

Football





fever

Millions of children are participating in organized football programs around the country this fall, savoring memorable experiences and capitalizing on opportunities to gain all sorts of valuable life skills – some of which can only be learned through the unique nature of the sport.

The first time Dennis Neal slipped on a helmet and shoulder pads to participate in a youth football program he quickly fell in love with the sport.

And that passion for the game is still going strong several decades later.

These days Neal coaches a team of 10, 11 and 12-year-olds in the Diablo Valley Youth Football Conference in Castro Valley, Calif., and is committed to providing his players with the same types of special, life-molding experiences that he enjoyed while catching passes and making tackles during his youth playing days.





“What I always loved about playing the sport was it was like a chess game to me,” says Neal, who also doubles as the vice president of the Diablo Valley program, which caters to 3,500 kids ages 7-14 from 18 surrounding cities. “That whole aspect of outthinking your opponent on what you are going to do on each play stayed with me. Plus, my coaches gave encouragement and they weren’t yellors and screamers. They were great mentors.”

Neal’s memories are indicative of how youth football, when coached the right way, can instill key qualities in kids as well as carve out those

teamwork, that everyone must do his or her job for the team to be successful and that every position is important every minute the clock is running. Unlike most other sports, football places importance on every position on every play. Most other sports a child is only involved if they have the ball. In football you have an offensive and a defensive team, which doubles the amount of participants on each team.”

Because so many kids are involved on every play, and have a role to perform whether they are near the ball or not, the importance of teamwork is magnified.

defensive side of the ball and handling their position’s responsibilities in order to help stop the opponent.

“I believe I learned more life skills and created stronger relationships with those I played football with,” says Ransford, who also played baseball and soccer as a youth. “There is a bond that grows on a football team that didn’t grow as strong with the other sports I played.”

Football also offers the opportunity for youngsters to experience being part of the process of striving toward a goal – such as working on a particular pass play that requires good blocking along the offensive line,



“The overall process of learning the skills and development over the course of a season, and the rewards of making plays and stopping plays, are successes the whole team experience together.”

– **Barry Baker, the recreation services director for the City of Savannah (Ga.) Leisure Services**

one-of-a-kind memories that stick with players for a lifetime.

SPECIAL SPORT

Those who coach youth football point to the many unique aspects of the sport that are beneficial to children – many of the benefits that they say simply aren’t a part of participating in a lot of other sports.

“Every spot on the field has a place for the different skills and physical abilities of children,” says Thomas Ransford, past chairman of the Sierra Vista American Youth Football and Cheer program in Fort Huachuca, Ariz. “It teaches

“You’re relying on the 10 other guys that you are playing with,” Neal says. “So you have that camaraderie because you are in the trenches together. That creates something within people.”

It’s a common theme that surfaces anytime the benefits of youth football are dissected: Those who have donned helmets and shoulder pads – and played for coaches who cared more about them than the scoreboard – formed special bonds with their teammates, regardless if it was playing on the offensive unit and working in unison to push the ball down the field or playing on the

good fakes by the running backs, good routes by the wide receivers and a good throw by the quarterback in order to be successful. When everyone is in sync and all their hard work pays off the group reaps the benefits together.

“Football is an exciting game to play,” says Barry Baker, the recreation services director for the City of Savannah (Ga.) Leisure Services, which has more than 1,700 youngsters ages 6-12 in its youth football program. “The overall process of learning the skills and development over the course of a season, and the rewards of making plays and

Special Offer For Youth Sport Leaders



- Earn the **CYSA Credential** 
- Become a Leader in Youth Sports
- A Comprehensive Certification Program

- Stay Up To Date With Current Trends
- Earn Continuing Education Units
- Network With Peers



San Diego, California
December 1-4, 2010

Register Online Now at NAYS.ORG or Call 1-800-688-KIDS



Co-Locating with The Athletic Business Conference Allows All NAYS Attendees Full Access To AB Events, Including Sessions, The Expo and Reception, As Well As All NAYS Sessions, Awards Presentations And Much More!

Sponsors



Nationwide®
On Your Side





INJURY RISK

Of course, any discussion on youth football wouldn't be complete without addressing injuries. Since young bodies collide into one another on every snap, participating in youth football is oftentimes associated with an increased risk of injury, yet that doesn't appear to be the case.

A youth football study conducted by the Mayo Clinic found that most injuries that occurred were mild, that no significant correlation exists between body weight and injury and that the risk of injury in youth football does not appear greater than the risk associated with other recreational or competitive sports.

"Our analysis showed that youth football injuries are uncommon," says Dr. Michael J. Stuart, a Mayo Clinic orthopedic surgeon and the principal author of the study.

Stuart and his colleagues studied 915 players aged 9 to 13 who participated on 42 football teams in the fall of 1997. Injury incidence, prevalence and severity were calculated for each grade level and player position. Additional

"A lot of things we have done through NAYS have helped us out a lot. When I meet with parents they like to hear that we are not just throwing people out, that they are getting training and everything is being done to help the kids."

– Dennis Neal, vice president of the Diablo Valley Youth Football Conference

stopping plays, are successes the whole team experience together."

The more tools and resources volunteer coaches have at their disposal, and the better they are able to keep their roles in perspective, the greater impact they'll have on their players and the more success they will have helping their players develop into well-rounded individuals.

Through the National Alliance for Youth Sports' new partnership with Sportskool, NYSCA coaches now have online access to its ex-

tensive library of drills and skills (*see NEW NYSCA member benefit: Access to Sportskool's skills and drills online library*) that can be used to upgrade practices, improve coaching techniques and boost players' skill development.

"A lot of things we have done through NAYS have helped us out a lot," Neal says. "When I meet with parents they like to hear that we are not just throwing people out, that they are getting training and everything is being done to help the kids."

analysis examined the number of injuries according to body weight.

Analysis of body weight indicated that lighter players were not at increased risk for injury, and in fact heavier players had a slightly higher prevalence of injury. Running backs are at greater risk when compared with other football positions, the researchers reported.

The study's authors also said risk increases with level of play and player age. Older players in the higher grades are more susceptible to injuries. The risk of injury for an

eighth-grade player was four times greater than the risk of injury for a fourth-grade player.

“Unless parents wrap their kids in bubble wrap kids are going to experience injuries being kids,” Ransford says.

He pointed out that last year the Sierra Vista American Youth Football and Cheer program had three kids break bones in activities other than playing football between the sign-up day and the first practice while only one player broke a bone among 400 participants during its three-month season.

Neal encourages parents who are interested in signing their child up for the Diablo Valley Youth Football Conference program to bring their youngster out – a year ahead of time.

“I tell all parents that they need to bring their child out a year before they begin playing to watch what we do at practices and how we get the kids’ bodies conditioned and ready to play,” he says. “A lot of parents come to games and see the finished product, but they are not there during August when we are conditioning and doing exercises.”

Coaches in the program are also required to go through first aid and CPR training, another step to ensure the safety and well-being of players.

READY...SET...HUT!

It’s the inescapable signal that fall has arrived – the crackling of pads as youngsters race up and down the field making tackles, catching passes and scoring touchdowns.

Millions of children once again are participating in youth football programs across the country and if they’re fortunate enough to play for caring coaches the experience will be rewarding and positive and one they will look back on for years to come.

“I’ve coached people 30 years ago who now have their own kids playing who still remember games and will come up to me to talk about them,” says Neal.

That’s the power of youth football. 

NEW NYSCA member benefit: Access to Sportskool’s skills and drills online library

NYSCA coaches now have access to the insights of some of the biggest names in sports, thanks to the partnership between the National Alliance for Youth Sports and Sportskool.

By logging in with their Member ID and password at www.nays.org and then clicking on *Skills and Drills*, NYSCA coaches can view Sportskool’s extensive library of drills and skills covering football, baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, lacrosse, cheerleading and hockey.

Football coaches can get tips and coaching instruction on teaching proper tackling techniques from former NFL All-Pro linebacker Stephen Boyd, as well as insight from Heisman Trophy winner Doug Flutie on excelling at the quarterback position. The football section also features video clips covering pass receiving, blocking and running.

The clips, which range from a couple minutes to 15 minutes in length, include coaching instruction and drills that can be used to help youngsters gain a better understanding of how to use the proper technique.

The following is a glimpse of some of the other clips that are available for different sports:

- ▶ **Baseball** – Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn covers hitting, bunting and infield and outfield play.
- ▶ **Basketball** – NBA legend Bill Walton teaches the basics of offense, defense, shooting and rebounding, and offers up some great drills to help youngsters strengthen those areas of their game.
- ▶ **Soccer** – U.S. Olympian Mia Hamm shares her knowledge on many key aspects of soccer, including shooting, delivering and receiving passes, as well as how to enhance players’ footwork to make them more effective both on offense and defense.
- ▶ **Softball** – Team USA coach Mike Candrea discusses coaching techniques for teaching the skills of hitting, throwing, fielding and base running.
- ▶ **Volleyball** – U.S. Olympic gold medalist Misty May covers serving, passing, attacking, blocking and defense.
- ▶ **Hockey** – Stanley Cup winners Kris Draper and Adam Graves offer their insights on teaching puck handling, shooting and delivering and receiving checks.
- ▶ **Lacrosse** – Three-time All-American Jesse Hubbard and Major League Lacrosse MVP Jay Jalbert cover basic stick work, shooting, dodging, ball control and playing defense.
- ▶ **Cheerleading** – The world renowned Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders are featured in these clips.