Parental Rage and Violence in Youth Sports: How Can We Prevent Soccer Moms and Hockey Dads from Interfering in Youth Sports and Causing Games to End in Fistfights Rather Than Handshakes

Dianna K. Fiore

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.villanova.edu/mslj

Part of the Entertainment, Arts, and Sports Law Commons

Recommended Citation
Dianna K. Fiore, Parental Rage and Violence in Youth Sports: How Can We Prevent Soccer Moms and Hockey Dads from Interfering in Youth Sports and Causing Games to End in Fistfights Rather Than Handshakes, 10 Jeffrey S. Moorad Sports L.J. 103 (2003). Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.villanova.edu/mslj/vol10/iss1/6

This Comment is brought to you for free and open access by Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jeffrey S. Moorad Sports Law Journal by an authorized editor of Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Digital Repository.
Comments

PARENTAL RAGE AND VIOLENCE IN YOUTH SPORTS: HOW CAN WE PREVENT "SOCCER MOMS" AND "HOCKEY DADS" FROM INTERFERING IN YOUTH SPORTS AND CAUSING GAMES TO END IN FISTFIGHTS RATHER THAN HANDSHAKES?

Excitement suddenly turned to fear for the 49ers youth football team . . . as players ran off the field holding their stomachs and began vomiting violently on the sideline. Parents and coaches helped the eight boys, ages 12 to 14, into cars and headed to the hospital, ending the practice for a championship game a few days later. No one knew it at the time, but the sick 49ers had been poisoned, casualties in an epidemic of parental rage sweeping through youth sports.1

I. INTRODUCTION

Youth sports have been a part of American culture for a long time.2 For many years, sports have provided positive experiences for children.3 When children play sports, they may experience the joy of learning a new athletic skill or even scoring the winning point in a game.4 Playing sports should not only be a positive experience for children, but should also be an enjoyable experience for parents who proudly watch their children play from the sidelines or the stands.5

Occasionally, parents are not involved in their children’s sporting interests.6 Before being introduced to the world of organized

3. See Fred Engh, WHY JOHNNY HATES SPORTS 2 (Fred Keating ed., Avery Publ’g Group 1999) (noting youth sports have provided children with memories and healthy exercise).
4. See id. (describing positive experience youth sports can be for children).
5. See id. (noting youth sports involve both children and parents).
6. See Jason R. Schuette, Comment, Adolescent Sports Violence – When Prosecutors Play Referee, Making Criminals Out of Child Athletes, but Are They the Real Culprits?, 21
youth sports, children often gather in streets to play stickball, shoot hoops, or play touch football with family and friends in a backyard. Overall, children participate in sports for exercise, fun, and camaraderie.

Today, the games that carefree children played in the backyard with friends are replaced by more structured activities such as organized youth sports programs. Sadly, parents and other adults have become too involved in youth sports, making them more structured, competitive, and violent, rather than carefree, recreational, and fun. As a result of this invasiveness, tragedies have occurred, such as when a father broke an umpire’s jaw at his son’s Little League game because he did not agree with a call; when a “soccer mom” slapped a fourteen-year-old referee at a youth soccer game; and when a “hockey dad” was sentenced to six to ten years in prison for beating another father to death after arguing at their sons’ hockey practice. These stories are just a few of the many examples illustrating the epidemic of parental rage at youth sporting events. Consequently, this rage is taking the fun out of sports and creating a negative learning environment for children.

This Comment examines the escalating problem of parental rage and violence in youth sports, the legal issues surrounding recent incidents, and the possible solutions needed to ensure that youth sports remain fun and safe and that children are not subject


7. See id. at 515 (explaining children begin playing sports with friends for enjoyment); see also William Nack & Lester Munson, Out of Control: The Rising Tide of Violence and Verbal Abuse by Adults at Youth Sports Events Reached Its Terrible Peak This Month When One Hockey Father Killed Another, at http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/features/cover/news/2000/12/08/yir_courtroom2/index.html (July 24, 2000) (noting in past, children learned to have fun and pass time by playing with friends without adult interferences).


9. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 522 (arguing parents now influence children to play organized sports for competition).


to unnecessary violence. Section II discusses the historical motivations behind the rise and development of youth sports programs.\textsuperscript{12} It further analyzes contemporary ideologies behind youth sports programs in order to understand better why such parental rage and unnecessary violence exist.\textsuperscript{13} Section III provides an overview of violence in youth sports by first describing unnecessary violence, such as "parental rage," and by then examining the causes of such violence through scrutiny of cases and notable incidents.\textsuperscript{14} Section III then discusses proposed solutions to this problem and analyzes strategies that have been implemented to help remedy the harmful effects that this epidemic has on youth sports.\textsuperscript{15} Finally, Section IV proposes the imposition of a national standard of conduct on parents, coaches, youth sports organizations, and young athletes to prevent exposure of young athletes to unnecessary violence in activities that should be fun.\textsuperscript{16}

\section{II. Background}

With an estimated thirty to thirty-five million children between ages five and eighteen participating in youth sports, it is clear that youth sports are integrated significantly in modern American culture.\textsuperscript{17} Children play to have fun with their friends and to practice and improve their athletic skills.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, parents want their children to be involved in sports to build character and to manage the children's free time with a healthy, positive activity.\textsuperscript{19} Participat-

\textsuperscript{12} For a further discussion of the history of youth sports programs, see infra notes 17-38 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{13} For a further discussion on contemporary ideologies behind modern youth sports programs, see infra notes 39-51 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{14} For a further discussion of the unnecessary violence in youth sports and recent occurrences of such violence, see infra notes 52-151 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{15} For a further discussion of suggested solutions to remedy unnecessary violence in youth sports, see infra notes 152-98 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{16} For a further discussion of the imposition of a national standard of appropriate conduct on all youth sports programs and at all youth sporting events, see infra notes 199-202 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{17} See Appenzeller, supra note 2, at 12 (discussing extent of participation in youth sports); Bob Bigelow et al., Just Let the Kids Play: How To Stop Other Adults from Ruining Your Child's Fun and Success in Youth Sports 5 (Health Communications, Inc. 2001) (emphasizing amount of interest in youth sports).
\textsuperscript{18} See Nack & Munson, supra note 7 (noting children play sports for fun and not necessarily to win).
\textsuperscript{19} See Schuette, supra note 6, at 517-18 (observing parents have best intentions when initially encouraging children to play sports). Youth sports programs are appealing to parents because participating in team sports teaches children morals, teamwork, sportsmanship, respect, self-sacrifice, self-control, loyalty, and success. See Appenzeller, supra note 2, at 9-10 (discussing values of team sports); see also Schuette, supra note 6, at 518 ("[O]rganizations . . . fashion theories of play
ing in youth sports programs, such as Pop Warner Youth Football League, Little League Baseball and Softball, PONY League Baseball and Softball, American Youth Soccer Organization, and National In-Line Hockey Association, can fulfill the needs and desires of both children and their parents.  

A. Historical Analysis Behind the Development of Youth Sports Programs

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, organized youth sports emerged in urban America because parents sought to occupy their children’s free time while they worked in factories and mills. Parents organized sports activities for their children to compensate for a non-rural upbringing and to fill the void caused by parents’ working long hours.

With this increased interest in engaging their children in sports activities with friends, parents had to organize and implement a more structured sporting experience for their children. As a result, the first two youth sports organizations, Pop Warner Football and Little League Baseball, emerged to provide wholesome values for children. Pop Warner Youth Football now offers devoted to promoting wholesome values and principles such as cooperation, self-sacrifice, obedience, and character development.”

20. See Engh, supra note 3, at 29-30 (citing examples of youth sports organizations in which children often participate); see also Appenzeller, supra note 2, at 10-12 (noting many available ways children can get involved in youth sports programs).

21. See Appenzeller, supra note 2, at 8 (discussing beginning of youth sports in United States). During the late 1800s and early 1900s, thousands of Americans left their farms and rural towns and traveled to big cities and major industrial centers to find work. See id. While parents found employment opportunities, the change in environment and culture deprived their children of the opportunity to run, play, and work in the fields and farms. See id. Once in the cities, children were either confined to small apartments without adult supervision or ran loose on city streets. See id.

22. See id. at 9 (explaining reasons parents organized and directed sports for children).

23. See id. at 11 (describing origin of youth sports organizations). “Practice, scheduled contests, officials, leagues, championships, tournaments, travel, and commercial sponsors were all seen by adults as important for children.” Id.

24. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 518 n.27 (citing Shane Murphy, The Cheers and the Tears: A Healthy Alternative to the Dark Side of Youth Sports Today 30-32 (Jossey-Bass 1999)). Founded in 1929, Pop Warner Football was the first youth sports organization. See Engh, supra note 3, at 30. At that time, Pop Warner Football was not very popular among the states, but today there are Pop Warner programs in thirty-six states. See id. at 30-31. Alternatively, Little League Baseball, originated in 1939, realized enormous appeal as it quickly opened in more than a dozen states with over 850 teams. See id. at 32-33. There were so many Little League Baseball programs across the country that national tournament games
highly organized football leagues involving over 350,000 children, 40,000 coaches, and 750,000 parents and friends. Little League Baseball is even more popular than Pop Warner Football. Little League Baseball is highly structured, organizing programs within local communities around the world. Granted by a bill signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, Little League became a federal incorporation, bestowing on the program the "protective integrity" of the U.S. government. Ten years later, Congress amended the law incorporating Little League Baseball to admit girls into the program. Since then, Little League has brought young girls and boys together on ball fields around the world and currently claims to have almost 3,000,000 baseball and softball participants worldwide.

The PONY League was created in 1951 to give children over the age of twelve opportunities to play organized youth baseball because Little League was available only to children younger than twelve. PONY, which stands for "Protect Our Nation's Youth," quickly grew to include over 28,500 national teams, 12 international teams, and an estimated 5,000,000 participants since it began. While competing with Little League and other youth baseball programs, PONY's wide acceptance and continuous participation were organized, in which the winning team of one state would advance to play the winning team of another state. See id. at 33.

25. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 30; see also Introduction/Background Information, at http://www.dickbutkus.com/dbfm/popwarner/info/intro-back.html (last visited Nov. 10, 2002) [hereinafter Introduction/Background Information].


28. See id. (stating federal government awarded Little League Baseball federal protection in all fifty states). Incorporation gave Little League Baseball the highest recognition allowed by the federal government, which placed Little League in the same class as other highly regarded organizations such as the American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America, and Boys Club of America. See id.; see also Act of July, 16, 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-378, 78 Stat. 325 (1964) (codified as amended at 36 U.S.C.A. §§ 130501-130513 (1998)).

29. See Structure, supra note 27 (noting amended legislation in 1974 received unanimous approval of both U.S. Senate and House of Representatives).

30. See Little League Participation, supra note 26, (displaying numbers of participating leagues, including baseball and softball participants from 1939 to 2001).

31. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 33-34 (stating Little League's Senior League was not formed until 1961).

throughout the world exemplified the increasing popularity and demand for youth sports programs.33

As an alternative to football, softball, and baseball, American Youth Soccer Organization ("AYSO") offers children from ages five to nineteen an opportunity to participate in an organized soccer league.34 AYSO modernized youth sports by implementing philosophies such as "Everyone Plays" and "Balanced Team," which have become part of AYSO's trademark.35 Parents found soccer and AYSO's ideology appealing because soccer is not as dangerous as football and does not place the same kind of focalized pressure on children as baseball does when a child is alone at bat.36

Lastly, the National In-Line Hockey Association ("NIHA") was formed in 1993 as the first youth sports organization to create amateur in-line hockey leagues with uniform rules and regulations across the country.37 NIHA interested parents and children because it allowed children to play hockey without the costs of renting time at ice rinks and buying traditional ice hockey equipment, and it lacked the risk of injury for which ice hockey is notorious.38

B. Contemporary Ideologies Behind Today's Youth Sports Programs

Although youth sports leagues were created with the best intentions for children, they were motivated by the ideal of "winning."39 Over time, these youth sports leagues progressed into intensely competitive programs, creating a competitive athletic environment for young children and shaping today's youth sports model.40 Now more than ever, adults structure youth sports programs to represent "miniaturized" versions of professional sports.41

33. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 34 (indicating PONY became as widely-accepted as Little League).
34. See id. at 35-36 (noting AYSO was introduced in 1964 and has grown internationally to over 50,000 teams).
35. See id. at 36.
36. See id. at 37 (explaining higher level of accountability in baseball and football than in soccer).
37. See id. at 38.
38. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 38.
39. See APPENZELLER, supra note 2, at 11 (explaining ideal of winning became motivation in organizing youth sports because organized youth sports did not present curriculum restraints, play theory, or ideology).
40. See id.; see also Schuette, supra note 6, at 518 (relating individualized sports programs evolved into team sports).
41. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 516 (stating youth sports organizations have been modeled after professional sports organizations).
Due to the highly structured organization of youth sports programs, they may appear to have been modeled after professional sports leagues.42 In fact, however, youth sports programs were never intended to replicate professional sports leagues.43 Carl Stotz, Bill Hughes, and Glen "Pop" Warner, the founders of the oldest youth sports organizations, intended youth sports to be fun, recreational, and social.44 Despite their intentions, youth sports eventually became so structured that they began to emulate their professional counterparts.45 Over time, parents became more involved in making youth sports just as intense and competitive as professional sports.46 Due to the combination of adults' over-structuring of youth sports programs and parents' over-involvement in their children's sports, youth sports comprise almost all of the same characteristics as professional sports.47 From scheduled practices and games, leagues, officials, umpires, referees, championships,

42. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 41 (noting youth sports organizations have changed to mirror structure and ideals of professional sports).

43. See id. ("It seems pretty clear that these programs are being modeled after what we see in professional sports, a concept totally alien to Carl Stotz, Bill Hughes, or Pop Warner."). Little League founder Carl Stotz organized the baseball program for younger children because when he was growing up, the older children in his neighborhood never let him play with them because he was just a "little kid." See id. at 31; see also APPENZELLER, supra note 2, at 11 ("Stotz founded Little League baseball in response to his own frustrations as a youngster with the unsupervised and chaotic play that existed."). AYSO founder Bill Hughes emphasized the "everyone plays" principle. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 35-36. The Pop Warner Football League originated as simply a local recreational football club in Philadelphia and was later named after legendary college football coach Glen "Pop" Warner. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 35-36 (discussing Pop Warner's history). PONY's founders ensured that every child had a chance to play baseball because PONY's goal was to provide children with an opportunity to continue playing baseball beyond Little League. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 35-34.

44. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 38, 41 (recalling founders' original goals, ideals, and philosophies when youth sports organizations were created).

45. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 516, 519 (asserting characteristics of professional sports model began to influence youth sports organizations). Pop Warner Football and Little League were the first organizations to structure their programs like their professional counterparts. See id. at 518 n.27. "Before long, nearly every sport at the adult level was complete with a miniaturized counter-part at the childhood level." Id. at 519.

46. See Larry Tye, Playing Under Pressure: For Some Youngsters, Sports Are Serious Business, BOSTON GLOBE, Sept. 28, 1997, at A30 (reporting young children now play sports for competition and have intense schedules like professional athletes). In an effort to be involved in their children's lives, parents volunteer to coach or organize their children's teams, supply teams with uniforms, distribute trophies, and schedule playoffs and All-Star games. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 519. Parents invest so much that they often neglect whether their children are having fun. See id.; see also Tye, supra note 46, at A30 (discussing adults as biggest problem in youth sports because they forget intent of youth sports).

47. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 41 (analogizing youth sports leagues with professional sports leagues).
tournaments, professional team names, trophies, team meals, travel, and even corporate sponsorship, children experience what it is like to be a professional athlete.\textsuperscript{48}

Unfortunately, some adults overlook the reality that exposure to the rigorous schedules and fierce competition that professional athletes face may be overwhelming for children who simply want to play sports to have fun with friends.\textsuperscript{49} Parents often neglect that the primary goal of youth sports is for children to have fun.\textsuperscript{50} Therefore, if the players are not enjoying themselves, the whole purpose of participation in youth sports is averted.\textsuperscript{51}

III. \textbf{Analysis: Assessing the Problem of Violence in Youth Sports}

Although most violence in sports occurs at the professional level, particularly in football and hockey, there is an inherent de-

\textsuperscript{48} See \textsc{Appenzeller}, supra note 2, at 11 (explaining parents organized youth sports leagues to resemble professional leagues because parents realized importance for children). Pop Warner’s Little Scholars program has a growing number of corporate contributors and sponsors such as Reebok, US Airways, First USA, and Wilson Sporting Goods Company. See \textit{Introduction/Background Information}, supra note 25 (listing organizations and companies having relationships with and sponsoring Pop Warner Little Scholars program). Little League has the growing support of numerous corporate sponsors such as Wilson Sporting Goods Company, TV Guide, American Honda, Russell Corporation, and M&M/Mars Corporation. See \textit{Little League Corporate Sponsors}, at http://www.littleleague.org/sponsors/index.htm (last visited Oct. 28, 2002) (listing corporate sponsors of 2001 Little League Sponsorship Program); see also \textsc{Engh}, supra note 3, at 41. A youth sports league season typically shadows the professional leagues, in that:

A draft is held where the coaches try to choose those whom they believe to be the best player for their teams, just like the professionals. Later, the best players on each team are selected for the all-star teams, just like the professionals. Then, there are the playoffs, just like the professionals, and the championship series, just like the professionals. In effect, we are treating our children – at least some of our children – as smaller versions of the adult professionals.

\textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{49} See \textsc{Tye}, supra note 46, at A30 (implying parents force children to play sports). “While more kids than ever are playing sports, more also are dropping out as they enter their teens and finally can decide for themselves.” \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{50} See \textit{Letters to the Editor/The Boston Files; Violence in Youth Sports: Blame Adults, Boston Globe}, July 24, 2000, at A15 [hereinafter \textit{Letters to the Editor}] (asserting most important goal in youth sports is for players to have fun).

gree of violence at all levels.\textsuperscript{52} As a result, sports involve a serious risk of physical injury.\textsuperscript{53}

A. Defining the Line Between Necessary and Unnecessary Violence in All Sports

A voluntary participant in any sport assumes all reasonable risks inherent to the sport, but only if the risks are foreseeable and incident to the game.\textsuperscript{54} The court considers risks to be incident to a game when a player voluntarily participates in a sport that requires physical contact with a potential for injury.\textsuperscript{55} Consequently, team players participating in contact sports assume greater risks of injury than participants in non-contact sports.\textsuperscript{56}

Regardless of the inherent violence of a sport, unnecessary incidents of sports violence do not fall within the scope of the sport,

\textsuperscript{52} See Walter T. Champion, Jr., \textit{Sports Law in a Nutshell} 193 (West Publ'g Co., 2d ed. 2000) (discussing violence in professional sports moving to amateur and youth sports leagues). Some sports, such as hockey and football, are deemed "extreme contact sports" because of the unavoidable violent nature recognized as part of the game. \textit{See id.}


\textsuperscript{54} See Pfister v. Shusta, 657 N.E.2d 1013, 1014 (Ill. 1995) (upholding contact sports exception allowing recovery by participants injured by co-participants due to willful, wanton, and intentional misconduct).

\textsuperscript{55} See Hackbart v. Cincinnati Bengals, Inc., 601 F.2d 516, 520, 524 (10th Cir. 1979) (finding recklessness, rather than assault and battery, proper standard for measuring liability because general principles of law governing liability for infliction of injuries inapplicable when injury occurred in course of game); Nabozny v. Barnhill, 334 N.E.2d 258, 260-61 (Ill. App. Ct. 1975) (applying recklessness standard in holding player liable for injury because conduct was deliberate, willful, or with reckless disregard for safety of other player).

\textsuperscript{56} See Restatement (Second) of Torts § 50, cmt. b (1965). Voluntary participation in a football game constitutes an implied consent to normal risks attendant to bodily contact permitted by the rules of the sport. \textit{See id.} Such risks are foreseeable or inherent to the playing of the sport. \textit{See id.} Participation in a game involving bodily contact does not constitute consent to contact that is prohibited by the rules or usages of the sport if such rules are designed for the protection of the participants and not merely to control the mode of play of the game. \textit{See id.}
and therefore any risk of injury that may be caused by such violence cannot be consented to or assumed.\textsuperscript{57} Unnecessary sports violence is conduct not related to the competitive scope of the sport that causes injury outside the rules of the sport.\textsuperscript{58} Most incidents of sports violence have consisted of athletes behaving recklessly or violently on the playing fields.\textsuperscript{59} Today, a new breed of violence in sports is appearing, especially in youth sports.\textsuperscript{60} This new violence does not involve the young players themselves.\textsuperscript{61} Instead, coaches, parents, umpires, referees, and spectators have all been contributing to what is now an epidemic of unnecessary violence in youth sports known as "sports rage" and "parental rage."\textsuperscript{62}

B. Identifying Unnecessary Violence in Youth Sports: "Sports Rage" and "Parental Rage"

Unnecessary violence now plagues youth sports across the country and has escalated to the point where parents, coaches, umpires, and referees are fighting and beating each other to

\textsuperscript{57} See Rowe, supra note 53 (explaining certain violent conduct in sports is considered unnecessary and not inherent in sports' scope). If an athlete's violent conduct is unforeseeable and unexpected within the scope of the sport, then the athlete may not use consent or assumption of risk as a defense in a tort action. See Champion, supra note 52, at 196-97. "One can knowingly consent to the normal violence associated with a sport, whereas one cannot knowingly consent to non-normal physical contact." Id. at 196. In addition, when an athlete clearly crosses a rational line between legitimate athletic performance and criminal conduct, the athlete will not only be prevented from using consent as a defense in a tort action, but the athlete may also be subject to criminal prosecution. See Abrams, supra note 53.

\textsuperscript{58} See Rowe, supra note 53 (defining sports violence and types of aggression in sports).

\textsuperscript{59} See Hackbart, 601 F.2d at 516 (discussing case of professional football player seeking recovery for injuries sustained when opposing player intentionally struck him during game); Nobozny, 334 N.E.2d at 258 (discussing case of young goaltender of amateur soccer team bringing tort action for injury sustained during soccer match); McKichan v. St. Louis Hockey Club, L.P., 967 S.W.2d 209, 210-11 (Mo. Ct. App. 1998) (discussing case of professional hockey goaltender knocked unconscious and injured when opposing player charged into him after whistle was blown during game); see also Abdul-Haqq, supra note 8 (stating most occurrences of violence emanate from players although coaches, parents, fans, and press contribute).

\textsuperscript{60} See Abdul-Haqq, supra note 8. Aggression is explained by three theories. See id. The first is biological, viewing aggression as a basic human trait. See id. The second is psychological and attributes violence to situational frustration. See id. The third is social learning, which regards aggression as learned through modeling and reinforced by rewards. See id.

\textsuperscript{61} See id. (noting other individuals responsible for increasing violence in sports).

\textsuperscript{62} See id. (discussing individuals other than players causing recent violent incidents in sports).
The labels "sports rage" and "parental rage" refer specifically to parents who lose control and take their "rage" out on other adults. Sports rage and parental rage are not new developments. Yet, the number of violent incidents in youth sports has increased at an alarming rate in the past five years. "From Little League to the big leagues, violence at sporting events is no longer startling." Organized youth sports programs are earning a reputation for producing a generation of unhappy child athletes. Children either must drop out of youth sports programs because they...
are too competitive and no longer fun, or be exposed to the violence that increasingly erupts.⁶⁹

In addition, the trend of violence in youth sports is exposing young athletes to the judicial system.⁷⁰ For example, the twelve-year-old son of Thomas Junta, the father convicted of beating another father to death at their sons' hockey practice, was recently subpoenaed to testify on his father's behalf.⁷¹ Given the extreme nature of this growing problem, parents, children, coaches, and youth sports organizations have sounded the alarm for youth sports league administrators and legislators to take action: first, to find out what is causing the unfortunate trend of parental rage and unnecessary violence in youth sports; and then to find a way to address the problem before it is exacerbated.⁷²

1. **The Causes of the Increased Violence in Youth Sports**

There are several factors that contribute to the alarming increase in unnecessary violence in today's youth sports.⁷³ The "win-at-all-cost coaches, violent parents and poor role models in professional sports" are primary causes.⁷⁴ Moreover, sports are inherently competitive.⁷⁵ Legendary professional football coach Vince Lombardi is credited for coining the phrase "winning isn't everything,

---

⁶⁹. See Tye, supra note 46, at A30 ("[F]un . . . is seeping out of sports.").
⁷¹. See Son Recalls Fatal Fight, supra note 70 (reporting defense team called son to stand after prosecution rested case).
⁷². See Marie Szaniszlo, Rink Killing a Cautionary Tale for Parents, Leagues, Boston Herald, Jan. 13, 2002, at 2 (noting parents are finally getting message about problem of parental rage with publicity of Junta trial and are now seeking ways to prevent such incidents from happening again).
⁷³. See Champion, supra note 52, at 193.
⁷⁴. James & Ziemer, supra note 66 (suggesting violent parents and poor role models in professional sports may be making youth sporting events more violent).
⁷⁵. See ENGH, supra note 3, at 9 ("[S]imply doing your best is no longer good enough."); see also Schuette, supra note 6, at 520 (explaining success in sports is determined by "status at the top, one's win-loss record providing the primary basis for a judgment relating to successful achievement, creating athletic achievement").
it's the only thing," and perpetuating such a mentality.\textsuperscript{76} This mentality in professional sports has been integrated in youth sports.\textsuperscript{77} The ideal of winning in youth sports has become much more important than mere participation as a team player.\textsuperscript{78} Because there is so much emphasis on winning, the physical and emotional nature of youth sporting events continues to change for the worse.\textsuperscript{79}

Unfortunately, the intense competition in youth sports has caused young athletes to play more aggressively on the field and has led to more violent outbursts by parents on the sidelines.\textsuperscript{80} Everyone involved in youth sports, including the athletes, coaches, referees, umpires, spectators, and parents, are at unnecessary risk of injury due to this win-at-all-costs mentality.\textsuperscript{81}

### a. The Parents

An early 1990s survey revealed that out of the 20,000,000 American children who participate in youth sports programs, approx-

\textsuperscript{76} See Doherty, supra note 51, at 130 (noting "winning is everything" mentality quickly became integrated in sports due to society filled with "winning" slogans). Vince Lombardi made it very clear that competition and winning are the most important aspects in playing professional sports when he said:

Winning is not a sometime thing; it's an all the time thing. You don't win once in a while; you don't do things right once in a while; you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing. There is no room for second place. There is only one place in my game, and that's first place . . .


\textsuperscript{77} See Schuette, supra note 6, at 519-20 (revealing modern mentality of competition in professional sports has invaded youth sports, analogizing youth sports to "miniaturized big leagues").

\textsuperscript{78} See id. at 520 (describing youth leagues' integration of competitive ideologies of professional sports).

\textsuperscript{79} See id. at 519-20 (discussing erosion of youth sports as place for skill development due to focus on winning and scoring).

\textsuperscript{80} See id. at 520, 522 (noting inclination of young players to play rough and use illegitimate violence to win, and tendency of parents to get caught up in idea of winning and act irrationally).

mately 14,000,000 will quit before they reach the age of thirteen.82
According to the survey, these children drop out “mostly because
adults—particularly their own parents—have turned playing sports
into a joyless, negative experience.”83

Parents have contributed largely to the “winning is the only
thing” attitude in youth sports.84 Child athletes now struggle to suc-
cceed to please their parents, not to achieve personal goals.85 This
struggle for perfection is causing anxiety among young athletes and
their parents.86

Parents traditionally attend their children’s sporting events to
avoid missing an opportunity to interact with their children.87 To-
day, however, parents are more involved in structuring their chil-
dren’s lives to ensure that their children become successful
athletes.88 Thus, putting pressure on a child to make a high school varsity team to increase his or her chance of procuring a college
athletic scholarship has become the new motivation for parents.89
Consequently, because of all they have invested in their children’s
success, parents become emotionally involved.90

It is very easy for parents to participate excessively in sports
competition when their own children are the players.91 The paren-

82. See Nack & Munson, supra note 7 (labeling increase of violence and verbal
abuse by adults at youth sporting events “epidemic”).
83. Id.
84. See Doherty, supra note 51, at 130 (noting sports are no longer fun be-
cause parents are putting too much emphasis on winning, with desire for fun re-
placed by desire to win at all costs).
85. See id.
86. See id. (referring to sports psychologists who theorize young athletes worry
about making parents happy).
87. See Jules Crittenden, Civility Is Part of Game Plan — Fatal Rink Brawl Puts
Spotlight on Codes of Conduct, BOSTON HERALD, Jan. 13, 2002, at 3 (noting parents
are much busier and have little time to be with children).
88. See id. (discussing parents increased involvement because of financial rea-
sons). Stephen Burke of Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sports
in Society believes that the pressure is higher for parents today because they con-
template the substantial cost of their children’s college education while realizing
that professional athletes make “tens of millions of dollars, and they think some-
how their kid can develop into one of these athletes.” Id.
89. See Letters to the Editor, supra note 50, at A15 (suggesting causes of parental
rage in youth sports).
90. See Peter DeMarco, Rink Rage, or Motherly Love? Many Women Arent Shy
About Venting Their Anger, BOSTON GLOBE, Jan. 13, 2002, at B1 (discussing parents’
concern about how games are played because of physical nature of sport); see also
Tye, supra note 46, at A30 (describing parents willing to spend endless hours driv-
ing children to and from practices and games).
91. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 522 (explaining parents are susceptible to “a
great deal of narcissistic appeal” of sports competition when child is involved).
tal instinct to protect their children when hurt during a game compels parents to lose control of their emotions and temper.\textsuperscript{92}

The most notable recent occurrence of parental rage resulted in the death of a young hockey player's father at a Massachusetts hockey rink.\textsuperscript{93} The fatal encounter between Thomas Junta, known as the "Hockey Dad," and Michael Costin occurred on July 5, 2000.\textsuperscript{94} Costin was supervising a hockey practice for ten-year-old boys, including his three sons and Junta's son at the Burbank Ice Hockey Arena in Reading, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{95} Junta was in the stands observing his son in a non-contact scrimmage.\textsuperscript{96}

During the scrimmage, Junta became infuriated as he viewed the young players acting rough and engaging in body-checking.\textsuperscript{97} Witnesses reported that Junta left the stands and went onto the ice, hollering at Costin for allowing the rough play.\textsuperscript{98} Costin, however, in his protective hockey gear, attacked Junta by choking him with Junta's necklace and kicking Junta's shins and feet with the three-inch blades of his ice skates.\textsuperscript{99} After the brief physical altercation, a rink employee separated Junta and Costin and requested that Junta leave the rink.\textsuperscript{100}

Investigators reported that Junta left the rink with his son and later returned to pick up his son's two friends.\textsuperscript{101} When Junta returned to the rink, he ran into Costin.\textsuperscript{102} A second argument en-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} See DeMarco, \textit{supra} note 90, at B1 (noting because some parents never played sports, they do not realize what type of hitting is painful).
\item \textsuperscript{94} See Fox Butterfield, Fatal Fight at Rink Nearly Severed Head, Doctor Testifies, \textsc{N.Y. Times}, Jan. 15, 2002, at A9 (reporting facts of 'Hockey Dad' case).
\item \textsuperscript{95} See Massachusetts Father Surrenders in Hockey Rink Killing, at \texttt{http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/07/10/hockey.fight02/} (July 10, 2000) [hereinafter \textit{Massachusetts Father}] (describing circumstances before fight).
\item \textsuperscript{96} See id. (noting hockey game was supposed to be non-contact scrimmage).
\item \textsuperscript{97} See id. (explaining Junta became agitated when young hockey players started to get rough during practice).
\item \textsuperscript{98} See Jessica Heslam, Hockey Dad Freed on $5G Bail, Victim's Kin Outraged, \textsc{Boston Herald}, July 11, 2000, at 1 (reporting early facts of 'Hockey Dad').
\item \textsuperscript{99} See id. (describing first fight and indicating father's presence on ice with three children immediately prior to fight).
\item \textsuperscript{100} See Expert: Hockey Father Beaten Severely, at \texttt{http://www.cnn.com/2002/Law/01/04/hockey.dad} (Jan. 4, 2002) [hereinafter \textit{Expert}] (reiterating story of rink employee, Nancy Blanchard, who saw first fight and then called police).
\item \textsuperscript{101} See Heslam, \textit{supra} note 98, at 1.
\item \textsuperscript{102} See id.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
sued and both men "squared off" and began punching each other.103 Several witnesses, including both Junta's and Costin's sons, saw Junta throw Costin to the floor and repeatedly beat Costin in the head and the neck.104

Upon their arrival at the rink, paramedics found Costin without a pulse.105 While being transported to a nearby hospital, Costin's pulse strengthened, but he still could not breathe on his own.106 At the hospital, he fell into a coma and was placed on a ventilator.107 A day after the incident, Michael Costin was declared brain dead, was removed from a ventilator, and subsequently died.108

On July 10, 2000, Junta surrendered to the police and was arrested for manslaughter.109 The case was assigned to the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, and at the arraignment, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts requested that Junta be held on $5000 cash bail.110 On January 2, 2002, Junta's trial began with jury selection, which consisted of asking potential jurors if they had children, if their children played on sports teams, and if they ever had witnessed an incident of parental rage at a youth sports game.111

During the trial, Junta's attorney tried to paint an image of Junta as a "gentle giant," arguing Junta fought Costin in self-defense.112 Junta's attorney gave the accounts of two women who described the fights as full of "anxiety [and] emotions."113 Prosecutors challenged the defense's arguments that Junta acted in self-defense by proving Junta was the ultimate aggressor.114 They had medical experts demonstrate that Costin's injuries were incon-

103. See id. (describing second fight between Junta and Costin).
104. See id.
105. See Expert, supra note 100 (reporting testimony of first paramedic to arrive at ice rink).
106. See id.
107. See Massachusetts Father, supra note 95.
108. See Expert, supra note 100 (stating Michael Costin declared dead on July 6, 2000).
109. See Massachusetts Father, supra note 95 (stating Junta went to Woburn District Court where police arrested him).
110. See Heslam, supra note 98, at A1 (reporting Junta went home to his four children after his family posted bail).
111. See Jury Selection, supra note 93.
113. Id. (reporting defense was trying to point out inconsistencies in testimony implying Junta was aggressor in fight).
114. See Expert, supra note 100.
sistent with the "minimum force" Junta claimed to have used in self-defense.\textsuperscript{115}

After twelve hours of deliberation, the jury convicted Junta of a lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter, an unintentional killing as a result of a battery that Junta knew or should have known would endanger Costin's life.\textsuperscript{116} Under Massachusetts law, Junta could have been sentenced to up to twenty years in prison, but on January 25, 2002, a Massachusetts judge sentenced Junta to only six to ten years in state prison.\textsuperscript{117} After the sentencing, Mary Barbuzzi, Costin's sister, embraced the Costin children and expressed that the family "believe[d] justice ha[d] been served" and that their prayers would be with the Junta family, along with their own family, as they attempted to overcome the tragedy.\textsuperscript{118}

b. The Coaches

Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, did not believe in cheating to win, nor did he show interest in winning "without heart, brains and sportsmanship."\textsuperscript{119} He did not shy away from the violence of sports, but he never believed in playing dirty to win.\textsuperscript{120}

Today's youth sports coaches should follow Lombardi's lead and act as role models to exert positive influences for children.\textsuperscript{121} In youth sports, the most successful coaches are concerned more about treating each child as an individual and displaying concern, respect, understanding, and patience with each child as he or she develops skills.\textsuperscript{122} Unfortunately, some youth sports coaches have

\textsuperscript{115} See id. A medical expert testified at the trial and displayed graphic autopsy pictures of Costin. See id. The pictures revealed that Costin had a bloody nose and severely swollen and bruised ear, neck, shoulder, and mid-back. See id. The medical expert also testified that Costin's brain suffered such acute trauma from the beating that "small blood vessels ruptured, causing extensive bleeding in the brain and spinal column." Id.

\textsuperscript{116} See Junta Convicted, supra note 112 (discussing Junta's conviction of involuntary manslaughter instead of more serious charge of manslaughter).

\textsuperscript{117} See Hockey Dad, supra note 11.

\textsuperscript{118} Pamela Ferdinand, Hockey Dad Sentenced in Beating Death Case: Thomas Junta Receives Six to 10 Years in Prison, WASH. POST, Jan. 26, 2002, at A3 (discussing Junta's sentence of six to ten years in state prison for involuntary manslaughter).

\textsuperscript{119} David Maraniss, Coach, Symbol, Savior: When Vince Lombardi Took Washington by Storm, WASH. POST MAC., Sept. 5, 1999, at 113 (discussing Vince Lombardi's legacy as sports icon).

\textsuperscript{120} See id. (explaining Lombardi's philosophy).

\textsuperscript{121} See Schuette, supra note 6, at 524 (noting coaches are guardians in influencing and instilling positive character traits during child's development).

\textsuperscript{122} See id. at 524 (explaining best youth sport coaches are not focused on win-loss records).
become fanatical about winning and have resorted either to instructing young players to play violently, or to coaching violently to ensure victory.\footnote{123}{See id. (noting coaches tend to negate positive values and benefits of youth sports).}

In an example of violent coaching, Ronald Gibson, coach of a Florida Boys and Girls Club youth football league, faced child abuse charges after lashing out at a ten-year-old player for missing a football pass during a game the previous week.\footnote{124}{See Robinson, supra note 81.} Gibson allegedly grabbed the boy, picked him up, threw him backward, and ultimately caused bones in both arms to snap when the boy tried to break his fall.\footnote{125}{See id. (indicating boy broke two bones in right forearm and one bone in left forearm).} The Boys and Girls Club fired Gibson, even though police interviewed other members of the youth football team and found that Gibson did not have a previous history of abuse within the league.\footnote{126}{See id. (noting Gibson worked for Boys and Girls Club for two years and incident with boy was first occurrence of violence).}

In addition, Toni Gay, coach of an Illinois junior high school volleyball team, was accused of trying to bring a meat cleaver into a school after she argued with a referee who had disqualified her team from a game.\footnote{127}{See Edward Wong, New Rules for Soccer Parents: 1) No Yelling. 2) No Hitting Ref., N.Y. TIMES, May 6, 2001 (reporting attacks on referees in youth sports because of poor sportsmanship), available at http://www.medwaysoccer.com/Reference/nytimes050601.htm.} Gay was charged with unlawful use of a weapon on school property and disorderly conduct.\footnote{128}{See id. (noting school’s zero-tolerance for violence in youth sports).} Subsequently, the Illinois school dismissed Gay as coach.\footnote{129}{See id.}

Moreover, Orlando Lago, an assistant baseball coach with a Hollywood, Florida Police Athletic League, was charged with aggravated battery for punching an umpire at a youth baseball game.\footnote{130}{See Amanda Riddle, Coach Breaks Ump’s Jaw: Aggravated Assault Charges After Coach Ejected from Game, at http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/umpire000713.html (July 13, 2000) (reporting case of Florida youth sports coach who broke umpire’s jaw during baseball game).} Lago and the umpire fought over a disputed call the umpire made during the game.\footnote{131}{See id. (describing how fight started between coach and umpire).} When the umpire drew his hand back to signal he was ejecting Lago from the game, Lago punched him under the mistaken belief that the umpire was going to hit him.\footnote{132}{See id.} Although Lago claims he did not provoke the confrontation, he felt terrible
about what had happened.133 Because of so many violent incidents similar to Lago’s impulsive beating, at least fourteen states have increased penalties for assaults on sports officials since 1987.134

c. The Child Athlete

Child athletes strive to be professional athletes and struggle to be the best in their sports.135 To be recognized by scouts as especially gifted and to succeed in competition, young athletes push themselves to their limits of talent and skill.136 When these athletes can no longer rely on their talents and skills, they panic over the possibility of losing, and consequently resort to aggressive, intimidating, and “unsportsmanlike” conduct on and off the field.137

In 1999, Tony Limon was a proud eighteen-year-old senior starter on his Texas high school basketball team with prospects of college scholarships and dreams of becoming a pro-basketball player.138 Sadly, his prospects of receiving college scholarships and of becoming a professional basketball player vanished in February of 1999.139 During a game, Limon intentionally elbowed an opposing player in the face, knocking him down.140 No foul was called and Limon was allowed to play the rest of the game.141

As a result of the elbow incident, the opposing player suffered cuts, a concussion, a broken nose, and required plastic surgery.142 Limon pled nolo contendere to a charge of aggravated assault with serious bodily injury.143 In a plea bargain, Limon agreed to accept

133. See id. (reporting Lago was released from jail on $5000 bond, but had pending four-year jail term if convicted).
134. See id. (explaining because verbal abuse towards youth sports officials has worsened, two or three officials report assaults each week).
135. See Schuette, supra note 6, at 524 (describing child athletes’ mentalities).
136. See id. (noting pressure child athletes put on themselves).
137. See id. (explaining child athletes try to be professional sports stars and behave in inappropriate manner as result).
138. See Ross E. Milloy, Basketball Player's Foul Draws a Jail Term, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 9, 2000, at A12 (reporting violent incident in high school basketball game in Texas).
139. See id. (referring to Tony Limon's violent elbowing of another player, for which Limon was arrested).
140. See id.
141. See id. (explaining that after game, school officials reviewed videotape of game and suspended Limon for remainder of season).
142. See id. (indicating severity of opponent’s injury).
a sentence of up to six years in prison.\textsuperscript{144} Nonetheless, the trial court sentenced him to only five years.\textsuperscript{145} Since then, Limon has claimed that his coach encouraged him to play aggressively, but the coach denies the allegation.\textsuperscript{146}

A more recent incident occurred on February 27, 2002, involving Jarrod Adkins and a group of students from a rival high school in Kentucky.\textsuperscript{147} Six Shelby Valley High School students severely beat Adkins, a Millard High School basketball star and leading scorer, after the Shelby Valley team’s tournament game.\textsuperscript{148} Adkins’s mother said that her son “[d]id not know how it happened, . . . [t]here were several people around him, kicking him and beating him.”\textsuperscript{149} The incident left Adkins too injured to play in his own team’s tournament game.\textsuperscript{150} The realities of Adkins and Limon exemplify the extreme measures young athletes will resort to both on and off the field when they fear defeat.\textsuperscript{151}

2. Suggested Solutions and Implemented Plans

Each instance of unnecessary violence in youth leagues contributes to the erosion of constructive values gleaned from participation in sports.\textsuperscript{152} Parents who seek to prevent their children from becoming violent and overly aggressive should be proactive and set an appropriate example.\textsuperscript{153} Coaches and youth sports league administrators who aim to prevent incidents of parental rage at youth sports games should communicate with parents and set guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.\textsuperscript{154} With so many notable violent events in youth sports, parents, coaches, youth

\textsuperscript{144} See id.

\textsuperscript{145} See id. (noting Limon expected probation but received jail sentence because he was already on probation for attempted burglary).

\textsuperscript{146} See Milloy, supra note 138, at A12.


\textsuperscript{148} See id. (suggesting motive in beating Adkins was to knock out star player, who averaged twenty-two points per game).

\textsuperscript{149} Id.

\textsuperscript{150} See id. (reporting Adkins suffered head injury and crushed bones in right hand after six students stood around Adkins, kicking and beating him).

\textsuperscript{151} See Schuette, supra note 6, at 521 (indicating child athletes are prone to act violently).

\textsuperscript{152} See id. at 520 (noting elevation of success as only goal in playing youth sports erodes old sports ethos).

\textsuperscript{153} See Baron, supra note 66 (noting standards must be raised to prevent violent behavior at youth sports games).

\textsuperscript{154} See id. (contrasting parental behavior at spelling bees and piano recitals with behavior at youth sporting events).
sports administrators, and even lawmakers are acknowledging finally that a problem exists and are making reasonable efforts to prevent future incidents of unnecessary violence.155

a. The Lawmakers

Lawmakers first attempted to address the increase of violence in youth sports in 2000.156 On September 13, 2000, hearings were held before the Senate Commerce Committee, which addressed children’s exposure to the increasing levels of violence in the media.157 At the hearings, politicians discussed a Federal Trade Commission (“FTC”) report that found a “pervasive and aggressive marketing of violent movies, music, and electronic games to children that are rated for adults or older teens.”158 The FTC report also showed that the media was targeting children with violent programming and “R” rated material, which created a violent culture for children, even though the substantial majority of those in the audience were adults.159 The Committee focused on violence in the media, rather than in sports, but Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House, endorsed wrestling as a positive outlet for children after the Columbine tragedy.160 Based on the hearing discussions, it may be inferred that Congress believes the problem is not violence in sports, but media’s pervasiveness; thus, violence in sports is neither specific nor critical enough to command immediate congressional attention.161

Unlike federal legislators, state lawmakers across the country have taken greater notice of the trend of violence in youth

155. See id. (promoting training and awareness programs for everyone involved in youth sports).
156. See Robert Corn-Revere, Bam! Whap! Thunk!: Even Though Politicians Are Battling Violence in the Media, The Real Villain – If There Is One – Is Our Culture, LEGAL TIMES, Sept. 25, 2000, at 74 (discussing congressional attempts to curb violence in media and House Speaker Dennis Hastert’s promotion of wrestling as positive activity).
157. See id. (addressing politicians’ efforts to reduce violence in American culture by restricting times during which violent programming may be broadcast).
158. Id.
159. See id. (reporting findings of FTC report that media was exposing children to violent content).
160. See id. at 75 (noting opinion on “[w]hy no congressional hearings or denunciations” have been held concerning violence in youth sports). According to Corn-Revere, Congress does not address violence in youth sports because it would not gain votes. See id.
161. See Corn-Revere, supra note 156, at 74-75. The author opined that “raising questions about sports is not likely to attract many votes” and “the debate is not really about violence, it is about controlling the culture.” Id.
sports. Fourteen states have passed or proposed legislation increasing penalties for individuals who assault sports officials. Recently, Arizona representatives proposed a bill entitled the Youth Sports Official Protection Act. Though the Senate ultimately defeated the Act, if it had passed, it would have reinforced penalties for violence against youth-league officials.

Additionally, the Oregon Legislature proposed a bill in 2001 that recommended establishing a Youth Sports Commission within Oregon's Department of Human Services. The bill would require youth sports coaches to be certified by the Commission. Furthermore, it would encourage youth sports organizations to do background checks on coaches and require coaches to complete a sports education program.

Moreover, the Jupiter-Tequesta Athletic Association in Florida is the first youth athletic association to require parents to enroll in classes on appropriate behavior at sporting events. Parents are required to take an oath to support coaches and officials in youth

162. See Caldwell & Young, supra note 63.

163. See id.; see also, Mario Fox, Experts on Youth Sports Discuss Violence, at http://www.s-t.com/daily/06-01/06-09-01/c04sp109.htm (last visited Oct. 13, 2002) (noting Illinois Legislature recently passed bill mandating penalties for people who assault sports officials in effort to combat violence against umpires and referees). Currently an additional nineteen states are considering similar laws. See Caldwell & Young, supra note 63; see also Mark M. Smith, Sports Violence and Punishment, CALEDONIAN-RECORD (St. Johnsbury, Vt.), Dec. 29, 2001 (reporting Alabama Legislature's approval of bill criminalizing harassing, menacing, or assaulting sports officials), available at http://www.caledonianrecord.com/pages/editorials/story/13fe576ef. The punishment under the Alabama bill would be harsher than normal convictions because the legislation would apply to all levels of athletics from church softball leagues to professional sports. See id. Moreover, officials propose a sentence of up to twenty years in jail for the assault of a sports official or coach. Id.

164. See Nack & Munson, supra note 7 (discussing bill initiated by students at Deer Valley High School outside Phoenix and nearly adopted by Arizona Legislature).

165. See id. (explaining passage of bill by State House of Representatives by vote of thirty-eight to eighteen, though defeated by vote of twenty-two to eight in Senate).


167. See id.

168. See id. (mandating participation in sports education program without providing details of program requirements).

athletics. If a parent fails to participate in the program, his or her child will not be eligible to participate in any youth sports activities. Youth league officials in Jupiter, Florida have already noticed improvements as a result of the required sportsmanship classes, and there have been no reported incidents of adults' violating the code.

In yet another example of action taken to prevent violence in youth sports, representatives from the Massachusetts Governor's Committee on Physical Fitness and Sports ("MAGCPFS") responded to the highly publicized "Hockey Dad" case by implementing a sport parent code of conduct in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Sport Parent Code of Conduct is a written contract that parents of youth athletes must sign, agreeing to comply with a set of guidelines when attending a youth sporting event. More than a dozen local organizations, such as the Massachusetts Department of Education and Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, have accepted the Sport Parent Code of Conduct.

Finally, New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey signed a law mandating an aggravated assault charge for any person found guilty of physically attacking another at a youth sporting event. Recently, Governor McGreevey also signed the Athletic Code of Conduct Bill, which allows school boards and youth sports organizations to write athletic codes of conduct for students, coaches, officials, and parents. Under this new legislation, fans, coaches, and play-

170. See id. (explaining requirement of parents to take classes on proper adult conduct and behavior at youth sporting events).

171. See id. (indicating prohibition on child participation provides incentive for parent to take class); see also Zitrin, supra note 63 (discussing New Jersey requirement that parents of children participating in winter sports program attend thirty-five minute meeting on importance of good sportsmanship and being proper role models).

172. See Zarrella, supra note 169 (indicating almost 6000 parents have taken sportsmanship class resulting in better conduct by adults and parents at youth sports games).


174. See id.

175. See id.

176. See N.J. STAT. ANN. § 2C:12-1 (West 2002) ("A person who commits a simple assault . . . in the presence of a child under 16 years of age at a school or community sponsored youth sport event is guilty of a crime of the fourth degree.").

177. See Assemb. 446, 210th Leg., 2002 Sess. (N.J. 2002); see also McGreevey Signs 'Athletic Code of Conduct' Bill: Youth Sports Programs to Benefit from New Law, at
ers that lose their tempers at youth sporting events in New Jersey are banned from attending future games until they complete an anger management course.\(^\text{178}\) Recent occurrences of violence at New Jersey youth sporting events prompted introduction of this bill.\(^\text{179}\) Governor McGreevey is confident this legislation will be an effective tool to protect and strengthen the positive aspects of youth sports.\(^\text{180}\)

b. The Youth Sports Leagues

League self-control and self-regulation have emerged as effective ways to curb violence in sports.\(^\text{181}\) Youth sports leagues are establishing more training programs for administrators in managing youth sports programs.\(^\text{182}\) To be fully effective, however, more youth sports supervisors are needed to train volunteer coaches, sports administrators, and parents.\(^\text{183}\)

Some youth sports leagues require that coaches undergo criminal background checks to obtain a coaching position.\(^\text{184}\) The background checks are intended to minimize children's exposure to violent offenders.\(^\text{185}\) Additionally, the National Alliance of Youth Sports (“NAYS”), a non-profit organization based in West Palm Beach, Florida, offers a certification program for coaches who wish

http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/governor/njnewsline/view_article.pl?id=826 (August 26, 2002) [hereinafter McGreevey Signs] (explaining implementation of Bill).

178. See N.J. Assemb. 446 (explaining schools and sports teams with athletic codes of conduct can ban students, coaches, officials, and parents who violate code).


180. See McGreevey Signs, supra note 177 (“Sports provide an opportunity for our youth to learn teamwork and good sportsmanship – qualities which can lead to success not only in athletic competition, but also in all aspects of life.”).


182. See Agbayani, supra note 64.

183. See Bill Hendrick, Who’s Coaching Our Kids? Leagues Taking Closer Look, ATLANTA J. & CONST., Mar. 9, 2001, at A16 (“There should be more safeguards about who can and can’t coach, more references, better checking[,] [b]ut too many people are afraid to speak up[,] . . . [a]nd they worry the coach will take it out on their kid if they report [suspicions or incidents] to their leagues.”).

184. See id. (discussing investigation of coaches who abuse children).

185. See id.
to participate in a youth sports association affiliated with NAYS.\(^{186}\) To obtain certification, coaches must undergo training and sign a code of ethics.\(^{187}\) If a coach violates the code of ethics, NAYS can revoke certification on a league board’s recommendation, which would prohibit the coach from participating in affiliated youth sports associations.\(^{188}\)

NAYS president Fred Engh commented that “[n]o organization that runs sports for children should allow parents to register their child without the parent going through an orientation and training program on ethics and sportsmanship.”\(^{189}\) Because many public parks and recreation facilities are used to organize and administer youth sports programs, the National Recreation and Park Association (“NRPA”) and NAYS recently joined forces to combat the ever-growing problem of violence among parents and coaches at youth sporting events.\(^{190}\)

As a member of the NRPA, an Alabama parish community’s recreation league joined forces with NAYS to reduce violence in youth sports activities in their community.\(^{191}\) Since the joint initiative commenced, the community and NAYS require coaches and parents to be certified in violence reduction by attending two-hour seminars for coaches and forty-five minute seminars for parents.\(^{192}\) After completion of the training session, the youth league coaches

\(^{186}\) See id. (noting certain youth sports league associations require coaches to undergo certification). NAYS was founded in 1981 as the National Youth Sport Coaches Association (“NYSCA”) with the mission of improving out-of-school sports for the more than 20,000,000 youth participants under the age of sixteen. See generally About National Alliance for Youth Sports, at http://www.nays.org/about/index.efm (last visited Oct. 13, 2002) (explaining purpose and function of NAYS). NAYS believes participation in youth sports activities allows children to develop important character traits and values, and the lives of children can be positively impacted if the adults caring for them have proper training and information. See id.

\(^{187}\) See Hendrick, supra note 183, at A16 (explaining NAYS certification program).

\(^{188}\) See id.


\(^{191}\) See Ascension Tries to Curb Sports-Related Violence, ADVOCATE (Baton Rouge), Mar. 20, 2001, at 4-B:5 (reporting joint venture between Ascension Parish Recreational League and NRPA-NAYS).

\(^{192}\) See id. The seminar for parents includes a video on the problems of violence at youth league events. See id.
and parents who have been certified in the community tend to respond positively.193

In addition, NAYS initiated a campaign called "Time Out! for Better Sports for Kids" ("Time Out!"), which addresses parental rage and strives to raise standards in youth sports.194 As part of "Time Out!", which inspires changes in all youth sports programs, NAYS recently published its "Recommendations for Communities" ("Recommendations").195 The Recommendations propose that each community appoint experienced administrators to oversee the total sports programming occurring on public facilities, whether sponsored by public agencies or independently run.196 Moreover, leading recreation professionals developed the Recommendations in the field of youth sports administration.197 Accordingly, members of the "Time Out!" task force and NAYS will work together to ensure that every community implements and maintains the suggestions outlined in the Recommendations.198

IV. CONCLUSION

It is imperative that adults and children involved in youth sports control their violent behaviors because rage has no place in recreational sporting activities for children. Unfortunately, parents and other adults have committed senseless violent acts with little or no consequence, inadvertently transmitting an example to children that violence wins. Their inappropriate actions have created a cycle

193. See id. (noting many of community's 400 coaches have already successfully completed training course).

194. See generally Time Out!, supra note 65 (identifying purpose of joining local "Time Out!" task force).

195. See id. For a further discussion of NAYS involvement in releasing the Recommendations, see supra notes 189-90 and accompanying text.

196. See Recommendations for Communities Released, at http://www.nays.org/fullstory.cfm?articleid=222 (Mar. 22, 2002) (discussing Recommendations as part of ongoing effort to help eliminate violence in youth sports programs). The Recommendations are available at no cost and outline what should be done to make the youth sports environment a positive and safe place for children. See Hockey Trial Leads Communities to Implement National Guidelines to Curb Parental Abuse in Youth Sports, at http://www.nays.org/fullstory.cfm?articleid=209 (last visited Oct. 13, 2002) [hereinafter Hockey Trial]. The first recommendation calls for an adoption of a community philosophy that makes youth sports safe and positive for children. See Time Out!, supra note 65. The second recommendation suggests appointing a professional youth sports administrator to ensure adherence to the philosophy. See id. The third recommendation suggests holding each person associated with the program accountable for his or her behavior. See id.

197. See Hockey Trial, supra note 196 (discussing results of Summit, held by NAYS, concerning strategies for positively changing youth sports).

198. See id. NRPA, along with many other associations and organizations, endorses the Recommendations. See id.
of uncontrollable behavior both on and off the field. Lawmakers, youth sports leagues, coaches, parents, and children nationwide should follow the example of NAYS to find a way to stop sports rage and put the fun back into sports.199

Implementing a national standard for behavior at youth sports games will reduce the number of tragic incidents resulting from violence in youth sports.200 The guidelines set forth by NAYS’s Recommendations should be adopted nationwide in order to restore some order and civility in youth sports, and to ensure that every child who plays a sport has a safe and rewarding experience.201 “The bottom line is we want players to play the game, the coaches to coach the game and the parents to be able to enjoy watching their children play the game.”202

Dianna K. Fiore

199. See id. (recommending involvement of parents, coaches, and administrators to reduce adult violence and restore fun in youth sports).


201. See Hockey Trial, supra note 196 (suggesting NAYS Recommendations should be adopted nationwide).

202. Ascension Tries to Curb Sports-Related Violence, supra note 191, at 4-B;S (quoting Bill Evans, director of Ascension’s Department of Recreation and Culture).