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Minnesota Community Tackles Youth Sport Parent Education

Minneapolis, MN, September 10, 2007—Minnesota *PLAYS*[™] (*Parents Learning About Youth Sports*), an innovative program to help combat the potential downsides of youth sport, will launch October 2 to Eagan parents of first- and second-grade students as part of a community collaboration among the University of Minnesota Youth Sport Research Consortium (www.MNYSRC.org), the Eagan Athletic Association (EAA), and School District 196. The MNYSRC is comprised of faculty and researchers across the U of M who care deeply about youth sports and Minnesota families and communities.

Thousands of children enter youth sport each year through school and community-based programs. Youth sports can provide a positive and meaningful context for youth development and family engagement, but, according to MNYSRC researcher and co-developer of *PLAYS*[™] Dr. Nicole LaVoi, the quality of youth sport experiences and child outcomes are determined by adults—the coaches, administrators, and parents who create, manage, and influence youth sports. The issues facing child-athletes and their families today as a result of sport participation include burnout, drop out, overuse injuries, cheating, violence, over-scheduling, inequalities, inadequately trained coaches, parental over/under involvement, and policy issues.

LaVoi describes Minnesota *PLAYS*[™] as a one-hour interactive workshop based on the latest research from child development and sport psychology as well as data collected from children and Minnesota sport parents. “Parents play a critical role in youth sports,” says LaVoi, “but parents receive very little—if any—education on how to create a positive sport experience for their child-athlete. We hope *PLAYS* will start sport parents out on the right foot in terms of their child’s sport participation.”

"EAA has been working with the U of M for almost two years to develop and implement this program and we are excited to be able to bring it to our first group of parents this fall," says EAA President Dan Mott, "EAA is committed to improving the climate surrounding youth sports in our community."

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Mott adds, "We believe *PLAYS* will help parents better appreciate the significant role they play in their child's athletic experience and provide them with specific suggestions for fostering a more positive environment around youth sports in Eagan. Our objective is to make sure that our programs remain focused on the overall development of our children as people, not just as athletes." Mott's sentiment is echoed by George Brewster, an EAA parent who was part of the *PLAYS*TM pilot. "*PLAYS* has challenged me see a kids'-eye view of sports and to let the youth sports experience belong to my kids and not to me." Another EAA parent, Dave Unmacht, commented, "I wish we'd had *PLAYS* when my children were younger. Parents should not underestimate the important role they play on the sidelines in support of their children."

With the perception that the professionalization of youth sports is driving kids away from sports and the rising epidemic of youth obesity which largely stems from inactivity, keeping children involved in sports is also a community health issue. LaVoi states, "If Minnesota communities are committed to positive youth development and concerned about the trends they see in youth sports, then *PLAYS*TM is one local solution." She believes that *PLAYS*TM will help Minnesota parents understand their role in creating healthy, family-friendly youth sport opportunities that not only benefit everyone in the community, but help ensure *all* children play, stay, benefit from, and enjoy sports.

For more information about Minnesota *PLAYS*TM visit the MNYSRC.org website. To schedule *PLAYS*TM for your community, contact Dr. Nicole LaVoi at 612-626-6055.

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