

# Youth Sports in Appleton

A youth sports focus group was developed within the Recreation Division to examine the effectiveness by which we were meeting the needs of the community through our existing youth sports model. Through research, data analysis, and professional experience our group identified the following key areas of strategic need:

- Inclusion
  - The removal of barriers to participation such as financial limitations, differences in ability, and social barriers.
- Skill Development
  - The need to provide all kids with a strong, fundamental set of skills and strategies that will prepare them with the ability and confidence to pursue a sport competitively, or recreationally, as they choose.
- Family Balance
  - Provide reasonable time commitments that allow kids to be kids, explore other interests, make time for free play, and enjoy a well-rounded life.
- Lifelong Enjoyment
  - Develop physically literate kids who are compelled to remain engaged in physical activity for life and who are inspired to teach and coach the next generation.

These concepts have been developed into the core values that drive our youth sports programs. These values guide our program structure and delivery, our messaging and marketing, and serve as the framework for our vision in our interaction with coaches and staff.

The outcome of implementing these core values has resulted in an extended run of program success which has captured the enthusiasm of the Appleton community and attracted national recognition.

- John O'Sullivan, Founder and CEO, founded Changing the Game in 2012. John highlighted the City of Appleton's efforts on January 23, 2018 (<http://changingthegameproject.com/winning-race-right-finish-line/>).
- The New York Times published an article on March 25, 2018 titled Bye-Bye Organized Sports. Editors contacted our department and information was submitted by the Recreation Staff. Unfortunately all reference to the City of Appleton was removed by the editor's. Grace, whom they reference, is a participant of the Appleton Parks & Recreation programs.

John O' Sullivan (Changing the Game):

In 2015, Nate Baldwin became the Youth Sports Programmer for Appleton, WI Parks and Recreation. They faced declining numbers across their four major sports – flag football, soccer, baseball/softball, and basketball – just like many other sports organizations. In Baldwin's words, "the first thing that struck me was how willing a "typical" park & rec sports program was to be the "fall back" option in the community. We were willing to be the program families settled for, if their children either weren't talented enough, or financially fortunate enough, to participate with an elite/travel program (as with many communities, the travel/elite system is big, vocal, and strong in this part of the state). ***I was already a firm believer in the message of Changing the Game Project at that point, so my first order of business was to basically stand up for the benefits we provide to the community.... Define our values, define our philosophy, and boldly position those qualities as the reason to ACTIVELY CHOOSE our program over the competition.***"

So what has happened in Appleton since 2015? First, they defined who they were and what they stood for, by outlining four core values:

1. **Inclusivity:** regardless of your skill or background, there is a place for you here
2. **Intentional Skill Development:** accomplished through structured lesson planning, coach training, and frequent feedback during the season to help coaches and players get from point A to point B, from week to week, and from season to season.
3. **Family Balance:** Reasonable time commitments that allow kids to be kids (and enjoy family dinners, get their homework done, and enjoy free play), reasonable financial commitments that don't artificially increase pressure or expectations, and a season length that allows a child to pursue other interests and other sports without guilt.
4. **Promoting Lifelong Enjoyment of Sports:** we want the league experience to be so positive, so encouraging, that every child will want to make this activity a part of their life, long-term.... regardless of whether they pursue the activity competitively or not

Next, Nate and his team relentlessly shared these values, educated coaches and parents, and held people accountable for upholding them. They said in essence "we told you how we do things here, if this is not a good fit we understand, perhaps it's not for you."

**Since 2015, participation numbers in their four major sports are up a staggering 47%, from 1642 kids to 2419!** It turns out that this type of programming was exactly what people were looking for. "It shows that kids still want to play, and it shows that families still value a positive sports experience, dictated by core values that make sense, match their family values, and promote the overall health, well-being and development of their children," says Baldwin. **"Being an active part of your movement has helped us reach these families with this message, and they have embraced it wholeheartedly with their participation, and their enthusiasm to share it with their friends, family and neighbors."**

The best part, I think, is this last paragraph from Nate's email to me: "A critical component of our success has been our ability to deliver on the experience we promote. ***Despite the incredible growth our programs have enjoyed, our on-field conflict and problems are practically non-existent.*** Parents, coaches, and staff ALL understand the value system, understand what our collective purpose is on the field each week, and are unified and collaborative in their efforts to provide that experience for our kids each week. ***They are also extremely PROTECTIVE of that mission because they know how important the integrity of that mission is to our program success.***"

Your town, your club, your sport can be the next Appleton, WI. It just takes belief in the science, a long-term vision, a healthy dose of courage to go from good to great, and relentless commitment to serving the needs, values, and priorities of the kids.

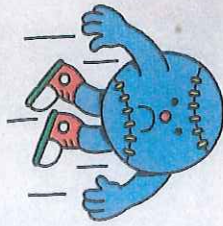
It takes a small group of people to stand up and decide to win the race to the right finish line.

I hope you will join our movement! If you don't know how to get started, send us an email at [John@ChangingTheGameProject.com](mailto:John@ChangingTheGameProject.com). We can help.

New York Times Article (See Attached)



Sports



BYE-BYE,  
ORGANIZED  
SPORTS!

FEWER KIDS ARE  
PLAYING ON SPORTS  
TEAMS. WHY?

BY JEREMY HSU



**GRACE, 12, LOVED** basketball from an early age and joined several local and regional kid camps in Wisconsin, her home. But when coaches encouraged Grace and her parents to try a competitive travel team starting in third grade, her enthusiasm drained away over three seasons. “I did not like playing on the team,” she says, “because many of the players were there for themselves or their parents — not to be part of a team, but to win.”

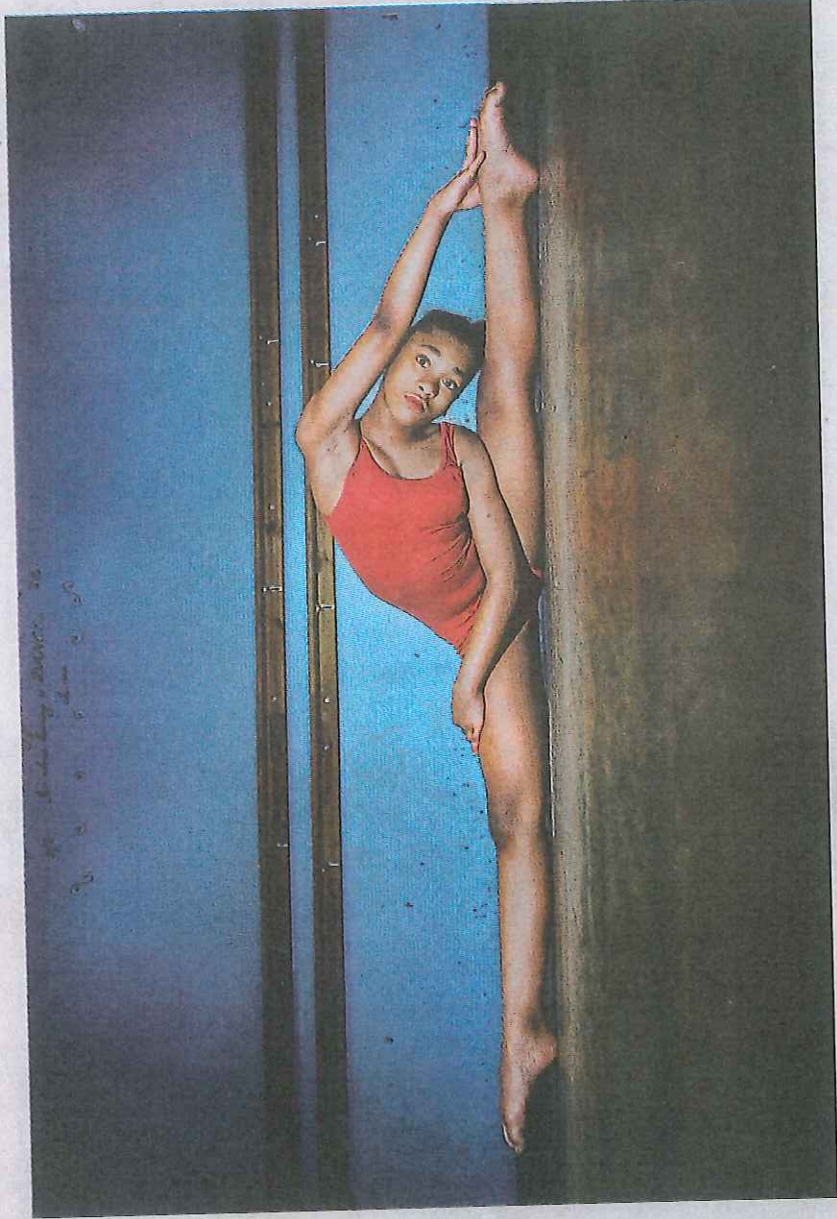
Grace, who considered dropping out, is part of a nationwide trend: Fewer kids want to play organized sports, like basketball, football and baseball. In 2016, about 37 percent of kids between ages 6 and 12 regularly played team sports, compared with 45 percent in 2008, according to a recent report. A push toward private clubs and competitive travel teams is one reason this is happening, says Amanda J. Visek, who studies exercise science. The supercompetitive attitudes, longer time commitments and high membership fees can discourage young athletes, she explains.

Safety concerns about head injuries in football and other contact sports are also growing and may contribute to declining participation. And then there’s technology: Many kids are spending more and more time with video games and smartphones. Some people think that’s a bad thing, but Jon Solomon, who helped with the trend report, says adults should first study why kids like video games for lessons about how to make team sports more fun. With video games, “there’s lots of action, they can play with their friends and there are no parents critiquing every move,” Solomon says.

As for Grace, she recently switched from the intense travel team to a recreational basketball program offered by her local recreation department that emphasizes enjoyment of sports. “This year,” she says, “I got to have fun and got to handle the ball, shoot and use my skills.” The result? She isn’t saying goodbye. Yet. ♦

HOW TO TRAIN LIKE  
**A COMPETITIVE DANCER**

BY LIZZIE FEIDELSON • PHOTOGRAPH BY DINA LITOVSKY



Katelyn Yancey, an 11-year-old from Georgia, started dancing when she was 2.

**W**HEN Katelyn Yancey gets home from dance class, she still has so much energy, she says, that she “just does leaps across the house.” Yancey, 11, lives and breathes dance: She’s a competitive dancer. In national competitions, she performs short solos and group routines packed with difficult technical tricks like aerials (no-hands cartwheels), vying against other dancers for trophies, scholarship prizes or even hundreds of dollars. More than 50,000 dancers participate in just one of the biggest competitions, called Showstopper.

To prepare for these competitions, Yancey practices nearly every day. Her training regimen at DanceMakers of Atlanta includes four days of classes a week, as well as rehearsals to perfect her moves. She begins each round of classes with a warm-up — five minutes of floor exercises, like splits and straddles — followed by a rigorous ballet class. After ballet,

she takes a second class in jazz, hip-hop, acrobatics or tap. On Saturdays, she takes a ballet class (ballet using toe shoes). “Ballet helps with your core muscles and turns,” she says. Hip-hop helps her learn to move with the music (her favorite hip-hop artists to dance to are Kendrick Lamar and Migos).

At competitions, Yancey performs before a panel of judges who record about how she’s doing, like if she has mastered difficult moves or is expressing with her face and body. That can make her nervous. (This year, she won Mini Artist at the Atlanta regional competition for the Nuvo Dance Convention, which is annually held in 28 cities in the United States and Canada.) She overcomes jitter with a quiet place to breathe deeply and say a prayer. Next year, she will move to the junior category, and go from being the oldest student in her age group to the youngest. “They say the junior level is really hard,” Yancey says. “But I can

**THE REALLY (REALLY)  
LONG RACE**

BY RACHEL SWABY • PHOTOGRAPH BY CASSI ALEXANDRA



Luke Sanchez, center, runs in the extreme-distance events called ultramarathons.

**ON  
APRIL 14,**

Sanchez will join roughly 400 runners at a starting line near

run!” With his older brother by his side (and his mom following close behind), Sanchez would run a mile or two home most afternoons. “It was fun after sitting

So far he has tried two 100-mile races, completing 75 miles of the first and all 100 miles of the second, finishing in just over 30 hours. (That’s 30 hours on his

**GROWING UP,** I was a tomboy. My father was a baseball and football coach. One day, he came home from work, and I had a bunch of boys lined up in the front yard with boxing gloves on. He told me that he didn’t want me boxing. “But Dad,” I said, “I’m winning.”

What I loved about growing up with all these boys is that when you first met them, they would think, What’s up with the girl? But if you had any athletic ability, it blew them away.

In high school, my dad would take me to college softball games in Los Angeles. I realized then that I wanted to get good grades, because I wanted to play sports, and for women’s sports, college is usually the pinnacle.