Mini-Essay Assignment

SPPH 552: Risk and Communication

Due: Monday February 3 at 11:59PM

**Thesis:**

All sports with a high risk of concussion (soccer, football, volleyball, basketball, rugby, hockey) that youth under the age of 18 play, should ban contact. The specifics are as follows:

* Football and rugby: Instead of contact, it can either be ‘touch’ or ‘flag’
* Soccer: No slide tackling another player and no headers (intentional head to ball contact)
* Hockey: No body-checking, slamming players into the boards, head shots, or fighting
* Volleyball: There is technically no contact within this sport but rule changes to warm-up routines will ban running under the net while players are setting, serving, and spiking which is where/when most of their concussions occur

If a tackle, body-check, fight, or header occurs in any sport it is an immediate ejection or large penalty for that game.

**Support:**

Sports programs are good for youth as they help children be healthier and more active. They reduce the risk of chronic diseases while also improving coordination and balance, teamwork skills, goal setting, and fun. However certain sports carry a higher risk of injury than others. The human brain doesn’t become fully developed until age 18. Children who play contact sports during their most critical years of brain development are at a significantly greater risk of neurologic impairments and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) later in life as repetitive impacts to the brain could cause cellular damage to the nervous system. Our society is committed to protecting children, that’s why we ban smoking, lead paint, and require parents to put their children in car seats. Thus, we should all be united in protecting youth from these injuries which could lead to both short long-term impairments.

**Opposition:**

The proposed rule changes will completely alter these sports. If you watch the highlight reel of any of these sports you will see the hard-hitting body-checks, sacks, slide-tackles and headers. Without tackling or contact the culture and identity of these sports would be completely changed.

Also, if kids that have never learned to take and receive contact before start playing without contact bans at age 18 when they are bigger, stronger and faster than when they would have been when they learned these skills as children, then they will be at a much higher risk of injury. Simultaneously, such a rule change would be disadvantaging any athletes that want to continue on and play at the collegiate or professional level. These athletes would have missed out on years of practice and skill development opportunities. Kids should instead be taught how to give/take contact better and they should wear better protective equipment.

Additionally, without the rough and tumble usually inherent in these sports, a lot of kids could be less inclined to play these sports, so there will be an increase in the health-threatening habits of youth sitting in front of screens. We have enough trouble getting youth to be physically active without creating even more roadblocks.

**Response:**

Perhaps it is time to change the nature of these sports altogether so that older players, too, are at a decreased risk of TBIs. After all, gladiator combat was a common spectator sport during the Roman Empire, but we more civilized individuals wouldn’t dream of watching it now. Perhaps, future generations will look back on contact sports in a similar way.

Getting youth involved in sports could certainly be a challenge, but changes might actually entice some youth who are not physically adept at contact sports to try it out. Perhaps creative innovations in all these sports will be necessary so that the loss of contact will not appear to be such a loss.

**Conclusion:**

The proposed rule change may not preserve the culture and excitement of these sports entirely. However, it is precisely such a drastic rule change that will likely help keep the focus of youth sports on promoting health and participation. A slight change in the speed or traditions of the games seem a small price to pay for the health and safety of our youth and leaders of tomorrow. Just as we protect our youth from smoking and drinking under the age of 18, we should protect them from this largely preventable injury in sports. Besides, this may induce us to create new and more skillful sports to replace what has been the excitement of contact.