



# sport & trauma

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## PLAYBOOK

**UP2US**  
**SPORTS**

**EDGE / WORK**  
CONSULTING

# sport & trauma partners

For more than 5 years, Up2Us Sports and Edgework Consulting have been working together to leverage the power of sports to help kids heal. Through coach training and program design we're using sports to create safe spaces for kids affected by trauma. Our aim is to create a sports environment that can encourage kids to be physically active, become more comfortable in their bodies, develop competence, and make meaningful connections with caring adults and supportive teammates.



Founded in 2001, Edgework Consulting has been providing cutting edge research, training and program design to leading organizations and institutions around the world. Edgework has been working at the forefront of the sport for social change movement, and specifically the emerging field of sport and trauma for over a decade. At Edgework, we are proud to be a team comprised of mad scientists, entrepreneurs, coaches, artists, competitors and relationship architects who believe real progress is made through collaboration, communication and challenging mindsets.



Established in 2010, Up2Us Sports is a national nonprofit dedicated to inspiring youth to achieve their potential by providing them with coaches trained in positive youth development. The organization does this by identifying, training and supporting coaches in their communities who bring sports-based youth development to the most underserved communities. Up2Us Sports' research, training and on-the-ground initiatives empower sports programs across the country to become a united force for meaningful change. To date, Up2Us Sports has reached more than 290,000 youth by placing nearly 2,100 coaches in underserved urban communities.

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Up2Us Sports and Edgework Consulting are pleased to work with JRI for the 2017 Trauma Center Conference. JRI been at the forefront of creating innovative trauma interventions and were the host of one of the first leagues to use sport as a tool for healing.



Justice Resource Institute (JRI) works in partnership with individuals, families, communities and government to pursue the social justice inherent in opening doors to opportunity and independence. JRI has over 100 programs that serve hundreds of clients in residential settings, thousands more in outpatient or community based services. The leadership we provide in public policy reaches tens of thousands more through our work in HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ services, and trauma informed systems of care. Each program is exceptionally effective and widely known in its field of concentration, and provides services to individuals throughout the United States and abroad. We employ approximately 2500 employees (and counting) in MA, CT and RI, who each individually and collectively strengthen JRI's ability to help our clients live more productive and happier lives.



# Nine Elements of Sport That Can Promote Healing

Sport can be fraught with interactions, experiences and even rules and requirements that could cause re-traumatization and reinforce a young person's emotional dysregulation. However, we have witnessed thousands of coaches and players who have worked together to turn the sport experience into something positive and powerful.

Below are nine "elements" of sport that, when used intentionally, can help transform the sport experience into one in which a young person can heal. The nine elements are the result of extensive research, collaborations between the sport and clinical realms and ongoing youth-facing work in the field. Each element describes a unique and powerful aspect of sport and how it can align with core healing principles and approaches.



## Home Field Advantage

The unique features of sport that can foster safety and security



## Seasons of Play

The structure and schedule of the sport activities that promotes future focus and creates opportunities to reset.



## Competence

Sport skills are physical and growth can be experienced rapidly; skills needed to be successful in sport mirror those needed to heal.



## Physical Activity

Sport requires physical activity; body work is a critical component of success in sport



## Team & Community Focus

Relationships, kinship and the development of identity are central to the sport experience



## Immersive & Engaging

The powerful ways that sport engages a person wholly in the experience and promotes thinking, feeling, acting and being "in the present"



## Organized & Structured

The rules that govern the way a sport is played and the schedule of activities that creates predictability and expectations for behavior



## Decision-Making

The many opportunities in sport for a player to make choices that bear immediate consequences



## Real Stakes

Competition in sport results in "situations that matter", through which participants get to test their ability to respond to stress



# Home Field Advantage

The unique features of a sport experience that can foster safety and security

What are the advantages of playing a home game?

What are the specific elements of the sport experience that create home field advantage?

What kind of benefits could this provide for a player who is anxious or feeling unsafe?

How can we help players apply home field advantage to other parts of their lives?

# Seasons of Play

The structure & schedule of the sport activities that promotes future focus and creates opportunities to reset

What is so powerful about the opportunity to work with the same players for an entire season?

What is so powerful about the opportunity to work with the same players for multiple seasons? How do we link the seasons together?

What can you do at the beginning and end of a season to promote healing?

How do the concepts of seasons of play link to other parts of a young person's life?



# Competence

Sport skills are physical and growth can be experienced rapidly; skills needed to be successful in sport mirror those needed to heal

What is it about competency building in sport that gives it greater potential for healing?

What are some of the key thinking and feeling skills needed to play sports?

What valuable lessons does practicing teach that help with healing??

How can players take the lessons learned from building competency in sport to other parts of their lives?



# Physical Activity

Sport requires physical activity; body work is a critical component of success in sport

How does trauma live inside a person's body?

What are some of the benefits of physical activity?

How can we use sport to help a player get more in tune with the dysregulated parts of their body?

How does getting more in tune with their body translate to other parts of a young person's life?

# Social Connections

Relationships, kinship and the development of identity are central to the sport experience

With whom can a player form positive social connections in a sport experience?

How can sport make the forming of these connections easier?

In what ways does sport help a player achieve and grow more than they could on their own?

How do we help young people leverage the positive connections they are establishing in sport in other parts of their lives?





# Immersive and Engaging

The powerful ways that sport engages a person wholly in the experience and promotes thinking, feeling, acting and being “in the present”

What is it about sport that makes it more immersive and engaging than other experiences?

What are sport’s positive benefits for a player who usually experiences an elevated heart rate?

What are the benefits of being able to “feel free” and “forget challenges” for young people affected by trauma?

How can we help a player shape more immersive and engaging experiences outside of sport?



# Organized and Structured

The rules that govern the way a sport is played and the schedule of activities that creates predictability and expectations for behavior

What are some of the common ways that a sport experience is organized?

Why does a player affected by trauma need this type of structure and order?

The referee is often the “enforcer” of the sport’s structure. How can we ensure that they are part of the healing process?

What can a player take with them to create order and structure in other parts of their lives?

# Decision Making

The many opportunities in sport for a player to make choices that have immediate consequences

Why is it so important that we provide players with chances to make their own choices?

The “feedback loop” on decisions in sport is often immediate. What is the healing benefit of this?

How can we teach decision making strategies inside sport?

How can we help players take their sports-based decision making strategies into other parts of their lives?



## Real Stakes, Real Stress

Competition in sport results in “situations that matter” through which participants get to test their ability to respond to stress

What is at stake for players in sport? Why do so many players get so into the competition?

What could be particularly beneficial for a player affected by trauma to be in a situation that matters?

What parts of sport are particularly useful for helping players reduce the stress if it becomes too much?

How do we help players take the strategies they develop for managing real stakes to other parts of their lives?



## Four Pathways that Promote Healing in Sport

We've identified four core pathways that can be utilized in using sport to promote healing. Depending on your role and the nature of your program's intervention, you can use some or all of these pathways to support players. Each one, on its own, can promote healing through sport, and there are a host of combinations, that when used together, can amplify outcomes.

PATHWAY	DESCRIPTION
<b>Player Development</b>	<p>Working directly with players on what they can actively do to use their sport experience to promote their own healing</p> <p>How it works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly equipping players with skills important in their healing that they can practice in their sport experience</li> <li>• Working through specific scenarios that occur in sport as opportunities to promote healing</li> <li>• Working with players to see the connections between how they develop in sport and what they can apply to their lives</li> </ul>
<b>Coaching</b>	<p>Knowledge and techniques a coach can use that are informed by the clinical and sport world</p> <p>How it works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A coach that understands the impact of trauma has a different mindset about player behavior and potential; uses techniques that promote healing like “coach the bench; praise the play”</li> <li>• A coach embeds rituals and routines that promote greater structure, pro-social connection, regulation and predictability to a player's sport experience</li> </ul>
<b>Training</b>	<p>A specific sequence and methodology of running a sport training session based on key principles/ practices that are trauma-informed</p> <p>How it works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing a variation on a traditional training session design that incorporates trauma-sensitive approaches such as rituals, check-ins, and drills and activities that allow for more choice and breaks and practice managing stress</li> <li>• Placing extra emphasis on transitions into and out of the sport experience as well as the warm-ups and cool-downs</li> </ul>
<b>Competition</b>	<p>The ways that the competition itself (match, tournament, league) is designed (or redesigned) and facilitated to promote healing</p> <p>How it works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesigning elements of the competition to be more trauma-sensitive, including the rules of the game, the rules of the league, equipment, playing space, and roles</li> <li>• Leveraging the opportunity to work with players in a real stress real stakes situation to develop coping and regulation skills</li> </ul>

# Player Development

Player development describes the ways in which a trusted adult works directly with a young person to use the sport experience to promote their own healing. This could be a coach, who is actively engaged in the sport experience with the player, who offers specific instruction, support and guidance. It could also be a clinician or caregiver working outside the sport experience, who engaged in conversations and planning with the player on how they can best use the skills in they learn in sport towards their healing goals.

Player development may involve working with an individual player or with an entire team. What’s powerful about the sport context is that there is a focus on skill building. Players push themselves to get better at physical, technical skills, as well as decision-making and tactical skills. At a basic level, the process of getting better at something can alone be powerful for healing. In addition to this process, many of the skills that a player needs to be successful in sport can also contribute to healing, like self-awareness, situational awareness, future focus, and making decisions under pressure. Players are actively engaged in skill building as they attend training sessions with the specific intent of “practicing” sport skills. Competitions serve as an additional opportunity to develop skills as they become a test of a player’s improvement under increased pressure.

Trauma-informed player development can happen in many different ways. Below are four ways a caring adult might create a development pathway for a player using trauma-informed strategies.

**STEP  
1**

**Identify the Most Important Areas for Player Development**

Take time to identify a player’s most important development needs. Start broadly by naming each priority skill. Then, using descriptive and behavior-based language, list out what the skill looks like in the sport experience and what it might look like in another part of the player’s life.

**Looks like in Sport**

**Looks like in Life**

**Self-Control**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making tactical decisions about how to enhance individual and team performance even when the pressure builds</li> <li>• Not retaliating when fouled (in basketball or soccer, for example)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting goals, sticking with tasks, not panicking during exams or when speaking in public</li> <li>• Not retaliating when confronted or harassed</li> </ul>
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**Positive Peer Interactions**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socializing during transition times</li> <li>• Participating actively in group warm-up activities</li> <li>• Engaging in conversations with teammates when not in the game</li> <li>• Helping teammates; offering praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socializing at meals, during transitions between classes, etc.</li> <li>• Joining clubs or groups in school</li> <li>• Participating actively in small group discussions in classes</li> <li>• Helping classmates/ friends; offering praise</li> </ul>
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**STEP  
2**

**Create a Common Language for Player Development**

There are lots of places where sport language shows up outside of sport. Time-outs, winning streaks, and bringing your “a game” are all concepts and language that have become as useful outside of sport as they are in sport. When working with a player to develop key sport and life skills, this language can be incredibly helpful. Much of the critical treatment language that we would use to help a player develop skills can be put through a sports filter so that we have an accessible way to communicate with our players that maintains its treatment power and has vivid meaning in the sport context.

<b>Examples of Treatment Language</b>	<b>Examples of Sport Language Adaptations</b>
Mindfulness, Self-awareness, Wisemind, Presentification, Situational Awareness	Come to Play
Regulation, Self-Control, Depersonalization, Impulse Control, Boundaries	Stay in the Game
Window of Tolerance, Stress Tolerance, Risk Assessment	In the Zone
Reflection, Returning to Baseline	Watch the Film
Pro-Social Connections, Attachment	Team Up
Empathy, Attunement, Judgment, Helping Behaviors	Spirit of the Game

The goal is to construct a “sportified” language that coaches and players use that works in the sport and players can take with them to other parts of their lives. There is often a powerful story to tell about how a specific sport, or sport in general, can be compared to life. It’s less about the pure metaphor or comparison and more about surfacing how the things a player does in sport can help them in the rest of their lives. For example:

- In sport, the warm-up is used to promote focus, loosening of muscles, clarity of thought, and being in the present. In life, a warm-up might help a player get ready to take an exam or complete a successful job interview.
- In sport, the spirit of the game refers to sportsmanship and following the rules, even when it’s to the other team’s advantage. In life, the spirit of the game can be used to challenge players to think about what kind of citizen they want to be in the work and to do “the right thing” when there are complicated choices.

**STEP  
3**

**Explore the Parts of Sport Where this Skill can be Practiced and Reinforced**

Part of what makes sport such a strong medium for promoting healing is that a player cannot develop in the sport by only focusing on the physical/ technical sport skills. There are cognitive, emotional, social and tactical skills that must also be developed. A successful athlete can’t develop one or the other, but must develop technical and tactical skills.

This step involves close scrutiny of the sport itself to figure out where and when a player can most meaningfully practice these skills. Different sports provide different opportunities to practice different skills in the course of play. For example, a point guard in basketball has many opportunities to work on decision-making and how to be sure to have a back-up plan. A rower, on the other hand, may have fewer decisions to make, but has countless opportunities to practice the discipline it takes to keep pushing throughout the whole race.

When thinking about specific opportunities in your sport, consider the entire sport experience, including travel time to and from the sport, transition times, warm-ups, drills, scrimmages and the competition itself. Help players see where they can develop themselves in their skill areas.:

- Situational awareness might be developed when walking the field or court before a competition
- Using the time when a player is substituted out of the game to reflect on stress levels and regulating their stress response can help build greater self-awareness
- The times in a game when the competition really heats up, maybe at towards the end of the game, or when the score is tied, is a great time to focus on stress tolerance as players experience the increased pressure to perform

#### STEP 4

#### **Actively Enlist the Player in their Development**


Depending on your role and the type of program or intervention you are use, player development work may be fully embedded inside the sport. This means that the primary language is sport and treatment language and talking specifically about trauma are left out. Conversely, player development might be more explicit and the player is encouraged to talk opening with the caring adult about aspects of their trauma history and related behaviors, as well as how sport can support their healing.

However explicit or embedded you make player development, whether they are working on their “window of tolerance” or getting “in the zone”, the strongest outcomes will likely come from their on awareness and understanding of their role in “getting better” in sport and in life. Sport can promote self-efficacy and give participants some of the control they have lost through their experience of trauma. The more that a player understand and takes ownership for their development, the more potential there is for tangible improvement. In order for this to be true, ownership must be established with the caring adult’s support and guidance versus done to a player through compliance.

One of the most compelling aspects of sport as a medium for healing is that there are crucial cognitive, emotional, social and physiological components to becoming a skilled and successful player. Therefore, there is a natural forum in which to engage in dialogue, education and problem-solving about how a player can best develop these part of their game. Topics like those below are part of the existing language of sport and can be easily applied to healing:

- Mental preparation, getting ready for the competition
- Maintaining focus and concentration
- Keeping your cool under pressure
- Thinking strategically, anticipating what comes next
- Adapting to unforeseen circumstances with plan be thinking
- Processing the competition and learning lessons for next time





## DNA OF A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE COACH

### THINKS

1. Considers each player as an individual with unique strengths and a different tolerance for stress.
  2. Understands the science of the brain and how it can impact a child's behavior before assigning blame.
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### BELIEVES

1. In the power of sports to heal - that the presence of a caring coach, supportive teammates, and physical activity can be protective.
  2. All kids are doing the best that they can do given their unique contexts.
  3. A player's progress is not linear and requires time, patience and care.
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### DOES

1. Creates a deeply safe space where kids are protected enough to take risks.
2. Helps players recognize and own their progress as they build skills.
3. Provides opportunities for kids to have choice over their experience.



# Trauma-Sensitive Coaching Techniques

When a coach understands the impact that trauma can have on a young person's body and brain, they become better equipped to deal with that player's behavior. Instead of assuming that a player doesn't have the "will" to do what the coach wants them to do, they consider whether the young person has the "skill" to do it or if something about their experience with trauma is getting in the way.

The number one job of a trauma-sensitive coach is to create a safe space for their players. Trauma-sensitive coaches consider how their behavior and other actors in the sport environment contribute to or get in the way of the way of safety. In order to create a safe space where players can try new things and take risks, trauma-sensitive coaches are reliable and consistent, they build positive team culture, think critically about ways to connect with players and consider ways to manage the competition in the sport for their players. **Examples of Trauma-Sensitive Coaching Techniques:**

## COACH THE BENCH; PRAISE THE PLAY

Coaches have an action bias. This means that in order to feel like they are contributing to the players' experience, they must be "doing" something. During games, this might mean pacing up and down the sideline and yelling instructions to the players. However, because games are a time when stress levels tend to be elevated, we know that giving instruction in the moment to players who have been affected by trauma is not effective. Not only does their stress response make it more difficult to take in the instruction, but the act of yelling by the coach is likely simply contributing to overwhelming their system with stress.

When players are on the bench, they are better able to engaging their pre-frontal cortex and think about their own performance. This keeps the players on the bench invested in what's happening in the game and allows them to take in helpful tips for future performance.

## COACH OUT LOUD

Coaches aren't used to describing what they do and why they do it. In fact, the norm for coaches tends to lean towards intentionally not explaining their decisions, that in order to assert their authority, coaches actually shouldn't offer explanations and players should question them. But this is actually the opposite of what coaches should do, especially when working with players affected by trauma. Coaches should Externalize what they are thinking and reveal processes for making decisions so that players can learn from the coach's example. This isn't the same as offering instructions, redirection, correction or praise. Instead, it is articulating your thought process so that players understand it. To help you start to coach out loud, use these prompts:

- Do you want to know what I'm doing? HERE is what I'm doing.
- Do you want to know why I'm doing it? HERE is why I'm doing it.
- Do you want to know how I'm doing it? HERE is how I'm doing it.

## PRACTICE POSITIVE TRADITIONS

Players feel safest when they know what to expect. There are lots of examples of places in sport where behavior is dictated by a ritual or tradition- like a warm-up routine, a team cheer, a team song or closing tradition. When working with kids affected by trauma, coaches can extend these traditions into times when a player might experience more stress than usual. This can help the player manage the stress and move on to the next play.

# A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SPORTS PRACTICE



## TRANSITION

The time from the moment when a player approaches your sport space to when you decide to start the official warm up

### SPACE

Be consistent in how you set up space so players know what to do and where to go. Secure valuables, minimize distraction, maximize privacy, and provide comfortable places to sit. Offer options for players to set their own transition pace.

### FIRST INTERACTIONS

Greet each player, using names, offering hi-fives and engaging in light inquiries and check ins. Facilitate connection between players by offering activities that encourage proximity and provide opportunities to talk.

### RITUALS

Provide options for players to choose how they become active. Make regular updates about time remaining before the warm-up. Have a consistent opening statement that sets the tone for the day



## WARM-UP

The time period from the formal start of your practice to the time when you begin structured sport activities

### HUDDLE UP

Facilitate reflection on how players are doing, feeling and what's happening in their bodies. Provide a clear road map and expectations for the warm-up. Facilitate connection and energy prior to the play.

### ACTIVITIES

Offer the 3 elements of a trauma-sensitive warm up in any order. Dynamic- initial synchronized and sequenced movement. Simulated Play- Sport-specific play that promotes max activity and connectivity. Choice- time for players to choose what they need to get ready.

### HUDDLE UP

Facilitate reflection on how players are doing, feeling and what's happening in their bodies. Provide a clear road map and expectations for the warm-up. Facilitate connection and energy prior to the play.



## PLAY

The time period that encompasses drills for skills, simulated game-play and any other activity structured by the coach

### BRIDGE

Use a bridge to move kids forward through a practice you've intentionally designed. This involves connecting where you players are and the realistic progress you think they can make in this.

### BOOST

Use a boost when the activity isn't working for your players, but you want to keep them in the experience. Boosts are short, targeted interventions meant to help a kid get back on track. They stop short of removing players from the activity. There are three boosts: control, connection and competence.

### BREAK

Use a break create an emotional space for the player to reset when the activity is no longer working. This might mean creating physical distance from the activity or at least space to gain control over their experience



## COOL DOWN

The time period from the end of structured sport activities to the formal end of your practice

### HUDDLE UP

Facilitate reflection on how players are doing, feeling and what's happening in their bodies. Provide a clear road map and expectations for the warm-up. Facilitate connection and energy prior to the cool down.

### ACTIVITIES

Offer the 3 elements of a trauma-sensitive warm up in any order. Dynamic- initial synchronized and sequenced movement. Simulated Play- Sport-specific play that promotes max activity and connectivity. Choice- time for players to choose what they need to get ready

### HUDDLE UP

Facilitate reflection on how players are doing, feeling and what's happening in their bodies. Help them make connections between sport and life. Provide a clear road map and expectations for the warm-up. Facilitate connection and energy prior to the play.



## TRANSITION

The time from the moment you finish the cool down to the time when players depart the space.

### SPACE

Be consistent in how you set up space so players know what to do and where to go. Secure valuables, minimize distraction, maximize privacy, and provide comfortable places to sit. Offer options for players to set their own transition pace.

### FINAL INTERACTIONS

Say goodbye each player, using names, offering hi-fives and engaging in light inquiries and check ins. Facilitate connection between players by offering activities that encourage proximity and provide opportunities to talk.

### RITUALS

Provide options for players to choose their path out of the program. Make regular updates about time remaining before your departure. Have a consistent closing statement that sends kids off on a positive note.

# Competition

Competition is a core element that distinguishes sport from other activities such as recreation or play. The competitive climate creates a unique opportunity for players who have been exposed to trauma. Players have the opportunity to work on crucial aspects of healing, like self-awareness, self-regulation and stabilization, with a caring coach in a safe environment where the stress can be modified and the outcomes genuinely matter to the players.

## **Competition can foster an atmosphere of real stakes, which means an element of stress.**

There is special meaning in a competitive context in which winning and losing is part of the experience. The outcome matter to the player. This makes a player more invested in how they perform. By generating this sense of real stakes, competitive sport experiences elevate a player's stress level, which stimulates their stress response system.

## **Elevated stress creates an opportunity to work with a player on their stress response in real time.**

A player experiencing real stress with real stakes is challenged to be aware of how they react to the stress, make choices in the moment and regulate their stress response. Helping a player face this challenge is the fact that, in sport there can be an open dialogue and skill-building around stress, both how to harness and channel excitement or "good stress" into high performance and how to manage and reduce anxiety of "bad stress" to avoid poor performance.

## **A player can experiment with awareness and control of their stress response system**

The focus of healing is often on reducing anxiety, or eliminating stress. This means we overlook the importance of differentiating bad stress from good stress. We want our players to know what anticipation and excitement feels like along with anxiety and fear. Sport can provide a player with a chance to work on mitigating their anxiety but also use their stress response to elevate their performance, their concentration, or their experience in their body. They have the chance to "get a win" or even get on a "hot streak" in competition. This can be an extremely powerful experience for their sense of efficacy, hope and esteem.

## **Competitions have special elements that support a player's development of their stress response**

When the time comes to compete in a game, match, race, meet or tournament, the stress level of the sport experience goes up. Because of this, these competitions often include traditions and rituals that can be particularly useful in helping a player work on their ability to self-regulate. For competitions, players and teams are expected to arrive early to the venue and are given time to transition, to change into their uniform and warm-up. When the competition ends, there are built in cool downs, rituals and transition times. These competition elements help support players as they work on building skills to manage stress.

## **Post competition activities can create even more opportunities for skill building**

Following a competition, coaches and teams regularly reflect on the experience. Players meet with their coaches to review their individual performance and the team's performance, and discuss what went well and what could have gone better. This presents a special chance to focus not only on the sport skills, but also on the skills for managing good and bad stress. The act of reflecting- literally or figuratively "watching the film" allows players and coaches to witness the same behavior, analyze what happened, and strategize for the future.

**Finally, a season of competition creates a calendar of opportunities for player to work on and monitor their progress.**

Most sports are played over the course of a season, comprised of multiple matches or games. Or there might be a series or tournament that makes up a sport's season. These "seasons of play" create perfect opportunities to plot out with a player their skill building journey from one competitive opportunity to the next. It makes it easy to map out goals, milestones and steps of development. It also provides coach and player with a natural schedule of preparation, competition and reflection, from one competition to the next.

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It is important to acknowledge that competition is a highly dynamic experience for players. There are many variables and factors in motion during a competition, and not all of them can be managed the way a coach might want to in order to meet the needs of a player or players affected by trauma. Coaches and league organizers must look closely at all the variables in their sport and how their competition is structured, and be open to the possibility of changing or redesigning some of the aspects of competition to make them more conducive to the needs of the players. There are rules of the sport, elements of how a league is managed, roles of coaches and others in the sport systems, and even adaptations of playing space or equipment that could help foster the right experience for player to have the best possible chance of making progress on managing their stress response.

Sample League Level Changes:

- Allowing for more or even unlimited timeouts could provide players with a unique tool inside the competition to regulate the entire sport experience and thus potentially regulate themselves more effectively.
- Conducting joint warm-ups before competition with players from both teams could foster a more collaborative and cohesive atmosphere that may reduce aggression or hostilities between different teams.
- League schedules may include "parity matches" at designated weeks in a season in which teams with similar records compete against each other to ensure that they are getting at least some competitions in which they are likely to be well-matched with their opponents and can therefore have more chances to work on both good and bad stress. Even better if the league can reshuffle mid-season so that teams have more parity games.

There are myriad ways that a competition can be redesigned to support specific outcomes that we want players to achieve. Coaches and league organizers who are willing to consider these changes to the competition and can harness the inherent power of competition to be a learning environment for young people affected by trauma are well on their way towards realized one of the most powerful benefits of sport as a medium for healing.

# Therapeutic Core of Sports

Every sport is different. This means that within each sport there are different learning opportunities that correlate with the skills it takes to be successful in that sport. While a quarterback in football has to be able to make quick decisions, an endurance cyclist depends more on their discipline. While a golfer might want no distractions while concentrating on sinking a putt, a sprinter might thrive off the noise and use the energy to run faster. When thinking about how different aspects of different sports might be more or less suited to a player's healing, we see lots of opportunities in which sport is inherently suited for this work and other places where small tweaks could have a big impact.

Examples of the Therapeutic Core of Sports:



- Baseball/ softball's "on deck" circle allows players space to prepare for the pressure of being at bat
- First and third base-coaches can offer support in making critical base-running decisions



- Basketball is game where there are many stops and many opportunities for substitutions. This provides opportunities to "reset" and get ready for the next play.
- While there is sometimes a lot of pressure associated with a "free throw", it is always the same shot from the same spot and no defense is allowed.



- When skiing or snowboarding, there are infinite ways to create your own way down a path. You can choose to stop anywhere at any time to plan your next move.
- Not only can you stop to plan your path, you can actually stop and watch other people go by and learn from the path that they took.



- In volleyball, each position has a specific role. The rotations into those roles are clear and players can see ahead to when they will need to focus on specific skills
- Volleyball teams huddle up between every point to celebrate or motivate and to strategize



- In tennis, the coach is not allowed to coach the match from the court. For players affected by trauma, being alone during a competition might be overwhelming. However, the skill building involved in getting to a place where you are able to make all of your own decisions in competition provides ownership and autonomy.



[sportandtrauma.org](http://sportandtrauma.org)