

ANTI-RACISM IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

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Chapter 4

Beyond Building Character: Addressing Racial Inequities in and Through Youth and Interscholastic Sport

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Abstract

The mantra that “sports build character” is ubiquitous in the United States (U.S.). Participation in youth and interscholastic sport is widely accepted as a means to promote cognitive, physical, and social development in youth, adolescents, and teenagers. Despite these purported benefits of sport participation, the possibility remains that youth and interscholastic sport also serve as a mechanism to perpetuate societal inequities, including institutional racism. To this end, this chapter examines the possible intersection of youth and interscholastic sports and racism. In doing so, the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE) and the King County Play Equity Coalition are highlighted as two sport organizations that are overtly challenging racism and discrimination in youth and interscholastic sports. The chapter concludes with recommendations for encouraging an anti-racism perspective in youth and interscholastic sport.

Keywords: youth sport, Seattle-King County, Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality

“Sports build character.”

- *Everybody*

The mantra that “sports build character” is ubiquitous in the United States (U.S.). According to Project Play by Aspen Institute Sports and Society Program, approximately 75% of youth between the ages of 6 and 12 participated in team or individual sports in 2020 (Project Play, 2021). Likewise, the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) estimates that 57.4% of high school students participated on at least one interscholastic sport team in 2019 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Indeed, the notion that sport can build character in its participants has driven a vast amount of research on youth and interscholastic sports and sport-based youth development (e.g., Coakley, 2016; Fuller et al., 2013; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Within sport research, the positive youth development (PYD) framework is prominent as it seeks to emphasize strength-based approaches that result in the promotion of cognitive, physical, and social capabilities in sport participants (Ersing, 2009; Fuller et al., 2013). At their core, sport programs adopting a PYD framework attempt to improve “health, happiness and competence of adolescents in a way to becoming productive and satisfied adults” (Linver et al., 2009, p. 354). The long-standing belief is that character developed in sport is transferable to other domains of life, such as in the home and at school, which will result in adaptive and healthy outcomes (Weiss, 2008). The PYD framework is believed to give voice to youth, adolescents, and teenagers while also promoting their empowerment (Ersing, 2009; Fuller et al., 2013).

In short, PYD youth sport programs are “designed with the purpose of helping youth to reach their full potential” and “effective PYD programs promote social flourishing and instill a sense of resilience in youth” (Fuller et al., 2013, p. 470). For example, the Sport Hartford Boys Program, a sport-based PYD

program in Hartford, Connecticut, reported that outcomes for its Black and Latino adolescent male participants included increases in social, physical, nutritional, and cognitive competence as well as growth in self-concept, self-worth, self-efficacy, caring for others, and connection with others. Likewise, Gators in Motion, a sport-based youth development program in Gainesville, Florida, focuses on holistic development of youth, particularly in the areas of academic enrichment, physical literacy and health, and character and life skills (Bopp & Roetert, 2018). Despite these purported benefits of sport participation, some scholars question if youth and interscholastic sports, including those who adopt PYD approaches, also serve as a mechanism to perpetuate societal inequities, including institutional racism (Anderson et al., 2021; Coakley, 2016; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). This might be especially the case when sports are focused on “underprivileged, “disadvantaged,” or “at-risk” youth and teenagers as the relationship between the athletes/participants and the facilitators/coaches can “mirror traditional racialized roles wherein the Black child is the target of a White program of design” (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 543).

Youth Sport and Racism

Despite claims of a post-racial society, the U.S. remains rife with racism – including in sport. As racial bias can develop at an early age – as early as four years old – sports have long been viewed as an effective mechanism to combat racism and create a level and equal playing field for all (Grenardo, 2021). But when examined from a more critical perspective, it becomes readily apparent that inequities, including institutional racism, exist and persist in youth and interscholastic sports. Within the U.S., disparities in physical activity and sport are closely aligned with race and socioeconomic status where youth from under-served and marginalized communities are negatively impacted (Bopp & Roetert, 2018; Farrey & Isard, 2015). Studies consistently show Black youth engage in physical activity at significantly lower rates than White youth. Likewise, children and teenagers from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods engage in physical activity at lower rates than those from more affluent areas (Bopp & Roetert, 2018; Farrey & Isard, 2015).

Consider the city of Seattle, Washington, as a textbook example. In 2019, Seattle, Washington ranked second in the American Fitness Index of healthiest cities, and Washington state was rated the most livable state (American College of Sports Medicine, 2019; U.S. News & World Report, 2019). In the same year, though, Project Play of the Aspen Institute Sports and Society Program analyzed the physical activity and sport in Seattle and the county where the city is located, King County (Farrey et al., 2019). Project Play found racial and ethnic inequities in youth sports in the region, leaving many without the ability to participate (Farrey et al., 2019). For example, youth of color were significantly less likely to participate in organized sports.¹ Moreover, Black, and Latino youth are participating in fewer types of organized sports than their White counterparts (Farrey et al., 2019). Of the 49 potential sport and physical activities asked of respondents, at least one White youth indicated participation in 48 of the activities, while only 32 were identified by at least one Black or Latino participant. Sports that were not being played by Black and Latino participants included lacrosse, rowing, ice hockey, and ice skating. These same youth of color also spent less time at local parks than their White counterparts due to fewer and more restrictive outdoor spaces near their houses. Likewise, youth in Seattle and King County who do not speak English in their home were nearly three times more likely to not have participated in youth sports and recreation (Farrey et al., 2019).

The racial and ethnic inequities in sport participation in Seattle-King County, just as across the county, partly the result of the increased privatization of sport which has increased the out-of-pocket expenses for youth and interscholastic sports, whether on the recreational or club/travel levels (Farrey et al., 2019). Consequently, youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are disproportionately affected. Specifically, Project Play found that nearly one out of every four youth in Seattle-King County either dropped out of sport or did not participate altogether because sport was deemed too expensive. While the national average for one child to participate in sport over a 12-month period is approximately \$700, the average in

1 In this section of the report, “youth of color” were participants whom were non-White.

Seattle-King County was \$825 (Farrey et al., 2019). This problem is not just concentrated at the youth sport level, but is also prevalent in interscholastic sports.

According to the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health (2019), required interscholastic sport participation fees averaged \$161 across the nation, with nearly 20% of sports requiring fees greater than \$200 (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2019). When additional costs of interscholastic sport, such as equipment and travel, are added to the required participation fees, the true cost to participate in interscholastic sport rises to over \$400 per sport nationwide (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2019). Again, the impact of these rising costs of youth and interscholastic sport are disproportionately felt by families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents from lower socioeconomic situations were three times more likely to express the benefits of interscholastic sports did not justify the costs (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2019). The Project Play report found similar results, but some Seattle-King County families with multiple students having to decide that only one child would be able to participate (Farrey et al., 2019). Beyond impacting the ability to participated, the cost of youth and interscholastic sports is also affecting the outcomes of the athletic contests.

Over the last decade, 80% of the public schools that won state titles in Washington were those whose population of free and reduced-price lunch students was below the state average (Farrey et al., 2019; Webeck, 2019). Thus, there is a differential outcome for schools with respect to athletic success depending upon, in part, the socioeconomic makeup of its student body. To address this socioeconomic divide, the State of Washington legislature proposed and passed House Bill 1660, which requires that "school districts that charge a fee for attendance at or participation in any optional, noncredit extracurricular event must adopt a policy for waiving all fees for students who are low income" as of June 11, 2020 (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2021).

The iniquities found in Seattle and King County are not outliers, but instead mirror the plight of youth and interscholastic sports in cities across the country (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2019; Farrey & Isard, 2015). Even when designed to promote positive development and provide opportunities for youth from marginalized backgrounds, scholars argue that sports still can perpetuate inequities and racism (Anderson et al., 2021; Coakley, 2016; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). This is because sports focused on positive development in effect "decontextualize and essentialize life skills and notions of social functioning tied to sport among youth athletes of color in problematic ways" (Kochanek & Erickson, 2020, p. 229). Though sport proponents often promote and tout character-building and life-skill acquisition as an outcome of involvement, these qualities and traits might be grounded in race-neutral or "White/Euro-American middle- and upper-class standards." In turn, the cultural capital that youth of color might already possess is often ignored in pursuit of conformity to what mainstream "White-standards" deem as appropriate positive development (Coakley, 2016; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). Anderson and colleagues (2021) refer to this pattern as the White-Savior Industrial Complex whereby PYD sports programs can serve to reinforce negative public perceptions of Black youth about affirm while simultaneously influencing what people believe sports should be about (e.g., character building). When youth sports are structured in such a way that they fail to acknowledge diverse cultural perspectives, they end up reproducing systems of racial inequities and racism (Coakley, 2016).

The Midnight Basketball initiative is one such example of how racial inequities can be reproduced by sport (Anderson et al., 2021; Hartmann, 2001; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). To recall, in the 1990s a multitude of cities in the U.S. organized late-night basketball leagues for young men of color in inner-cities and under-resourced areas (Hartmann, 2001). While Midnight Basketball Leagues were initially supported by the general public, they eventually drew scrutiny from some because the leagues operated during high crime hours and with police oversight (Hartmann, 2001; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). Those critical of the initiative saw Midnight Basketball Leagues as a thinly veiled attempt to control and discipline young men of color. In contrast, White youth were not targeted for similar initiatives. Instead, they were encouraged to participate in sport for fun and recreation - as opposed to participation for

control and discipline (Hartmann, 2001; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). As demonstrated, the Midnight Basketball initiative is just one way in how sport designed for positive development can in fact serve to reproduce systems of racial inequities.

Coakley (2002) cautioned against focusing on youth as the problem when pursuing youth and interscholastic sport, and instead concentrating on real societal problems including as racism. For this reason, the remainder of this chapter will focus on two organizations that explicitly and overtly seek to challenge racism through youth sports, the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE) and the King County Play Equity Coalition.

Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE)

The Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality, or RISE (www.risetowin.org), is a nonprofit organization founded in 2015 by Stephen Ross, the owner of the NFL franchise the Miami Dolphins (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018). RISE was created to “harness the unifying power of sport to end racism and champion social justice (RISE, 2022b).” As an organization, RISE is a coalition of key figures and entities in the sports industry, including professional sports leagues, media outlets, athletes, and educators. With programming in more than 40 states, RISE seeks to educate and empower communities to eliminate racial discrimination, uphold social justice, and bolster race relations (RISE, 2022c). Self-admittedly, the vision of RISE is bold: “to create a nation unified through sports committed to racial equity and social justice.” RISE participants learn and agree to the RISE Pledge to End Racism which states, “I pledge to treat everyone with respect and dignity. I will not tolerate racism or discrimination of any kind. I will speak out, RISE up and be a Champion of Change (RISE, 2022c).”

The two primary foci areas for RISE are (1) athlete engagement and (2) leadership and education. RISE has partnered with professional sport leagues such as the National Football League (NFL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) and community organizations such as Police Athletic Leagues (PAL) and Boys and Girls Clubs to provide youth sport programming designed to educate, inform, and ultimately combat racism (RISE, 2022b). The impact of RISE’s programming is noteworthy. After participating in RISE programming, 97% of youth indicated a desire to deepen their knowledge of race and diversity issues, 93% believe they are equipped to have difficult conversations surrounding race and diversity, and 97% indicate they would act to stop racial discrimination (RISE, 2022c).² Two key RISE programs for youth include the Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs and the Building Bridges Through Basketball Program.

RISE Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs

With the Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs, RISE works with area schools and community organizations to engage youth and high school athletes and their coaches in programming that combines experiential learning and skill building with sports (RISE, 2022b). The RISE leadership curriculum is designed for athletes and their coaches to be leaders in discussing and confronting issues such as diversity, inclusion, and racism (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018). Grounded in a PYD framework, the curriculum “acknowledges that youth can be built upon to enhance and optimize their own development (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018, p. 162). The ten-week leadership program provides education and training on topics such the history of race in sport, how to use sport as a vehicle for change, racial imagery in sport, and identity and diversity (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018). A key aspect to note about the Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs is that although it is grounded in a positive youth development perspective, it addresses a major critique of youth sport programs related to contribution as an outcome of participation.

Within the PYD framework, “contribution” is often presented as an outcome of sport participation

2 At publication of this chapter, the RISE website did not provide demographic data on its participants.

(Coakley, 2016; Fuller et al., 2013; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). Yet, when sport programs highlight contribution as an outcome, they generally refer to social contributions. With the Sport Hartford Boys program, for example, researchers noted youth sport participants found ways to assist in their home, classrooms, and community (Fuller et al., 2020). Examples of these social contributions included helping parents out at home when and where needed, helping keep the school classroom clean, and participating in a neighborhood cleanup (Fuller et al., 2020).

Some argue, however, youth and interscholastic sport programs should move beyond a focus on social contributions to also foster critical contributions (Coakley, 2016; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). When focused on critical contributions, youth and interscholastic sport programs would not only be concerned with how participants can contribute to society (i.e., neighborhood cleanup), but also emphasize how sports can foster thought and action that challenge systems of inequity and oppression (Coakley, 2016; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). That is to say, critical contributions “diverge from typical understandings of social contribution (or functioning) in that they encourage youth to question and disrupt unjust social systems and work toward a better alternative” Kochanek & Erickson, 2020, p. 226). Critical contribution, rather than just social contribution, as an outcome of youth and interscholastic sport is, therefore, an important aim - particularly when working with individuals who frequently experience marginalization and racism (Coakley, 2016; Hershberg et al., 2015; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020).

The RISE Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs’ emphasis on critical contribution is helping develop agency in its participants to challenge and confront inequities in society, something that is imperative for all youth and high school students (Coakley, 2016; Hershberg et al., 2015; Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). For example, Mac Intosh and Martin (2018) evaluated the outcomes of the RISE High School Sports Leadership Program at seven high schools in urban areas in Michigan. Data were collected from approximately 400 athletes, with nearly half (n=191) completing both pre- and post-test measures. Fifty-eight percent of the athlete sample were girls and 42% were boys. Of the 191 participants, 93 self-identified as White and 60 self-identified as Black.³ After completing the High School Sports Leadership Program, participants’ self-reported understanding of all topics covered in the RISE curriculum increased. Specific content included: (1) race, (2) ethnicity, (3) implicit bias, (4) racial ideology, (5) perspective taking, (6) leadership, (7) critical thinking, (8) racism, (9) diversity, (10), cultural competence, and (11) microaggressions (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018). Moreover, athletes reported increased attitudes with respect to participating in diverse social and cultural activities. Likewise, athlete participants reported advances in their perspective on diversity and racial equality, as well as how diversity can influence their own personal growth. For example, athletes reported they would be more willing to have discussions with teammates about race and diversity (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018). Readers are encouraged to review (Mac Intosh & Martin, 2018) for more detailed information on the formation, implementation, outcomes, and theoretical underpinnings of the Youth and High School Sports Leadership Programs.

Building Bridges Through Basketball

Another RISE program for youth is the Building Bridges Through Basketball program, which won the Corporate Community Impact Award at the 2019 Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) Sports Humanitarian Awards. In an effort to “break barriers, build trust, and create pathways for positive communication” the program unites youth and law enforcement in communities throughout the U.S. (RISE, 2022a). Since 2016, RISE has created and implemented 25 programs in 15 major cities that have used sports as vehicle to bring together local youth, officers, and community leaders to discuss topics such as race and diversity (Williams et al., 2020). Cities that have hosted this programming include Charlotte (NC), Chicago (IL), Los Angeles (CA), Detroit (MI), and New Orleans (LA) among others. The program spans 10 weeks and combines basketball training with cultural competency curriculum such as diversity, racism, conflict resolution, and other themes (RISE, 2022a). After gathering

3 The authors did not provide the racial and ethnic self-identification of the remaining 38 athletes.

data from program participants, RISE found that prior to engaging in the Building Bridges Through Basketball program, youth held a combination of positive (i.e., protectors) and negative (e.g., abusive and/or racist) perceptions of law enforcement officers. Likewise, the program found members of law enforcement also held a combination of positive (i.e., future leaders) and negative (i.e., disrespectful troublemakers) sentiments about youth prior to program participation (Williams et al., 2020). After participating in the Building Bridges Through Basketball, though, RISE found that positive interactions between law enforcement and youth helped facilitate more positive perceptions among both groups (Williams et al., 2020). Though not exhaustive, these are just a few ways that RISE seeks to address inequities and racism through youth sports.

King County Play Equity Coalition

Another youth sport organization explicitly dedicated to anti-racism is the King County Play Equity Coalition. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Project Play by the Aspen Institute Sports and Society Program analyzed the physical activity and sport in Seattle and King County and found wide disparities across area youth experiences and outcomes (Farrey et al., 2019). In response to the Project Play report, over 100 organizations across King County formed a coalition called the King County Play Equity Coalition (KCPEC) to address these disparities. Member organizations include those across the sport, recreation, public health, business, and education sectors in King County, Washington (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b; Wong et al., 2020). The KCPEC works to address systematic gaps in sport and physical activity for disenfranchised youth, which the coalition defines as youth that are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), youth that have disabilities, youth who do not speak English as a primary language at home, girls, and youth from low-income families (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020b).

It is at this point critical for the reader to understand that at the time of publication for this chapter, the KCPEC is a relatively nascent organization. The first coalition meeting occurred in February 2020 and the leadership team was installed in March 2020 (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020c), at which time the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread in the United States and the rest of the world. The reader should keep these circumstances in mind as the COVID-19 pandemic has likely impacted the trajectory of the KCPEC. Specifically, it appears the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the implementation of the KCPEC initiatives such that the organization completed its first strategic plan during Fall 2021. Additionally, the focus of the KCPEC appears to be how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted equity in youth and high school sports.

The mission of the coalition is fundamentally anti-racist as the coalition seeks to challenge and change “systems to shift power and center physical activity as a key part of health and youth development” (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b). Additionally, the vision of the KCPEC is “a King County - where all youth - and particularly youth from historically under-served groups - experience the transformative benefits of play, sports, outdoor recreation and physical activity” (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b; Wong et al., 2020). To this end, KCPEC has adopted values grounded in an anti-racism perspective.

The four values of the KCPEC include: (1) communities of Color-centered, (2) empowering play at all levels, (3) collaboration across sectors, and (4) disruption of traditional systems. With its first value, communities of color-centered, the KCPEC recognizes the expertise located in communities of color and seeks to shift the power to those communities (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b; Wong et al., 2020). For example, members of the coalition’s leadership team come from community organizations including African Community Housing and Development and the Congolese Integration Network, a non-profit organization for Congolese immigrants and refugees.

The second value, empowering play at all levels, recognizes that youth involvement in sport, play, and

physical activity can be protective and empowering. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the KCPEC distributed a community survey to gauge the impact of the pandemic on families and youth (King County Play Equity Coalition, n.d.). The organization discovered the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on under-resourced members of the community such that there were reduced opportunities for play and physical activity. As one way to empower play despite the impact of the pandemic, the KCPEC organization created a resource guide for youth, families, and coaches to implement when time, space, and other resources are limited (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020d). Content of the resource guide includes free physical activity apps and videos and sport-specific resources. Another way the KCPEC is attempting to empower play for all is through its Facilities Access Action Team (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2022). The Facilities Access Action Team was created due to inequities in access to recreation facilities across Seattle and King County. The team spent eight (8) months analyzing recreation facility policies such as rentals and fees, practice schedules, and reservations “through a lens of impact on equity evaluating how Black, Indigenous, and communities of color have been impacted (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2022). The outcome of this analysis are recommendations that area facilities improve reservation processes to prioritize access to organizations that serve most of the youth who experience inequities in sport and physical activity. Additionally, the Facilities Use and Access Action Team has proposed that local facilities develop goals to improve equity of access, revise their policies to allow prime time usage for new users, not just historic ones, and to change their facility fee structures to allow for tiered levels based on financial capacity of individuals and organizations (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2022). The Facilities Use and Access Action Team is now working with Seattle and King County park agencies, school districts, and private organizations to implement the proposals (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2022).

Rather than seeking to operate in isolation, the KCPEC focuses on system level solutions that necessitate collaboration with both the public and private sectors (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021; Wong et al., 2020). As previously mentioned, the KCPEC is comprised of over 100 organizations across Seattle and King County. In May 2021, the KC Play Equity Coalition received a \$20,000 community impact grant from the Seattle Mariners (Major League Baseball) to support its work (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021a). Further, the coalition employs a bottom-up approach with respect to collaborations. Rather than the KCPEC forming community collaborations, the coalition created a collaboration program by which community organizations form their own collaborations to serve BIPOC and other disenfranchised youth (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020b). In turn, the KCPEC provides financial assistance, up to \$10,000, to support those collaborations selected for the program (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020b). Given the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on under-represented populations, collaborations under this program must either (1) address current pandemic-related gaps or (2) address a system gap service to youth most disenfranchised from physical activity (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020b).

The final value of the KCPEC is unequivocal in its anti-racism perspective in that the coalition is actively working “to disrupt systematic racism and oppression that are upheld and perpetuated by the status quo” (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b). One of the methods the coalition utilizes to achieve this end is its Action Teams. According to the KCPEC, the Action Teams are intended to create systematic change by centering on the experiences of “youth most disenfranchised from physical activity and the programs that serve them” (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020a). As of Spring 2022, the KCPEC has four action teams: (1) Covid-Related Advocacy, (2) Facility-Use and Access, (3) Youth, and (4) Gender Equity Shared Learning. For example, during early stages of the covid pandemic (May 2020), the Covid-Related Advocacy Action Team created a two-page “Return to Play Equity Resource” designed to ensure Covid-related safety, while also advocating for disenfranchised youth to not be left out of sport and physical activity (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020e).

Additionally, to uphold its four-fold values the KCPEC has identified five primary goals to drive its work. These goals are:

1. Shift power in the youth sports and physical activity sector to BIPOC, community led organizations
2. Raise up play as a central component of healthy child development and a priority in regional policy-making, funding, and education decisions.
3. Build a strong, connected, cross-sector network of organizations committed to Coalition mission.
4. Build and support a strong, sustainable organizational structure grounded in equitable governance
5. Work towards equitable access to and change in ownership of sport and play infrastructure, facilities, and fields.

Anti-racist strategies to achieve the goals of the KCPEC include recruiting and retaining BIPOC leadership, identifying where power does and does not reside in the physical activity sector, creating a structural plan to shift power to community-based organizations, and working with county government agencies to distribute funds to community organizations (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b). The aforementioned coalition collaborations program is one such strategy to achieve the goals of the KCPEC. Collaborations are community and member-driven projects, funded by the KCPEC, and designed to address current pandemic-related or system gaps in sport and physical activity services to disenfranchised youth. Likewise, the Action Teams are another strategy to achieve the goals of the Coalition. For example, the Facilities Use and Access Action Team is working with community-based organizations, park agencies, school districts, and sports leagues to ensure use and access disenfranchised youth. To recall, the Facilities Use and Access Action Team found that access to adequate facilities was a barrier for disenfranchised youth sports participation in Seattle and King County. To this end, the Facilities Use and Access Action Team created a model joint-use agreement that schools, community organizations, and park agencies can implement to improve equity of access to facilities. Though the model joint-use agreement is specific to Washington state law, interested readers can download a copy of the template at https://kcplayequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/KC_PLAY-Model-Joint-Use-Agreement-FINAL.pdf. Likewise, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the KCPEC has prioritized input from communities most vulnerable and most impacted by COVID-19. As previously discussed, the Covid-Related Advocacy Team distributed a community survey whereby it gathered information on how the pandemic has impacted families and how the KCPEC could help. Findings from the survey indicated that the pandemic has decreased sport and physical activity access for youth in under-resourced communities. Based on the results of the survey, the Coalition has begun hosting regular Zoom sessions with community members, creating and distributing resources Covid-related sport and physical activity resources, and advocating for federal, state, and local funding to help support youth physical activity (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2020d).

Recommendations for Encouraging Anti-Racism in Youth Sports

Though the focus of this chapter was on the RISE and the KCPEC organizations, others are also adopting anti-racism practices to youth and interscholastic sports. For example, Davis County and the state of Utah announced a partnership to combat racism and discrimination in the Davis County School District, including in interscholastic sports (Davis School District, 2022).⁴ When considering how to use youth sport to combat racism and systems of oppression, coaches, administrators, parents, and others involved would do well to move beyond the traditional PYD framework that was discussed earlier in this chapter. Rather, intentionally orienting youth sports to address racism is required to prevent youth sports from perpetuating systems of inequities and racism. In a discourse on if sports can be used to combat racism, Grenardo (2021) proposed four concepts youth sport practitioners can use to promote anti-racism in youth sports: (1) education, (2) experiences, (3) early, and (4) opportunity.

⁴ The partnership is the result of a federal investigation by the Department of Justice that found “serious and widespread racial harassment” of Black and Asian American students.

Education

First, education is critical for combating racism in and through youth sports (Grenardo, 2021). Youth sports can be used to educate youth on the importance of an anti-racist perspective, including the importance of valuing diversity and inclusion (Grenardo, 2021). RISE's Youth Sport Leadership program serves as model for education in youth sports. The program does not just focus on skill acquisition or positive developmental characteristics such as teamwork and confidence. Rather, RISE's programming educates its participants – both young and old alike – on topics such racism, prejudice, diversity, and inclusion, and how sports can be used as a vehicle for change. Just as some states require mandatory trainings for coaches and athletes, such as those related to concussions, Grenardo (2021) suggested required courses on anti-racism and diversity should be embedded in youth sports for all participants – including, players, coaches, administrators, and parents. RISE's strategy of using high-profile professional athletes and professional leagues and franchises to partner with and promote their anti-racist curriculum could be a model to follow, when possible.

In addition to RISE, other sport organizations attempt to leverage the celebrity of professional athletes to combat inequities in sport. Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international governing body for soccer (football/futbol), for example, has a 94-page guide on how to promote diversity and anti-discrimination in the game of soccer (football/futbol) (FIFA, n.d.). In the guide, FIFA encourages the involvement of professional players to communicate the importance of diversity and anti-discrimination to youth players. At the very least, a pledge such as RISE's Pledge to End Racism or a statement on diversity and anti-racism by the organizing league could be infused in youth sports. Grenardo (2021) proposes such a statement that could be communicated to youth while participating in sport:

In this great country of the United States of America, laws prevented some people from having basic rights... People were very mean to each other just because someone looked different than them, had a different color of skin, or came from a different culture. The United States saw this was bad and changed the laws so that everyone may be treated the same, regardless of what they looked like or where they came from, but the laws did not change everyone's attitudes about each other. Sports are where people of all different colors, cultures, and backgrounds come to play and have fun. To win as a team, you must work together with everyone on your team... We should appreciate those differences and celebrate them... We want to play hard, play fair, and treat people the way we want to be treated. And, remember, we always want to say "yes" to unity and "no" to racism. (p. 298)

Similarly, the Aspen Institute, in effort to recognize the right of every child to play, created the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports (Aspen Institute, n.d.). Contained within this bill of rights is the statement that youth sports should be free of discrimination and youth sports should be a safe and healthy environment. More than 60 prominent sport organizations, including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, Under Armour, and ESPN have endorsed the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports. Youth sport adopters of the Children's Bill of Rights in Sports might consider modifying it to contain more explicit and overt statements about the importance of diversity and anti-racism. In doing so, the bill of rights will truly recognize the human rights of youth who participate in sport.

Experience

In addition to education, experience with people from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds is another key factor in combating racism through youth sports (Grenardo, 2021). At least in the scholarly community, the idea that sport can be a fertile ground for promoting positive and healthy interactions and experiences amongst and between people from different backgrounds was popularized

by Allport's (1954) intergroup contact hypothesis. The hypothesis suggests experiences with members of an out-group, especially when from different racial and/or ethnic groups, are effective in changing negative prejudicial attitudes. In fact, Allport (1954) highlighted sport as a textbook example of how experience can reduce prejudicial attitudes as he stated: "The (hypothesis) is clearly illustrated in the multi-ethnic athletic team. Here the goal is all important: the ethnic composition of the team is irrelevant. It is the cooperative striving for the goal that engenders solidarity" (p. 276).

Research testing Allport's (1954) intergroup contact hypothesis, including in the domain of sport, have found positive outcomes are best achieved when three mediating conditions are present in the experience (1) increased knowledge about the out-group, (2) reduction of anxiety about the out-group, and (3) an increase in empathy toward the out-group (e.g., Bruening et al., 2014). These key conditions are present in RISE's Building Bridges Through Basketball program, which is the likely reason that youth and law enforcement officers who participate in the program report more positive perceptions and less negative perceptions of one another.

As many youth sport leagues tend to be organized based on geographical location, there might not be opportunity for intergroup contact in a team setting in which the majority of residents in that area are racially and ethnically homogeneous (e.g., predominantly White). Even still, providing youth and teenagers with opportunities to interact with other kids from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds can prove vital in helping to promote and encourage anti-racist perspectives (Grenardo, 2021). Recruiting, hiring, and retaining coaches from different racial and ethnic groups could be an effective experience when a youth or interscholastic sport team or league is primarily homogeneous in its racial and ethnic makeup. It will be important, though, that avoid tokenism by hiring just making one or two hires to "diversify" the coaching staff. Instead, a critical mass of representation is needed – something that will likely not happen overnight. Likewise, pre-season, mid-season, and end-of-season events with teams from other leagues, conferences, and geographical areas can help promote youth from different racial and ethnic groups to interact with one another (Grenardo, 2021).

It should be acknowledged, however, that a major impediment to achieving the aforementioned experiences might be funding (Grenardo, 2021). Where funding is an issue, youth sport leagues can look to establish partnerships across their geographical communities, as well as within the larger sport community, as done by both RISE and the King County Play Equity Coalition. Large corporations such as Nike, Under Armour and ESPN have already increased their grant funding to programs serving Black youth and under-resourced communities in the wake of the killings of George Floyd and other people of color. Likewise, after legalizing sport gambling, the state of New York earmarked 1% of all of first year gambling revenue and \$5 million annually thereafter to youth sports programming (Scanlon, 2021). Moreover, of the \$1.9 trillion contained in The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, some \$350 billion is allocated for states and local governments to address economic and social impacts, including in recreation and physical activity (National Recreation and Park Association, 2021). These are just a sample of the many funding sources that can be used to promote positive intergroup experiences in youth sports.

Early

Next, the promotion of diversity and anti-racism in sport should occur early in life, as racial bias can begin as young as four-years old. This will likely require buy-in from youth sport organizations with younger athletes, such as Little Leagues Baseball and Softball and Pop Warner. Again, RISE provides a useful case study as its anti-racist curriculum can be tailored based on the age group of the targeted audience. RISE's Digital Learning Series, a web-based interactive experience that provides users with tools to develop their cultural competency is a relevant example. Combining technology with gamification to teach cultural competency to youth and teenagers could be an effective approach. Additionally, multimedia and digital organizations such as Disney and YouTube could be useful vehicles. For example, recent Disney films including *Moana*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, and *Encanto* have featured a

predominately non-White cast of characters. Moreover, youth sport organizations might also consider partnering with early childhood development institutions or social justice organizations to promote diverse racial and ethnic perspectives during an athlete's formative years. While the experts in early childhood education would likely have the most ideal methods to promote racial diversity, one example might be an adapted version of Clark and Clark's (1940, 1947) doll experiment in which the dolls are sport characters. To recall, the researchers used dolls identical in every way except skin color to analyze racial perceptions of children. The use of sport-based dolls might reveal racial and ethnic preferences specific to the sport domain.

Opportunity

One final strategy for using youth sports to combat racism is to provide individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to exercise and maintain leadership and influence (while keeping in mind the need for critical mass rather than tokenism) (Grenardo, 2021). This strategy for combating racism through youth sports is exemplified in the efforts of the King County Play Equity Coalition. The KCPEC recognizes that expertise already resides in their local communities of color. Accordingly, the coalition is attempting to shift the power to those communities by promoting BIPOC led community organizations in their area. Additional opportunities to build leadership and influence for those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds include targeted hiring, mentoring, and training programs. Sport leagues and organizations at higher competitive levels already have practices and policies in place to promote diversity and inclusion (or at least give the appearance of promotion). The NCAA, for example, provides diversity grants to fund athletic administration positions at Division II and Division III colleges and universities. Youth sport leagues could likewise establish programs to recruit, train, and mentor future youth sport leaders from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Such programs will likely take time to establish, particularly given the financial constraints of youth and interscholastic sport leagues. As previously noted, where funding is an issue, leagues should seek partnerships with corporations or apply for local, state, and federal funding. A prime funding opportunity is the \$350 billion in The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for state and local governments to address economic and social impacts, including in recreation and physical activity (National Recreation and Park Association, 2021).

Conclusion

As racial bias can occur in children as early as four years old (Grenardo, 2021), youth sports has the potential to be an ideal vehicle to challenge and combat racism. A combination of proactive and concerted efforts around education, experience, and opportunity can work towards achieving these aims. Thankfully, practitioners and proponents of youth sports are not without guidance for promoting an anti-racist perspective in youth sports. Organizations such as RISE and the King County Play Equity Coalition stand as models for addressing racism in sport, and particularly in youth sports. When pursued with intentionality, youth sports indeed has the potential to build more than character in youth. Instead, youth sports can help to build a more just and equitable society by encouraging its participants "to disrupt systematic racism and oppression that are upheld and perpetuated by the status quo" (King County Play Equity Coalition, 2021b).

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