

# Washington Square Citizens League

Discussion Forum

7:00-8:15 pm

Monday, March 4, 2024

Curt Johnson, moderator

## **Sports in Our Society: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Plus an Unsettled Question**

This is a subject with many facets. Our discussion will focus on examples of the good, the bad, and the ugly. I have included some readings to get the discussion started. I am hoping that you will bring your own ideas as to what contributions to our daily lives illustrate the good, which aspects of sports you think of as bad for our society, and which are downright ugly.

**Let's start with THE GOOD.**

### ***Benefits of Youth Sports***

Developed by the President's Council on Sports, Fitness and Nutrition Science Board (9/17/2020)

The National Youth Sports Strategy aims to unite U.S. youth sports culture around a shared vision: that one day, all youth will have the opportunity, motivation, and access to play sports—regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, ability, or ZIP code. Why youth sports? Research shows that participating in youth sports can lead to immediate and long-term benefits for youth, their families, and communities.

#### **Mental, Emotional, and Social Health**

73 percent of parents believe that sports benefit their child's mental health.<sup>1</sup> And they are right!

Participating in sports is associated with:

- Lower rates of anxiety and depression
- Lower amounts of stress
- Higher self-esteem and confidence
- Reduced risk of suicide
- Less substance abuse and fewer risky behaviors
- Increased cognitive performance
- Increased creativity
- Greater enjoyment of all forms of physical activity
- Improved psychological and emotional well-being for individuals with disabilities
- Increased life satisfaction

## **Physical Health**

88 percent of parents believe that sports benefit their child's physical health. Indeed, participation is one way for youth to get the physical activity they need to be fit and healthy.

Participating in physical activity is associated with:

- Improved bone health
- Improved weight status
- Increased cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness
- Reduced risk of cancer and diabetes

Participating in sports is associated with:

- Increased physical activity levels
- Improved cardiovascular fitness
- Decreased body fat percentage for girls
- Increased overall quality of life

## **Educational and Career Success**

55 percent of parents believe that sports will benefit their children academically and improve their future careers. 80 percent of parents believe that sports helped their child learn about discipline and dedication, as well as how to get along with others. Research supports these beliefs.

Participating in sports is associated with:

- Improved teamwork, social skills, and social responsibility
- Improved life skills (e.g., goal setting, time management, work ethic, empathy, negotiation)
- Increased empowerment, personal responsibility, and self-control
- Improved educational and occupational skills (e.g., determination, perseverance, grit, resilience, critical thinking)
- Higher levels of academic achievement
- Greater leadership qualities
- High school athletes are more likely to attend and graduate from a four-year college

## **Lifelong Participation**

73 percent of adults who play sports participated when they were younger. This means they built the habit of physical activity early and are reaping the rewards in adulthood.

- Lifelong participation in sports can lead to improved mental health outcomes.
- Over 50% of adults who participate in sports believe that participation reduces stress and improves mental health.
- Adolescents who play sports are 8 times more likely to be physically active at age 24 than those who do not play sports.
- Participating in sports leads to immediate psychological benefits, and these can continue even after retirement from sports.

## **Economic and Community Impact**

The benefits of youth sports extend beyond the field and even beyond the participant.

Participating in sports and physical activity can lead to:

- A decrease in direct, indirect, and personal health care costs (collectively, up to \$28 billion per year)
- A stronger long-term labor market

## ***How Title IX changed the landscape of sports***

29 JUL 2022

**2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the breakthrough law in the US, Title IX. We look at how this law has contributed to the development of women's sports.**

### **What is Title IX?**

The Education Amendment Act was signed into law by Richard Nixon, the former president of the United States of America, in 1972. [Title IX](#) of the law recognized education as an equal right for all. Within the title, there was a clause prohibiting gender-based discrimination in sports programmes, granting equal opportunity to both men and women to participate in sports.

In 1975, specific provisions to prevent gender-based discrimination in sports participation came into place, which also provided educational institutes with three years to fulfill the requirements of Title IX. Following this, in 1978, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, [mandated the provision of equal opportunities](#) to men and women in all educational institutes.

Title IX requires all educational institutions in the US to [reward male and female athletes](#) equally. Along with that, it also ensures the prevention of discrimination when it comes to accessing sports facilities, training centers, equipment, and other support provided to sport programmes.

In order to ensure compliance with Title IX, universities and colleges in the US are supposed to provide an annual [Equity in Athletics Data Analysis Report](#), which tracks participation, coaching staff and salaries, revenues, and expenses. Additionally, athletic departments are also required to ensure that the ratio of men and women's participation opportunities is proportionate to the total number of students in an institution.

### **What has been the impact of Title IX?**

Title IX came into effect during the second wave of feminism, a time when women were fighting for equal work, equal opportunities, and extended childcare services. Women's involvement in sport was limited, mostly to participation at the collegiate level. Before the introduction of Title IX, some efforts were made to encourage inter-collegiate sport among women. This included appointing a [Commission on Intercollegiate Sports for Women](#) in 1966 and in 1969, along with the announcement of several national championships for women.

However, post the implementation of Title IX, the participation of women in sports in the US significantly increased in high school and college athletics. Data from 2010-11 suggests that [41%](#) of the high school athletes in the US were female as compared to the participation before the implementation of Title IX, which was only [7%](#). Similarly, in college athletics, female participation went up by [456%](#) from 29,972 in 1971-72 to 166,728 in 2007-08.

Due to the increase in participation of women in sports, American women were also able to progress in other aspects of their life. A study from 2010 found that participation in sports [helped increase the employment and education levels in America](#). Moreover, it has also been noted that Title IX was able to create better access to sports facilities for women. As American society was going through major changes in its social blueprint, Title IX was also seen as one of the steps towards gender parity in the country. Given the global political climate at the time, Title IX was inspiring for women across the world.

### **Where does it fall short?**

Despite the successes of Title IX, there are certain areas that still need to be worked upon.

Women from marginalized sections have not been able to benefit from Title IX as much. [A report](#) from the Women's Sports Foundation found that girls at schools where people of color are in majority have access to 67% of the athletic opportunities that boys do. This is starkly different from the numbers in predominantly white schools where girls see 82% of the athletic opportunities that boys do.

Although Title IX made a provision for additional funding to promote women's participation in sports at the collegiate level, departments in certain colleges do not have equitable spending for men and women's participation in athletics. As per a [report](#) by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), in the institutes that fall under the first division of the NCAA, the spending for men's athletics is three times more than what it is for women.

As a result of the provision for better funding opportunities for women in sports, some universities [have stopped giving awards and scholarships](#) in other subjects solely to women. Moreover, the Department of Education has also started reducing the number of scholarships, leadership programs, and awards for women in other disciplines.

Women hold only [41.1%](#) of the coaching positions across all colleges and universities in the US. As Title IX allocated more funds for women's sports, universities increased the salaries of sport coaches for women. Given the high salaries, men also gained interest in coaching positions previously held by women. Even the administrative positions lack representation as only [25% of NCAA](#) head coaching and athletic directors' positions are held by women.

A major reason for many institutions and universities not adhering to the rules set by Title IX is the [ambiguous nature of regulations set out](#) by the law. Universities can easily evade the regulations, which further creates accountability issues.

### **Way forward**

In the last 50 years, Title IX has played a significant role in enhancing women's participation in sports in the USA. Recently, the Biden administration [expanded Title IX](#) through certain progressive

amendments. One of them included strengthening the rights of the LGBTQ+ community within the scope of the law.

Other areas that need to be improved upon include a more sustainable compliance structure for educational institutions, better provisions for minorities, more representation of women in leadership positions, and better management of funds. The success of Title IX should certainly be celebrated, but with the recognition of how to move forward into the next fifty years.

Despite its shortcomings, Title IX is one of the first few laws to create institutional provisions for women's representation in sport and it has indeed been able to bring a historic change in the landscape of women's sports. Looking at the scale of the impact, it can be said that it is important to bring changes at the policy level when it comes to women's representation, especially in sports. Institutional changes bring in compliance structures, which are important to ensure accountability, particularly in the context of women's representation in sports.

**There's no question that sports is popular, especially on television.**

## ***Super Bowl Viewership Rose to 123.4 Million, a Record High***

By [John Koblin, NYT](#), Feb. 12, 2024

Sunday night's overtime Super Bowl shattered ratings records.

An audience of 123.4 million watched the Kansas City Chiefs beat the San Francisco 49ers, according to preliminary figures from Nielsen and CBS, which broadcast the game. That figure easily eclipsed last year's record high of 115.1 million, when Kansas City defeated the Philadelphia Eagles. Final Nielsen ratings for the Super Bowl will be issued on Tuesday.

The figure is the total who watched on CBS, the Paramount+ streaming app, the Spanish-language channel Univision, N.F.L. digital channels or Nickelodeon, which aired a child-friendly telecast. The vast majority watched the game on CBS, which recorded 120 million viewers, according to Nielsen.

The game had a lot going for it. It went into overtime, concluded with a game-winning touchdown pass (for a 25-22 final score) and featured an elite Kansas City team with a superstar quarterback, Patrick Mahomes. Travis Kelce, Kansas City's starting tight end, also happens to be dating a megastar in Taylor Swift, who attended the game in Las Vegas.

At a moment when traditional television ratings have been in free fall, the N.F.L., particularly the Super Bowl, has stood immune to massive viewership changes affecting the rest of the media world. Thirteen of the last 15 Super Bowls have drawn more than 100 million viewers, according to Nielsen, a bigger audience than in earlier decades.

Sunday's performance also capped off a big year for N.F.L. ratings.

Viewership was up 7 percent, according to Nielsen, falling just shy of the record set in 2015. Several playoff games set ratings records, including the A.F.C. championship game on CBS, which scored more [than 55 million viewers](#), and an A.F.C. divisional playoff game that drew more than [50 million](#). The N.F.C. championship game was a little short of a record.

League officials [have pointed](#) to numerous close games this season — along with a playoff hunt that still included several teams toward the end — as big reasons that ratings jumped. (It's less clear how much Ms. Swift helped [boost viewership](#).)

Other live events, like some award shows, have also had good returns recently. Last week, the Grammy Awards, also on CBS, drew roughly [17 million viewers](#), a 34 percent jump from last year's ceremony. Ratings for the Oscars have increased in back-to-back years.

The success of N.F.L. telecasts stands in sharp contrast to the rest of traditional television, which has had nose-diving viewership for several years as more and more viewers migrate to on-demand streaming entertainment. Viewership among the major broadcast networks has declined 12 percent since the current television season began in September.

Last year's Hollywood writers' and actors' strikes mostly starved the broadcast networks of new episodes of scripted television series for the last five months, and CBS has been particularly hurt. The network's prime-time audience has declined 30 percent since the television season began, according to Nielsen.

---

## So what's THE BAD?

### #1 Betting

## *Think Taylor Swift is ruining football? Don't bet on it.*

by [The Editorial Board](#), Published Feb. 9, 2024

The National Football League, like other sports leagues, once abhorred gambling. But this year's Super Bowl shows the NFL is now all-in.

Contrary to [complaints](#) from some sports fans, [Taylor Swift](#) is not ruining football. But gambling is.

The National Football League, like other sports leagues, once abhorred gambling. But this year's [Super Bowl](#) shows the NFL is now all-in.

For the first time, the big game will be played in Las Vegas, the [still-seedy gambling](#) capital that rose from the desert [thanks to mobsters](#). The NFL long avoided Vegas because gambling undermined the games' integrity.

Now, the NFL has a team in Vegas — as does professional hockey, with baseball coming soon. After [approving](#) four sportsbooks and partnering with Caesars, DraftKings, and FanDuel in 2021, the NFL is literally in bed with the gambling industry. Hence the weeklong Super Bowl extravaganza featuring [parties and concerts](#) to go with tickets that [start at \\$5,000](#).

Sadly, the professional sports leagues' addiction to gambling makes us all losers.

More than [\\$245 billion has been lost](#) since the U.S. Supreme Court loosened sports betting laws in 2018. There has been a [sharp increase](#) in [teens and 20-somethings](#) becoming addicted to sports

gambling. Families are also upended, as [studies show](#) gambling leads to more bankruptcies, divorce, and suicide.

Even fans who don't gamble must [endure](#) the [relentless ads](#) from sportsbooks like DraftKings and FanDuel. One study found gambling messages fill an [average of 21%](#) of sports broadcasts. That's much less than the [25 seconds](#) of airtime dedicated to Swift when she attends games to watch her boyfriend, Travis Kelce, play for the Kansas City Chiefs.

In addition to the gambling commercials, pregame betting shows and continuous odds updates clutter broadcasts. Football legends like Paul Hornung and Alex Karras were once [suspended for betting](#) on games. Now, former NFL greats like the [Manning brothers](#) are gambling pitchmen.

Much like someone struggling with a gambling addiction, the NFL is trying to hide its problem. In the run-up to Sunday, the two teams competing in the Super Bowl stayed [25 miles away](#) from the Vegas strip, and the players were [prohibited from betting](#) during the week. Instead of the usual advertising barrage, only [three gambling commercials](#) are slated to be aired during the game.

Such window dressing does little to conceal a growing concern. The NFL [suspended 10 players](#) over the past two years for violating its gambling policy. A Jacksonville Jaguars employee [pleaded guilty](#) last year to stealing \$22 million from the team to fuel his gambling addiction. A former NFL officiating executive said [referees have been approached](#) about fixing games, which adds to the conspiracy that [the NFL is scripted](#).

While casual fans may tune in just to watch the Super Bowl commercials, many eyes will be glued to mobile phones. The explosion of gambling apps enables anyone to place bets anywhere at any time. In fact, a [BetRivers commercial](#) shows a woman sitting in a bathroom stall singing, "When you are sitting on the throne and you get in the zone."

The ubiquitous betting comes thanks to [the 38 states](#) — including Pennsylvania and New Jersey — that legalized sports betting. So, not only is the NFL in cahoots with sports bookies, so are state lawmakers who are sworn to protect the public.

In a perfect world, repealing sports betting is the best course. At the very least, more must be done to study the impact of online gambling and how to prevent addiction. Some argue individuals are free to gamble and should be responsible for their losses. But just as slot machines are [designed to addict users](#), the [sophisticated technology](#) behind the betting apps leaves gamblers overmatched.

Operators amass reams of data about when individuals bet, how much they bet, and who they bet on. Betting apps send constant push notifications designed to entice customers to wager more. One [study found](#) sports betting was "more strongly linked to gambling problems."

Sports betting goes beyond picking which team will win. Hundreds of so-called [prop bets](#) can be placed during the Super Bowl on random things such as which player will score the first touchdown or who will gain the most yards.

After all the hype, NFL fans will have [bet away billions](#) and Taylor Swift will [still be a billionaire](#). So who is ruining what?

## **#2 Injuries to Both Adults and Children**

### ***Effects of Sports Injuries Later in Life***

By [Douglas W. Stoddard MD, M Sp Med, Dip Sport Med, ES](#), May 18, 2019, [Blog](#)

There are many achievements and rewards associated with participating in sports and regular workouts. However, sports-related injuries are an unfortunate consequence that's often unavoidable. Even though you might not get a direct injury, the effects of regular wear and tear add up throughout the years. Excess strain on joints and muscles often lead to torn ligaments and stress fractures.

These injuries not only cause a lot of pain and put a damper on the active lifestyle of an athlete, but they can also have lasting effects. The long-term implication can linger for years even after the injury has healed. Some injuries can also lead to serious health issues later on in life.

Here are some common lasting health problems that are caused by sports injuries.

#### **Cognitive Decline**

Concussions are a normal part of contact sports. A concussion is caused when a direct hard hit to the head causes the brain to slam into the skull. This results in traumatic injury, which causes the brain to swell. Even after a concussion has healed, some brain damage can remain unnoticed. According to a study, athletes who have suffered from concussions are more likely to have cognitive defects as they age. They're also at a higher risk of neurodegenerative diseases, mild cognitive impairments, or diminished cognitive functioning. Repetitive neurotrauma during sports such as boxing and rugby can result in permanent brain damage.

#### **Arthritis**

Arthritis is the inflammation of joints in the body. It occurs when the slick protective cushioning surface around the joints wears down causing them to become stiff and swollen. Arthritis tends to get worse with age and decreases mobility as it progresses. Sports injuries that occur on the field such as torn ligaments or cartilage can increase the chances of arthritis among athletes. If a person does suffer any such injury, the best thing to do is to avoid strenuous activity until the injury is fully healed. This can reduce the risks associated with arthritis and other joint problems.

#### **Bone Deformity**

Child and pre-teen athletes are still going through their growth phases. Their bones and muscles are under the process of forming and growing. If they sustain an injury that affects the area where new bone cells grow, it may prevent the bones from forming properly. An improperly healed injury can lead to bone deformity, which may take a crooked appearance of a protruding bone from the affected area. Not only will this affect the appearance of the area as the child grows, but it can also lead to additional issues such as breathing problems, in case of a broken nose, or crooked finger.

#### **And now THE UGLY**

### **#1 Abuse and Exploitation of Children**



# ***Exploitation of children in sports: a widespread and unchecked problem***

Margot Thompson-Wells, Posted in Children's Rights, Humanium, [March 29, 2022](#)

Sport is an essential part of a child's physical and mental development and growth. Unfortunately, far too often, **children** are maltreated and **abused** in a sporting environment, and this continues to go unchecked. This is for many reasons, such as the inability to recognize abusive relationships, and child athletes being ashamed or afraid to come forward.

Based on the international legal framework, States and sports organizations are required to deal with these **human rights** violations, however, this obligation is too often not upheld and therefore abuses still occur and go unchecked.

## **The importance of sport for children**

Sport is a common and widely enjoyed form of activity for people of all ages, especially children. According to a study, around 60 million children and teenagers between the ages of six and 18 engage in organized sports every year.

Sport can not only have physical and mental **health** benefits, but it is also widely enjoyed. Sport is a "refuge" through which they can not only learn physical skills, but also develop other essential skills such as tolerance and teamwork which "they'll utilize throughout life".

**Children** have the right to leisure and **play** as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Humanium is a strong advocate of children's right to "have their voices heard in the planning and delivery of the sport activities in which they are involved".

As per article 29 of the **Convention**, people involved in children's sports, including coaches, volunteers and professionals, are required to "ensure that sport is practised in a culture of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, friendship and fair play among all people". .

## **The vulnerability of children**

WHO defines child **maltreatment** as "all forms of physical and/or emotional abuse, **sexual abuse**, neglect or negligent treatment, or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity, in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power". Child abuse and maltreatment happen in many sports, and girls, minorities and higher-level athletes are most often the victims.

Moreover, although coaches are generally the perpetrators, Bjørnseth and Szabo (2018) argue that new research suggests that "peer-athletes may precede the coach". Turner and McCrory (2004) found that in swimming, documented offences have generally involved a male coach with female students, but that in tennis, while this has been documented as well, there have also been multiple offences involving a male coach and male students.

Children are in a vulnerable position in sport, and coaches and instructors far too often take advantage of their vulnerability to groom and abuse them. Based on a study by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, out of "3,939 survivors of sexual abuse who came forward" between June 2016 and March 2020, "64 described child sexual abuse that took place in a sporting environment", and 91% of those 64 reported being "sexually abused by a sporting coach or volunteer in a sports organisation".

Sport provides a “conducive environment for physical contact”, due to children most often being away from their parents and defenceless.

Another issue is the strong power imbalance which further highlights children’s vulnerable position. Coaches and other authority figures groom children abusing their status as an “important figure” for their pupils – a mentor and at times even, a father figure.

People in positions of power like sports coaches can pose a threat to children, especially due to the “unique characteristics of the sport environment”, including the importance of the “coach–athlete relationship, the intensity of youth sport, the demands of competition, the interest of the media in young athletes, time spent in distant training centres, recruitment procedures of young athletes, and the distance from home or school environment” (Fortier, Parent, & Lessard, 2019). Children are usually unsupervised, and the risks of abuse in this high-risk environment leave lasting effects on children mentally, and sometimes physically.

### **Cases in the media**

Some stories have gained media attention, which order to raise awareness of the issues occurring to many children. For example, Bamba, a 51-year-old under-18 girls’ basketball coach from Mali was accused of assaulting and harassing at least three players, and impeding their careers when they refused to have sex with him (Human Rights Watch, 2021). To worsen the situation, Human Rights Watch (2021) found that basketball officials have been covering up a pattern of the same type of sexual abuse, “allowing it to continue”.

Another example is the rife violence and abuse of Japanese child athletes. Physical violence as part of coaching is widespread in Japan, “often seen as essential to achieving excellence in competition and in personal character” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Thus, coaches and parents don’t always see the violence as abuse, due to the tradition and belief that it helps in the children’s training (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

However, this is damaging to children, and has even caused some to self-harm, for example in 2012, when a 17-year-old high school basketball player in Osaka committed suicide because of his abusive coach. Due to allegations and pressure ahead of the 2020 Olympics, the Japanese government and various sports organizations made some reforms, including the 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence in Sport, and the 2019 governance codes for national sports federations and other sports organizations. Nevertheless, since these reforms do not specifically address abuse of children in sport, and “neither are legally binding”, questions arise over their effectiveness.

Finally, another famous example that gained widespread media coverage last year was the story of Simone Biles, an American Olympic gold medalist, and one of the world’s top gymnasts. She was sexually abused by Dr Larry Nassar, a former USA Gymnastics doctor. When she testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee, she stated that the abuse happened because organizations like USA Gymnastics and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee, both created by US Congress to protect athletes, “failed to do their jobs”.

A Justice Department inspector general report released in July 2021 found that gymnasts first reported allegations of sexual assault to the FBI in 2015, but Nassar continued to treat gymnasts at a high school club, a gymnastics club, and Michigan State University until late 2016.

Sexual abuse among young athletes is “shockingly widespread” in the USA, with around 13% of student-athletes being survivors of sexual assault, and approximately one in 12 athletes having been sexually abused by a “sports official or peer athlete”, which is likely much worse due to the “pattern of underreporting”.

## **An unchecked and continuing problem that needs to be addressed**

Hartill suggests that “there are four barriers to reporting sexual abuse in organized sport: (1) lack of procedures for reporting sexual abuse; (2) abuse viewed as the problem of the individual member, not the institution; (3) the closed nature of institutions; and (4) the belief system surrounding institutions”.

Sport can “provide an environment suited to paedophiles”, and in many cases, abusers are able to get away with their acts for years before being prosecuted. Additionally, sporting organisations are “often reluctant to acknowledge that child abuse could be taking place within their jurisdiction”, and most of them have no mechanism to deal with complaints or allegations of abuse. Even when perpetrators are found guilty and given a custodial sentence, this does not help the problem as the abuse often starts again post-release.

Child maltreatment and abuse is a problem of power imbalance, and children are vulnerable and often unaware of what is happening to them due to being groomed by their perpetrators from a young age (Fortier, Parent, & Lessard, 2019). Furthermore, children feeling scared of not being believed, ashamed, and guilty, are other factors preventing them from coming forward, combined with often not having anyone to talk to.

Not only is there a need for reporting mechanisms, but there is of course a strong need for effective child safeguarding policies in sport (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Training “all individuals falling under the authority of sports institutions” and enforcing systematic background checks of people working with children is also essential, as well as educating athletes on the matter. Finally, more research and awareness-raising of sexual and physical abuse of children in sport is vital to keep the conversation going.

## **#2 Parents out of control**

### ***Parents Behaving Badly: A Youth Sports Crisis Caught on Video***

By **Bill Pennington**, NYT, July 18, 2018

TULSA, Okla. — In one video, a fan at a youth soccer game bellows profanities and violently kicks a ball that slams into a teenage referee standing nearby. She disagreed with a penalty called.

Another captures parents at a youth basketball game charging the court to hurl punches at the referee. And yet another shows parents berating game officials as they walk to their cars after a soccer game. The players were 8-year-olds.

The videos were posted on a Facebook page, Offside, created in frustration by an Oklahoma youth soccer referee, Brian Barlow, who offers a \$100 bounty for each clip in order to shame the rising tide of unruly parents and spectators at youth sports events.

“I do it to hold people accountable — to identify and call out the small percentage of parents who nonetheless create a toxic environment at youth sports,” Barlow, 44, said. “It’s a very visual deterrent, and not just to the person caught on video but to others who ask themselves: Do I look like that jerk?”

In fact, many do.

A torrent of verbal, and occasionally physical, abuse toward referees nationwide has disrupted the sidelines of youth sports.

The harassment has grown so rampant that more than 70 percent of new referees in all sports quit the job within three years, according to the National Association of Sports Officials. The chief cause for the attrition, based on a survey conducted by the association, was pervasive abuse from parents and coaches.

The result has been drastic referee shortages across the country with scores of youth and high school games canceled and leagues aborted. Barry Mano, the president of the officials' association, said it received one or two calls weekly inquiring about the organization's assault insurance or for the legal advice that goes with it.

Here in eastern Oklahoma, Barlow chose to fight back. Players, parents, coaches and administrators in the area say his online postings — he has put up only a small fraction of the hundreds of videos from around the country he has received — have altered sideline behavior.

“If one parent starts yelling at a ref, all the other parents move away and say: ‘Hey, you don’t want to be videotaped for Barlow’s Facebook page,’” said Kristin Voyles, whose 14-year-old son, Easton, is a referee and soccer player in Broken Arrow, a Tulsa suburb. “We know that everyone on the sideline has a smartphone in their hand.”

Sid Goodrich, the executive director of the Oklahoma Soccer Association, agreed that Barlow’s initiative has had an effect.

“People are looking at themselves and asking, ‘Am I the reason we don’t have more referees?’” said Goodrich, who added that his association loses about 40 percent of its referees each year, forcing zealous recruitment of new officials.

Barlow’s quest to shine a light on the worst sideline behavior has made him a minor celebrity in the Tulsa area, where he lives. In the 18 months since he started the page, which also includes guidance for referees and pictures of appreciative fans, he has been the subject of three segments on local television stations.

But Barlow has also made his share of enemies among the “cheeseburgers,” as he calls the abusers, that he denounces.

“Some people, frankly, want to punch me in the mouth,” he said.

Travis Featherstone, a Tulsa coach, referee and father of young players, praised Barlow’s intentions, but wondered if the page went too far.

“There may be a different way to go about it, as in getting more parents involved with it instead of just pointing them out and making them look like they’re awful people,” Featherstone said.

Just because Barlow runs the page, it does not necessarily mean parents and fans always tone it down around him, or even his 12-year-old daughter, who is a referee for games with younger children.

After a game last month, Barlow and two other referees needed an armed police escort to their cars. Last month, his daughter, Zoe, had to stay inside a building for 90 minutes after a game at the urging of tournament officials, to protect her from threats made by parents who were irate with calls made by the crew of referees. The game had to be canceled.

“Sometimes I have to intercede and tell these parents that it’s not the World Cup, and remind them that the players are 6 years old and the ref is 12,” Lori Barlow, Brian’s wife, said.

Brian Barlow, a referee for 14 years, has done more than use the Facebook page to stand up for his fellow officials. He started a program called S.T.O.P. (Stop Tormenting Officials Permanently) that distributes bright signage prominently placed at youth sports complexes. One sign reads: “Warning: Screaming at Officials Not Allowed.” Another reads: “Caution: Development in Progress, Stay Out of It.”

The initiative also includes S.T.O.P. vests that are worn by volunteers acting as field marshals, assigned by leagues to oversee games. The marshals also have large, red octagon S.T.O.P. signs, and if parents are growing agitated with the officials, the marshals are instructed to hold up the S.T.O.P. signs from the sideline.

Youth referees also hand out small badges to offending coaches that read in part: “This is a warning. A ‘youth’ referee has issued this pass. The next one will be a dismissal.”

Six Oklahoma clubs have paid a one-time fee of \$999 to join the S.T.O.P. initiative, and 30 leagues from states including Virginia and Washington State have made inquiries.

Barlow’s methods are not the only efforts to curb abuse across the country.

The South Carolina Youth Soccer Association last year instituted a policy called “Silent September.” Parents and visitors at games statewide were not allowed to verbally cheer, or jeer, players or referees for the entire month. Clapping was allowed.

“It was a resounding success and made for a much more focused environment for learning and for play,” Burns Davison, who heads rules and compliance for the South Carolina association, said. “We got everyone’s attention. People thanked us for the peace and quiet.”

Other states have tried a more punitive approach. Legislatures in nearly 20 states have increased the penalties for assaulting a sports official by making it a discrete, independent category of the crime, according to Alan. S. Goldberger, a lawyer from New Jersey and the author of “Sports Officiating: A Legal Guide.”

One factor that many sports officials believe contributes to parents’ bad behavior is the desire for their children to earn athletic college scholarships. Leagues in Massachusetts and Virginia have tried to address that pressure and jolt parents back to reality with signs at the entrance to athletic complexes that read: “No N.C.A.A. scouts are looking at your child today,” or “No N.C.A.A. scholarships will be awarded on this field today.”

Many families regularly spend \$2,000 to \$20,000 a year per child on elite club team dues, private trainers and other costs, like far-flung travel to the best tournaments and recruiting showcases. The investment of money and time leads to heightened expectations among parents, even at a contest

between elementary schoolers. In fact, sports officials insist that the younger the players, the worse the sideline behavior usually is.

“When I got into officiating I looked forward to doing the youth games; I didn’t know that was where most of the trouble was,” said Mary DeLaat, a basketball referee in the Milwaukee area who began officiating in 2014 but quit this year. “The parents are all like, ‘My kid is going to get that scholarship and be the next LeBron James.’”

“When something isn’t going right with that plan, the blame has to go somewhere, and often it’s the referee. It’s our fault.”

It’s possible, of course, the sideline behavior springs from bad officiating, in part because the shrinking pool of referees leads to quick turnover in the ranks, which can lead to unprepared refs.

“It’s a very volatile situation,” said Donnie Eppley, who oversees officiating for several high school and youth programs in central Pennsylvania.

In Oklahoma, aside from the shaming videos, clubs have made their own efforts to keep parents in line, including assigning game proctors to document bad behavior and even having children reprimand them.

“If a parent was acting up, we had a coach who would remove that parent’s child from the game and send her around to the other side of the field to talk to her parent,” said Eric Edwards, the father of three children playing soccer in the Tulsa area. “It was embarrassing for the kid and the parent. The girl went back in the game right afterward but most of the other parents were saying, ‘Thank God the coach did that.’”

In early May, Barlow donned his bright yellow referee jersey to work a semifinal game of the Oklahoma high school state soccer championships in Tulsa. To his relief, it went smoothly, with no irate parents or fans — and one even thanked him.

“That kind of thing does happen,” he said afterward, soaked in sweat outside the locker room. “Lots of people get it and are very nice, too.”

Earlier that day, Barlow was having breakfast with a handful of soccer coaches and administrators. One coach at the table, Richard Beattie, conceded that he was once the kind of person who might have ended up as a video star on Barlow’s Facebook page. But a few years ago, at a coaches meeting, he saw himself on video kicking a water bottle and yelling at the referee. He was embarrassed and resolved to change.

“I was once the biggest abuser,” Beattie said, “and if I can say that my behavior was unacceptable and had to change, then other people can do it, too.”

Barlow smiled.

“This is what I mean, this is what we’re trying to do,” Barlow said. “Have we won the war? No. Are we fighting back? Yeah, we are.”

## And now the unsettled question...

### *House approves trans athlete ban for girls and women's teams*

BY KEVIN FREKING. AP, Published April 20, 2023

WASHINGTON (AP) — Transgender athletes whose biological sex assigned at birth was male would be barred from competing on girls or women's sports teams at federally supported schools and colleges under legislation pushed through Thursday by House Republicans checking off another high-profile item on their social agenda.

The bill approved by a 219-203 party-line vote is unlikely to advance further because the Democratic-led Senate will not support it and the White House said President Joe Biden would veto it.

Supporters said the legislation, which would put violators at risk of losing taxpayer dollars, is necessary to ensure competitive fairness. They framed the vote as supporting female athletes disadvantaged by having to compete against those whose gender identify does not match their sex assigned at birth.

The House action comes as at least [20 other states](#) have imposed similar limits on trans athletes at the K-12 or collegiate level.

The bill would amend landmark civil rights legislation, known as [Title IX](#), passed more than 50 years ago. It would prohibit recipients of federal money from permitting a person "whose sex is male" to participate in programs designated for women or girls. The bill defines sex as "based solely on a person's reproductive biology and genetics at birth."

The sponsor, Rep. Greg Steube, R-Fla., highlighted the case of Emma Weyant, a resident of his district and a 2020 member of the U.S. Olympic swimming team who finished second in the NCAA women's 500-yard freestyle championship last year. She was defeated by Lia Thomas, who had competed for three years on the University of Pennsylvania men's swimming team before joining the women's team.

"The integrity of women's sports must be protected," Steube said.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said it was a "great day for America, a great day for girls and women and for fairness in sports."

Democrats said every child regardless of gender identify deserves the opportunity to belong to a team and that preventing competitors from doing so sends the message that they don't matter.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., who has a transgender daughter, said Republicans were cruelly scapegoating transgender children to score political points. She said three-quarters of transgender students report having experienced harassment or discrimination at school and many have considered suicide.

"These bills tell some of the most vulnerable children in our country that they do not belong," Jayapal said. "Shame on you."

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., said most people in the United States don't know anyone who is transgender and that can create fear for politicians to exploit. The bill, he said, does nothing to address the severe inequities in the resources dedicated to men's and women's sports.

He highlighted the stance taken by Gov. Spencer Cox, R-Utah, who last year [vetoed](#) a bill banning transgender students from playing girls sports. Cox said: "I struggle to understand so much of it and the science is conflicting. When in doubt however, I always try to err on the side of kindness, mercy and compassion."

Pocan noted that in Utah at the time of the veto there were four transgender players out of 85,000 competing in high school sports, with only one competing in girls sports.

"There's your raging national problem," Pocan said. "What's the Republicans response to this nonexistent issue? Hurt kids for being kids."

In a message this week threatening a veto, the White House said that being part of a team is an important part of growing up, staying engaged in school and learning leadership and life skills. It said a national ban that does not account for competitiveness or grade level targets people for who they are and is discriminatory.

The administration also has [issued a proposed rule](#) that would prevent any school or college that receives federal money from imposing a "one-size-fits-all" policy that categorically bans trans students from playing on sports teams consistent with their gender identity. Such policies would be considered a violation of Title IX.

Any limits would have to consider the sport, the level of competition and the age of students. Elementary school students would generally be allowed to participate on any teams consistent with their gender identity, for example. More competitive teams at high schools and colleges could add limits, but those would be discouraged in teams that don't have tryouts or cuts.

"We don't want biological men taking away the achievements of women who fought so hard to get where they are today," said Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., the first woman to graduate from The Citadel military college.

It was the latest proposal by newly empowered Republicans to win over parents concerned about what their children are experiencing in school.

But Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeke, R-Iowa, assessing Thursday's action, said, "Make no mistake, this is not a culture war." She spoke of those who "are trying to diminish and erase who we are as women and I will not stand for it."

The American Civil Liberties Union condemned the vote and said that so far this year, more than 450 bills attacking the rights of transgender people have been introduced in state legislatures.

"Why are Republicans in Congress spending their time bullying children? This is not what voters elected them to do," said Deirdre Schifeling, the ACLU's national political director.