Sports Training Culture Affects Not Only Physiological Development in Young Athletes but Psychosocial Development as Well

(an addendum to "A Letter to Parents" in *No Pain, No Gain?*)

The powerful influence which sports settings and values have on the long-term development of young people is hard to overestimate. An astounding majority of young high school students have reported to me year after year that the experiences which have given them their most sure and profound sense of their individuality, intelligence, power and freedom have occurred through sports. They may be describing what the Germans have termed *Funktionslust*, the pleasure and confidence one gets from simply doing what one does best. But the extraordinary power and durability in these experiences has been routinely described by athletes and performers of many sorts as well and is closely related to what has been described as "flow" experiences, "when everything clicks and nothing matters but the experience itself." In experiences of such peak performance (at whatever level and point in life they occur) the performer is physically and mentally relaxed, extraordinarily aware, feels in control, "in the cocoon," detached from external distractions and evaluations (Hanin 148, 150). Such emotions are as wondrous as they are complex. Of greatest significance to us, however, is the fact that they are also particular sources and qualities of energy which make possible higher than usual performance experiences. In a word, cause and effect (and affect) interact to progressively as to be mutually supporting, if not indistinguishable.

The subtle and complex emotional-physical dynamics of flow experience can have important life consequences, according to the the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990)(cited in Hanin, ed., *Emotions in Sport*, (2000)). The potential for psychological growth derives from the fact that in such experiences the organization of the self becomes more complex, and his further explanation should make clear to us how profound an affect (even as one functional starting point) sports development can have on a youngster's inclination toward higher levels of socialization and education in general. That that inclination starts and how, both physically and emotionally, is clearly a central concern of education, for we recognize its importance for intellectual readiness as well. Certainly we move the discussion decisively forward if we can finally recognize that sports programs are anything but simply enjoyable extra-curricular diversion and channeling overabundant, chaotic teenage energy into athletic schedules and seasons.

It is worth it here at the outset, therefore, to pursue Csikzentmihalyi's remarks a moment further. In the individual's experience, he notes, differentiation occurs after flow because of the increase in skill one perceives after successfully meeting a challenge. Integration follows from the ordering of consciousness that occurs in flow, leaving one feeling more in tune with oneself and with the world. [Differentiation thence naturally tends to facilitate a growing capacity to tolerate, be generous, indeed love. One needs some vigorous sense of self before sharing it appear possible.] Differentiation implies a movement toward uniqueness, toward separating oneself from others. Integration refers to the opposite: a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self. A complex self is one that succeeds in combining these opposite tendencies. (Czikzentmihalyi cited in Hanin, 148-151).

Czikzentmihalyi is also variously cited in Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). Goleman presents a comprehensive review of research demonstrating the critical role which emotional intelligence and its development play in cognitive development and achievement in general. He provides further basis for our desire to foster such fundamental positive experiences and thence bridge

them from sport into both general emotional development as well as a youngster's trust and enthusiasm for learning. No end of philosophical and educational rationale has been forthcoming on the subject. But enough more is known in some scientific depth about these connections nowadays, so it would seem useful to trace the effects of alternative paths in sports development which are seen in our schools. The two paths are somewhat tricky to sort out because of the child's complex development, particularly in the period just preceding puberty, age 9-12.

On the one hand, the child begins to change rather rapidly. Whereas earlier he has sought his affirmation largely from parents and has equated effort with ability, now he turns progressively to peers for his sources of affirmation and to coaches. The time is ripe for comparison through competitions. Games, races and rankings (who beats whom) become significant concerns, the various external evaluators kids come to depend upon.

On the other hand, as their children seek affirmation elsewhere, parents are often bewildered, or even hurt, by their apparent loss of importance and may seek to become the super-spectators or emotion-boosters in order to retain their prominent role in the child's self-affirmation process. This further accentuates the importance of the ranking or win, the external evaluators. Coaches are often particularly strong in their emphasis on normative standards of skill and the season's win-loss record. Schools also place high social importance in their teams' successes.

The problems with this path are at least twofold. In the first instance overzealous adult involvement (by either parent of coach) with the young athlete can easily misread or even push aside the youngster's own process of development and maturation, the process as the youngster is seeing and experiencing it. With what I sometimes call “an overdose of love” the more articulate adult unwittingly takes control over (even hijacks) the young athlete's personal agenda for progress, his moments of interior preparation for a performance. The adults unwittingly become a source of stress rather than the usual refuge from it (Hellstedt in Murphy, *Sport Psychology Interventions*). Imagine the young athlete before a competition as someone reading a book or having a phone conversation. An attempt to help with such a highly focused personal engagement with another subject can easily be experienced by the athletes as a break-in in which his process is not aided but in fact interrupted, taken over by the very outsider (parent or coach) who only wishes tom help. His focus is then diverted from his task to the would-be helper, and emotional fracturing or irritation is often a quite natural result.

Research has also shown that the competitive win culture in our schools adds more general cumulative stress from the outside to youngsters' lives and, along with insufficient time to adequately prepare for competition, produces a higher incidence of injury due to unwise volumes and intensities (Murphy).

This should not and need not happen if we understand the second problem: the child's source of self-affirmation, understandably, continues to develop, but the culture of competition tends to stay the same, is in fact institutionalized in the educational system. From 13 or 14 on the child moves on to more intrinsic sources of self-affirmation: mastery of skill and task, the rewards of learning in a sense of forward moving ability. This makes things progressively more tricky and unpredictable for those who would like to help, and in particular for parents who themselves need to feel they are helping, that is to say, helping affirms them. This is not made easier by the fact that as children approach and enter puberty their estimates of their competence (and self-esteem) go down at the same time as the accuracy of their self-appraisals is going up (Weiss in Murphy, 47, 54). In a word, they are becoming

smarter and more reality-savvy, and they are paying an emotional price for it. It is a price we all would like to spare them, yet our efforts to help as often raise the price even higher, if we allow, or unwittingly force, the peer comparison stage to simply continue, unchanged or usually even expanded into the high school years. Typically, we praise the socially redeeming virtues of competition, the more therefore the better, a notion drastically simplistic and thus failure-prone in light of teenagers' evolving emotional and intellectual complexity. It is thus more often the case that maturation and performance is delayed, if not blocked, and the young athlete's true potential thereby trivialized and wasted amidst the cheering.

Imagine the athlete who has just finished an event and is unhappy with his performance. A parent attempts to comfort him with praise for his effort, a method which worked effectively in his younger days. The youngster has long since differentiated between effort and ability, however, so the praise for effort misses the mark, even irritates because it seems to discount the fact that emotional growth has occurred since. That is “not where the kid is” any more. The young athlete rejects the parent's good will (which the parent may well experience as rejected love) and at the same time feel utterly lonely in the accuracy of his own appraisal (which accuracy is in fact a sign of emotional and cognitive growth).

The situation can easily be just as complex for the coach. If the youngster performs below his par and the coach compliments his effort regardless, the message to the athlete may be “You tired hard but did not really have the skill to do better.” The coach then unwittingly makes the same mistake as the parent, missing where the kid is developmentally and cognitively and applies the measure of effort to ability level. On the other hand, if the coach expresses frustration with the youngster's performance, a display which might initially (and to an outsider, especially a parent) seem callous and insensitive, that expression might just be more congruent with what the athlete is feeling. He is unhappy, but he appreciates the coach's honesty because it reflect the coach's belief in his greater skills. What he then requires is not vague praise about his “good job” but specific skill-relevant information to move him back into his groove and expected level of competence. (Cf. Weiss in Murphy, 48f.)

The complexity of communicating positively with a young athlete at this more differentiated emotional and cognitive level of awareness has been documented in a number of studies. In one study, for example:

> Results revealed that skill improvements accounted for the most variance in self-perceptions of ability, but certain coaching behaviors also significantly contributed to these changes. Specifically, players who received more frequent positive reinforcement scored lower in perceived physical competence, and players who received higher frequencies of criticism were found to be higher in competence perceptions.
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> At first glance, these results directly contradict predictions based on Harter's competence-motivation theory. However, Horn (1985) observed that positive reinforcement statements frequently were given to players, often unconditional to their skill behaviors. That is, praise was frequently given in the form of “good job” or “way to go” without specific reference to the desirable skill technique or strategy displayed or combined with informational feedback on how to improve. Therefore these athletes might have inferred low performance expectations conveyed by the coach and this influenced perceptions of competence. In contrast, the criticism given for skill errors usually was directed at the high-ability players and contained skill-relevant information on how to improve on the

> next attempt (e.g. “Use two hands when you are trying to catch a pop fly!”). These results are important in demonstrating that the quantity of reinforcement and the mere use of positive statements is not sufficient to effect changes in ability perceptions and motivation. Rather, the quality of coaches' communication, specifically the contingency to behavior and the appropriateness of the information provided, are crucial for influencing children's perceptions about skill capabilities. (Weiss in Murphy 48f.)

What these results confirm is something that teachers of all kinds have known for a long time: working with kids is anything but kid stuff. Any kid knows his instinctively as well and experiences the complex muddle of his emotions before, during and after competitions both deeply and usually with some bewilderment. It is not surprising that it is not only the physiology that requires a warm down after the race but the emotions as well, and they need longer and are less agreeable to intrusion from others, however loving, be it parent or coach.

Another distinction can be helpful to all three, athlete, parent and coach.

Sport psychologists recognize the crucial role of intrinsic motivation in long-term performance improvement, skill acquisition and enjoyment. At the same time they cite the negative effects of emphasizing or prolonging external sources of motivation which derive from peer comparison (beating others) or the sense of obligation to meet others' standards or expectations. Reliance on competition schedules, therefore, season after season, the perceived rewards of making the varsity as a freshman or sophomore, sacrificing health or serious individual goals to the needs of the team or school or community, all suggest that we should question anew what the real psycho-social goals of sport are, where they are to be found and how they are to be fostered.

What sport psychologist Maureen Weiss says about children applies equally to teenagers.

> Personal development and a healthy lifestyle through positive sport experiences are the primary focus, with performance enhancement a secondary goal. More specifically, positive self-perceptions, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, positive attitude toward the value of physical activity, ability to cope with stress, and sportspersonlike attitudes form the core characteristics that provide the justification for children's competitive sport. However, little substantive evidence supports this claim. Instead, many parents and coaches come to expect that these personal qualities and skills will emerge as a result of mere participation and exposure to the rigors of competitive play. (Weiss in Murphy, 42)

In order to more clearly grasp the origins of both positive and negative experiences in sport, psychologists distinguish between two basic motivational orientations in athletes, one intrinsic, the other extrinsic.

We assume at the outset that all types of children are motivated towards competence demonstrated both to themselves and to others. Certainly the sensations of competence arise from an experience of harmony and grace of movement between self and landscape or between self and other players. It is also clear that however fleeting this experience of flow of some sort is, it embeds itself

firmly in the memory and emotions of personal power in any young person, be he athlete or dancer, musician or scholar.

The first motivational perspective is a task, or learning-goal, perspective, In this perspective

> people rely primarily on self-referenced information to judge their level of competence. In this perspective, mastery of personally challenging goals is the focus, and sources such as effort, positive affect, learning, and improvement are used to judge level of ability. With a task, or learning-goal perspective, individuals who are high or low in perceived competence are hypothesized to choose moderately difficult challenges, exert effort and persistence to attain these challenges, show task interest and enjoyment, and use effort attributions to maintain progress toward meeting goals as well as respond to unsuccessful performances. When these mastery-oriented people encounter failure, they view it as a temporary setback and a cue to increase effort or to determine what factors the can modify to maximize the possibility of future success. (Weiss in Murphy, 50)

The second perspective is more extrinsic in orientation. In contrast to task, or learning -goal perspective, Nichols and Dweck describe the ego- or performance-goal oriented person who

> seeks to maximize the display of high ability and minimize the display of low ability. These people define competence in relation to the performance of others and thus primarily depend on social comparison and evaluation to judge their abilities. According to Nichols and Dweck, the ego- or performance-goal-oriented person who is high in perceived competence should evidence the same types of achievement behavior as the task-or learning-goal oriented person: selection of optimal challenges, intrinsic interest, effort, persistence, and enjoyment. However, the ego-or performance goal oriented person who is low in competence perceptions [most early teenagers!] avoids moderate challenges, so as not to risk demonstrating low ability. Such people (labeled as helpless-oriented by Dweck) choose very easy or very difficult tasks to protect evaluation of their ability. East tasks guarantee success and the demonstration of ability, whereas failure at difficult task would not necessarily signify low ability. In addition, the ego-low-confidence person is expected to expend little effort and persistence, thereby increasing the probability of low performance attainments. The helpless-oriented person experiences little enjoyment and low levels of intrinsic motivation and attributes negative outcomes to low ability, which is viewed as predictive of future failures.(Ibid, 50f.)

Weiss goes on to review that “achievement-goal theorists also state that goal perspectives vary as a function of situation and individual difference factors. Situations which emphasize interpersonal competition, public evaluation, and normative feedback are likely to invoke an ego or performance-goal orientation, whereas situations characterized by a focus on learning, participation, skill mastery,

and problem solving increase the probability of invoking a task, or learning-goal, orientation."(Ibid. 50f.)

Contrasting the two orientations once again: If **independent mastery attempts and the skill learning process** are encouraged and rewarded, the child tends to use internal or self-referenced criteria (e.g. skill improvement, effort) to judge ability and adopts a self-reward system or learning goals as a standard. If **performance outcome** (e.g. winning, performing better than others) is emphasized and rewarded by significant others , the child is expected to become dependent on external or normative criteria (e.g. peer comparison and evaluation) and adopt an extrinsic reward system and ego or performance-goals as their preferred motivational orientation.

"The **mastery-oriented child** will derive positive perceptions of competence and an internal locus of control (or adaptive attributions for success or failure) and enjoyment and pleasure, and will choose optimally challenging skills and display maximal effort and persistence. **The performance-outcome-motivated youngster**, in contrast, will be susceptible to negative perceptions of competence and an external locus of control (and maladaptive attributions ["I'm just a klutz"] and negative affect in the form of anxiety and embarrassment [and boredom - "Nothing in this for me"] and will choose either easy or difficult tasks and display little effort and low-persistence behaviors. This orientation should result in less-than-optimal personal performance." (Ibid, 52f.)

Sports psychologists draw a number of conclusions from such research, most of which will not surprise us.

1. Since post age 14 the use of social comparison sources declines in favor of the desirable progressively more self-referenced criteria, frequent use of peer comparison (competition) should be de-emphasized.

2. The adolescent's emotional and cognitive development requires that attributional feedback (*why* it was good or not so good) and skill-relevant feedback (*how you can do it* more effectively) are used instead of effort praise ("good job").

Nobody underestimates the complexity, and difficulty, of achieving a sports environment in our schools which can systematically foster the mastery- or learning-goal orientation to participation rather than the ego-, performance-outcome orientation, given our competitive culture and the dominance of sports contests in the school year calendar. At the same time, the central role of mastery goals as opposed to performance-outcome goals in the classroom suggests the wisdom of fostering a similar and supportive orientation in our sports programs.

As Weiss reviews the situation:

> Despite the obvious benefits for employing individualistic goal structures to influence psycho-social development, competitive sport by its nature maximizes the likelihood of invoking a competitive-goal structure, where winning and being number one are highly valued. However, competitive goal structures give added salience to the natural use of peer comparison cues while decreasing the salience of self-referenced cues. If praise and criticism for children's performance ate

> given primarily for the outcome of an event or competition, young athletes are likely to adopt peer comparison and evaluation as a primary source of judging ability. But if adults also praise the quality of performance success, provide corrective instruction in response to performance failures. And encourage the use of efforts attributions, then children also learn to use internal sources such as self-improvement, degree of effort, and quality of skill technique to judge their competence. (Ibid, 60f.)

The same desired priorities hold in the academic setting, where

> results revealed that students who perceived mastery goals as salient in the classroom preferred challenging tasks, has a more positive attitude toward the class, and had a stronger belief that success follows from one's effort. Students who perceived performance-goal orientations in their classroom focused on their normative ability, evaluated their ability negatively, and attributed failure to lack of ability. (Ibid, 61)

Yuri Hanin, the Finnish sports psychologist, has reviewed the research into many more of the emotional attributes of those two orientations with regard to the manner in which they affect optimal performance. Vallerand and Blanchard (in Hanin) echo Weiss' conclusions.

> In sum, results from studies conducted in sport and exercise settings provide support for the self-determination theory. The more self-determined forms of motivation (intrinsic motivation and identified regulation [self-chosen from external source]) lead to positive affect, while those less self-determined forms of motivation (introjected [through a sense of obligation to others] and external regulation and amotivation) lead to less positive and even negative affect. (Hanin 22)

They also review the research which shows how “sport task orientation of high school students was positively associated with feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment. Conversely, ego [performance-outcome] orientation was positively correlated to feelings of boredom....The results showed that task orientation was negatively related to task-relevant worries and thoughts of escape. Finally, several studies have found that ego orientation was positively related to cognitive anxiety.” (Hanin, 23)

It is equally important to understand that emotions are not only responses to events but co-determining forces which influence a performance as it proceeds. The inhibiting affects of cognitive anxiety, in sport or classroom, are perhaps the most obvious example. But the distinction between task-mastery and ego orientations extends more broadly yet to the practical tactics and strategies we each use in performing any challenging task. So what works best and why?

Optimal performance emotions before and during an activity are usually anticipatory and are triggered by appraisals of challenge or threat. Their most significance characteristic is that they are focused on the *present* (what is about to take place and is then *taking place* each moment of the competition). In contrast, dysfunctional emotions are usually triggered by premature perception of

perceived *outcomes* (appraisals of gain or loss) *before* task completion. In other words, focus on the actual task at hand is lost, the functional acuity to successive immediate *present* moments, and shifts to *future* time after the event. Instead of anticipatory, active mind-set, outcome emotion is a relatively passive "I did that" response. It is not difficult to see how such premature experience or focus on an outcome impairs both energy mobilization and utilization, both in amount and accuracy of application. The athlete/student's mind and emotions are literally elsewhere, a realm of peace and satisfaction quite distant from the actual performance in which he needs most to be engaged. He is so fixed on feelings of his hunger stilled (which he has analyzed with great accuracy) that he does not set out to gather available food and actually eat it (the classic underachiever). Whatever intense desire this athlete/student may have, his efforts are drained away by too little or too much energy in relation to his actual resources (he races too hard early on, dreaming his desire alone will carry him through, instead of "listening" accurately to his body/skills in relation to the course). The application of his energies is thus inefficient or erroneous because his focus is essentially task-irrelevant. It is no surprise that athletes/students like this seem driven by worry and self-doubt rather than by confidence in their skills and curiosity which they deserve and which would most surely move them forward. Many fine young athletes leave sport because ultimately they do not want to compete, if this is what it is, for it essentially leaves them out as real, whole people, and that is not much fun.

Once again, the potentially dysfunctional influence of concern for competitive status, rank or results becomes clear: the individual sees himself as the creature of outcomes of pre-and externally-determined desirability. The predictability high performance levels, on the other hand, will be decided by the optimal emotions of a self-determining, task-mastery-oriented athlete, either by himself in an individual sport or together with others on a team, in which emphasis remains on process, on building physical capabilities and mastering skills. (Cf. Hanin 84)

In terms of coming to some intelligent evaluation of the role of competitive sport, and the wisdom of requiring participation in competitive sport, some key words would seem to be "task-oriented,""mastery,""learning challenge," "failure experienced as challenge to improve," "enjoyment," as opposed to "boredom," "task-relevant worries," "escape," "cognitive anxiety," "failure experienced as lack of ability"(negative self-appraisal). We have all witnessed these emotions in our experiences in sport at one time or the other, and they are clearly relevant to how a sports program fits into the academic learning and socialization goals of a coherent overall school curriculum.

It is also clear that when competition and an uninterrupted competition schedule dominate the sports culture of an institution, that emphasis explicitly alters the definition of sports play as being characterized by having a non-binding outcome, as the historian Jan Huizinga put it (in *Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture,* 1950). We are long past that state of innocence, something Huizinga bewails as well, and at the same time are in a much better position to reform our sports culture in more healthy ways, both physiologically and emotionally. The gain will be that sport can be divested of its "extra-curricular" character, which in the minds of adolescents it has never had, and truly integrated with the broader and more profound learning culture of our schools. Overall and well-founded learning goals in developmental physiology as well as cognitive and psycho-social growth might then inform the administration of such programs.

Finally, it is important to affirm that none of this is to suggest that competition or competitive sport is inherently bad. To the contrary, competitive sport settings are wonderful stages for growth, refinement and enjoyment of many kinds. What defines their positive or negative affects relates

directly, however, to the developmental appropriateness and the educational coherence with which they are valued, presented and administered.

Even then, great acuity is required of adult coaches to the complex of emotions both expressed and hidden by young athletes. Strategies to recognize and counter dysfunctional emotions are just as important at utilizing optimizing emotions and teaching sports skills. That can be particularly difficult, for example, with lower level players, who tend to suppress the expression of their negative emotions, whereas higher level players vent them more freely. The lower level player may not appear to be feeling anything, therefore, but he may carry a heavier personal burden off the field with him than a player entrusted with scoring, and he may hold it much longer. In practical terms, lower level players may be a less attractive group to coach, but they have an even greater need for a coach's skill-building expertise and for his time off the field perhaps more than on it.

A buildup of emotional stress is by no means more likely to occur only among less gifted players. As Henschen states (in Hanin, 236f.), "Although accurate prediction is virtually impossible, certain types of individuals have a proneness to MFS [maladaptive fatigue syndrome – burnout]. Athletes who are dedicated, high-achieving, success-driven, high responsible, other oriented and perfectionistic seem to be likely candidates." He then lists a number of contributing factors, among them length of the competitive season, particularly where inappropriate training principles or inadequate preparation time are applied. Monotony of training, perceived overload and consistent high levels of competition are other contributors. At the base of all of these is boredom. Athletes, all who are doing athletics, "are challenge-oriented people who need stimulation. Because of the hours they spend on the same activities (practice), they often feel helpless or trapped."

The high-achieving, "problem-free" athlete, therefore, is just as complex and may be just as vulnerable to the less optimal values and attitudes of a sports training culture as the more average participant. Depersonalization, depression, loss of interest and ability to focus, some of the symptoms of overtraining and burnout, for example, can remain particularly secretive in many highly intelligent, "perfect" athlete-citizens. At the extremes, suicide and anorexia, for example, appear in this group, and while such clinical cases are rare and need not cause panic about the general population of teenagers, they do suggest strongly that we need to pay as close attention to the top level athletes as well as the more average, despite any democratic or Christian inclinations we might have toward kids who appear to be the more humble performers.

Part of that attention, furthermore, needs to be paid to the differences between what kids, particularly the well-socialized ones, amy be showing us and what they are actually experiencing within themselves. The may accept and display the emotions they have learned are the more socially desirable, and are often emphasized in a school's social adjustment goals – pleasantly extraverted, dutiful and comfortably verbal. But that behavior can as well be showing us a utilitarian veneer more than the actual person before us in his or her more profound interior experience. Forcing a kid to be a team player, a competitor, with limited personal demeanors, may as likely succeed in emptying his core self as fostering its growth as a self-determining, motivated performer.

Kids are more complex than that, we know, and so is performance itself. Psychologists are well aware that the optimal emotions for performance are not solely the socially desirable ones. Most recently, for example, Yuri Hanin's Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) model has demonstrated how some pleasant emotion are actually dysfunctional to performance (P-), whereas

others are specifically helpful (P+). How these emotions divide out also varies with individuals. Unpleasant, negative emotions work the same way. Whereas it is obvious negative emotions may detract from the readiness and capacity to undertake challenge in performance (N-), other, such as anxiety and anger, may be just as powerful in enhancing it (N+). Again, the selection and mix in individuallly varying.

Both athletes (and performers in general, especially young ones) and the surrounding adults generally recognize the roles of the P+ and N-, but they seldom grasp the powerful functional nature of N+ or the dysfunctional affects of P- emotions. Readiness to perform and optimal response to challenge depend most powerfully, therefore, on intrinsic motivation and self-determining choices of setting and approach. This conclusion by the broadest array of sports psyhologists suggests at the very least that athlete development cannot be regimented from the outside through regimented competition, or even competition alone. Nor despite the gains in socialization which may accompany sports participation can it be assumed that everyday social adjustment norms are necessarily uniformly productive for optimal performance and response to growth-stimulating challenges, athletic, artistic, or intellectual.

Finally, research in the field of education confirms the conclusions of sport psyhcologists. Benjamin Bloom's comprehensive study of the phases of learning in 120 elite achievers (pianists, swimmers, tennis players, sculptors, mathematicians, neurologists) supports the notion of learning patterns common to al successful learners. Two factors were found to be key: the correct sequence of the phases and adequate continuous time. Beyond the introductory phase consequential learning is no longer "episodic." As he states, "The better we appreciate the time involved in learning something (especially learning it well), the greater the likelihood that we will improve our ability to create conditions that encourage long-term, non-trivial growth."

At the very least, then, it is reasonable to conclude that the simple succession of different, short (seasonal) competitive sports is at best a simplistic approach, at worst an actual hindrance to the positive grwoth experiences we would hope to foster in sport. That conclusion would seem to hold both for the development of each individual not ust in sport alone but in the relationship which sport might ultimately have to the remainder of one's academic experience.

The question of whether or not, or to what degree, an institution emphasizes, or even requires, competitive sport is a serious one. Once that question is discussed, the other fundamental question must be addressed in terms of sports-educational philosophy and practice: How do we foster the mastery-, task-, learning-orientation in our sports programs which can lead kids' sports experience into a more rich and mutually informing congruence with the rest of their development? How can we link sport more securely (as kids themselves do) to their emotional health and to their cognitive growth through the arts, humanities and scientces in the academic curriculum?

Bibliography/Readings

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The phases of learning are:

1. playful, filled with immediate rewards, tinkering around
2. precision, skill, the urge to excel, instruction becomes more rational, less personal and

informal than earlier, discipline, systematic work.

3 Technical precision evolves into personal expression and creative control. Coach/teacher recedes in importance, wants pupil to become not so much pianist as a musician, the skier, runner to become less technician or competitor than a whole athlete.

2. Csiksentmihalyi, Mihalyi, *Flow, the Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990)

The experience of flow has long been know, of course, whether it was called that or not. For example, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 251.

> They finished another swath and another. They went through long swaths, short swaths, with bad grass, with good grass. Levin lost awareness of time and had no idea whether it was late or early. A change now began to take place in his work which gave him enormous pleasure. In the midst of his work moments came to him when he forgot what he was doing and began to feel light, and in those moments his swath came out as even and good as Titus'. But as soon as he remembered what he was doing and started trying to do better, he at once felt how hard the work was and the swath came out badly.

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Alternative Affects of Developmental Sport

Negative	Positive
extrinsic (introjected or external regulaton)	intrinsic or identified (self-chosen) regulation
directed	taught
external evaluators	internal evaluators
ego (comparison to others)	mastery, task-, learning-orientation
outcome-oriented	process-oriented
extending role of competition	developing fitness and skills for improving performance
results from:	
parents wanting to remain part of child's self-affirmation process through tracking results, rankings, awards	parents being there for whole spectrum of child's experience, rewards for details of improvement, respecting child's self-evaluation
coaches wanting/needing quantifiable proofs of success	coach fosters, rewards patterns and gains in skills and fitness
failure = loss work harder	failure is not loss but step in development skill-relevant critique
culture of "make the team at all costs" varsity syndrome physical, social stratification	team an opportunity for optimal individual development, with others
RESULT:	RESULT:
ego-, performance-orientation	mastery-, task-orientation
cognitive anxiety	attraction to challenge
negative self-appraisals	positive self-appraisals, coping
boredom, apathy	persistence, fascination with "What I can't
fear of "What I can't do"	do yet"

Cf. Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (original title *Prisoner of Childhood*)

political self	vs.	authentic self
I act in relation to others		I act in relation to myself
relative power		my own power
exterior factors dominate		interior factors dominate