

## **Mandated training, accountability can help solve problems in youth sports**

Pervasive problems in youth sports such as unruly parents and a pressure-filled win-at-all-costs environment – issues identified in the recently released report card on the state of youth sports by the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance – can be attributed to insufficient training and a lack of accountability among volunteer youth sports coaches and parents, and can be remedied in part with training and education programs mandated at the community and state levels, according to the National Alliance For Youth Sports.

“While it is great that individuals and organizations such as the Citizen Through Sports Alliance are investigating and outlining the problems in youth sports, the National Alliance For Youth Sports is working hard to combat these problems with training and accountability,” said Alliance CEO and Founder Fred Engh. The National Alliance For Youth Sports (NAYS), a nonprofit organization, has been offering training and educational programs that improve the youth sports experience since 1981.

Engh said that park and recreation organizations and other groups at the community and state levels must mandate training of volunteer youth sports workers as well as parents, as many of those involved in youth sports are uneducated about the roles and responsibilities they hold. “In the last 60 years, we have built here in the United States a total of 90,000 publicly financed facilities in which children play organized youth sports,” Engh said. “Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of youth sports programs are run by volunteer coaches and administrators with no training or standards to which they are held, so the children suffer.

“If we are going to make changes in youth sports, local and state park and recreation departments must take a firm stand on this issue, and require the volunteers who are running these programs on their facilities to receive proper training and be held accountable for their actions,” he said.

Engh said that while there are big-picture problems in youth sports, many organizations and youth sports leagues at community level are, in fact, working to overcome those issues. “We are finding that an increasing number of park and recreation associations and other youth sports organizations are focusing their efforts on improving the youth sports experience,” he said, “implementing programs that train and educate the major players in youth sports, including coaches, parents, officials and administrators.”

NAYS has developed training programs for those involved in youth sports, including the Parents Association For Youth Sports (PAYS) and the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA), to combat the problems in youth sports that threaten to harm children emotionally, mentally and even physically. The PAYS program promotes understanding between coaches, kids and parents, while NYSCA is designed to sensitize volunteer coaches to their roles and responsibilities, and hold them accountable to a strict code of ethics. Violations to this code of ethics is strictly enforced – to date, more than 100 coaches have been banned from membership in NYSCA for behavior considered

detrimental to young athletes. Currently, more than 3,000 community-based organizations offer the NYSCA program to coaches of 11 different sports.

“Quite simply, the major problems in youth sports can be overcome if all volunteer coaches and parents commit to improving and educating themselves, and if more organizations require them to do so,” Engh said. “Youth sports organizations are only limited in what they can do by their hesitation to take a stand and implement the highest rules and standards when it comes to the well-being of children.”

The National Alliance For Youth Sports will celebrate 25 years of being America’s leading advocate for positive and safe sports for children. For more information, visit [www.nays.org](http://www.nays.org), e-mail [nays@nays.org](mailto:nays@nays.org) or call (800) 688-KIDS.