FIG. 13–2   Gracie's essay on the risks of competitive sports   **1**

Competitive Sports: Do They Promote Healthy Lifestyles or Ruin Your Future?

Picture this, it's halftime at your school's basketball game, your team is ahead by 2 points and it is your, and your team's, time to shine. Your practiced routine is going smoothly until your double jump comes to a crashing end. After your failed stunt and your team's failed attempt to catch you, you quickly fall to the floor, head first. You knew this wasn't going to end well as this was your second concussion, but you had high hopes in recovery as your first concussion didn't cause severe symptoms. This time was different. As time goes on, the symptoms get worse. You develop the sensitivity to noise and light, and you experience fainting spells, seizures, depression, anxiety and excessive drowsiness. This was all caused from a sports injury, your life was crashing down around you, and your social and school life was at risk as you began to fail. Your whole life spirals out of control because of one sports injury. This happened to a competitive cheerleader named Shelby. Many say that sports are the best activity for children and teenagers to get involved in because they build character, self esteem, and most importantly, they promote healthy lifestyles for kids. However, due to the high risks of injuries and negative impact on self-esteem, the focus of sports should not always be about competition, especially amongst children.

Healthy lifestyles are key this day in age as many suffer with obesity. 35.7% of American adults are obese. Sports are seen to make a good example on today's youth, but do sports really create the better, brighter future or do they simply cause more pain?   According to Mark Hyman in the article, "For Children in Sports, a Breaking Point", every year more than 3.5 million children under 15 require medical treatment for sports injuries, nearly half of which are the result of simple overuse. Hyman also says "...with each passing season youth sports seem to stray further and further

FIG. 13–2   *(Continued)*   **2**

from its core mission of providing healthy, safe and character-building recreation for children" This means that the longer today's youth plays sports, the more of a negative effect it will have on them later in life, as sports are becoming less and less about the game itself, and more about the ego boost that comes along with winning.

Many people say that competitive sports promote healthy lifestyles because school sports set expectations for the athletes to meet. Although, playing sports may promote a healthy lifestyle, they can also be extremely dangerous for both your physical and mental health. It's not a secret that competitive sports are very dangerous for people of all ages, as 3.5 million children under 15 years old need medical treatment for their sports injury. One of the many dangers of competitive sports is simply overdoing it. The article "The Dangers Of Overdoing It" states that "Overuse injuries, overtraining and burnout among child and adolescent athletes are a growing problem in the United States." it was also discussed that "...too often the goal is skewed toward adult (parent/coaches) goals, either implicitly or explicitly. As more young athletes are becoming professionals at a younger age, there is more pressure to grab a piece of the 'professional pie', to obtain a college scholarship or to make the Olympic teams." Young athletes do not know when their bodies have had enough, they do not know when to stop and their coaches do not want them to stop because the more they play and practice, the better they'll get at said sport... or so they think. An article called "Playing It Safe" supported the article segment before and made a very valid point where the pediatrics council stated: "A major factor in the rising injury rate is the current emphasis on playing one sport all year long, which leaves no time for muscles and joints to recover from inevitable microtrauma that occurs during practice and play. With increased specialization, there is no cross-training that would enable other muscles to strengthen and lighten the load." Some may argue that at least one to two days off per week from competitive athletics is all it takes to recover from both mental and physical exhaustion. However, most athletes live by the motto "Go Hard or Go Home" which causes them to not want to take a couple days off from their sport, as they don't realize how much that short hiatus will help them in the future.

"Competition is to self esteem as sugar is to teeth." is a very

FIG. 13–2 *(Continued)* **3**

amazing quote for this topic by Alfie Kohn from his in depth article about children and teenagers in athletics, "The Case Against Competition" where he mainly discusses the effect sports have on their athletes, both mentally and how their self esteem and self image is at risk. "Most people lose in most competitive encounters, and it's obvious why that causes self doubt. But even winning doesn't build character; it just lets a child gloat temporarily. Studies have show that feelings of self-worth become dependent on external sources of evaluation as a result of competition: Your value is defined by what you've done. Worse-- you're a good person in proportion to a number of people you've beaten." This quote relates to many teens lives, as many don't feel comfortable in sports. When they aren't good, it makes them feel like they lack overall importance, which is not the best feeling. They walk into gym, scared to perform the sport they are graded for and feel like all the better athletes are watching, judging and criticizing lack of skills. With that fear living inside them, it causes them to dismiss the activities quickly and take the lower grade rather than trying their best and ignoring the others. To many, mental injuries seem nonexistent in the competition field, but they can cause more pain than the physical injuries. Studies show that athletes in the NFL are three times more likely to die from neurodegenerative diseases than the general population and four times more likely to die from Alzheimer's disease and amyotrophic later sclerosis.   "In a competition culture, a child is told that it isn't enough to be good-- he must triumph over others. Success comes to be defined as victory..." (Kohn).

People performing in the athletics field may argue that involving yourself in sports will boost your social and behavioral skills while also giving your confidence quite the boost and without competition, we would have no goals to strive for. We'd be nowhere without it. Many disagree. Kohn makes yet another important point in his article that claims "Children succeed in spite of competition, not because of it- Most of us were raised to believe that we do our best work when we're in a race-- that without competition we would all become fat, lazy, and mediocre. It's a belief that our society takes on faith. It's also false." To build off of what Kohn said, the competition in sports do not better the person we become and we can live a healthy life without urging to hurt others in a way that we succeed. Competitive athletics turn their players into monsters on the field/court, they don't go out to play the game and just have fun; they are thirsty for

FIG. 13–2   *(Continued)*   **4**

victory and the failure of the opposing teams. In their mind, if someone gets hurts, it's no big deal as that's how the game goes. It's NOT how the game goes. These sports were created to give people of all ages a reason to get out of their house and release their energy while getting a workout. They weren't created for people to get hurt physically and mentally.

Competitive sports are not all they are made out to be. They can ruin your future and the way you view yourself. The injuries are endless and the pain of failure never seems to lessen. Sports have caused many to look in the mirror and question whether or not the goal was worth a broken leg or if the home run was worth the concussion or if signing up for this "life changing activity' was worth the self doubt and hatred. We all have to take Alfie Kohn's wise words into consideration, "Having fun doesn't mean turning playing fields into battle fields."