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ALLIANCE ISSUES 'POOR GRADES' ON NATIONAL YOUTH SPORTS REPORT CARD

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Youth sports get low grades for parental misbehavior and an overemphasis on a win-at-all-cost mentality among parents and coaches. According to the first-ever National Youth Sports Report Card, announced by an alliance of the nation's most prominent amateur and professional sports organizations, youth sports need to focus more on the child's experience and less on winning games or earning sports scholarships.

Members of the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance (CTSA), a national coalition of professional and amateur sports organizations, include the NCAA, MLB, NBA and WNBA, and NHL. (See below for a complete list of members.)

“CTSA is concerned that youth sports has become too focused on winning at the exclusion of the child's well-being,” said Ron Stratten, CTSA chair and vice-president of education services at the NCAA. “Youth sports offer children wonderful benefits, including fitness and character development. But we are concerned that issues, such as early sports specialization, poor sportsmanship and over-invested parents seeking sports scholarships, are threatening to undermine the positive experience of youth sports.”

CTSA's report card (attached at the end of the release) included two Ds, one in the category of “Parental Behavior/Involvement” and one in the area of “Child-Centered Philosophy,” which focuses on the child's perspective of the experience. The panel issued a C- for the “Coaching” category, a C+ in the area of “Health and Safety” and a B- in “Officiating.”

“The 2005 Youth Sports National Report Card should serve as a wake-up call for all Americans,” said Congressman Mike McIntyre, a U.S. Representative from North Carolina's Seventh District. “We should, can, and must do better to provide a positive environment for youth sports. Their character, safety and future depend on it.”

Dan Gould, director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, Michigan State University, released the grades issued by the national expert panel, which was composed of youth sports leaders, authors, sociologists, sports psychologists, coaches and parents. “One of the biggest issues in youth sports today is the professionalization of children’s sports,” said Gould, noting that this occurs when adults take a professional sports model and impose it on children’s activities. “Examples of this professional model include adults pressuring kids to win at early ages, along with single-sports specialization and year-round training at an early age.”

Clark Kellogg, CBS Sports basketball studio analyst, offered a unique perspective on CTSA’s efforts. “Because sports participation can have such a positive impact on young people, it’s extremely important that parents and coaches keep the games in perspective and the interests of the participants at the very top of the priority list,” Kellogg said. “Unfortunately, there are a growing number of examples where that is not the case. As one who has enjoyed the benefits of athletic participation, and as the father of three young athletes, that is terribly disheartening to me. And it needs to change. I welcome the opportunity to be part of the process to help parents and coaches be the role models they *can* be and *should* be for youth in sports.”

CTSA board member Judy Young, vice-president for programs, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), focused on the resources CTSA has developed to improve the situation. “CTSA has developed several resources to help youth sports leaders and parents address the challenges facing youth sports,” Young said. “Those resources include a parent’s guide and community report cards that can be used by parents and youth sports leaders to evaluate their own youth sports program. We know that many organizations are working hard to change youth sports for the better, and CTSA would like to bring attention to their efforts.”

The Citizenship Through Sports Alliance is committed to promoting positive behavior in youth sports by harnessing the collective resources of major U.S. sports organizations to provide practical and proven tools for parents and coaches in youth sports.

The members of the CTSA are: National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA); Major League Baseball (MLB); National Basketball Association (NBA) and Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA); National Hockey League (NHL); National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS); National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA); National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE); National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA); and National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA).

