

Fostering joy in sport with Play Better: How coaches can support youth's basic psychological needs by rewarding skill development with charitable donations

Name: Angie Fan

SFU Faculty/Major: Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Psychology

Presentation Description:

What makes sport enjoyable for youth? We interviewed 23 soccer coaches who used Play Better: a sport program that rewards youth with charitable donations for meeting skill development goals. We found that Play Better helped coaches support youth's basic psychological needs which helped foster greater feelings of enjoyment for youth.

Abstract:

Sport is a significant source of enjoyment for youth, yet past work suggests that a focus on winning undercuts enjoyment and participation. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—one leading theory that offers insights into where and how people experience joy—suggests that people experience the most joy and psychological growth in contexts where their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported. As such, researchers recommend that coaches use sport in ways that support youth's basic psychological needs to foster growth and enjoyment in their athletes. In one novel program—Play Better—coaches reward youth with charitable donations for meeting skill development goals set by their coaches or team. Can Play Better help coaches support youth's basic needs and foster enjoyment in sport? We conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 Play Better coaches to understand their experiences with the program. Using deductive thematic analysis, we examined themes of SDT needs fulfillment and perceived enjoyment. Coaches reported that a focus on charitable giving and skill development helped coaches foster youth's basic psychological needs—particularly relatedness. Critically, themes of greater enjoyment emerged for youth and coaches when coaches supported youth's basic needs. These initial findings suggest that charity- and skill-oriented programs such as Play Better may help coaches create meaningful and enjoyable experiences for youth by supporting their basic psychological needs.

References/Acknowledgments:

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