The Impact of No Pass/No Play Sanctions on High School Athletes: Implications for Youth and Policy

Jennifer A. Oliphant, EdD, MPH,
Healthy Youth Development * Prevention Research Center, Department of Adolescent Health and Medicine, University of Minnesota

Background

In the original “No Pass/No Play” legislation students had to pass all classes with at least a 70% average to participate in sports or extracurricular activities (Shannon, D. J., 1987).

Since then, no pass/no play regulations have been enacted across the nation with little evidence regarding their effectiveness.

In spite of this nearly universal implementation:

- There are mixed views in literature about sports participation as a protective factor in youth
- Eligibility and punishment for breaking the rules vary widely
- No studies show the impact on youth development, high school athletes and No Pass/No Play

Study Design & Methods

Design

Qualitative, interview-based, grounded theory methodology from 15 cases, 7 females and 8 males, aged 14-18 at the time of sanction

Goal

Examine how imposed no pass/no play sanctions affect the youth development of high school athletes

Working Definition

While the term no pass/no play originally applied only to grades, non-academic behavior infractions such as underage alcohol consumption and tobacco use have since been linked to no pass/no play (Texas Homeland Security, 2010).

Data sources:

College attending students, 18-22 at age of interview, recruited through college bulletin boards within two major universities in Minnesota.

Outcome

A combined total of 387 useable comments, 157 describing the outcomes of the sanctions that facilitated youth development and 230 the impeded youth development.

Conclusions & Implications

- No pass/no play sanctions overwhelmingly negatively impact the youth development of athletes
- Sanctions may encourage dishonesty and cheating, with adults facilitating such actions
- Apologizing to teammates is as an effective form of youth development

Definition of Youth Development

“A process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that helps them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. It addresses the broader developmental need of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems.”

(National Collaboration for Youth Members, 1998)

References


Contact Information

Jennifer Oliphant, EdD, MPH
University of Minnesota, Department of Adolescent Health and Medicine, Healthy Youth Development Prevention Research Center
(612) 624-1907 or (612) 240-1726; oliph001@umn.edu