

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

“SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG!”

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A year or so ago, I wrote an article for Washington Coach called, “Why Johnny and Jane Can’t Skip!” I examined why we are getting kids at the high school level with NO bio-motor abilities and talked about our lack of Physical Education/Fitness emphasis in this country. The response I receive via E-mail in support of the article was overwhelming to say the least. Little did I know that 10 months later, I would find myself right in the middle of a movement to re-energize Physical Education in this country and in our state.

Shortly after Bill Roe was elected President of USATF, he asked me to chair a national task force to lobby our law makers to do something about Physical Education in this country. This task force is not about looking into the quality of our Physical Educators. Many are the best in education. I’ve began to dialogue with the American Cancer Society and someone from the Washington State PTA Association. I selected highly respected educators and coaches from around the country to join the task force. The first task at hand was to begin to gather data on not only the health of the kids, but the current state of our Physical Education programs. As I begin to gather data, I am both shocked and astounded by what I am finding.

My first objective was to ask our teachers and coaches here in Washington what is going on at their school in Physical Education. I will share those results to date with you. I also read an interesting article that was emailed to me from the July 18, 2001 edition of the St. Petersburg Times, written by Mr. Wes Allison. I will also share some of Mr. Allison’s findings.

First, let’s look at the survey being conducted on the Washington High School Track and Field web site.(www.watfxc.com) Thanks to Doug Fulton of South Whidbey, we have set up 5 simple questions for the coaches and teachers to respond to. With just under 100 surveys back in just one month, and consistency throughout the survey, here is what I am finding:

**The average number of years of Physical Education needed to graduate in this state is 1.7 years. (Don’t kids go to high school for 3-4 years? Don’t our schools bring in experts on brain research who tell us the importance of physical fitness in adolescent brain development. Are schools ignoring these experts? Are our lawmakers ignoring these experts?)*

**58% of those responding say it’s easy to get Physical Education waived at their high school. (PE is being waived for sports, drill teams and cheerleading. So does that mean we waive math if a student is in math club after school or science if they are in science club? Yes, a college bound student needs high level course work, but at what, the expense of their health?)*

**68% of those responding say they DO NOT give the President's Physical Fitness Test at their high school. (So how is progress being measured?)*

**25% responded by saying their programs play games only, with 75% saying their have both fitness and game sports in their programs. (PE should not always revolve around a ball!)*

52% of those responding were DISSATISFIED with their schools Physical Education program. (We all know what 52% means if that was your score on a college paper-FAILURE!)

Just after Doug loaded in the survey, I was e-mailed an article that hammered a huge message home regarding the health and fitness of our kids. I'll let you figure out Mr. Allison's message as I pull out some key points to his article.

Here are just some of the key points that jumped off the paper at me:

**Up to 1 in 5 American children are considered obese or overweight. (Half of all adults)*

**Children are spending up to 5 hours a day watching T.V That doesn't count computer time.*

**Overweight or obesity now rivals smoking as the nation's top health scourge*

**Obesity is expected to lead to 300,000 deaths and cost more than \$100 billion this year (US Centers for Disease and Prevention)*

**Severely obese children has doubled the past 20 years*

**"Unfortunately, I think for a lot of people the epidemic slipped up on us," US Surgeon General David Satcher told the St. Petersburg Times. "If we don't mount a very aggressive campaign now, against overweight and obesity in children, we're going to pay a tremendous price."*

**At least 70 percent of overweight children will be overweight adults, studies show, putting them at greater risk for a variety of diseases.*

**Physical Education has become an educational afterthought:*

Daily participation among high school students has dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 29 percent in 1999, the CDC says.

I got involved in this issue for two reasons. First, our sport relies heavily on quality Physical Education Programs. PE is the backbone of track and field. As a track and field coach of 20 years, the downfall of Physical Education has had a negative impact on track and field at the high school and middle school level. How many coaches reading this article were discovered by a coach in a physical education class? After talking with coaches from other sports, their message is the same. "Something has gone wrong," and it's having a negative impact on their sport.

Second, the health of our kids is a stake and right now, no one seems to be too concerned. We think we have a health care crisis in this country right now? Wait 20 and 30 years when these kids become adults. Then we'll see a real health care crisis that'll make the current one look mild.

*Kids are unfit. Kids have poor bio-motor abilities. Kids are sliding out of the WEAK Physical Education requirements with a plethora of excuses, with barely over 25% in a PE classon any given day. Kids come to the athletic field more unfit than ever. These problems begin in our communities, in our schools and in our classrooms. That's where **we** need to begin to solve the problem.. It won't be solved by someone sitting in a desk in Washington, DC. It'll be solved by people like you and I, coaches from the various coaches associations, pulling together in a united voice, who realize "**Something Has Gone Wrong**" and **WE** need to fix it!*