ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreword by Tom Farrey</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xxiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong></td>
<td>Why America Needs Alternative Models of Sports Development and Delivery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong></td>
<td>Interscholastic and Intercollegiate Athletics Development in the United States</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong></td>
<td>The European Sports Club and Sports Delivery Systems</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong></td>
<td>The Positive Gain for Public Health and the Citizenry of the United States</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 5</strong></td>
<td>The Educational Conundrum and the Need for a Comprehensive National Sports Policy in the United States</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6</strong></td>
<td>Potential Alternative Sports Development and Sports Delivery Models for the United States</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7</strong></td>
<td>Model 1—A Realignment and Reform of the Current Education-Based Sports Development Model</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 8</strong></td>
<td>Model 2—An Academic/Athletic Commercialized Solution</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 9</strong></td>
<td>Model 3—A “European-Type” Club Sports Development Model or Hybrid Model</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 10  Model 4—A Complete Separation of Competitive Sports from Schools  145

Chapter 11  Funding and Sustainability of Alternative Models of Sports Development and Delivery in America  155

Chapter 12  The Potential Future of Sports Development in America  167

Notes  179

References  197

Index  211
Let’s start with the end in mind, with a vision of the communities that we as Americans want to live in, based on human needs and shared values. Imagine, if you will, towns and municipalities where people want to get out of their homes because life is richer out there, full of parks and balls, dogs and laughter, old friends and new. Imagine places that offer a rich array of recreational options, where citizens and schools and industry demand those options because they appreciate the myriad benefits that flow to those whose bodies are in motion.

How do we get there?

It’s a question that has guided much of my work at The Aspen Institute, where we convene leaders around the important challenges of our time, help them find common ground, and inspire solutions that aim to deliver the greatest good for the greatest number. My focus is on how sport, broadly defined, can serve the public interest, starting with the building of healthy communities.

This book makes a great contribution to that dialogue. David Ridpath recognizes the essential role that sport plays in the vitality of the nation and its people, then asks whether the sport system we have in place, drawn up more than a hundred years ago as a tool of nation-building, is serving the needs of Americans in the twenty-first century. Better yet, with research and courage, he identifies several potential paths forward.

We should not be afraid to explore systems-level change in the development and delivery of sport programs in the United States, but rather understand it as an opportunity to respond to the marketplace.
Consider: More than four out of five parents of youth under age eighteen say it’s “very important” or “somewhat important” that their child play sports, and a full 96 percent see some value, according to household surveys conducted in 2017 for our Aspen Institute program, Project Play, a multistage initiative to provide stakeholders with tools to build what we call “Sport for All, Play for Life” communities. Americans get sports, and not just as spectators. It’s a physical expression of the spirit, and a site of self-learning and social connection. No one wants their kid stuck on the couch, glued to a screen, all but thumbs inert.

Yet today, as early as first grade in some communities, the structure of our sport system begins to push aside kids. We create tryout-based travel teams, sorting the weak from the strong well before children grow into their bodies, minds, and true interests. Those who don’t make the cut, or don’t receive the playing time, get the message that they are not a priority and begin checking out of the system. Meanwhile, the kids at the center of the system—those told they are the next generation of athlete-entertainers—are increasingly encouraged to train year-round. They often play too many games for their developing bodies, risking overuse injuries, unnecessary concussions, and burnout.

For each of the past five years, the number of youth who are “active to a healthy level” through sports has fallen, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Only 24.8 percent of kids ages six to twelve, and 38.4 percent of youth thirteen to seventeen, play at least three days a week. Further, only 27.1 percent are physically active one hour daily, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, even as participation on high school teams has held steady at about half of all students.

To date, Project Play has been focused on ages twelve and under, given the mountain of research on the physical, mental, social-emotional and educational benefits that flow to physically active kids. Getting them moving early unleashes a virtuous cycle—they go on to college more often, stay active into adulthood more often, make higher incomes in the workplace, enjoy lower health care costs, and are twice as likely to have active children. As a society, we must make quality, regular sport activity accessible to every child, regardless of zip code or ability.

At the same time, we recognize that the landscape of youth sports has been transformed over the past generation by the priorities of the two institutions that Ridpath explores in this book—school sports and
college sports. NCAA member institutions today offer $3 billion in athletic aid, up from $250 million in the early 1990s, according to the NCAA. That’s a lot of chum tossed into the sea of youth sports. Even for the well-positioned, it’s rarely a meal, as full-ride athletic scholarships are confined to just a few sports; rather, it’s just enough to induce a feeding frenzy among parents, terrified about how they one day must pay hefty college tuitions. So they invest, at ever-earlier ages for kids, in private trainers, traveling club teams, and $300 cleats or bats.

If they can.

They seek return on investment, even if it’s just playing time for their kid on the high school team. Not an easy thing to come by today. Intramurals are largely a thing of the past, as is regular PE past middle school. At large, public high schools, eighty kids might try out for the varsity basketball team. Thirteen might make the team, with eight or nine seeing real minutes in games. It’s hardly a recipe for broad-based provision of the health and other benefits that sports participation can provide.

In places, school-based sports works beautifully. Go to just about any prep school. They usually create as many teams in a sport as necessary to accommodate the kids in the school who want to play that sport—an A, B, C, and D team if necessary. They allow the supply of sport opportunities to meet the demand. And they ask that every student participate in that economy, by playing at least one sport. Often, sports are not extracurricular but cocurricular, in recognition of the educational value they can provide.

Write me if you think that’s an awful model, one that leaves US students less prepared to compete in a global economy. I’m guessing that my inbox isn’t about to explode.

So, to me, the question becomes: Can that model be adapted to high schools with larger student bodies and/or smaller budgets? If so, how? This is where the conversation that Ridpath seeds gets very interesting—and promising, if we allow it. Given schools’ responsibility to serve all students, can they work more effectively with local clubs to identify participation opportunities for students? Can they allow them to use campus facilities more readily, if clubs embrace policies and practices that are inclusive and model best practices? Can the role of the athletic director or PE teacher be reimagined, making it less a provider of sport opportunities and more a connector to community programs?
One level up is the hard question to ask: Do NCAA Division I member universities need to continue to position themselves as the pathway to the pros? To fill their stadiums and arenas, do they need the very best emerging athletes—or should they turn over the training of the top 1 percent of the major sport pipelines to leagues like the NBA starting at age sixteen or even fourteen? And, if the model adjusts in that direction, could the NCAA amend its rules to make room for prospects who, after spending time with such a club, realize college is likely their best option?

What’s clear to me, having studied our sports system as an author and journalist for thirty years, is that the day will come when the role of sports in schools gets reappraised and updated by its key stakeholders.

This day could come suddenly, and from any of several angles. The catalyst could be a legal ruling, changing the economic relationship between universities and athletes. It could be a legislative action, akin to Title IX, which with a stroke of a pen in 1972 opened up sports opportunities for one disenfranchised group, women. It could be an administrative action, a meatier version of the Dear Colleague letter issued by the Obama administration prohibiting discrimination of disabled students in school sports. It could be a unilateral industry action, such as the NBA embracing a version of the European club model described above. It could be a collective industry action—a serious push to legalize and tax sports betting, with a cut dedicated to investments in parks and other recreation infrastructure.

When that day comes, you will hear doomsday scenarios about the end of sports as we know it, and maybe the loss of American values. Sports participation is too easily conflated with participation trophies, which no one outside the trophy industry is really all that big a fan of but have become a great tool anyway to grouse about millennials and liberals. It’s ironic, given that the original vision of school sports in America, by its founders more than a century ago, was of mass participation, of sport as a tool of public health and educational achievement.

The way you can support renewal of this vision is to be open to new ideas. Do not buy the theory that if change is made, our games will go away. The sports entertainment industry will be just fine; the market demands that Alabama play Auburn on one Saturday each fall. Nor is anyone going to start tearing down the gyms and fields attached to schools; the physical infrastructure of sports in our country remains.
What is in play is the software side of sports—how the operating system works, who gets to use it, how its assets can best be deployed and services scaled.

Do not marinate in nostalgia. Do not idealize the way we used to do it, because, while for many of us there was much to like about our childhood experiences, there was not much room on playing fields for girls and almost none for kids with disabilities until the ’80s. The next great sport development and delivery system that we embrace will be the first great sport development and delivery system that we have.

Do not forget that most kids do not play sports regularly today.

Scan your network of friends and family, and think about who is left out of our de facto sport system. Picture their faces . . .

The nephew who is slow to grow into his body.
The niece with a chronic condition, like asthma.
The coworker’s kid who is overweight.
The neighbor’s kid who can’t play football anymore because of concussions.

Think about how we can help them, how we need them, to become their best selves. And think too about the role that you know sport can play in that process.

Tom Farrey
Executive Director,
Sports & Society Program
The Aspen Institute
The title of this book may seem radical; frankly, that is by intent. However, it has an important premise and, dare I say, even promise, in proposing needed changes to a long-standing, popular, but ultimately fragmented sports delivery and entertainment system that is in desperate need of change. Proposing that the United States change its deeply imbedded, educationally based sports system is akin to changing the health-care marketplace in America or proposing new gun control measures, and one does not have to look too far to see the challenges both of those issues present. Is it any wonder that this, too, is a difficult proposition? The United States’ primary way of delivering sports while concurrently developing athletes of all skills is under immense pressure as to how it fits within the funding-starved public education system. Yet, educationally based sports in America remain incredibly popular overall, despite this tenuous relationship. School-based competitive sports have long been touted, in many ways correctly, as a source of community pride, an effective strategy for school branding, and a way to develop skilled athletes, while presenting many other intrinsic and tangible values. Still, this does not mean that we as citizens should not look at ways to potentially change the status quo of sports development and delivery, for the potential betterment of the country and our entire sports development system.

There are many direct and indirect comparisons when it comes to attempting to change existing, deeply embedded systems, regardless of what they may be. This applies even if the need for improvement is highly evident, as I feel it is with how we do sports in America. Change
is hard for many, especially when money and control are involved. Resistance to change in most any walk of life will always be there, by those who are comfortable and/or fear change for whatever reason. For example, it is arguably critical to the health and economy of the United States to have better access to health care for all, which in turn might increase competition, lower costs, and provide health and wellness benefits. This sounds great in theory and may ultimately be accurate, but it certainly does not mean there will not be resistance to any change in the American health-care system, since the current system does benefit certain segments of society and those populations do not want to abandon the status quo. We see arguments about this subject almost every day in the news.

One can also debate the current state of sports delivery and sports development in the United States, both as it compares to other countries around the world and as to whether the primary education-based model should be revised, if not changed completely. Sports development and sports delivery are broad terms that need to be defined. Essentially, there are several definitions, and in this country there are no standard definitions for overall sports development and sports delivery processes. Empirically, elite sports development has been defined as “the skill development of talented athletes in the continuum of elite athlete ‘production’” (Hogan and Norton 2000, 215–16). Sports development can also be described as a delivery system of sports in a certain context, such as how sports are delivered to and accessed by groups and individual citizens of a certain country. In America, sports development and sports delivery are rather fragmented, in that the United States does not have a centralized national sports policy or a governmental sports ministry to provide a governance framework, as is the case in many other countries. What we have is a mishmash of several organizations that are educational, public, and private, which provide sports and exercise opportunities throughout the country. For the purposes of this book, “sports development” is an umbrella term for all sports delivery options that currently exist in the United States, whether scholastic, public, private, professional, or amateur.

This book proposes various options to potentially assist in creating better and more centralized sports development systems in order to offer more alternatives for athletes, coaches, administrators, and others, beyond the current educationally based system in America. Despite the
availability of other options, competitive and recreational sports opportunities in America are still primarily available only in schools. According to the United States Olympic Committee, educationally based athletics encompass over 80 percent of all sports delivery and sports development options in the United States. Access for all participants in sports beyond the schools is often restrictive and limited because of cost and a dearth of offerings. Meanwhile, most schools are focusing more on elite sports development and delivery than on mass participation and exercise. We are becoming a nation mostly of spectators and the systematic development of elite athletes rather than a nation with a system or systems that provide access for all. Sadly, even most of the primary and secondary public schools in the United States are charging additional, often high participation fees for athletes just to play in sports that are ostensibly already funded by public taxes, thus making it even tougher for individuals to participate and exercise in what might be one of the only available sports development options.

Scholars have debated and analyzed the issues and problems with educationally based sports development for over a century. Somewhat ironically, this is about the same time period that organized sports gained a foothold in our education system. I have been part of this debate for well over a decade, following a long career in intercollegiate athletics as a coach and administrator in which I passionately defended the very system this book proposes to change. I am intensely cognizant of what this book is suggesting, and absolutely understand that dramatic change will not be quick or easy, but that does not negate the need to create, analyze, and modify different approaches that can ultimately provide real and meaningful change before it is too late. These are not short-term options. Any potential solution must present generational changes and proposals, but significant alteration of sports development and sports delivery in America can and should be done.

I do not think it is either quixotic or wishful thinking to propose dramatic changes to the way we do sports in America. There is almost universal agreement among scholars, coaches, university presidents, secondary school teachers, and even athletes themselves that the present commercialized, economic, and academic foundation of educationally based sports is on very shaky ground and its future is certainly in doubt. Thus, many conclude that it is not a question of whether economics, legal challenges, and athlete’s rights movements and other forces will
change the current system, but only a matter of when.\textsuperscript{2} Even some of the most jaded supporters of the education-based model are raising questions and looking toward the future. Big Ten Conference Commissioner Jim Delany, one of the most powerful people in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletics, recently said, “Anybody who thinks that we’re in a good place or that what we have is totally sustainable—I would suggest, is not really reading the tea leaves, because of the federal litigation, the federal interest in Congress, and the public’s skepticism, and even the media’s skepticism. We’re not in 1965; we’re in 2015. We think it’s time for a good, full, broad, national discussion on where education fits in the system” (Planos 2015).

The United States of America is basically the only country (with some exceptions, such as a limited system by comparison in Canada and limited educationally based extramural sports opportunities elsewhere) whose primary avenue of sports development and delivery for most of its citizens lies within the structures of primary, secondary, and higher education. On the surface, this may appear to be a mutually beneficial arrangement and even a noble effort to combine the shared aspects and goals of education and sports development. Education, maturity, and growth have consistently been discussed in terms of the effort to foster a sound mind and sound body in developing a total person as part of the educational process. Ostensibly, gaining a valuable education while participating and competing in sports, even at an elite, hypercompetitive level, can seem to be an effective and promising combination. This meshing of sports and education is not unique, in the sense that most educational systems in the world include some type of physical education and sports component. Most young people in countries other than the United States actually get their first exposure to sports in school through broad-based sports participation opportunities, while more specialized and competitive development continues in local and regional sports clubs.\textsuperscript{3} The main difference between the United States and other countries is in the prominent place sports has in education and the academic eligibility requirements to be able to practice and compete.

Interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic competition in America is not only hugely popular and at times profitable, it is also the primary avenue for mass participation as well as elite sports development and competition. That is where any similarity between the United States and other countries with regard to sports and education begins and
ends. As mentioned previously, it is estimated that over 80 percent of sports development and delivery in the United States is done through educational systems. Approximately 65 percent of the US Olympic team at the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games had participated in university-based sports programs (Forde 2015). This does not even include the numerous athletes from foreign countries who come to the United States not only for an education, but also to hone their athletic skills within its higher education system. In the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Brazil, 1,018 athletes, representing many nations, were either current, incoming, or former American college athletes, including the 430 athletes in the US delegation (Martinez 2016). This in itself can cause numerous issues, not the least of which is that the primary American sports development system is providing training opportunities for elite foreign athletes who may take away opportunities from potential US athletes. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but it is another reason why more opportunities should be available to all athletes, beyond the education system, to play and participate in sports in America. In countries such as those in Europe that are a primary focus of this book, the major avenue of sports development and delivery is outside the educational system, embedded in separate nonprofit sports club systems. The details, benefits, and weaknesses of this model, when compared to the current educational sports model in America, are discussed in greater depth as the book progresses.

Despite the existence of empirical research and popular discussion regarding issues and problems with the American sports development and sports delivery models, there has been a dearth of discussion regarding potential changes to the status quo. Ironically, very little of the research has discussed the mechanisms, concepts, or theories for change, even though there is almost universal agreement that change must occur. In 2015, an outstanding empirically based book, Sport Development in the United States: High Performance and Mass Participation, by Peter Smolianov, Dwight H. Zakus, and John Gallo, put forth a practical, theory-based process for potential changes to the current US model and began to drive serious discussion about needed changes to the way this country conducts sports and develops athletes. Candidly, that book is a primary inspiration for this work, and I strongly feel that both sets of proposals are needed to add to the debate and the body of knowledge regarding future sports development models and
changes in the United States. Many of the ideas presented in their work are similar to mine. Although there are significant overlaps and synergies in potential applications, this work is based more on conceptual models of change, including modification of the current educationally based model.

This book analyzes historical aspects of interscholastic and intercollegiate sports development in the United States as well as reasons for the parallel development of the non-education-based model found in European countries. The final chapters discuss the why and how of reviewing, analyzing, and ultimately proposing new models of sports development and delivery for the United States both inside and outside the existing educational system. Some of my proposed changes to the existing American model draw upon the European sports club system as one of the potential templates. The overarching analysis points to the inevitable unsustainability of a primary sports development and sports delivery model being part of all levels of education in the United States. The “why” concerns the challenges to the system via legal and legislative structures, as the NCAA’s Jim Delany mentioned, and also those arising within the system itself. The primary thrust of this work is one of extreme caution or even outright worry. An overwhelming percentage of all participation in sports in the United States, whether elite or mass, is grounded in education, and the potential for loss of many of these opportunities (outside the special cases of football and men’s basketball) within the educational system is very real. There is also very real potential for the continued and worsening loss of external opportunities in a number of sports that are not available or are out of reach for many because of the costs involved. The ability of America to be competitive internationally in many of those sports in the future could also be dramatically impacted. The loss of these opportunities within the American education system is already happening, bearing negatively on public health in the United States due to decreased exercise and sports options. The lack of mass sports participation and physical education opportunities is a significant contributor to the epidemics of poor health and obesity facing America today. If we continue on our current path of chiefly supporting only commercially viable sports that can rake in television, sponsorship, and ticket revenue, opportunities in other sports, and the health benefits that come with them, will eventually be reduced or even evaporate.
My personal sports background, while fairly broad based, was mainly in wrestling. As checkered as my competitive and coaching careers were, my participation and competition in sports was a defining, largely positive element in my life, and one I was fortunate to have access to throughout my formative years. Sadly, sports like wrestling, swimming, gymnastics, and track and field are being downsized at all levels of the US education spectrum, if not outright eliminated, in the face of increased costs, budget reductions, and a desire to field more competitive teams in football, men’s basketball, and other largely male-dominated, entertainment-centric sports. It cannot be discounted that other extracurricular offerings at the scholastic level, such as music programs and other nonathletic options, are also being downsized and eliminated to save costs. While these other issues are not within the scope of this book, there are very real dangers to not providing broad-based educational and nonathletic life-skill opportunities for American students. In the critically acclaimed 1995 movie, Mr. Holland’s Opus, starring Richard Dreyfuss as the title character and longtime high school music teacher, Mr. Holland reacts to his music program being eliminated by saying, “The day they cut the football budget in this state, that will be the end of Western civilization as we know it!”

I am not promoting the end of Western civilization by advocating the end of sports as we know them in America. To the contrary, I am actually advocating massive expansion of low-cost sports- and health-related options for all Americans, most notably our youth. We must as a country begin to explore alternatives and determine the best role for sports and physical activity to play within and outside the educational system. Our goal must be to establish options that improve health, physical fitness, access to sports, and competition. It is time, after more than a hundred years of a primarily education-based sports development model, to explore structures that will not only grow sports opportunities for people of all ages, but also keep the United States a premier player in the competitive international sports world. This can be done, and must be done, by taking at least some of the sports delivery stress away from the educational system, developing alternatives that are both publicly and privately financed.

My main goal here is to help move the discussion and frame the inevitable changes that are both already occurring and on their way in sports and sports development in America. The United States is a
leader in the world in arenas ranging far beyond those of sports. It is important for it to understand and accept the responsibility of being (or becoming) a leader in this sphere, too, by pushing for the adoption of improved international sports development and sports governance systems. I hope that this book also adds to that needed conversation.