education, Committee on Education and Labor on September 27, 1990:

> . . . sport is an activity that captures the attention and interest of a wide audience of Americans. . . . We do not claim to understand any more than others why this is; nor do we wish to pass judgment on whether the importance Americans place upon sport is desirable or otherwise. We simply accept the prominent social position of sport in America as a social fact . . . .
>
> Furthermore we believe interscholastic athletics may be an especially critical and effective educational tool in the country's largest metropolitan areas, because it is here . . . that the power sport holds over young people and the community at large seems to be most compelling.
>
> Whether we like it or not, sports activities are the school sponsored activities that receive the most concerted interest, the highest levels of involvement, and too often the only positive attention from parents, students, community members, and the media alike. We seek to harness the energies devoted to interscholastic sports, and utilize them, re-direct them in a sense, toward strengthening the overall educational mission of a school. (IAE brochure, Summer 1989, research files)

The energies devoted to interscholastic sport can prove useful for the overall educational mission of a school in several different ways and at several different levels. Much of Hawkins' rhetoric and practice (as in the quotes above) tends to focus on how interscholastic sports program can help keep otherwise uninterested students in school. But the academic benefits of athletics can also apply to nonathlete students in school. One example would be how high-profile student athletes can serve as role models for their nonathletic peers. Another would be how an entire school community—parents, teachers, and students—can come together as a result of a sports contest or team. Both of these social functions were explained originally in some detail by the well-known sociologist and late Hawkins supporter, James S. Coleman in his classic work *The Adolescent Society* (1961) and in much of his other work in educational sociology.[4] Yet another way in which sport can serve the academic curriculum would be by using examples, illustrations, anecdotes, and activities drawn from the world of sport in the classroom, in teaching traditional academic subjects as a way to engage students, to bring subject material to their level of interest (for a more elaborate description, see MacAloon, 1991).

All of these are, in different times and in different forms, articulated and endorsed by Hawkins and his staff. Nevertheless, the bulk of their energies are directed toward the development of programs that utilize the broad, general concept of sport as a form of recruitment, retention, and engagement. For example, a focal point of institute activity in the fall of 1989 was a pilot after-school sports-tutorial project at an elementary school in one of Chicago's most devastated south side neighborhoods. The program was structured so that on Mondays and Wednesdays, the 7th and 8th grade boys practiced basketball in the gym, while the girls from the same age range worked on homework in supervised tutorials; on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the set-up flip-flopped, with girls playing volleyball. In order

to play sports, students had to have attended the tutorials the previous day. Even in practices, a few moments each day were spent emphasizing the importance of classroom work. In addition, the coaches who ran the practices also helped out in the tutorials, and the teachers who ran the classes helped out in the practices. Finally, it was stressed that these students should serve as role models for the kids in all the lower grades. These procedures were meant to convey to students that the athletics and academics are not two separate domains but part of a common educational process (fieldnotes, Fall 1989; also Hartmann, 1990).

Nevertheless, Hawkins himself tends to emphasize the one-on-one, interpersonal possibilities of using sport to reach out to otherwise disinterested, disadvantaged young people. This is perhaps best illustrated by a story I heard him tell several times over the course of the summer of 1993. It happened at one of the IAE "recognition events" (awards ceremonies) that took place in the auditorium of a YWCA in Woodlawn, one of Chicago's poorest south side neighborhoods. As Hawkins and his staff were cleaning up after the event, he looked outside into the hazy summer nightfall to see a bunch of young boys he didn't know gathered at the corner. Intrigued, he went outside to see what they were up to. As he got closer, he realized that they were running little, informal track sprints. "It was a sight to see," Hawkins recalled, "one 'race' after another, proceeded by the inevitable argument over the winner and the eventual jostling for position on the next starting line." He watched this informal Olympics for a while and then went back inside and asked one of his own students if he knew any of these boys. The student knew one who turned out to be the kid who was winning most of the street-side sprints. Having his student serve as envoy and mediator, Hawkins went back outside and started asking these "little guys" about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

The coach quickly came to realize that these neighborhood kids had seen some of his own students wearing ribbons and medals around their necks as they left the awards ceremony and, after deciding that they too wanted such prizes, they had immediately set about practicing their own impromptu races. After talking with these kids for a while, Hawkins invited them to come to an informal track and field training program the Institute was sponsoring a couple of nights a week in preparation for a bigger open meet they planned to host the following month. Anxious to show off their skills and, especially, to win some prizes, these guys began showing up at their practices and were good enough to win one of the relay races at the open meet. As they got to know these kids better, Hawkins and his staff invited them along on a couple of enrichment trips and encouraged them to come to their after-school tutorial program. One thing led to another until finally several of them became more or less regular participants in all the activities—both academic and athletic—sponsored by the Institute.

What stands out most about this story—which was obviously why he found it so compelling—is how central sport is to reaching and educating young people for Hawkins. As he himself observed when I discussed the matter with him,

> Had they not been running those races, I wouldn't have noticed them and I wouldn't have had anything to talk with them about. Why would they want to listen to an old man like me? On the other hand, if we hadn't have been running a little track training program ourselves, I wouldn't have had anything to offer them. But because they were voluntarily and unconditionally interested in running—or at least in winning ribbons—and because I could offer them a place to display and develop that interest, we had something to talk about, something to build a relationship on. (Personal interview, August 3, 1993)

It is a relationship that Hawkins is proud to point out now involves a great deal more than running races and winning ribbons. Hawkins concludes, "You can never know for sure, but they seem to be on the right track. At least they are on the track I would like them to be on, and I feel like I've got some expertise in that area" (Fieldnotes, Summer 1993).

The Paradoxical Power of Sport

Always the teacher and the coach, Hawkins is sometimes prone to mixing metaphors. This tendency (along with the conventional ways in which youth sport is understood and practiced in American culture) might make it easy to infer that Hawkins' understanding of sport and athletics mirrors or matches that of most gym teachers and coaches today or of the YMCA mission workers who founded and built the college where he was educated (Baker, 1994): namely, that there is some kind of inherent, positive social benefit to be accrued from competitive physical activities. Such an interpretation of Hawkins and the IAE might also seem to be supported by the fact that in recent years, in the face of declining resources for public school sport (especially in the inner-cities which typically lack private funding alternatives), rising costs (due to liability insurance, equipment, and salaries), and the general disappearance of all manner of community-based opportunities for sport and recreation (see, for discussion Rauner, Mendley, Stanton, & Wynn, 1994) a good deal of their public advocacy and activism has been a general defense of participatory sport in any form in inner-city, ghetto communities. This general inference that Hawkins and his staff support sport in these uncritical, unequivocal ways—that they are what Robert Lipsyte (1976) has aptly described as "true sports believers"—would *not* be correct. The track Hawkins is referring to in this case is not an athletic one.

Hawkins' understanding of the educational value of sport does not, it should be reiterated, refer to health, recreation, fitness, or physical education as school sport might immediately suggest for some. Indeed, Hawkins is very critical of his colleagues in the scholastic sport world and their national organizations for having allowed the relevance of the phrase "education and athletics" to be narrowed and marginalized into the physical education that we know today (personal interview, April 28, 1994). Neither is it primarily about character building or learning lessons for life as many coaches and athletes so easily claim when asked to comment on the social virtues of sport. When Hawkins and his IAE staff talk about the educational power and potential of sport, they mean education in the sense that sociologists of sport have usually understood the term (cf. Fejgin, 1994). In other words, they are speaking, in fact, about the academic curriculum, classroom performance, and scholastic achievement—and this is not something they think sport automatically or inevitably contributes to.

On more than one occasion, I heard Hawkins follow up the neighborhood track story I recounted above with another anecdote about a little league baseball team whose coach turned out to be a drug dealer, who was quite literally using his players as distributors because 11 and 12 year olds in baseball uniforms provided

a very good cover. For Hawkins, this story was a cautionary tale meant to suggest that just as easily as sport can serve positive, desirable social ends, it can also be used in inappropriate, even harmful ways (fieldnotes, Summer 1993). For all of his emphasis on sport's power as an educational tool, Hawkins is not someone who believes in the abstract, inherent power of sport to do good, even (or perhaps especially) in educational terms. In contrast to the unqualified, idealistic sport believers who dominate the world of sport and recreation delivery in the U.S., Hawkins is a critical sports realist who sees sport as a "double-edged sword" (Kellner, 1996) that can be misused as easily as it can be used productively.

Hawkins' cautious understanding of the paradoxical, multifaceted nature of sport (see also Eitzen, 2003) was clearly captured and conveyed in a keynote address James Coleman delivered at the Institute's national conference in 1990. In his speech, the famous sociologist described two schools he had studied, both of which emphasized boy's sports. In both schools, according to Coleman, the most powerful staff member was the coach of the leading sports team (football in one school, wrestling in the other) and while both coaches clearly knew and understood their power, each utilized it in a very different fashion. The football coach "flaunted his power" by "[making] jokes that were obliquely directed toward the ridicule of his players, putting pressure on teachers to keep boys eligible, and getting special privileges for his athletes." The wrestling coach, in contrast, was a creative and engaging teacher who tried to "use the glory gained by his team to enhance the attractiveness and status of biology" (his classroom subject) and he "showed respect for the principal and for the other areas of activity in the school." The educational outcomes of these different approaches are not surprising. The life of the schools revolved around their respective teams, but in the football school, this involvement drew energy away from school work and scholastic achievement, while in the wrestling school it fostered a deeper engagement in the school in general and in scholastic subject matters (Coleman, 1991).

Coleman's account focusing attention on the coach as the decisive factor influencing the positive or negative education impacts of sport was not accidental. Hawkins' first major project upon founding the Institute for Athletics and Education back in the early 1970s (with Coleman's help) was to initiate a coaches training and retraining program designed to help coaches and physical educators put their work in proper educational perspective. His primary argument in the course (which was for a time offered a Master's level degree in concert with a local university) was that if coaches were to be genuine educators, then they had to understand the unique influence that they have on young people and develop the skills, knowledge, and techniques that allow them to channel this influence toward positive social and educational ends. In short, coaches had to understand themselves not just as coaches but as "teacher-coaches."

Coleman's tale of two schools and Hawkins' notion of teacher-coaches taken together suggest that the power of sport is rather like the power of any other tool, technology, or social practice: Its efficacy has to be judged on how and to what ends it is used. Another way of putting this is that sport is not a monolithic institution or activity; rather, it is a diverse, sometimes conflicting set of understandings and practices whose social consequences and impacts vary in equally complicated ways. Hawkins realized this very early on in his own career. More than this, he came to believe that unless it was channeled toward educational objectives in a conscious, deliberate fashion, the practice of sport in schools more often than not

tends to subvert or simply overshadow the broader educational goals of the school, at least for athletes if not the entire student body. Hawkins elaborated upon this in the context of a conversation about one of his first and most athletically successful basketball teams. Despite the fact that at least four of the six main players were good enough to win scholarships of one kind or another, Hawkins saw them struggle just to graduate. He took personal responsibility for their problems:

> It wasn't until several years later that I realized how badly I'd behaved with those young men. . . . We got too caught up in the fun and excitement of it all . . . I did the sports part but I wasn't careful enough about the rest of their lives. I missed them. I didn't prepare them for the classroom properly. It wasn't like I didn't say to study but I didn't say it forcefully enough. . . . I decided I would never do that to a kid again. I think that might have been the beginning of moving forward this concept of seeing [sport as] more than just a game where everybody feels good or bad depending on whether they win or lose. I think that is where it came from. (personal interview, April 28, 1994)

A large number of factors contribute to Hawkins' critique of the corrupting influence of conventional sport programs (things like an over-emphasis on winning, the importance of finances, cheating, and the like) but all of them boil down to the way in which sport is turned into an end in and of itself, something Hawkins himself eventually decided to refuse to allow or accept. Just as would be suggested by the detached, analytical tone of his comments in front of the House Subcommittee quoted above, he sees little or no inherent value in sport. On a more personal note, he sometimes denies caring about sport at all:

> Some of my friends have always been pissed at me for not going on to coach at the college level or higher. What they didn't understand was that I wasn't interested in going anywhere else. Hell, I wasn't even that interested in being a coach either but it was a great way to reach kids. (personal interview, July 7, 1993)

Hawkins frequently insists, in fact, that if they cannot be shown to have any curricular benefit, sports should be taken out of the schools entirely.

If Hawkins can be considered a realist about the social impacts of sport, then, it is because of this nonideological, instrumentalist view of sport. This understanding ultimately puts Hawkins in a difficult political position, however. On the one hand, he finds himself trying to convince many teachers, counselors, principals, and administrators who believe sport to be an inherent distraction or corruption that it can be a powerful educational tool if understood and utilized appropriately. On the other hand, he is constantly frustrated by what he might call the "anti-educational" attitudes and approaches of those coaches and physical education instructors who would otherwise be his natural allies. The situation of being uncomfortably situated between one group of naive sport supporters and another of skeptical, dismissive critics is not unlike the paradox that the renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described as characterizing and problematizing the scholarly study of sport over two decades ago in his seminal "Program for a Sociology of Sport" (1988): On the one hand, Bourdieu wrote, those who know the most about sport tend not to have the inclination or ability to realize its broader social connections and significance or think critically about it; on the other hand,

those who have the requisite skills to understand the broader social dimensions tend to ignore or dismiss sport as a phenomenon worthy of serious social scientific investigation.

The practical problems associated with this paradoxical situation are numerous. In the after-school sports-tutorial program described above, for example, Hawkins found that the teachers were reluctant to venture into the gym, while the coaches were not very comfortable helping in the classroom. It also put Hawkins in a very awkward position during the debates over the NCAA's Propositions 42 and 48. In this case, he found his commitment to education as the sole reason and justification for school sports coming up against the claims of African American coaches and activists that these programs were discriminating unfairly against African American student athletes.[5]

Fortunately, just as his practical, instrumentalist sense of sport is what gets Hawkins into this situation in the first place, it may provide for us analysts and theorists a way out. More specifically, I would argue that an appreciation of Hawkins' sense of sport as a tool which must be *directed* in a specific fashion in order to achieve desired educational outcomes turns our attention away from the abstract, universalizing question of whether sport is an inherently positive or negative (or neutral) social force and suggests instead that we might do better to consider the conditions—in terms of both the form of sport and its environment—under which sport can be seen to have different kinds of effects upon racial advancement. Rather than treating sport as an unproblematic independent variable, in other words, we should inquire into its multiple formations and the social circumstances and historical contexts that make it more or less likely to contribute to the goals of youth outreach, intervention, and development.

This is not, of course, an entirely new proposition. Bourdieu's influential conception of sport as a site of social struggle and reproduction (which was, in certain ways, foundational for all of his social theory) is based around just such a way of thinking (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1988, 1991). Moreover, Laurence Chalip and his colleagues worked on a number of carefully designed comparative surveys in the 1980s (Chalip, 1980; Chalip et al., 1984; McCormack & Chalip, 1988), which demonstrated that at least for understanding the individual experience and impact of sport, it was necessary to break out of overly abstract, totalizing, and moralizing notions of sport in favor of an approach that differentiates between different practices or forms of sport and situates them in their appropriate social context. The Chalip et al. paper (1984), for example, found that one of the most important determinants of a positive experience in sport for individual athletes was the coach, his or her relationship with athletes, and his or her attitude toward sport—a finding that Hawkins obviously would not find at all surprising. In short, sport is not a monolithic social entity, but a complex collection of very different and often conflicting social practices and consequences. If its social significance is to be fully appreciated and understood, it must be treated as such and situated accordingly.

Such an approach demands a complicated, multidimensional, and concrete way of thinking about the relationships between sport and social intervention that may not be easy to apply, implement, and develop. But in many ways, this is precisely the point for someone like Hawkins. In his view, the relationships among sport and education in the United States are far more complicated, uncertain, and

even contradictory than conventional theories can allow. It is these complexities we must explore if we are to really begin to understand the role of sport as a form of outreach, intervention, and prevention. And it is not as if such an approach means that we must reject dominant theories and findings out of hand. Such an approach should help us to see, instead, that both sides in the debate have contributions to offer to our understanding of the relationships between sport and social change, but these insights must be recaste as the product of specific forms of sport and particular social and historical conditions rather than absolute or abstract universals.

Race, Education, and Culture

Even if we accept the proposition that Hawkins' instrumentalist conception of sport helps us rethink the role sport can play in social intervention, questions about the social context and cultural specificity of his understandings still remain. More specifically, it becomes important to consider what lessons Hawkins and his program hold with respect to the "at-risk," young people of color who have been the focal point for so much problems-based athletic programming referred to in the introduction. This question presents a particular puzzle because of Hawkins' own puzzling, if not paradoxical, relation to and way of talking about race. On the one hand, talking to Larry Hawkins or reading about him and his program might lead one to believe that race is not much of a factor in either the day-to-day function of his operation or its overarching philosophy. Hawkins' sport-based "program," as I have tried to capture in the preceding pages, is typically framed and explained, in essentially race-neutral, color-blind terms as if this model would apply to young people across racial, ethnic, and class lines.[6] On the other hand, the on-the-ground, practical realities of Hawkins' entire operation run completely counter to this universalized discourse. Having emerged in the late 1960s out of the struggles of the Civil Rights movement, the program has a clear African American history and identity. Since its inception, the program has served African American youth almost exclusively, and the vast majority of the staff and teachers have been African American as well.[7]

Perhaps the first point to make in this context is that Hawkins does not believe there is anything essentially or fundamentally unique about Black culture or consciousness; he sees them, rather, as the products of (and thus limited by) the unique social conditions of inequality within which they are situated. More than this, he sees the problems that African Americans face as largely structural and impersonal, based primarily in class and economics. Indeed, Hawkins broad, if largely implicit, critique of American society and American racism roughly parallels the analysis William Wilson (who served on Hawkins' Executive Board during his appointment at the University of Chicago) offered in his famous and influential *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). This much is illustrated in the first lines of text Hawkins delivered when asked to testify before the House Subcommittee on September 27, 1990:

> The lifestyle in this country, particularly in large cities, is being endangered by a number of social ills: poverty, crime, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, drug use, and gang-related activity, to name a few. As Gordon Berlin of the Ford Foundation has indicated, the fact that a

> large segment of the population cannot read, write, compute, or communicate both intensifies and contributes to these problems. We hold that the most appropriate and direct public response to these social dilemmas is to improve the American system of public education. (House Statement, Hawkins files)

And under such stark conditions, sport offered one of the few sources of social capital that social workers and educators have to draw upon. Because of the large numbers of African Americans involved in sport and their deep passion for it, sport is a powerful and important social force in the Black community, so much so that it can have serious impacts upon or consequences for more traditionally serious social concerns such as education or even African American progress in general. Hawkins doesn't necessarily provide for us a rationale or explanation as to why this is the case; he simply takes it as a given and a useful starting point for social outreach and intervention.

What we quickly realize, of course, is that Hawkins' vision of racial change through sport is predicated completely and unconditionally on his belief in education. Indeed, Hawkins is clearly convinced that education is the key to social change, to the revitalization of the Black community, and to American society as a whole. Which brings us to the deeper question of why Hawkins focuses so much of his energies and efforts on education. Why, in other words, does he borrow Wilson's analysis but follow Coleman's solution?

This has less to do with his vision of education (which is fairly standard liberal faire) than with his understanding of what constitutes meaningful social change and of the social and political limits within which African American activism and progress must take place. What it does not involve, in Hawkins' view, typically, is noteworthy: It is not about state interventions, dramatic political protests, and large structural shifts. Rather, meaningful social change usually refers to small, ongoing changes that work themselves out in the course of people's daily lives. Part of this notion of change stems from his pragmatic political belief (also represented powerfully in Wilson's work) that mainstream America has gone as far as it is willing to go in terms of large-scale, structural policies and programs designed to combat racial problems. But a larger portion of his turn to education can be attributed to his understanding of real, meaningful social change as coming only slowly and gradually, from the bottom up, one individual success at a time. Here is where we begin to see why education is crucial for African Americans. It is about empowering individuals to work within established social structures and take advantage of the opportunities that exist therein.

In a certain sense, of course, Hawkins' understanding of education and its importance for African Americans is not a radical vision at all; it is, in fact, rather mainstream, reflecting traditional American ideologies about individualism and meritocracy much like those espoused by the early Martin Luther King, Jr. and his liberal-democratic dream of a colorblind society. (It is no accident, I think, that the only poster on the IAE office wall is one of King with a caption from his famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech or that the IAE's motto is "Sport opens doors . . . education keeps them open.") But this slower, subtler, and more indirect way of thinking about change is important as far as the terms by which we consider the relationships between education and social change. It is also where we can glimpse an even deeper sense of the importance of sport with respect to Black culture and

community life. I am referring here to the alternative, "learner-centered" conception of education and pedagogy—where "coaching" and "mentoring" models play a central role—that are implicit in Hawkins' practices.

Jabari Mahiri's *Shooting for Excellence* (1998) is a recent analysis that embodies much of this approach. Mahiri's book is a provocative attempt to construct an alternative, learner-centered vision of education and pedagogy based upon an understanding of the cultural identity of African American youth. Mahiri's framework can be best understood in contrast to the influential accounts of African American educational failure purported by the educational anthropologist, John Ogbu (1978, 1990). According to Ogbu, low levels of academic achievement among African American youth can best be explained by the oppositional attitude and identity African Americans assume with respect to the culture of schools and American educational institutions more generally. In particular, he suggests that for African American kids to succeed in schools, they are obligated to adopt attitudes and behaviors associated with the White mainstream; they must "act White"—a posture that cuts against the meaning and history of Black identity in American culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The implication for Ogbu is that the identity and orientation of African American students will need to change if they are to be successful in American schools.

In contrast, Mahiri, drawing on the work of a diverse set of critical scholars (including Gloria Ladsen-Billings, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and Stuart Hall), sees African American youth culture as less of a problem and more of a resource to work with and build around. Mahiri suggests that "educators simply take these cultural practices and sensibilities as given and then try to understand and build upon the authentic experience of students" (1998, p. 7). His emphasis is thus on changing or transforming the culture of schools and the pedagogical practices and understandings of teachers and mentors working with such diverse student populations. "Aspects of popular youth culture can act as a unifying and equalizing focus in culturally diverse classrooms" (p. 7), he writes, if they are understood and directed appropriately.

The details of Mahiri's argument and analysis are obviously well beyond the scope of this paper. But it is relevant that Mahiri develops his theory and pedagogy out of and based upon an intensive ethnographic experience with a "community-based sports program" (also, it is worth noting here, on the south side of Chicago). Taking the "authentic experience" of students and young people seriously and making it the starting point from which engagement, outreach, and education—rather than forcing them to adapt to and be shoehorned into the often-unfamiliar culture of schools—is, of course, central to this theory. But the idea of coaching is also a crucial part of his vision of classroom learning and pedagogy itself. "Coaching practices and perspectives in the community sports setting I observed were not only viable for the development of athletic skills. . . they also revealed a variety of ways to develop these youths as crucial and conscious actors in the world beyond sports" (p. 9).

I don't want to push the parallels between Mahiri's theories and Hawkins' practices too hard. I am not entirely certain how much of this alternative conception of education and pedagogy Hawkins himself would accept. (While I am sure he would accept much of this in principle, there are elements of Hawkins' own theory and practice, both as a coach and as an educator, that remain rather traditionally oriented around the authority and discipline of the coach and educator. In

particular, he is convinced that coaches and teachers ultimately know best and thus need to be directive, assertive, and often authoritative for youth and their parents.) Nevertheless, this comparison should bring out what may be most unique and important about Hawkins' intuitive understanding that social programs of any sort, especially those serving African American youth, need first to engage those whom they are intended to serve and support if they are to be successful in their goals.

Summary and Conclusions

As popular and pervasive as sport-based social intervention programs have become in the last ten to fifteen years, the vast majority of these well-intended initiatives lack a coherent conceptual foundation. Too often, such programs simply provide an excuse for athletic administrators to secure funding for otherwise limited sports facilities or programs or allow public officials to make it appear as if they are taking steps to deal with the perceived problems of urban crime, violence, and public safety in an era marked by declining support for social services run by the state (Hartmann, 2001). Such shortsighted and one-dimensional visions not only leave such efforts vulnerable to public criticism and cutback (witness the attacks on midnight basketball in the context of debates over the federal crime bill in 1994), they also compromise their immediate impact and effectiveness.

This study of a Chicago-based, "educator-coach" and his sport and education operation provides some important insights into how we might better understand and operationalize sport-based social intervention initiatives. The experience and practical understanding of Larry Hawkins suggests, in the first place, that while sport can be a powerful force for social intervention, its impacts are not (*contra* traditional idealist beliefs) automatically or inevitably positive. Indeed, as Hawkins well realizes, sport can actually serve undesirable ends or reinforce problematic behaviors if implemented improperly. Thus, sport is better understood as a tool for social outreach, a hook or instrument whose impact depends upon the ends toward which it is directed, how it is implemented, and the context in which it is deployed.

This brings us quickly to a second point: The success of any sport-based social interventionist program is largely determined by the strength of its nonsport components, what it does with young people once they are brought into the program through sport. A great deal could be said here about all the things that are required for meaningful social intervention, especially under the conditions of poverty, inequality, and institutional discrimination that "at-risk" urban youth typically face. Hawkins' own broad emphasis on education, for example, suggests that social intervention may be far more intensive and extensive and expensive than we typically are willing (or able) to acknowledge. But the key point in this context is that the operators of sports-based programs must fully understand and engage these issues if they are to make good of their social interventionist ideals and objectives.

None of this is to suggest that the sport-based components of such programs can be ignored, taken for granted, or minimized. To do so would be to risk losing the very hook that brings young people into the program and inspires their ongoing and energetic participation. Rather, it is to insist that there needs to be a balance between the sport-based and the nonsport-based aspects of a program, where sport is just one part of a whole package of resources and social supports requiring

a level of investment and intensive, day-to-day involvement far beyond that of most sport-based intervention programs. It may not be too much to suggest, in fact, that sport-based social intervention actually requires of its operators a kind of sophisticated bait-and-switch technique where participants are brought into the program for purposes that are only instrumentally related to other goals and objectives. In any case, it is clear that rather than having it easier than other youth workers, sport-based program organizers have a unique double burden requiring that they must be proficient at both sport and social intervention.

All of these challenges and complexities in mind, it is important to stress one final point: Whatever sport-based social intervention programs may have to contribute to improving the lives of urban youth, we must be careful not to expect too much from them. Social intervention is a complex and challenging enterprise even under the best of circumstances, with abundant resources and using the most comprehensive and advanced modes of engagement and programming. Given their typically limited resources and scheduling, sport-based programs by themselves, even when brilliantly conceived and implemented, will not always succeed; more often than not, they will fail. To believe anything else at once overestimates the social force of sport and underestimates the difficulties of meaningful social intervention and change. Perhaps, even worse, such misunderstandings can actually serve to reinforce and exacerbate the problems faced by at-risk urban youth by deflecting public attention away from deeper social sources of their problems. "If we are not cautious," as Jay Coakley has put it, such programs " . . . may unwittingly reaffirm ideological positions that identify young people, especially young people of color as 'problems' and then forget that the real problems are deindustrialization, unemployment, underemployment, poverty, racism, and at least twenty years of defunding social programs that have traditionally been used to foster community development in ways that positively impact the lives of young people" (Coakley, 2002, p. 23).[8]

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Notes

[1]There are many reasons for this growth. From the point of view of sport practicioners, declining public funding for sport and recreation provision have been a driving force (Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002; Crompton, 1980; Crompton & McGregor, 1994; White, 1992; Ewing & Seefeldt, 1989; Chalip, 1988; Ingham, 1985; Shivers & Halper, 1981). From the point of view of public planners little interested in sport, these programs seem to offer an affordable approach to problems of urban youth risk in an era marked by paradoxical rising concerns about crime, risk, violence, and public safety and declines in support for public goods, especially the social services of the welfare state (cf. Wacquant, 1994; Wacquant & Wilson, 1989). But whatever the motivations and driving forces, this seems to be a policy initiative that is well entrenched and will remain with us for the foreseeable future.

[2]To be certain, numerous programs that include athletic and physical activities as one aspect or component of a larger integrated service or outreach effort—Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, after-school based programs would be typical examples—have been found to have positive violence prevention effects (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman 1994; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995; Gottfredson, 1986). However, these tend not to be sport based or even use recreation as the key to their outreach and recruitment and appear not to systematically theorize the role or place of sport and recreation in the conception and operation of the overarching program.

[3]Although this paper is intended to draw upon Hawkins' program to formulate something of a new theoretical model for how to understand sport and recreation-based social intervention programs, some evidence of this program's own historic effectiveness would probably be helpful. Obviously, such an intensive, unconventional approach to education and social intervention does not lend itself to the kinds of quantitative analyses that drive and sustain most schools, funding agencies, and public policies: It doesn't reach large numbers of students; conventional measures of academic success and criterion of program evaluation fail to capture Hawkins' long-term goals and influence. Nevertheless, there are clear indicators that Hawkins' program works. Alumni of the program include notables such as Chicago Judge Michael Stuckey, former Illinois Senator Carol Mosley Braun, former NBA great and now Atlanta Hawks Vice-President Cassie Russell. And the real success of the Program is not in the standout individuals it has produced but in the regular stream of solid students and citizens they produce. Between 1975 and 1984, for example, 201 of 220 seniors who completed the program enrolled in elite colleges and universities around the country (*University of Chicago Magazine*, Spring 1984). In a city like Chicago—where many high school valedictorians have great difficulty making the transition from community college to college—these numbers are nothing short of remarkable.

[4]It might be pointed out, in fact, that Coleman, who spent much of his career at Chicago, was one of Hawkins' strongest supporters, and the two often exchanged ideas on schools, sport, and other social issues.

[5]A more widely known African American sports personality who found himself in this situation was Arthur Ashe, an old friend of Hawkins and his Program (cf. Ashe with Rampersaad, 1993, pp. 147-153).

[6]Given sport's own history of sexism and gender bias, a word on gender may be in order. The program seems to have been largely masculine and male-dominated in its early years in terms of participants as well as of staff, teachers, and coaches. But beginning the late 1970s, the program (perhaps in conjunction with developments around Title IX) seems

to have begun to make gender equity a real priority. In the 1980s, in fact, Hawkins himself shifted from coaching boys sports to girls sports and for many years now has worked primarily with girls volleyball in the city. Hawkins believes, in short, this vision of sport as an educational tool applies to girls and young women as well as boys and puts these ideas into practice as well.

[7]I was one of only three—out of approximately 20—White staff members during the year and a half I worked most intensively at the program. I first met Hawkins in the spring of 1989 when, on the advice of my undergraduate mentor, I gave him a copy of a paper I had written on the 1968 African-American Olympic Protest Movement (it was titled "Where sports, race and radicalism collide" and would become the basis of several subsequent works). All I knew about Hawkins at that time was what I had been told by one of my advisors: that he ran this organization that was supposed to use sport to keep kids—especially inner-city kids—in school. I wasn't quite clear why he would even be interested in my project, but it turned out he was and he invited me to discuss it with him a week or two later. I was both surprised and confused to discover that Hawkins had read my paper carefully (which I would only later discover was somewhat remarkable in itself, given the demands on his time) and said that he considered this story his own—that his life, too, involved just such a radical commitment to and struggle for racial justice and African American advancement in and through sport.

[8]Culturally-oriented sport scholars have written a great deal on the unfortunate and unintended symbolic effects such programs can have (cf. Hartmann, 2001; Pitter & Andrews, 1997; Cole, 1996; Hartmann & Wheelock, 2000).

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The Current Often Implemented Fitness Tests in Physical Education Programs: Problems and Future Directions

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This paper aims to examine current nationwide youth fitness test programs, address problems embedded in the programs, and possible solutions. The current Fitnessgram, President's Challenge, and YMCA youth fitness test programs were selected to represent nationwide youth fitness test programs. Sponsors of the nationwide youth fitness test programs need to (a) carefully examine the efficacy of youth fitness test batteries in promoting student health-related fitness, (b) increase the accountability of youth fitness testing, (c) add a written test on student fitness knowledge to the fitness test programs, and (d) select and develop more efficient test items in each test component.

Youth fitness testing in school-based physical education programs has been in existence for more than a century (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1992; Pate, 1989). Nationwide regular youth fitness testing, however, began in the 1950s in response to lower performance on the Kraus-Weber test by American youth, compared to European youth. (Freedson, Cureton, & Heath, 2000; Seefeldt & Vogel, 1989). Although the Kraus-Weber test generally was not considered a valid measure of children's health-related fitness (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1992), regular fitness test programs in school-based physical education programs were nevertheless adopted (Freedson et al., 2000).

Issues regarding regular youth fitness testing have been debated for years (McKenzie & Sallis, 1996; Seefeldt & Vogel, 1989). It is premature to draw any conclusions on whether fitness testing has a beneficial impact on health-related fitness and regular participation in physical activity (PA). Nevertheless, the merits of youth fitness testing have been brought into question, probably resulting from the following three facts: (a) American children have failed to show improvement

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