

Session 2: Program Environments

Psychological Environment, Health, and Safety in Youth Sport Programs



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DEFINING QUALITY YOUTH SPORTS ENVIRONMENTS:

A Conceptual Framework and Examples from the Field

Slam Dunks of Fun!

Intentionally Shaping Quality Youth Sports Environments

A Basketball Case Study from the YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit

Jacqueline Kippen
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YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit



Program Overview

How can we intentionally design the youth sports experience around the child?

Our Recreational Basketball League became one example of putting this approach into practice.

- Intra Y basketball league
- Volunteer coaches
- YMCA-trained referees
- Family-centered philosophy
- Developmentally focused
- Growing participation and strong family satisfaction

Our Design Philosophy

Children experience the environment our organizational systems create.



Framework Dimension: Psychological Environment

Intentionally designed through organizational systems

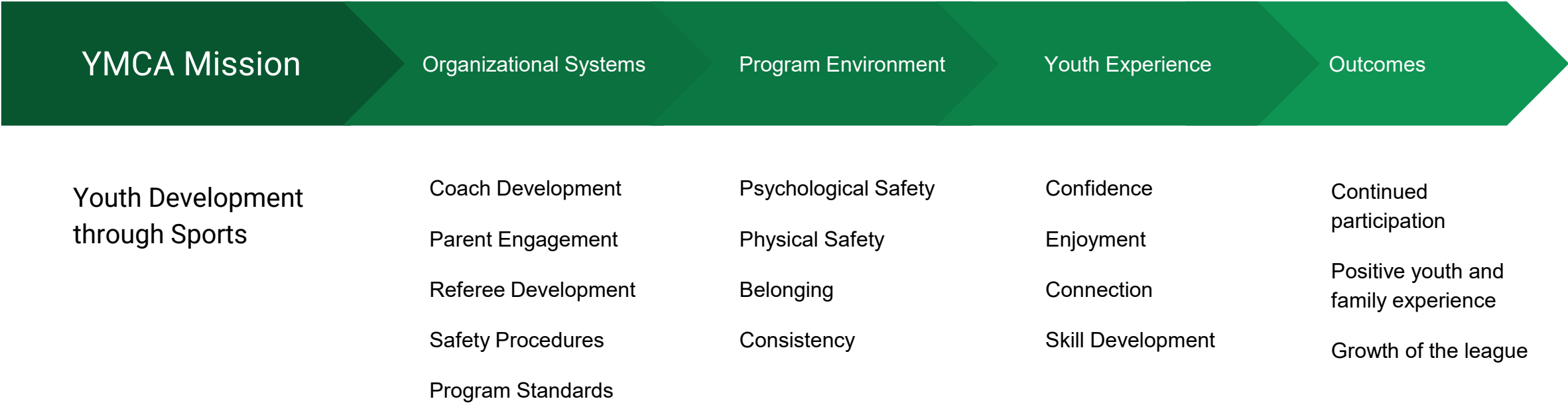
Child Experience	Organizational System	NCCOR Connection
I feel supported	Coach onboarding and ongoing development	Coach conduct & motivational climate
I feel confident	Standardized lesson plans and coaching resources	Athlete-centered coaching
I belong	Equal participation philosophy	Sense of belonging
Adults encourage me	Parent engagement system (code of conduct, preseason orientation, weekly communication)	Organizational climate
The game feels fair	YMCA referee development	Athlete-centered communication

Framework Dimension: Health and Safety

Children experience safety as an environment—not as a checklist.

Organizational System	NCCOR Framework Connection	Why It Matters
Screening, background checks and child abuse prevention training	Screening and abuse prevention	Trusted adults
Coach education	Injury prevention and supervision	Safer instruction
Referee development	Safe play and behavior expectations	Consistent game management
Controlled access and participant check-in	Safety protocols	Secure environment
Staff supervision and incident response	Boundary maintenance	Consistent response

Bringing it all together: Framework in Action



In Real Life (IRL)

"The basketball program is great for children. It is very well organized, and **all the kids have good sportsmanship.**"



"The coaches were great and taught my boys skills, and they grew during the 8 weeks. "

"Good vibes and good people, the toddler basketball coach is great. "



Lessons Learned

We've Learned...

- Quality cannot depend on individual coaches.
- Parents are part of the youth sports environment.
- Consistency is a strategic decision.

We Continue To...

- Create systems that make every coach more successful.
- Invest in parent engagement, not just parent communication.
- Standardize expectations, resources, and support across every location.

Takeaways

Quality youth sports environments begin before the first practice. Organizational systems shape the psychological and physical environment children experience.	Operational excellence is youth development work. Coach training, referee development, parent engagement, and safety procedures all contribute to child outcomes.	The NCCOR framework provides a common language for defining quality. Our experience demonstrates how those concepts can be intentionally operationalized within a community-based recreation program.
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Thank You!



DEFINING QUALITY YOUTH SPORTS ENVIRONMENTS:

A Conceptual Framework and Examples from the Field

Rise Above

Jaci McCormack
Co-founder/CEO
Rise Above



Program Overview

- Mission: To educate and empower Native American youth using sport as a modality
- Seattle-based 501c3 NPO founded in 2015
- Population served
 - Native American youth 5–18 (priority) and at-risk indigenous youth
 - Underserved communities of color
 - 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State
- Program
 - Evidence-based Behavior Image Model (BIM)
 - Culturally tailored interventions that incorporate sports/mentoring to promote healthy behaviors



Framework Dimension: Psychological Environment



Framework Dimension: Health and Safety



Key Takeaways & Recommendations





jr. NBA    

Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA Basketball Clinic

Saturday, July 28 @ 3:00 - 4:00 PM
Phoenix Convention Center | 100 N 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85004



The Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA and Rise Above invite Native American youth ages 8-15 to participate in this special WNBA All-Star clinic focused on learning the fundamentals!

Qeci'Yew'Yew (Thank You)



DEFINING QUALITY YOUTH SPORTS ENVIRONMENTS:

A Conceptual Framework and Examples from the Field

DC SCORES

Tierra Stewart

Chief Program Officer



Our Mission

DC SCORES empowers youth to lead healthy lives, be engaged students, and have the confidence and character to make a difference in the world.

Program Sites

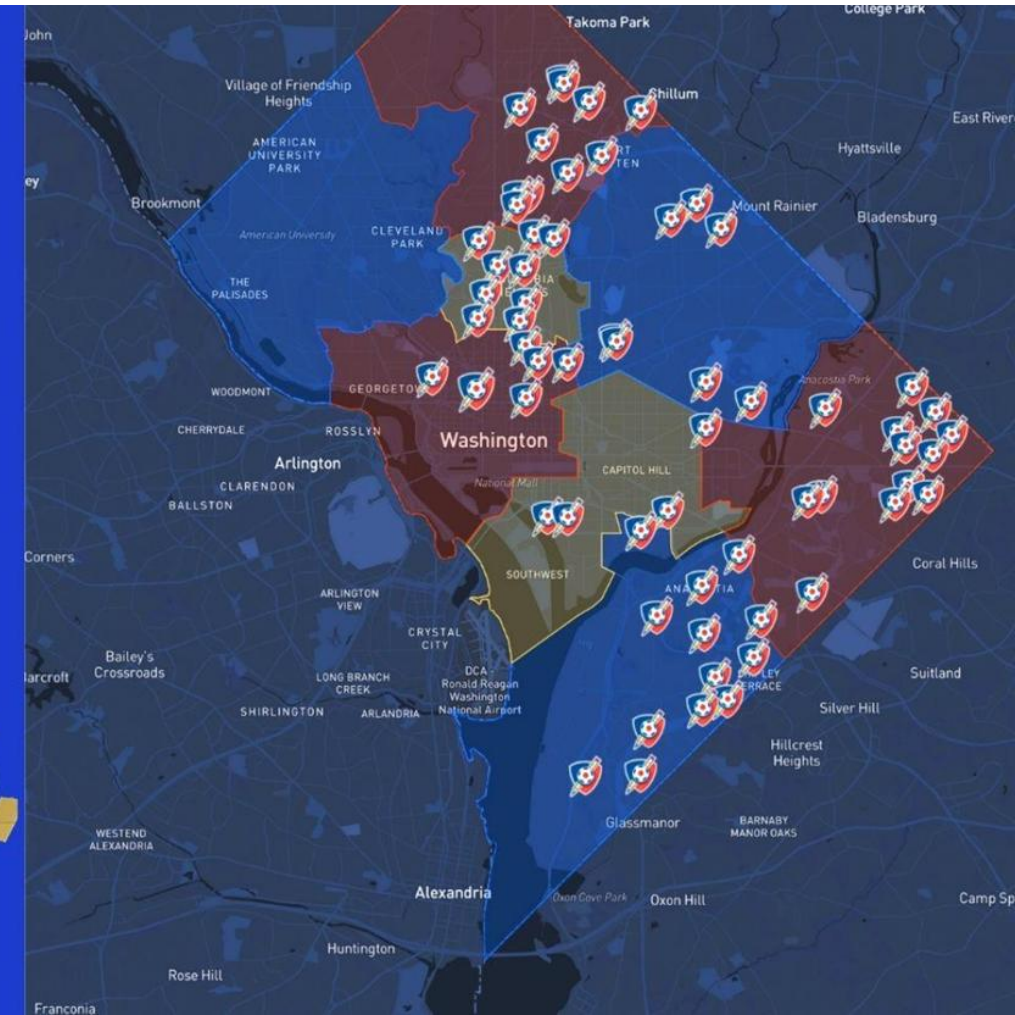
DC SCORES serves 68 public and public charter schools in the District!

3,500 **Poet-Athletes**

300 **Coaches**

28 **Schools on the Waiting List**

Official Community Partners



DC SCORES
has a whole-
child positive
youth
development
model.



Program Model



Soccer

The most popular game in the world teaches kids teamwork, leadership, and commitment. Our year-round program helps level the playing field for youth, and keeps kids healthy and active.



Poetry

One of humanity's oldest forms of self-expression, poetry helps our kids find their voice, and through that find their confidence and a sense of identity. Our Poetry Slam gives our kids a platform to be heard by their community and peers.



Service-Learning

Creating fully-formed citizens starts with teaching our kids to be stewards of their local communities. Our service learning program is led by the poet-athletes, and transforms them into agents of change.

Creating Spaces Where Young People Feel Safe to Be Seen

Framework Dimension: Psychological Environment

Organization

- Whole-child philosophy
- Healing-centered engagement
- Social-emotional learning embedded in every season
- Equity-centered coach education
- Youth voice integrated through poetry and leadership

Facility / Environment

- Welcoming rituals
- Community circles
- Inclusive physical spaces
- Team identity building
- Celebration of every participant

Coach-Athlete Relationship

- Athlete-centered coaching
- Strength-based feedback
- Restorative conflict practices
- Positive coaching language
- Emotional check-ins

Youth Outcomes

Youth report stronger:

- Belonging
- Confidence
- Emotional regulation
- Leadership
- Positive peer relationships

Activity/Tool Spotlight: One of our strongest tools is our SCORES Play Card, which gives every coach and athlete a shared language around our core values. These values become how we teach soccer, resolve conflict, celebrate growth, and define success.

Protecting Young People Means More Than Preventing Injury

Framework Dimension: Health and Safety

Organization

- Comprehensive coach onboarding
- Child protection policies
- Background checks
- SafeSport requirements
- Emergency action plans
- Incident response protocols

Facility

- Site safety assessments
- Hydration protocols
- Heat monitoring
- Equipment inspections
- Emergency communication systems

Coach-Athlete

- Emotional safety
- Trauma-informed coaching
- Fair Play expectations
- Restorative responses

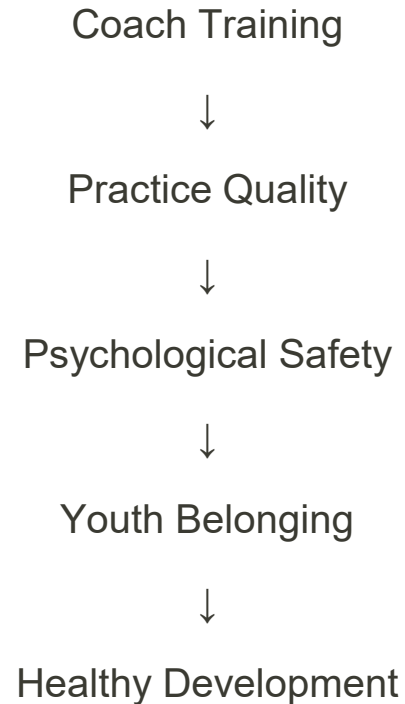
Youth Outcomes

Youth experience:

- Physical safety
- Emotional safety
- Trusted adults
- Healthy relationships
- Confidence asking for help

Activity/Tool Spotlight: Pre-Game Fair Play Facilitator Guide. We recite an interactive fair play circle at the start of all competitions to ensure high-quality game-day environments that center youth experience across DC SCORES. Poet-athletes reflect on three core values: Fair Play, Teamwork, and Self-Awareness, aligning with the youth skills we teach in our programming.

Coach Education Is Our Greatest Investment



Activity/Tool Spotlight: The DC SCORES Community Building Clinic is a coach training and youth engagement experience designed to strengthen team culture before the start of each season. Rather than focusing on soccer skills alone, the clinic introduces coaches and young people to the values, routines, and relationship-building practices that create a positive team environment. Through interactive games, team challenges, reflection activities, and social-emotional learning, participants build trust, establish shared expectations, practice communication, and develop a sense of belonging that serves as the foundation for learning, teamwork, and healthy competition throughout the season.

Key Takeaways & Recommendations

1. Design for belonging before performance by intentional building community.
2. Train coaches as youth development practitioners, not only sport instructors.
3. Measure success beyond wins and losses.
4. Create shared values with youth that guide everyday decisions and that they can reflect on.
5. Build systems that support coaches.

Thank You!

DC SCORES

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