

In January of 1996, a team of evaluation specialists at the University of Illinois was contracted to conduct an evaluation study of the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP). Originally designed as a three year study with three strands of concentration, work was terminated after the first year. This report represents the team's findings of the quality of NYSP activities, organization, and accomplishments.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The place of sports in the lives of young boys and girls is significant. And the privileges of good coaching and of teachings about the relationships among sports and fitness and academic achievement are inadequately extended to low income families. The need for sports opportunities, both organized and self-developing, is widely recognized. For 27 years, the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) has addressed this need.

The NYSP is a partnership between colleges and universities, the federal government, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) formed to offer underprivileged youngsters (aged 10-16) five weeks of sports, physical fitness, and educational instruction during the summer months. The program employs a local staff of instructors, aides, and support people and serves as a link between the college campus and the local community. Further, the program offers medical screenings and referrals and USDA-approved meals for the participants as part of its offerings.

During the summer of 1996, NYSP had a program at Altavista University¹ (presented as a case in chapter 2) and 169 other college campuses nationwide, serving over 66,000 youngsters. After 27 summers, NYSP is a mature, well-established program steeped in its own history and tradition, guided by experienced, long-time NYSP administrators and advisors. The program has enjoyed relatively secure federal funding and strong support from its local communities. Its mission, program objectives, and operational Guidelines have remained essentially unchanged since its inception. Looking to the

¹By original agreement, all local sites have been anonymized although NYSP administrators know all or almost all the sites we studied.

future, the program's leaders are currently engaged in a strategic planning effort and in creating a new annual report to better communicate the program's features to external audiences and potential funders. New pilot programs for older participants, streamlined procedures for selecting exemplary local projects for national recognition, and a National Workshop agenda organized around the themes of team building and communication are some of the current efforts toward internal strengthening and improvement. Also in 1996, NCAA contracted with the University of Illinois to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of NYSP's purposes, procedures, personnel and products.

This Illinois study was designed to produce deep understandings of strengths and weaknesses, benefits and tradeoffs, of this large and complex program. This report is intended to be a document for study as much as a presentation of information. The three separate but interlocking strands of the Illinois evaluation study were:

- activities of local projects as they adhere to NYSP standards and Guidelines, yet adapt to accommodate local needs and constraints;
- the characteristics and perceptions of the youth who participate in these programs; and
- issues of the national program itself and the national policy implications that emerge from the study's findings.

In this introduction, we describe the basic structure and features of the national program, discuss some history, explain the design and methods of the evaluation study, and present the organization of the remainder of the report.

Objectives of the National Youth Sports Program

In 1969, the federal government, the NCAA, and 100 of its member institutions formed a partnership to offer a "heartfelt response" and positive alternative to the social unrest and violence in the streets of the nation's cities. This initial partnership, promoted as "one of the most ambitious and significant programs ever undertaken by NCAA and its member

institutions" (*NCAA News*, February, 1969), has survived--flourished, in fact--for nearly three decades.

The mission of the program, "to provide important life experiences to young people living in areas of urban or rural poverty," is fleshed out by five broad objectives:

- To expand opportunities for youth from low income families to benefit from sports-skill instruction, engage in sports competition, and improve their physical fitness.
- To help young people acquire good health practices, to help them become better citizens, and to acquaint them with career and educational opportunities by utilizing the personnel and facilities of institutions of higher education.
- To enable institutions and their personnel to participate more fully in community life and in the solution of community problems.
- To provide a combination of employment and on-the-job training in sports instruction and administration.
- To serve disadvantaged areas in the major metropolitan centers of the United States and other areas of need, within the limits of program resources.

Each of these objectives is operationalized by program features that form the basic structure and essential character of NYSP.

One distinguishing feature of NYSP is its location on college and university campuses. Utilizing the personnel and facilities of higher education introduces students to a different environment--one with "high quality" resources and relatively free from threat and danger. They have opportunity to see the institution from the inside, to walk the halls, to play on the football field, swim in the pools, shoot baskets in the gym. They are surrounded by people who have worked to be there and are enjoying real privileges--student athletes, coaches, the college kids they pass in the hallways. This glimpse at another world is part of the plan to encourage youth to aspire beyond their current school life. The choice of college campuses as the site for the program also has a practical side. Only colleges and universities

are likely to have the facilities available during the summer months to accommodate sports instruction for large numbers of youth.

The primary feature of NYSP is, of course, the sports. It is seen as the magnet, the draw, to entice the youth to enter this other world and benefit from its lessons. Initially, the emphasis on sports skill instruction and competition did point to objectives of improved physical fitness and of improving the level of sports development of the nation's youth. Some institutions continue to place high value on the development of sports skills; increasingly, others see sports as only the vehicle for teaching and modeling broader life skills.

NYSP has never been sports alone. Even at its inception, there was a "brief educational component" devoted to "employment, study, and career opportunities." Over the years, this component has expanded and matured to include specific topics related to nutrition, hygiene, career awareness, drug and alcohol prevention education, and, at some sites, mathematics and science education. Additional services to youth in the form of medical examinations and USDA approved meals extend the program's reach beyond sports instruction to broader goals of wellness and physical fitness.

A requirement of a minimum average daily attendance of 200 youngsters has been in place since the beginning of the program. Guidelines stipulate the instructor-student ratio (currently 20:1) and the services to be provided. NYSP serves as a summer employer and, when the staff members are local school personnel or older youth from the community, adds something to the number of jobs available during the summer months. For many interested in careers in sports or working with young people, these summer staffing experiences are worthwhile.

The target population also has remained constant. Founded in response to social need, NYSP has retained its commitment to the youth of low income families. The program requirement that a site recruit from an area that is 90% economically disadvantaged (according to acceptable criteria, validated by a local community action agency) was formalized in the legislation attaching the program to community service programs.

Local institutions of higher education work with community agencies to recruit the participants. They open their doors to them for five not-entirely-convenient weeks. In some cases, they are known in the local community as the sponsor of this program. NYSP provides public relations opportunities and also a chance to "give back" to the local community. As such, it provides one instance of increased communication between each institution of higher learning and the larger community within which it resides.

The organizational structure of the program is well established. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has always been the sponsoring agency. Core funds for the program are provided federally, specifically (since about 1980) from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, at approximately \$12 million per year; NCAA contributes administrative costs; local institutions are required to contribute or solicit from local sources at least 20% of the operating costs, in addition to donating facilities and administrator time. The National Youth Sports Program Fund is the actual recipient of federal funds and the managing body. The Youth Programs Advisory Committee, a committee of the NCAA, serves as an oversight and authorizing body for the program. The national program is currently managed by two staff members at the NCAA headquarters in Overland Park, Kansas. A team of internal Evaluators, led by a Chief Evaluator who also serves as a liaison with the NYSP National Office and the Advisory Committee, are the central means for monitoring compliance with the Guidelines, a published set of procedures and criteria that must be followed at each site if NYSP funding is to be maintained.

NYSP is described in program materials as a "customized program with national accountability," or a juxtaposition of diversity (serving local needs) and standardization (meeting nationally set criteria). The program's mechanism of internal monitoring and accountability is an important and well-publicized feature. This mechanism consists of the Guidelines on the one hand and the internal Evaluators on the other. The 1996 Guidelines consist of 94 requirements and a set of "enhancements" that represent optional additions to the core program. While the Guidelines are amended slightly each year (usually more by expanding detail and elaborating criteria but sometimes by adding

or deleting a full item), they are basically reflective of the 1969 Guidelines. These are thought of as the "minimum requirements" for the program to comply with, and cover topics ranging from sports to personnel to community participation.

Monitoring each local project's compliance with these Guidelines is the job of the Evaluators, experienced former NYSP project staff members who constitute a team that reports to the National Office through the Chief Evaluator. For a day, Evaluators visit each site during the summer operation and rate the project on each of the Guidelines. They also write narrative reports and provide oral accounts of their visits at meetings with representatives of the Advisory Committee. Based on their ratings, programs become eligible for national recognition or subject to sanctions, including probation and, eventually, expulsion.

History

Every once in a while, people are really able to think about an intervention and design it [from the beginning] with all the right pieces. And I think they did it.

This quote from a federal government official captures the spirit of the historical development of the National Youth Sports Program. Program features, goals, and operational Guidelines have changed very little, and it is the feeling of most of the people we talked with that this constancy and stability is good--that the essential features or "pillars" erected in the first year of the program have stood the test of time and are still solid foundation for the kind of program NYSP delivers to the nation's underprivileged youth.

The NCAA established a partnership with the President's Council on Physical Fitness to offer "summer sports competition and instruction to youngsters of both sexes, ages 12 through 18, in poverty areas of the nation's larger cities through the use of the exceptional facilities and highly trained personnel of the NCAA's

member institutions²" (*NCAA News*, February, 1969). Then-HEW Secretary Robert H. Finch described the goal of the program as "help[ing] equip inner-city youth with new skills and with a broader perspective on the employment and educational opportunities available to them" (*NCAA News*, June, 1970). The basic features of the program put in place to accomplish this goal were: sports instruction and competition coupled with classes in drug and health education and career awareness; medical exams; nutrition (provision of meals); and, exposure to the college/university environment, students, and personnel. These essential elements of the program, along with operational guidelines such as the length of time (24-25 days), number of participants (average daily attendance of 200 or more), and targeted group (90% low income participants) have remained unchanged.

The initial pilot effort in 1968 was expanded to 100 institutions in 54 cities in 1969, enrolling 43,020 youths. Federal support was \$3 million, with NCAA contributing over \$60,000 for "staffing and servicing," and member institutions contributing personnel, facilities, and other resources (combined NCAA and institutional contributions were estimated at \$2 million).

In a 1970 news conference announcing the continuation of the program, spokesman James Lovell contrasted the program with more "typical sports programs" in which athletes visit the ghetto to sign autographs but change nothing. NYSP he said, "could do a lot to improve the lives of our needy young people, and it could do a lot to improve our sports development programs. . . . We think this is the only way you can help and change youngsters--by giving them the same kind of opportunities and attention most of us are able to provide for our children through our own means" (*NCAA News*, June, 1970).

While program goals and features have remained stable, internal leadership and administrative changes have marked specific eras in the program. The first 14 years of the program, under James Wilkinson's direction, apparently faced difficult times. As reported by Jack Falla (1981) in *NCAA: The Voice of*

²The program was originally called National Summer Youth Sports Program (NSYSP), but the "summer" was dropped in 1976; the ages of eligibility changed fairly early to ages 10 to 16.

College Sports, federal support for the program was tenuous: "But in spite of the NYSP's acknowledged efficiency and success, as well as the fact that half of the program's support is in non-federal contributions and only two percent of the Federal funding goes for administrative expenses, the directors of athletics and other officials of several NCAA member institutions nevertheless find themselves involved in several lobbying efforts to preserve Federal funding. Five times, from 1971 to 1981, the colleges participating in the NYSP successfully persuaded Congress to maintain its financial support of the program" (p. 209-210).

In 1982, several changes occurred to redirect the future of the program. Ruth Berkey, a member of the NCAA staff,³ assumed supervisory leadership of the program and began a number of changes. One NYSP observer called the collection of changes "unbelievable, the kinds of things she put in place." Berkey brought a system of financial accountability and responsibility to program management. She is credited with the present system of financial audits. She is also credited with major changes in the internal monitoring system, specifically the role of the NYSP Evaluators. The earlier era, it is often said, was marked by tension in the relationship between the Evaluators and the local project staff. Berkey put in place a Chief Evaluator who began encouraging and enforcing a new approach to Evaluator visits. The emphasis remained on monitoring project compliance, but the tone became more collegial.

At the federal level, the sponsorship of the program also changed. With the closing of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the original funding agency, the sponsorship of the program was shifted to the Department of Health and Human Services, specifically to the Office of Community Services. OCS did institute two requirements for continued sponsorship. First, it became a requirement that at least 20% of the local funding was provided by local institutions and agencies. Prior to this, matching funds (or in-kind services) were voluntary.⁴ The second requirement was increasing the staff-participant ratio from 15:1 to 20:1, in order to serve more participants for the same amount of

³Berkey had been appointed in 1981 as NCAA's first Director of Woman's Championships (Fall, 1981).

⁴Some sites were already exceeding the 20% recommendation. Current NYSP Fact Sheets indicate that donors and local agencies currently provide 1/3 to 1/2 of the operating budgets of local programs, in cash contributions or in-kind services.

money. Neither of these requirements represented major programmatic changes for NYSP and were readily accepted.

The third "period" in NYSP's history began with Ed Thiebe's assumption of leadership in 1989. Within NCAA, he was named Director of Youth Programs. With the accountability, management, and federal funding issues relatively stable, management attention "moved on" into substantive issues. Several pilot efforts over the past 10 years have been started in various areas of the program: For example, initiatives in sports areas (such as a collaboration with professional tennis players), academic areas (a pilot project in mathematics and science education), gender issues (special program for girls), and age issues (with a new pilot planned for older youth). Thiebe is credited with improvements in program functioning, such as new Evaluator-project relationships, "forward thinking" that keeps NYSP advancing.

Legislation and Funding

The reauthorizing legislation for NYSP was Section 681 of the Community Services Block Grant Act of 1981, as amended (P.L. 97-35). This legislation provided for support of ongoing activities of national or regional significance, including special emphases on community development programs, rural development, assistance for migrants and seasonal farm workers, and, specifically, "national or regional programs designed to provide recreational activities for low-income youth." NYSP fits under this final clause, embedded in the broader community service legislation. Thus the funding is part of the 9% discretionary funds for community development specified in the Block Grant. This has become significant because some community action agencies have viewed the funding of NYSP as from "their funds" and, from time to time, there are discussions at OCS as to whether the program should continue to be funded out of these funds. However, there has been no recent federal agency request for a formal assessment or review of the program.

Currently, the program is supported annually with approximately \$12 million in federal funds, authorized partly from the Community Services Block Grant and partly from Section 3521 of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The program enjoys

strong support from local communities across the country, and local projects "do a stellar job" of making sure their local Congressional representatives are aware of the program. NCAA employs a strong "educational" agent to inform Congress of the benefits of its programs, including NYSP. Given the local support, the Congressional support, and the relatively small federal obligation, NYSP appears in no known danger of loss of federal funds.

External Evaluations

Over the past 27 years, the program has expanded to include more sites and is said to have become more sophisticated in its implementation, but it is essentially the same greatly needed program that it was in 1969. There are institutions, and personnel, who have been involved in the program since its inception, and a substantial number of local project personnel and the program staff (including Evaluators) who have been with the program for more than a decade. The longevity of senior project staff members and of Evaluators speaks to their commitment to the program's goals. It implies a deep knowledge about the program's aims and procedures (e.g., the Guidelines) and a familiarity with other project personnel. It may also imply a sense of complacency or "we've always done it this way" that limits self-critique, disallows a different perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the program and masks possible directions for improvement. The truth probably is some of both. Clearly it is a program of stability and tradition.

Perhaps due to the strong internal system for monitoring compliance, there have been few calls for external review of the program. In fact, we can uncover only two previous external reviews of NYSP in its 27 years. Conducted in 1982 by the Inspector General's Office by request from the new federal sponsoring agency, the IGO report apparently was conducted during a one month period. The report states that there were no formal observations of program activity, as the study took place during the spring. The Final Report from the IGO is dated April 23, 1982, just prior to the funding cycle for the next year. A "service delivery assessment" was conducted on 47 NYSP (current and former) sites across the country, with 169 face-to-face or telephone interviews with Project Administrators, project staff

members, participants, parents, and community representatives. The resulting report was extremely positive. While offering some suggestions on re-directing funds to increase the number of participants, the report did not identify any problem areas within the program and concluded that support should continue, and that NCAA should continue as the sole source grantee. According to one federal official, this report was crucial to the continuation of NYSP. This was a time in which the program could have "fallen through the cracks," as did many programs previously funded by OEO. Had anything turned up in this assessment, it is likely OCS would have objected to sponsorship, since the program did not really "fit" OCS priorities. However, the program was saved and safely made the leap across federal agencies.

Another review was conducted by the Heritage Foundation in 1980. This review concluded that although the program was not "essential," it did appear to "[make] better use of the taxpayer's money than many of CSA's programs" and should "be retained for the present" (p. 1074).

This current Illinois evaluation study, we are told, was not commissioned in response to a specific problem or need. It is our understanding that it was part of a "forward thinking" NCAA strategy to obtain external validation of the program, for internal use as well as in negotiations with current and prospective funders. We hope that the study will contribute to internal planning and documentation efforts beginning this year (such as the strategic planning process to be undertaken by the Advisory Committee) as well as for continuation of the serious discussions that have long occurred among National Office and local project people.

This Evaluation Study

The Illinois evaluation study was designed as three partially independent strands or foci: the assessment of local project characteristics, the assessment of student characteristics, and the examination of national program issues. Each strand was directed by a senior faculty member at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Lizanne DeStefano, Delwyn Harnisch, Robert Stake, respectively) and each strand had its own data collection and analysis staff. During the year, the principals met

periodically to discuss strategies and linkages among the strands, but data collection and analyses proceeded more or less independently.

According to the original plan, data were to be collected on each strand during each of three years of the study, but to focus primarily on one strand each year. In the first year of the study, the emphasis was to be on student characteristics and the bulk of resources were directed accordingly. The primary method of data collection was by standardized survey administered to student participants, detailing personal characteristics and attitudes towards NYSP, sports, and themselves, with results analyzed quantitatively. Local project descriptions using ethnographic and case study procedures (observations, interviews, etc.) were obtained at a number of sites, to provide baseline data and to formulate issues to be explored in Year II, when local project characteristics were to become the dominant strand. Data and insights relevant to the national program and to policy issues were also collected and reflected upon throughout, but the main effort toward that strand was scheduled in Year III. Overlaying this strategy of staggering study emphases was a plan to follow some students, instructors, and projects longitudinally, over the three years of the study.

To guide the Illinois evaluation team, we created our own Advisory Group, each member providing relevant expertise. The members were Mildred Griggs (Dean of the College of Education, University of Illinois, NCAA faculty representative, vocational educator), Glyn Roberts (sports psychologist, survey researcher, University of Illinois), William Foster (Senior Vice President of the Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse, youth counselor, political analyst), Robert Long (youth leadership specialist, philanthropy and volunteerism program director, Kellogg Foundation), Gordon Hoke (retired athletics trainer, gifted/talented program coordinator, program evaluator), and Don Kirkendall (NYSP Evaluator, kinesecologist, SUNY-Cortland). In addition to critiquing drafts and being available for informal counsel, our Advisory Group met twice, in the spring and fall of 1996.

During 1996, site selection for both survey and observation was "purposive." Working with the NYSP National Office, we identified 20+ sites, balanced to represent the national scope of

the program, emphasizing sites functioning well but including a few with large problems. Attempts were made to be non-intrusive. For initial explanation and access, Don Kirkendall, a member of the Illinois Advisory Group, served initially as liaison between the team and the sites.

We of the Illinois evaluation team concentrated on studying the quality of NYSP, local and national. In evaluation, unlike ordinary research, the priority is not on information gathering or generalization of program relationships but on coming to know the merit of the particular program, policy or product. Practical utilization of the findings and the summaries of merit are expected, with the assumption that use will be adapted to the circumstances of each reader, be they Project Administrator, Advisory Committee member, NCAA official, or whomever. Specific research questions guiding data collection strategies at the outset of the study included the following:

Local project strand. Scheduled for special emphasis in Year II, this strand focused on describing the characteristics of local projects, investigating relationships between program characteristics and student outcomes, and portraying the role that these projects play within the university and the broader community. To get it started, extended site visits were conducted on eight campuses, with five of the write-ups appearing in this final report. Special attention was given to exploring the range of project enhancements (beyond the minimum requirement of the Guidelines), such as incorporation of academic components in mathematics and science. Six major evaluation questions were under initial consideration:

- What are the nature and quality of student experiences in local projects?
- What relationships are to be found between program characteristics and student characteristics?
- In what ways does the project work at increasing staff members' competence, confidence, and commitment?
- What role do local NYSP programs play within the university and the broader community?

- Beyond the minimum requirements of NYSP Guidelines, what enhancements are found and how do these enhancements impact students, staff, and the community?
- Does the community recognize the project as an asset for youth development?

Student characteristics strand. This part of the evaluation focused on individuals in the classrooms and activity spaces, particularly the students selected for NYSP who study, interact competitively, and play under the supervision of an instructor/coach in a classroom, arena, specialized setting. Three broad concerns were considered in the student strand: to examine whether instruction at the national program is consistent with the formally stated objectives of NYSP; to describe certain motivational characteristics of the students participating in the NYSP programs across the country; and to investigate the extent to which children perceived the program as a "caring community" and the benefits experienced during participation in activities. Examples of specific questions guiding the data collection:

- What affective changes in youth are occurring during participation in the program?
- To what extent is their self-esteem maturing?
- When children engage in NYSP sport activities do they tend to focus on learning skills or do they prefer to show others they are "the best?" And how do they see NYSP affecting the choice?
- What beliefs do they hold regarding the causes of success in sport? Do they believe they can be successful through hard work or do they view genetic ability as the determining cause of sport accomplishment?

Comparisons were made with regard to participant age and gender and the number of years the participant had been in the program.

Policy study. This strand of the evaluation study was a smaller but equally important part of the whole. Inquiries were oriented to the role of the NCAA and federal sponsors, as well as that of the participating campus Athletic Departments. As apparent in the five case studies, attention was given to local management. Leadership at the National Office and through the Advisory Committee was another focus. Examples of issues, in addition to the five NYSP objectives listed earlier, included:

- Are these sports and personal development activities an essential need of participating youngsters?
- Is the recruitment of youth for participation well thought out and well carried out? Are the most appropriate children found?
- Is the collective sponsorship of this program a real and vital partnership?
- Are local project “enhancements” consistent with the long term aims of the program?

Termination of the evaluation study. Although the evaluation work was initially expected to continue over a three year period, partly to allow multiple year follow-up data to be gathered, the project was terminated after the first year. The one year contract between NCAA and the University of Illinois beginning February 1, 1996 gave either party the option of terminating after the first year. Upon receiving a draft of the report of first year work, the NYSP Advisory Committee indicated that the project should not be continued.

As described in chapter 7, when three members of the evaluation team met in Kansas City in October for its first observation of the Advisory Committee at work, several members of that committee indicated that they were not satisfied with the work and that a different kind of study would be needed if there were to be a second year. In addition to concern about fieldwork methods used and questionnaire content, they objected to lack of consultation with them as to information needed.⁵ In outlining

⁵ Further details are available toward the end of chapter 7.

prospective work for the second year, we indicated our interest was only in continuing a program evaluation study in which the evaluators had final responsibility as to data to collect, research questions and sites to be observed. Following an Advisory Committee meeting early in January, 1997, to review the prospectus and draft report, Ed Thiebe passed the word to us that a continuation contract would not be offered. To prepare this final report, we asked for a six month no-cost contract extension and it was granted.

Organization of This Report

This report follows the three strands of the evaluation design. In chapter 3, Lizanne DeStefano and her assistants present findings on quality of operation of local projects. Also in chapter 3, Rita Davis presents a brief review of problems and accomplishments of the summer of 1996 as seen by the Activity Directors. In chapter 5, Delwyn Harnisch and his research assistants present the student characteristics strand. Findings were based on surveys and connections drawn between student responses and the larger questions of program quality. In chapter 7, Robert Stake and Kathryn Sloane provide a detailed list of emerging issues from the vantage of the national program, with special attention to NYSP internal evaluation. The even number chapters are case studies of local programs. Chapter 9 is an Executive Summary with recommendations.