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# Major League Impact: A Comparative Analysis of Youth Programs within Major League Baseball Club Charities

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**Major League Impact:  
A Comparative Analysis of Youth Programs  
within Major League Baseball Club Charities**

by

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Capstone Research Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
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in the School of Management  
directed by Dr. Marco Tavanti

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## **Abstract**

As one of the most common structured activities for youth, sport provides numerous opportunities for children to learn to lead healthy, active lifestyles. Additionally, the popularity of sport among young people makes it an effective platform for Positive Youth Development (PYD). However, merely participating in sport does not guarantee that youth will develop positive character traits or acquire important life skills. For that reason, nonprofit organizations that offer sport-based youth development programs must have targeted approaches to facilitating opportunities for learning and growth. This study focuses on the methods of youth programming utilized by the charitable affiliates of five professional sport teams. Through in-depth interviews with program leaders and thematic analysis of collected data, this research identifies definitions of success and key elements of effective sport-based youth development programs in underserved communities. Additionally, the findings presented here highlight the importance of relationship-building and cross-sector partnerships among organizations that offer sport-based youth development programs. This research culminates with a model and recommendations for continued program success among sport-based youth development providers in the nonprofit space. Results of this study can be applied beyond professional sport team charities to any community-based organization seeking to positively impact youth through sport.

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## Section 1. Introduction

Youth development programs, specifically those focusing on Positive Youth Development (PYD) have become a common service offered by community-based organizations in North America. The goal of PYD programs is to use engagement, activities, and services to develop the whole child. Unlike intervention programs, youth development programs emphasize cultivating positive character traits and allow youth to prosper from within, focusing on their strengths and potential rather than their shortcomings.

Due to the popularity and overwhelmingly positive affect surrounding sport, many youth service providers turn to physical fitness and recreational activities when creating PYD curriculum. In recent years, sport has emerged as a powerful platform for youth development models, especially in the nonprofit sector. Community-based organizations and nonprofit service providers use sport to facilitate learning for critical youth development initiatives, including social skill acquisition, positive behavioral development, and academic enrichment.

As the need for PYD opportunities grows and the access to sport programs declines, nonprofit organizations have taken responsibility for providing sport-based youth development models in their communities. National organizations, such as the YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs, emphasize the importance of physical activity in concert with healthy social/emotional development and acquisition of interpersonal skills (YMCA 2019; Boys & Girls Clubs, 2019). While many communities rely on the models and curriculum from such large organizations, there is a need to address the changing circumstances of communities, and how those changes affect those who live and work there (Kenny et al., 2000). Thus, sport-based youth development program leaders have a responsibility to understand the needs of the communities they serve and to adjust their program structure and curriculum accordingly.

With the need for youth sport programs on the rise, numerous professional sport leagues have implemented programs through club teams within their geographic areas of operation. For example, the National Hockey League (NHL) serves youth through its Learn to Play initiative, which is accessible to youth in numerous communities (National Hockey League [NHL], 2017). Like many programs in the youth development space, the NHL Learn to Play program promotes both sport and non-sport skill: "As children learn the skills needed to succeed on the ice, they also build and solidify important character traits needed to succeed off the ice" (NHL, 2017).

While most professional sport leagues dedicate some of their time and resources to youth development efforts, Major League Baseball (MLB) is known for its involvement in numerous youth programs, some of which fall under their affiliate Play Ball initiative (Play Ball, 2019). Additionally, many MLB club teams have charitable arms (commonly designated foundations or community funds) that oversee their youth programs. Such club charities are the focus of this research.



To date, research spanning multiple professional sport team charities has not been made publicly available, yet the programs offered by such organizations are quite popular. This is likely due in part to the association with the team and their co-branding efforts. However, in order to fully understand what keeps participants engaged in these sport-based youth programs, it is important to consider the factors beyond the major brand boost of the affiliate team. This research addresses the gap in the literature by investigating what the nonprofit leaders at MLB club charities observe and interpret as effective program elements and successful outcomes.

This report is organized in six main sections. Following the introduction, a review of the current literature is available to inform the research conducted here. The methods of data collection and analysis are explained, followed by a presentation of the analyzed data. Implications and recommendations are offered by the researcher, and a model is presented that may be utilized by sport-based youth development program organizers. This model is not limited to use by professional sport team charities, but may be applied to any sport-based youth development program operated in a community space. Finally, concluding statements are made with the incorporation of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

## **Section 2: Literature Review**

### **Positive Youth Development in Underserved Communities**

Research has shown that youth in underserved, under-resourced communities are less likely to have access to structured positive youth development programs, and that they are less likely to participate in organized sport (Bruening et al., 2015; Vandermeerschen, et al., 2017). Additionally, Roth and Brooks-Gunn found that ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in youth development programs, and are more likely to drop out of structured programs than their white counterparts (2016). However, there is consensus that youth development programs, specifically after-school programs, are linked to numerous positive outcomes. According to Gooden and colleagues, “After-school program participation is linked to positive influences on both reading and mathematics test scores for low-income and at-risk youth,” and that “youth from at-risk communities demonstrate increased academic performance after participating in these types of programs” (2018, p. 385).

Further, youth that grow up in under-resourced, lower socioeconomic communities often experience “more frequent and pervasive barriers to positive developmental outcomes than their more affluent counterparts,” such as homelessness, community violence, and extreme poverty (Whitley et al., 2008, p. 117). Thus, there is a high need for organized youth programs in such underserved communities. Camiré et al. indicated that while youth organizations generally try to direct their services toward underserved urban areas, “implementing programs for underserved youth is challenging because this population faces many social and economic problems and their value systems often run counter to the values promoted by programs” (2013, p. 189).

It must be noted that not all after-school programs or extracurricular activities geared toward children are Positive Youth Development programs. Positive Youth Development, or PYD, is “the idea that every young person has the potential for successful, healthy development and that all youth possess the capacity for positive development” (Lerner qtd. in Newman et al., 2017, p. 310). According to Vella et al., “Positive youth development focuses on the positive aspects of human development, holding that all youth have innate strengths and resources upon which they can build” (2010, p. 33). Rather than focusing on addressing the deficits of human functioning, PYD considers the opportunities to build upon the resources that youth already embody. Holt (2008) also explained that youth are often looked upon as “problems waiting to be solved” (p. 2) but the PYD framework uses an approach that emphasizes that young people are full of potential and awaiting development, not intervention.

Further, according to Roth and Brooks-Gunn, there are certain aspects that are necessary for PYD to occur:

The defining aspects of a youth development program include program goals that seek to promote positive development, even when striving to prevent problem behaviors; a program atmosphere that supports positive relationships with adults and peers, empowers youth, communicates expectations for positive behavior, and provides opportunities for recognition; and program activities that allow participants to build skills, engage in real and challenging activities, and broaden their horizons. (2016, p. 189)

Thus, it is critical to approach youth development programs with a framework focused on the holistic development of the child, and not the mere absence of problems. Tolan (2016) stated that in addition to steering away from an intervention-based approach and moving toward a development-based approach, there is a need to “shift from viewing outcomes as status attained or a fixed end, and more as relative progress on developmentally expectable benchmarks toward adult functioning” (p. 148). When focusing on the development of the whole child, it is crucial to consider the experiences and life skills that will carry them into adolescence and adulthood.

### **Sport and Positive Youth Development**

Bruening et al. (2015) explained that an increase in PYD opportunities is especially important in lower socioeconomic communities, as the lack of resources can deter personal development. Further, sport-based youth activities have been shown to benefit the youth in such communities. According to Vandermeerschen et al., “research indicates that sports participation is socially stratified, with people from lower socio-economic background being less likely to participate in sport,” and that “specific societal groups, such as people with disability, people from a different ethnic-cultural background and people living in poverty, are in a disadvantaged position with regard to active participation in sport” (2017, p. 309).

Although access to organized sport is limited in many under-resourced communities, Whitley et al. noted that sport has the potential to deeply impact underserved youth by broadening their horizons and enabling them to explore their identities and opportunities for development (2018). According to Côté et al., youth sport has the ability to impact three important objectives of youth development: physical health, psychosocial development, and motor skill development (2008). Additionally, Côté et al. found that sport programs have the potential to contribute to Positive Youth Development when enacted with intentionality and within the proper setting:

Programs that focus on developmental assets integrate a broad range of individuals' internal and external attributes and increase the likelihood of healthy development through sport. Therefore, sport has the potential to contribute to a person's positive developmental outcomes if delivered within an appropriate framework such as the developmental assets framework. (2008, p. 38)

As Newman et al. explained, "Sport is a globally accepted construct capable of breaking through cultural, racial, religious, generational, gender, and economic barriers" (2017, p. 309). Further, they found that in a sport-based PYD approach, sport and physical activity can be used to garner interest among participants and become a platform for life lessons, skill development, and continual learning. As Newman et al. explained, sport-based PYD "captures the psychological, emotional, intellectual, physical, and social developmental benefits that have been documented in sport participation, and pairs them with the intentional methodologies and framework of PYD" and has the ability to promote numerous social-emotional outcomes, including teamwork, self-control, and social responsibility (2017, p. 310-311). Other studies have found that participation in youth sport may lead to improved cognitive skills, social skills, confidence, and problem-solving (Camiré et al., 2013, Vella et al., 2010).

In agreement with Newman et al., Petitpas et al. explained that sport and other types of physical activity are valuable leisure activities for youth, so they are effective in promoting PYD across various life contexts, including in school, after school, and throughout the summer (2017, p. 309). In fact, it is quite common for sport to be used as a platform for youth development in the United States, where programs often emphasize life lessons as the primary objective and sport skill development as a secondary goal (Svensson et al., 2017). As with PYD programs in general, sport-based youth development programs must also be designed to address the healthy development of the whole child over time and focus on the long-term developmental outcomes that are sought (Côté et al., 2008).

### **Nonprofit Organizations and Positive Youth Development**

According to Jones et al., nonprofit organizations have become integral in the realm of sport participation, as such organizations often form organically in response to community need. Gooden et al. suggested that due to a decline in government investment in urban youth programs over the past two decades, many major U.S. cities have come to rely on community-

based nonprofit organizations to address the need for youth programming related to education, life skill development, and social services (2018).

Nonprofits that offer opportunities for youth to participate in sport-based programs are frequently fueled by volunteers and community resources. Jones et al. explained that “this informal structure not only promotes positive outcomes for participants, but also offers opportunities for community members to develop skills and knowledge, social capital, and civic engagement through their involvement” (2017, p. 148). Thus, such programs can lead to noticeable community benefits. Research shows that PYD programs, including sport-based PYD programs, may encourage youth to desire to contribute to and improve their communities (Bruening, 2015; Petitpas, 2017) and nonprofit organizations that already have a strong community base might strengthen that outcome. Studies have shown that youth who participate in community-based programs have greater exposure to the needs of their communities, and are more likely to become agents of change as they realize they can contribute to society in meaningful, impactful ways (Petitpas et al., 2017; Kenny et al., 2000). Involvement with community-based programming, as opposed to school-based programming, has also been observed to positively impact feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem in youth participants (Gooden et al., 2018).

However, it is critical that communities are engaged in the process of developing programs that serve their youth. Communities must feel that the development of youth programs is “being done *with* them, not *to* or *for* them” (Hodge et al. qtd in Petitpas et al., 2017, p. 310). Before implementing any type of youth-serving program, it is important for organizers to gain a clear understanding of the needs of the community (Petersen et al., 2012). Kenny et al. noted that one of the challenges of community and youth work is to meet needs in an everchanging society, so organizers need to be aware and responsive to changing circumstances and the ensuing effects (2000). Additionally, Jacobs et al. (2016) found that long-term, consistent program models that focus on community agency are most effective. In their study of a Chicago-based nonprofit, Beyond the Ball, the leaders of the organization felt that their success came from the fact that the directors and coaches both live and work within the community. As Jacobs et al. explained, “Beyond the Ball is an organization that builds a prolonged relationship with the youth while all the stakeholders are part of that very community” (2016, p. 20) and this allowed the organization to “empower youth so they could become leaders in their own community and improve the lives of their neighbors by replacing the negative norms of gangs and violence with the positive norms of sport, play and empowerment” (p. 19). Gooden et al. agreed that community leaders are key to nonprofit success when it comes to youth programs, as “their values are translated into the actions and behaviors of the nonprofit organizations” (2018, p. 375). Thus, the trust that is built between nonprofit leaders and the community is an indicator of program effectiveness and sustainability.

## Character Development and Life Skill Acquisition

The current literature supports the notion that sport programs can be an appropriate vehicle to encourage character development and life skill acquisition in youth participants. Life skills are defined as cognitive, behavioral, and social skills that enable individuals to succeed in their unique environments (Camiré et al., 2013). Further, studies have indicated that sport programs can lead to the development of numerous positive values, such as sportspersonship, cooperation, responsibility, empathy, fair play, and self-control (Côté et al., 2008). As explained by Camiré and colleagues, organized youth sport is an ideal setting in which to teach life skills and values because of its ability to instill intrinsic motivation among participants due to its popularity (2013). More specifically, Camiré et al. noted:

To maximize positive outcomes, researchers have created physical activity and sport programs designed specifically to foster the development of youth. The main strength of these programs lies in their use of physical activity and sport as tools to promote youth's academic, personal, and social development. (2013, p. 188)

Recent studies have indicated that there is a noticeable emphasis on academic enrichment opportunities within sport-based youth development programs in the United States (Svensson et al., 2017) and that the combination of sport-based activities with other non-sport program elements have become the focus of many youth-serving nonprofits. However, a mixture of structured sport and non-sport activities is not enough for Positive Youth Development to occur. According to Strachan et al.:

The field of PYD points to the five Cs (Lerner, 2003, 2007) as the guiding framework for describing positive outcomes. These five Cs (i.e., confidence, competence, character, connection, caring) are important characteristics for youth to possess to attain the sixth C—contribution. Each C is hypothesized as being a unique factor in the development and growth of the person . . . If people develop these Cs, research suggests that there is a higher chance that they will want to be active contributors to society and community and will display leadership and engagement (i.e., contribution). (2018, p. 293-294)

As noted in the previous section, research holds that development opportunities rooted in community-based programs are likely to lead to increased civic engagement among participants, and the work of Strachan et al. speaks to that point. The research of Vella et al. also suggested that “outcomes of character were the most easily recognized and most often articulated outcomes” among subjects of their study of youth sport program participants (2010, p. 38.) Specifically, Vella et al. noticed that many of the outcomes centered around pro-social, respectful, and moral behaviors, as well as character traits such as responsibility, honesty, and self-control (2010). The research of Gooden and colleagues also found that participation in extracurricular PYD programs, sport-based or otherwise, is linked to stronger self-esteem and better academic performance (2018). Participants in the research of Strachan et al. explained

that character is a construct based on the display of respect, discipline, and leadership, which are each emphasized in the literature on sport-based PYD (2018).

### **Positive Relationships**

Another critical aspect of sport-based PYD programs is the development of relationships between participants and adult leaders. This is especially important for youth in under-resourced communities, as functional advocates (i.e., coaches and volunteers) are needed to “consistently and proactively help(s) them overcome logistical barriers (e.g., travel to sport sites, access to equipment) as well as emotional barriers (e.g., sense of hope, belief in self) in order to access a developmentally-focused sport environment” (Whitley et al., 2018, p. 122). Similarly, coaches have the ability to gain trust and encourage healthy relationships among participants, which may lead to increased feelings of belonging, meaningful inclusion, and social competence (Côté et al., 2008).

Researchers have found that the successes of sport-based youth development programs are due in part to the relationships formed between participants and the volunteers and instructional staff who facilitate programming:

These relationships are foundational to positive youth development programs, providing a web of support in school, after school, and during the summer and by exposing participants to a variety of new experiences. Such relationships and activities provide opportunities for youth to gain confidence in their abilities and promotes personal agency. (Petitpas et al., 2017, p. 311)

According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn, the cruciality of supportive, sustained adult-youth relationships “appears in every discussion of why programs impact participants, leading some researchers to refer to them as the ‘critical ingredient’ in successful programs” (2016, p. 193). Further, the quality of mentor-participant relationships has been linked to positive outcomes, including attendance and engagement. Côté et al. (2008) identified strong support and connectedness among coaches and youth as a key influence on participants’ psychological, social, and physical growth. Studies have also indicated that coaches tend to view success in the context of improved skills, positive affect, fun, and happiness—not in terms of winning games (Vella et al., 2010). Coaches, staff, and volunteers are in a position to communicate this message of true success to youth through their influential roles as leaders.

Additionally, Newman et al. found that leaders in youth sport programs are seen as the main change agents in cultivating physically and emotionally safe environments where participants can acquire skills through sport experiences that are intentionally built to achieve developmental outcomes (2017). Thus, volunteers and coaches are not only instructors or care providers, but also mentors, role models, and parental figures (Newman et al., 2017). Jacobs et al. further emphasized the importance of organizational leaders embodying a strong commitment to long-term participation, as Beyond the Ball’s triumph over similar programs comes from “expanding their mission beyond just sport or youth development to relationship-

building as well” (2016, p. 20). Similarly, Bruening et al. asserted that program organizers should seek to create a climate in which strong bonds between participants and adult leaders are possible, as such relationships are the catalysts for lasting impact (2015). As concluded by Bruening et al., “Sport-based youth development (SBYD) programs based on strong and enduring relationships between youth and mentors have the potential to make lasting impacts on both groups” (2015, p. 87).

### **Coach Training and Resources**

In their research, Vella et al. (2010) found that “coaches see themselves as responsible for facilitating eight interrelated and interdependent themes that are consistent with the positive youth development literature: competence, confidence, connection, character, life skills, climate, positive affect and, positive psychological capacities,” yet some coaches note that they are provided with a lack of training and rely more on intrinsic motivation. Newman et al. found that while there are resources focused on coach education, most lack quality instruction on non-sport leadership skills (2017). Further, research has shown that many adults in sport-based youth programs lack knowledge of and training in both coaching and Positive Youth Development. Petitpas et al. argued that one way to promote PYD is to “devote more resources to strengthening adult capabilities,” and “ensure that all the adults who interact with children on a regular basis acquire critical life skills through a comprehensive system of training or coaching” (2017, p. 309). Circling back to the importance of addressing community needs, a simple coach education program is likely insufficient, as it is often challenging for organizations to recruit, train, supervise, and retain adult mentors for sport-based PYD programs (Camiré et al., 2013; Petitpas et al., 2017).

Within youth programs, trained facilitators have been determined to be key contributors to youth learning and positive outcomes. As indicated by recent studies, providing training and support to coaches based on the fundamentals of PYD is likely to result in better sport-based youth programs, as well as environments that cultivate positive relationships (Côté et al., 2008, Vella et al., 2010). Perhaps just as critical, research has shown that lessons learned in sport settings do not automatically transfer to other aspects of the participants’ lives. Vella and colleagues suggested that in order to transfer learning to other life domains, “training coaches to transfer these skills from the sport setting is a necessary next step in coach training research” (2010, p. 116). Similarly, studies have shown that reflection is a crucial component for effective learning and development to take place: “Reflection is crucial and central to both processes in order to: make experience significant, to identify strengths and development of learning needs; and establish a meaningful basis for further self and/or community development” (Kenny et al., 2000, p. 116). Thus, coaches must be trained not only to encourage learning during sport-based activities, but to help youth reflect on lessons learned and transfer them to other areas of their lives.

## **Organizational Capacity, Infrastructure, and Partnerships**

One challenge that many sport-based youth development programs face, especially those run by nonprofit entities, stems from a struggle to build organizational capacity. According to Jones et al., “maintaining and building capacity is especially difficult in the nonprofit sector, as organizations must find ways to continuously grow capacity amid increased competition and declining resources, all while remaining aligned with their established mission statements” (2017, p. 149). Additionally, Svensson et al. found that nonprofit and voluntary organizations without membership structures, including many sport-based PYD program providers, face challenges with regard to staffing, volunteer recruitment, and fund development (2017). In the realm of nonprofit youth sport organizations specifically, the literature has suggested that understanding how to build organizational capacity is critical, as government subsidies and grants have declined and volunteer rates have dwindled in recent years (Jones et al., 2017).

Svensson et al. (2017) also suggested that there are key areas of organizational capacity that effect nonprofit operation in the youth development space: human capacity, financial capacity, infrastructure capacity, external relationships, and planning and development. Studies also cite access to facilities as a critical challenge for sport-based nonprofits, as they have a need for both sport and non-sport physical spaces. As Svensson et al. explained,

Specifically, the numerous issues associated with youth development (see Pittman et al. 2011) and the non-sport programming components of participating organizations require the provision of both sport and non-sport facilities. This also necessitates creating safe spaces for program participants (Spaij and Schulenkorf 2014), resulting in increased resource demands. (2017, p. 2076)

Additionally, as noted in the previous section, human capacity is especially critical for nonprofit sport-based youth programs, as recruiting and retaining coaches and staff is key for achieving optimal youth development outcomes. Participants in the research of Svensson et al. “consistently reported the importance of paid staff for broader organizational capacity,” emphasizing the need to find highly qualified people to advance the organization’s mission and goals (2017, p. 2066).

Studies have shown that sport-based youth organizations in the nonprofit sector often find themselves competing for resources rather than collaborating with other organizations, but researchers have found that interorganizational partnerships can help alleviate capacity and infrastructure shortcomings (Jones et al., 2017). Such cross-sector partnerships can provide access to resources, infrastructure, and community support for nonprofit entities. According to Petitpas et al., partnerships and shared costs can accrue financial saving across numerous categories, including program costs related to research, training, and evaluation (2017). Additionally, Jones et al. found that interorganizational partnerships can lead to increased visibility and legitimacy, community leadership, and social capital for nonprofit sport organizations (2017). The research of Svensson et al. also asserted that the ability to cultivate



and maintain interorganizational partnerships is a central element of nonprofit capacity, and noted that such partnerships may exist with private corporations, school districts, government entities, professional sport teams, and other community-based organizations (CBOs) (2017).

### **Research and Evaluation**

In the mid-1990s, nonprofit funders began asking for documentation that proved the programs they were supporting were producing positive outcomes (Bialeschki and Conn, 2011). Thus, the need for more accountability and evidence-based research became the norm for nonprofit organizations that worked to serve the youth in their communities. For sport-based youth development programs, research and evaluation processes should document the competency of achieving desired goals (Camiré, 2013).

In the current nonprofit space, there is a need for more evaluation of youth programs. Specifically, policy makers and funders seek evidence that their investments, financial or otherwise, are truly making an impact (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). While coaches and program leaders tend to highlight simple metrics—such as participant retention rates—as a measure of success, the literature has shown that typical evaluation efforts may fail to identify the developmental contexts of programs (Vella et al., 2010; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016) which are often significant contributors to key metrics. As the nonprofit youth-service space shifts towards a predominantly evidence-based landscape (Bialieschki & Conn, 2011) there is a need for more pointed research and evaluation that identifies positive developmental outcomes and documents the contributing factors that lead to such results.

Informed by the current literature, this research seeks to investigate the perceived success and effectiveness of sport-based youth development programs among Major League Baseball club charities by addressing the following questions:

- **RQ 1:** How do organizers of sport-based youth development programs define program success?
- **RQ 2:** What are the key characteristics of successful sport-based youth development programs?
- **RQ 3:** Are strong relationships between participants and coaches/staff/volunteers an indicator of program success?
- **RQ 4:** Are strong corporate and community partnerships an indicator of program success?

## **Section 3: Methods and Approaches**

### **Literature Review**

A comprehensive review of the current literature reveals that sport environments provide an optimal setting for nonprofits to engage youth in Positive Youth Development activities. Research has identified contributing factors to effective sport-based youth development programs, including community partnerships, relationships with caring adults, and a PYD framework approach to the development of the whole child. The existing literature informed the study design and methods used to collect data for this research.

### **Interview Approach**

Research indicates that structured interviews are a highly effective means of collecting data because they enable the interviewer to establish rapport and follow up with targeted probing questions (Jones et al., 2017). Such probing questions have been noted to improve participant recall among subjects. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from participants. To do this, the researcher developed a 25-item questionnaire (see Appendix) to guide conversations with five experts in the field of sport-based youth development. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: introductory questions, program focus, program execution, organizational capacity, and program evaluation. In total, there were three introductory questions, eight questions on program focus, six questions pertaining to program execution, five questions regarding organizational capacity, and three questions directed at program evaluation.

### **Interview Participants**

Interviews were conducted with program leaders at five Major League Baseball club charities. Participants were employed by the following organizations:

- Giants Community Fund (San Francisco Giants)
- Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation (Los Angeles Dodgers)
- Texas Rangers Baseball Foundation, Rangers Youth Academy (Texas Rangers)
- Astros Foundation, Astros Youth Academy (Houston Astros)
- Reds Community Fund, Reds Youth Academy (Cincinnati Reds)

Of the five experts interviewed, two held the title of Director of Youth Academy, one was the Director of Youth Programs, another was the Deputy Director, and one was the Youth Baseball and Softball Coordinator.

Each interview was conducted over the phone and lasted between 35-60 minutes. Interviews were recorded with permission from the participants and transcribed verbatim following the conversation. Transcriptions were then coded and analyzed by the researcher.

## **Coding and Thematic Analysis**

The method of thematic coding was used in this study to categorize and analyze emerging themes in the collected data. Thematic analysis, a method of structural coding, was used in this research because it provides a context to create categories of codes and code families (Belotto, 2018). According to Gooden et al., (2018) codes vary from themes in that themes are broader units of analysis that “unify multiple aspects of the raw data. A theme captures something important about the data and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Gooden et al., 2018, p. 405). Each of the five transcribed interviews were read through three separate times: the first time to identify key passages that related to the research questions, the second time to categorize the key passages into themes and subthemes, and the third time to determine frequencies of themes and subthemes in each individual interview. Content analysis tables with frequencies for each theme were created to cross-compare data from each interview. Additionally, quantifiable data were extracted from the interview transcriptions and charted as well.

## **Section 4. Data Analysis**

The five organizations that participated in this study served youth between ages four and eighteen years of age. While program size and geographic reach varied, the MLB club charities in this research indicated that they served between 1,000 and 24,000 youth annually. Of the five organizations, only one organization utilized a fee-for-service model, and it is important to note that the fee did not go to the club foundation. Instead, this particular club allowed their community partners (referred to as “affiliate partners”) to charge a fee if it was necessary for their program and the sustainability of their partnership. As the program director explained:

Pricewise, when we say there’s a fee, we don’t make any money off of this program. We allow our partners to charge up to \$25, no more than that. So, some charge \$0, some charge \$10, some charge around \$25, but we look at that money as it’s really helping them with their staffing, banquets, trophies, things like that.

All of the interview participants emphasized that their programs aim to provide opportunities in underserved communities. All five participants indicated that they target low-income, urban, and minority communities (see Table 1). Additionally, three organization directors stated that they aim to serve girls as a target demographic, and two participants said their programs intentionally target high-crime communities. According to one participant:

When we speak about the Academy, the word ‘underserved’ comes up a lot, and we kind of use that as a blanket. You look at the neighborhood we’re in and yes, it’s underserved, you know. There isn’t a lot of budgeting going towards the schools in the area, the infrastructure’s not that great, and so when you just kind of look at that area, you know, yeah, we are in the right spot for a reason.

Each of the program leaders interviewed explained that their programs give girls the opportunity to play both baseball and softball; however, two of the participants did not consider girls to be a target demographic. Some programs allowed girls to play baseball in co-ed divisions before age seven or ten (depending on age divisions) and then transitioned them to softball. However, some programs gave girls the option to play baseball through high school. One interview participant even identified serving more girls as one of their key program outcomes (see Table 5 in following subsection).

While each interview participant focused on their presence in under-resourced communities, one program leader explained that they seek to take it a step further by using data from the county to identify neighborhoods with high needs for baseball and softball specifically.

**Table 1: Target Demographics**

<b>Target Demographics</b>	<b>Organizations (n = 5)</b>
Low-Income Communities	5
High-Crime Communities	2
Urban Communities	5
Minorities in Community	5
Girls in Community	3

*Source: Author's creation.*

While the organizational structure and program operations of each charity varied greatly, all of the program leaders identified their programs as being highly associated with the work of the fund or foundation. In fact, all five of the programs or families of programs examined sourced their budgets from the overall fund or foundation budget.

As noted in Table 2 (see below) all organizations in this research operated summer programming. Additionally, three of the five groups also ran after school programs through their Youth Academies, and four of the organizations operated Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) programs. For one organization, RBI was their main vehicle for youth programming, while the other three programs with RBI also ran some sort of after-school program through their Youth Academy locations. None of the organizations in this research provided in-school youth development programming, but one program with a Youth Academy model offered weekend programming in addition to after-school resources during the school year.

**Table 2: Program Structure**

<b>Program Structure</b>	<b>Organizations (n = 5)</b>
In School	0
After-School	3
Weekend	1
Summer	5
RBI Initiative	4

*Source: Author's creation.*

As for staff structure and capacity, each organization relied on variations of similar staffing models. Each organization had dedicated full-time staff to oversee their programs, but the number of paid coaches and instructors varied. All five organizations indicated that they have a mix of paid staff and volunteers, but at this time only four of the five programs utilized paid instructors to work with the children on the program level. Within those four groups, some paid all of their after-school program instructional staff and RBI coaches, while others relied more heavily on volunteer coaches. One program director expressed that their partner organizations had the ability to pay coaches within their specific league from their own budgets, and another explained that they relied on a community partner to provide non-sport instructional staff to support their after-school program. One of the programs had a unique model that enabled them to utilize their high school participants as instructors for the younger children, in addition to paid staff and volunteers:

We probably have 10 to 20 paid instructors, and then we have probably 60+ volunteers. Some of our kids that are in our high school-based RBI program, since everything is free of charge for them, the only thing we ask of them is to volunteer. So, they volunteer with the youth programs as well.

As for program focus, each of the five participants of this study indicated that they prioritized areas outside of sport skill acquisition and development. Table 3 (below) shows that while all five organizations focused on sport skills within their programming, they all focused on character development/life skill acquisition and education as well. Education was further broken down into components including literacy, STEM/STEAM, arts, and scholarship opportunities. Health and violence prevention (including anti-bullying efforts) emerged as common areas of program focus as well.

**Table 3: Program Focus**

<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Organizations (n = 5)</b>
Sport Skill Development	5
Health	3
Literacy	5
STEM/STEAM	3
Arts	2
Scholarship	3
Violence Prevention	4
Character Development/Life Skills	5

*Source: Author's creation.*

### **Emergent Themes**

The thematic coding and content analysis of this study resulted in 24 primary themes (see Table 4). Many of the primary themes were composed of families of subthemes, or secondary themes, with some primary categories housing up to 19 subthemes. Top themes were identified based on frequencies across interviews, with the top ten primary themes highlighted in the content analysis table below. Additionally, a further breakdown of selected categorical subthemes provides insight into the various interview passages that were coded under each primary theme (see Table 5). The top five themes from this table inform the first two research questions of this study (RQ 1 and RQ 2) which seek to identify 1) how organizers define program success and 2) the key characteristics of an effective sport-based youth development program.

**Table 4: Content Analysis**

	<b>Primary Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Average Mentions per Interview</b>	<b>Identified Subthemes</b>
1	Character Development/Life Skills	<b>45</b>	9.0	10
2	Community Partnerships	<b>43</b>	8.6	17
3	Coach Values/Qualities/Skills	<b>40</b>	8.0	19
4	Key Program Outcomes/Success Indicators	<b>40</b>	7.4	13
5	Education	<b>34</b>	6.8	10
6	Underserved Communities	<b>30</b>	6.0	15
7	Coach Training/Resources	<b>22</b>	4.4	14
8	Staffing/Structure Successes	<b>17</b>	3.4	16
9	Baseball/Softball Skill Development	<b>16</b>	3.2	8
10	Corporate Partnerships	<b>14</b>	2.8	12
11	Program Evaluation	<b>13</b>	2.6	10
12	Fund/Foundation Support	<b>11</b>	2.2	5
13	Lack of Facilities/Field Space/Infrastructure	<b>11</b>	2.2	4
14	Free/Affordable Programming	<b>10</b>	2.0	5
15	Volunteers	<b>10</b>	2.0	5
16	Character Development Training/Resources	<b>9</b>	1.8	5
17	Programming for Girls	<b>8</b>	1.6	5
18	Own Space/Accessible Facilities	<b>7</b>	1.4	6
19	Family Services	<b>6</b>	1.2	6
20	Staffing/Structure Struggles	<b>6</b>	1.2	8
21	Geographic Location	<b>5</b>	1.0	1
22	Health	<b>4</b>	0.8	5
23	Safety	<b>4</b>	0.8	4
24	Team Support/Brand	<b>3</b>	0.6	3

*Source: Author's creation.*

**Table 5: Primary and Secondary Themes of Selected Data Categories**

<b>Primary Themes Secondary Themes</b>	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>Primary Themes Secondary Themes</b>	<b>Total Frequency</b>
<b>Character Development/Life Skills</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>34</b>
General Character Development/Life Skills	16	General Education/Academics	5
Teamwork/Cooperation	6	STEM/STEAM	5
Anti-bullying	5	Literacy	4
Major League Citizens/Communities	5	Tutoring	4
Sportsmanship	4	College Tours	3
Confidence	3	College/ACT Prep	3
Integrity	2	Scholarship Program	3
Leadership	1	Arts	2
Respect	1	Career Workshops	2
Determination	1	Essay Help	2
Spirit	1	Scholarship Resources	1
<b>Coach Values/Qualities/Skills</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>Key Program Outcomes/Success Indicators</b>	<b>40</b>
Knowledge of Baseball/Softball	4	Character Development/PYD	7
Knowledge of Life Skills	4	Major League Citizens	5
Caring/Compassion/Support	4	Program Participation	3
Promotes Relationships	4	Improved Education/Academics	3
Desire to work with/get to know kids	3	Baseball/Softball Skill Development	3
Consistency/Dependability	3	Attend College/Higher Education	3
Role Model/Mentorship/Influence	3	Play Baseball/Softball at Collegiate Level	3
Engagement/Personality	3	Access to Sport	2
Want to Succeed	2	Positive Opportunities/Experiences	2
Leadership	2	Safe Space	2
Respect	1	Outdoor Activity	1



Timeliness	1	Productivity	1
Good Communication Skills	1	Enter Workforce	1
Major League Citizens	1	Fun	1
Patience	1	Access for girls/Serving more girls	1
Collegiate/High Level Athletic Experience	1	Relationships/Mentorship Opportunities	1
Trustworthy	1	Healthier/More Active	1
Openness	1		

*Source: Author's creation.*

**Character Development and Life Skills.** In line with the literature, the organizers of each program in this study emphasized the importance of developing the whole child through character trait and life skill acquisition. The theme of character development/life skills was addressed 45 times across interviews, with an average of nine mentions per interview. There were 10 identified secondary themes within character development/life skills, including teamwork/cooperation, anti-bullying, sportsmanship, and confidence.

It is important to note that general character development and/or life skill acquisition as an outcome or goal of youth programming was mentioned 16 times, making up 36% of the total frequency. Such general references included statements such as “we’re trying to look at the holistic picture of the group” or “we’re really just trying to create an environment where they’re learning a lot of different characteristics.”

Many of the participants expressed the idea that their program aims to cultivate “major league citizens” and to create “major league communities,” as noted below:

- “We’re not trying to create Major League players necessarily, but major league communities. So giving these kids opportunity to, one, get access to the sport, but just a safe space, where they can still be a kid.”
- “We want our kids to be major league citizens, I think that’s kind of our saying. We want to turn our kids into major league citizens.”
- “We don’t necessarily have any core values, per se, we use the term a lot more so within the RBI program, ‘building major league citizens.’”

While some of the programs studied here did not have core values or defining pillars, two of the program directors made a point to share their guiding character traits:

- "Our Four Bases of Character Development are confidence, leadership, teamwork, and integrity."

- "Cooperation, integrity, respect, education, determination, and spirit."

**Partnerships.** The second most common theme among interview data was community partnerships, which was mentioned 43 times throughout the five interviews (average of 8.6 mentions per interview). It was expressed on numerous occasions that program leaders felt community partnerships were critical to the sustainability and success of their youth programs. According to one interview participant, "I think for us, where we've found great success is partnerships and volunteers to really help with the various things, so our team can really focus on administrative day to day." Another program director reiterated these sentiments: "The partnerships with agencies, and the training and commissioner. That's our sustainability."

While some organizations in this study relied on community partners to oversee the execution of their youth programs on the ground, others relied on partnerships with CBOs for other initiatives, such as non-sport programming support. Examples of such included partnerships with public libraries, local universities, educational or developmental nonprofit organizations, or national sport-based organizations, such as Science of Sport, Up2Us Sports, and Positive Coaching Alliance. One program organizer explained how a partnership helped them focus on trauma-informed care for their participants: "Trauma-informed has been something we were looking to really enhance. We have a large partnership with Up2Us Sports, and we sync their trainers into all our coach's trainings we do, and then we're also having a specialized workshop for trauma-informed pieces, so I think that's a really big one for us." This also speaks to the importance of partnerships in providing effective training and resources for the coaches and staff who work with the youth participants.

Two of the five organizations did not own their own field space or facilities, while three organizations had space for programming through their Youth Academy models. However, even for the groups operating Youth Academies, partnerships were necessary. For example, one of the Youth Academy directors mentioned that they have a lease and partnership with the city, meaning that the city actually owned the property and is responsible for maintaining the space. Another program with a Youth Academy also relied on a partnership with the city's Parks and Recreation Department:

On site we have the indoor field, and then five outdoor fields. And something that we're doing this year is we're partnering with City Parks and Rec for our RBI leagues. So, what we'll be doing is that we will host the summer baseball and softball season, and then during the fall Parks and Rec will host the fall baseball season and then we'll host the fall softball program.

As indicated in the current literature, partnerships serve as a means of addressing infrastructure challenges, such as lack of facilities and field space. Lack of facilities or field space was referenced 11 times throughout the interviews of this study, and most participants acknowledged that their partnerships were one remedy to address that need.

The overwhelming consensus among participants in this study was that strong partnerships, both community and corporate, are essential for program success. This affirmation answers RQ 4 of this study, and shows clear emphasis on the perceived value of community partnerships over corporate partnerships. However, corporate partnerships did play a relatively strong role in funding, which was noted on numerous occasions across the interviews. It is also worth noting that of all 24 themes that emerged from this data set, the support of the affiliate Major League Baseball team and the power of its brand had the lowest frequency. In fact, the most common reference to the baseball team affiliated with the charity occurred when discussing corporate partnerships and how those funds are raised. As one participant explained, “Between the Foundation and corporate partnerships, corporate partnerships makes a deal and our fundraising guy will go in, and say, ‘what are your philanthropic goals?’ and try to figure out, is it something where you can donate money to us, or donate meals, or literally anything that’s tangible that we can use towards the Academy?”

While it was common for program directors to discuss the value of corporate partners allocating resources to the fund or foundation by means of team sponsorship, there were notably few mentions specifically referring to the usefulness of the professional team’s brand. It is possible that this is due to the program organizers’ recognition of the need to function like a youth development organization, as opposed to an extension of a professional sport team.

**Coach Values, Qualities, and Skills.** Positive coach attributes, including values, qualities, and skills, were mentioned 40 times throughout the participant interviews (an average of 8 mentions per interview). As evidenced in Table 5, knowledge of baseball/softball, knowledge of life skills, caring/supportive attitudes, and ability to promote relationships were the highest-ranking coach qualities identified by the interview participants. It is important to note that while each of these categories were mentioned the same number of times, the degree of expertise sought among coaches varied greatly. While some program directors hoped to recruit coaches with some level of understanding of the game, other directors prioritized finding coaches with collegiate or other professional-level experience. The latter group tended to be directors who were hiring instructors to teach baseball and softball skills through their Youth Academies, whereas the former was more likely to utilize volunteers for spring or summer leagues.

The subthemes that emerged from the primary theme regarding positive coach attributes informs RQ 3 of this study, which focused on the importance of relationships between youth participants and coaches, instructors, and program staff. All five of the program leaders interviewed for this research agreed that relationships played a key role in the success of their programs. When asked if the relationships between participants and coaches was important for program success, one director responded with the following:

Yes, 100 percent. If you don’t have that, you won’t get the buy-in, you won’t get people following the leads, but you also need good leadership at the top. That your coaches can rely on that leadership to just follow their pathway...I just think that in order for the

Academy to work, you have to have great staff, you have to build character into the kids. I think that is any organization, is that your staff is most important.

There was clear emphasis on the most desired traits of coaches among all of the interview participants. One program leader expressed that he felt one of the most important characteristics to seek in coaches was “understanding that they have a high amount of influence on the kids’ lives. They don’t have a responsibility just to teach them about the game, they have a responsibility to teach them about life. How to be a man or a woman of character, doing the right things when they’re not the easiest things to do.” According to another program director, “They have to enjoy working with kids. They should want to succeed. Treat each other and treat everyone with respect, and communicate well. Those are the key kind of characteristics, but beyond that we hope that they some knowledge of baseball and softball, and that they have some interest in the life skills and teaching life skill.”

**Key Program Outcomes.** Each participant of this study identified numerous outcomes that they seek to achieve through their youth programs. Key program outcomes and success indicators were categorized into one primary theme with 13 secondary themes. There were a total of 40 mentions throughout the five interviews, with character development being cited most frequently as a key program outcome. Other key outcomes that were identified by the program leaders included the cultivation of major league citizens, participation in programs, improved education or academic skills, development of baseball/softball skills, attending college or obtaining a higher education, and playing baseball or softball at the collegiate level. It is important to note that while not all of the interview participants identified youth program participants being signed to play in college as a goal, there was consensus that obtaining a college education was among the top priorities of each program.

The following quotes from various interview participants provide insight into the key outcomes their programs seek to achieve, with an emphasis on “off the field” successes:

- "We're trying to find major league citizens who are trying to work with kids to get them to the next level, if that is playing baseball or softball at the collegiate level, or just trying to do that. But our main focus is working with these kids to get them to college, or get them ready for college, in the classroom or the workforce. We're trying to look at the holistic picture of the group."
- "I would say we want to create an environment where kids are thriving on and off the field. We are specifically in areas that are underserved, low-income, and need our resources."
- "Getting kids outside, allowing kids to have access to a recreational program, getting them out in fresh air. Beyond that, kids that are healthier, more active, and have improved their reading. They're a better person at the end of the day. More about off the field than on the field success."

- "Giving them the opportunity to have other opportunities after they leave our Academy. Positive opportunities. Of course, every kid can't go to college and won't go to college, but I think we hang our hat on trying to get every kid we can into college."
- "Our Vice President sent us an article back in October about the impact community centers make on neighborhoods. And after reading the article I emailed back to her like, this is what I want the Academy to be. Somewhere where, the minute you get out of school, you're coming here, you're getting your homework done, you're playing baseball, you're playing softball, and by the time you're done, you're so tired that you can just go home, and shower, eat, and sleep. And understand that there's no opportunity for you to run around and get into trouble and you know, do anything that isn't productive. That for me is my number one goal—to make sure that this is a safe haven for kids, and making sure that a kid can grow up here. From the time that they pick up a bat to the day they sign to go play college somewhere."

These sentiments echo each other in their desire to provide resources, opportunities, and consistency to the youth participants of the organization's programs. This theme, when cross-compared with other themes among the content analysis, informs RQ 1 of this study. It is clear that the organizers of these sport-based youth development programs define success as the development of the whole child, off the field as well as on the field.

**Education.** A final major theme that emerged from the content analysis of this study is the importance of education among each of the five programs, and the data have shown that an educational component is a key factor of a successful program in this space. The theme of education had a total frequency of 34 mentions across interviews, with an average of 6.8 mentions per participant and 10 identified secondary themes.

The organizations in this study focused mostly on STEM/STEAM, literacy, and tutoring in their education initiatives. As one program organizer explained, their program relied on a local community partner to help them fulfill their educational goals for their program:

We have baseball and softball after-school programming Monday through Thursday, and then we partner with a family services organization. They'll do certain classes, they do teen summits, they do tutoring, they actually do family finance classes, so we're able to touch on every aspect within the family from the kids to the adults.

In addition to focusing on the core educational components that youth are learning in school, a few of the organizations have a strong emphasis on college preparation. In particular, one program director discussed the key partnership between their Youth Academy and a local university, and how that enabled them to help participants prepare for college, in addition to offering resources to younger students:

We offer tutoring to every child that's in the program—that is free of charge. For our RBI teams that come through our program, they have to do different seminars and things like that, and a lot of those seminars are education-based. We have an ACT boot camp where kids go through a four-week program, and then they take an ACT test afterwards, and we do that three times in the year. We also do our Home Base program where we work with kids that are in the public schools. It's a week-long immersion at the University, we do ACT prep with them throughout that time.

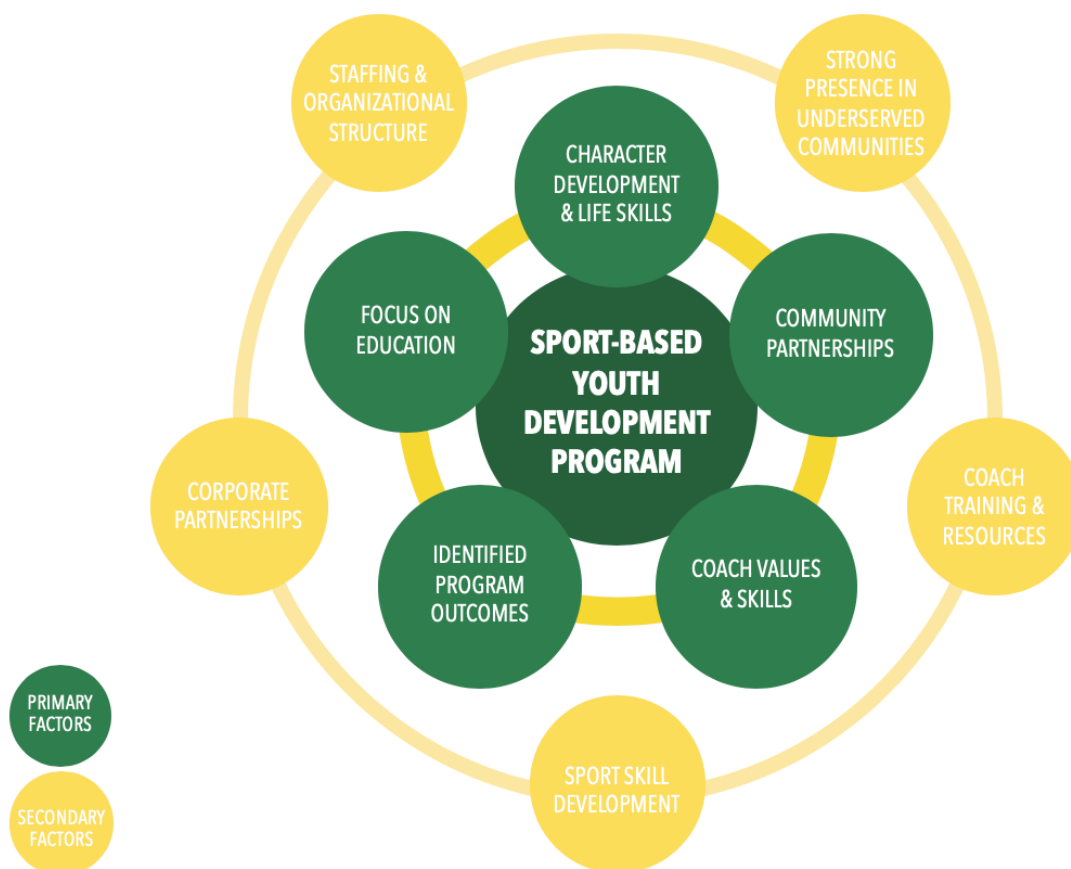
A final component that was noted under the education umbrella for many organizations was the opportunity for participants to receive scholarships. Three of the five charities had their own scholarship opportunities available for participants, and a fourth organization provided scholarship resources and essay help to families with high school-aged children.

**Other Notable Themes.** The following five themes were identified as important themes that emerged from that data, although they were not mentioned as frequently or with as much urgency: serving under-resourced communities, providing coach training and resources, successful staffing structure, sport skill development, program evaluation, and corporate partnerships (as opposed to community partnerships). While these themes were noted less frequently, they have still been incremental in creating the following model and recommendations based on this research.

## Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

This research has uncovered numerous common themes and key contributing factors of successful sport-based youth development programs in the nonprofit sector. While the organizations examined here are affiliated with a professional sport team, the following model (see Figure 1) and recommendations are well-suited to be implemented by any sport-based youth development provider operating in the nonprofit space.

**Figure 1: Nonprofit Sport-based Youth Development Program Model**



*Source: Author's creation.*

### Model

The culmination of this research is the development of a model that may be utilized by nonprofits that provide sport-based youth development programs. This model is intended to be used by any type of nonprofit organization that operates sport-based youth development

programs, even those that are not charitable affiliates of professional sport teams. Thus, all of the factors that went into the creation of this model are relevant to various youth-serving organizations in the nonprofit space.

**Primary Factors.** There are five primary factors that come into play for an effective sport-based youth development program: character development and life skill acquisition, community partnerships, coach values and skills, identified program outcomes, and a focus on education.

These primary factors were determined with consideration of the existing literature and the results of this research. This study has shown that character development and opportunities to acquire life skills are key to the success of sport-based youth development programs, as the goal of these programs is to encourage the healthy development of the whole child. Additionally, this research and other studies have shown that community partnerships are essential to providing additional infrastructure support, as well as non-sport program expertise, in the nonprofit space. The role of coaches and their ability to form and promote caring relationships with and among youth has also been heavily documented, and their values and skills enable them to do this well.

This study investigated the various program outcomes and success indicators identified by program leaders. This research shows that these outcomes often go beyond sport programming, and work with the other primary factors to ensure holistic youth developmental outcomes. Additionally, a focus on education emerged as a crucial factor to the effectiveness of the programs examined in this study, as a common goal among each organization was to make the path to higher education more accessible to the youth they serve.

**Secondary Factors.** Additionally, there are five secondary elements that emerged from the data analysis of this study. These secondary factors that contribute to the success and effectiveness of sport-based youth development programs are strong presence in underserved communities, effective coach training and resources, sport skill development among youth, corporate partnerships, and staffing and organizational structure. While these factors are not as central to the overall effectiveness and success defined by the participants of this research, they still contribute to program outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

The current literature, coupled with the research presented here, provided an in-depth look at the desired outcomes and key elements of sport-based youth development programs. As a result, this research recommends the following for nonprofit organizations that provide sport-based youth development programming:

- 1. Address Character Development.** When implementing a sport-based youth development program, it is crucial that the host organization focuses on the development of the whole child—not just on sport skill acquisition. Previous studies have determined that participation in sport as a leisure activity is not enough to



ensure that youth will develop positive character traits or life skills. It is critical that opportunities for positive youth development be facilitated through structured activities, intentional discussions, and engagement with caring coaches and mentors. In order for a sport-based youth program to achieve character development, it must be a goal of the program organizers to create an optimal environment for PYD initiatives to take place.

- 2. Seek Community Partnerships.** Community partnerships play an invaluable role in the execution of nonprofit sport-based youth development programs. Since youth-serving nonprofits often operate with smaller budgets than organizations that offer competitive or membership-based sports programs, it is critical that they seek partnerships with other community-based organizations. Partnerships with other national or local nonprofits and CBOs will result in infrastructure support, program expertise, training resources, and a broad range of additional support. For many organizations, partnerships with city entities and parks and recreation departments are a promising way to ensure adequate field space and access to facilities.
- 3. Recruit Quality Coaches.** Since relationships between coaches and program participants are an important determinant of program success, it is essential that organizations recruit quality coaches. While organizations might not have the financial means to hire and pay all coaches or instructional staff, they can still exercise their ability to recruit, vet, train, and retain volunteers with values and skillsets that align with their missions and program goals. Regardless of whether coaches are paid staff or volunteers, it is also critical to provide training and resources. In addition to providing training sessions and materials focused on the game and sport skill development, organizations should prioritize equipping coaches with resources and strategies to address Positive Youth Development. By taking these steps, program organizers will enable coaches to thrive and positively impact the youth they serve.
- 4. Focus on Education.** While some nonprofit organizations may not focus on educational elements within their program curriculum, it is advised that they do so to encourage the holistic development of their youth participants. Sport-based programs have an advantageous platform from which to teach study skills and encourage academic achievement, and these in turn will lead youth on a path to a brighter future. By emphasizing the importance of education, program leaders and staff are setting the scene to encourage the acquisition of additional life skills that can be transferred to other life domains.
- 5. Identify Key Program Outcomes and Engage in Evaluation.** It is recommended that sport-based youth development program organizers identify their program outcomes and come up with indicators of success in order to effectively plan, execute, and evaluate their programs. While all organizations in this study were able

to identify the outcomes they hoped to achieve and define what success meant for them, only four of the five organizations were currently involved in some form of program evaluation. Of those four, only three were on track to completing longitudinal studies or comparing data across multiple years of programming. In order to continuously improve, program organizers should prioritize data-driven results and implement a method of program evaluation that makes sense for the outcomes they seek to achieve, whether that be pre- and post-surveys, interviews, or focus groups.

## **Section 6: Conclusions**

The findings of this research provide insight to how organizers of sport-based youth development programs in the nonprofit space define program success. Additionally, this study has identified key factors of effective sport-based youth development programs, and confirmed that positive relationships between coaches and participants are indicative of program success. This research also found that both community partnerships and corporate partnerships are important indicators of program success, with community partnerships regarded as being the more valuable of the two. Even in the niche environment of professional sport team charities, this study has proven that the literature on sport-based Positive Youth Development holds true.

The resulting model, implications, and recommendations of this study create an opportunity for nonprofit organizations to refine their sport-based youth development programs. Our youth are the leaders of tomorrow, and they deserve opportunities for active engagement and positive development, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. By utilizing the model and recommendations presented here, program leaders will be able to focus on the primary factors contributing to effective sport-based youth development programs in various community settings: character development and life skill acquisition, community partnerships, coach values and skills, identified program outcomes, and a focus on education. By focusing on these key elements, organizational leaders can work towards planning, implementing, and evaluating their programs for continued success. Additionally, program evaluation will lead to continuous growth and keep programs on track to achieving desired outcomes. This research will benefit not only the charitable affiliates of professional sport teams, but any community-based or nonprofit organization using sport as a platform for positive youth development.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

After completion of this research, a few limitations of this study emerged. First, the purposeful selection of organizations to be participants in this study eliminated the opportunity for a large sample. While conducting in-depth interviews with five program leaders provided adequate and insightful data, it would be interesting to compare these five data sets with qualitative data from some of the other 26 Major League Baseball club charities—depending on how many offer sport-based youth development programs.

Additionally, time constraints and geographic location made conducting a large number of interviews quite difficult. Of the organizations in the current study, three of the five interview participants were located in different time zones than the interviewer. Thus, scheduling more interviews with other experts in the field posed a challenge. A lack of time to complete more interviews among participants from the same or other organizations also dictated the number of interviews completed here.

There were also limitations resulting from the type of analysis utilized in this study. Thematic analysis is highly effective in analyzing qualitative data, but many of the results and findings were high level. With more time, and perhaps additional researchers, it would be interesting to dive deeper into the findings and analyze them beyond frequencies and themes of passages. Additionally, having multiple researchers would provide more reliable results and eliminate the bias that comes from having only one individual read and code the interview transcripts.

Finally, an excellent extension of this study would be to collect data from other individuals within the sport-based youth development programs, including participants, coaches and staff, volunteers, and families or guardians. It would be valuable to bring in more perspectives within each individual program, and to see what types of commonalities emerge across groups of beneficiaries, instructors, and families. A study that incorporates additional perspectives would also reflect the need for nonprofit youth program providers to be familiar with the communities they serve, as each community has diverse needs.

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## Appendix: Interview Questionnaire

### Sport-based Youth Development Interview Questions Major League Baseball Clubs & Club Charities Spring 2019

#### Introductory Questions

1. Name
2. Title
3. Organization
  - What is the association with team foundation/fund?
  - Where does the budget fit in?

#### Program Focus

4. What type of sport-based youth programming does your organization offer?
  - In-school programming
  - After-school programming
  - Weekend and/or extracurricular programming (outside of school facilities)
    - i. Fall
    - ii. Winter
    - iii. Spring
  - Summer programming
5. What is your target demographic?
  - Low-income communities
  - High-crime communities
  - Urban communities
  - Minority communities
  - Girls
  - Other—please explain
6. What are the main areas of focus of your programs?
  - Sport skill development
  - Health (nutrition and/or physical activity)

- Literacy
  - STEM/STEAM
  - Arts
  - Scholarship
  - Violence prevention/anti-bullying initiatives
  - Life skills/character development
  - Other—please explain
7. If your program focuses on character development, what character traits does your program seek to develop or nurture?
8. Does your organization have key virtues, core values, or pillars that guide your program? (For example, the YMCA has four core values: Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility).
9. How many participants does your program serve annually?
- How is that divided across programs, if more than one?
10. What age range does your program serve?
11. Does your program offer gender-inclusive or gender-specific programs? Please explain.

### Program Execution

12. Who **primarily leads** programming at the participant level?
- Paid coaches/staff (employees of your organization)
  - Paid coaches/staff (employees of a partner organization)
  - Volunteer coaches/staff
  - Interns
  - Other—please explain
13. How are coaches/staff/volunteers trained for their roles within the program?
- For training on topics other than baseball/softball skill acquisition:*
- Is there an emphasis on introducing topics to the kids?
  - Is there an emphasis on debriefing or recapping lessons learned?
14. What is the time commitment for coaches/staff/volunteers?



15. What qualities, values, or skills are most important in coaches/staff/volunteers?

- Do you think that relationships between participants and coaches/staff/volunteers important for the success of the program?

16. How many times per week do participants meet for scheduled programming?

17. Do participants pay registration fees to participate in your program?

### **Organizational Capacity**

18. Does your organization have its own facilities for your program? Please explain.

19. Do you believe that your organization is adequately staffed to carry out your program? Please explain.

20. Does your organization have important partnerships with community organizations? Please explain.

21. Does your organization have key corporate partnerships? Please explain.

22. What is MLB's role in your organization's program?

### **Program Evaluation**

23. What key outcomes does your program seek to achieve?

24. How do you measure the success of your program?

25. What metrics are tracked for program evaluation?

### **Author's Bio**

Hayley Walker is a development professional who strives to bring respect, compassion, and responsibility to the work that she does every day. She is the Marketing & Development Coordinator at Real Options for City Kids (R.O.C.K.) in San Francisco, California, where she manages fundraising campaigns, corporate events, marketing and outreach strategies, and volunteer activities. She works closely with major donors and corporate partners—including Salesforce, Google, and Adobe—to ensure that the needs of children in Visitacion Valley, one of San Francisco's most vulnerable communities, are met. Her rich experience in nonprofit social media and community outreach enable her to create engaging content and manage R.O.C.K.'s brand consistently and effectively, thus drawing in new volunteers and attracting potential donors.

She is currently pursuing her Master of Nonprofit Administration (MNA) at the University of San Francisco, where she has completed projects with numerous organizations in the Bay Area, including Rockwell Leadership Institute, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, and Inner City Advisors. Her projects and papers for the MNA program reflect her interest in philanthropy, development, environmentalism, and nonprofit leadership.

Hayley has a history of working with nonprofit organizations in the Bay Area and beyond. Before beginning the MNA program at the University of San Francisco, Hayley worked with the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden and the Giants Community Fund. Her passion for service has guided her career path, and she still carves out time to volunteer for causes close to her heart.

Hayley is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the Nu Lambda Mu International Honor Society, and the Pi Gamma Mu International Honor Society of Social Sciences. She graduated from California Polytechnic State University with highest honors and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies.