Exploring the Benefits of Adaptive Baseball From the Parent Perspective / Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Athletes

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Exploring the Benefits of Adaptive Baseball From the Parent Perspective

Kristen Yee; Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L; Becki Cohill, OTD, OTR/L, Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND
Adaptive sports refer to “any modification of a given sport...to accommodate the varying ability levels of an individual” (Lundberg et al., 2011, p. 206). Adaptive baseball is an environmentally modified sport that caters to individuals of all abilities, integrating physical, sensory, cognitive, and social components (Costalonga et al., 2020). Participation in adaptive sports has shown to have a positive impact on youth development. These impacts transcend across all domains, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive (Ryan et al., 2013). Participation in adaptive sports contributes to an individual's physical health and well-being, self-identity, and quality of life (Magsamen-Conrad et al., 2016).

METHODS
Parents who had a child involved in adaptive baseball (n=9) were recruited by convenience from across the country to participate in a virtual interview via Zoom.

Interviews were part of an IRB approved study. Consent was reviewed by each participant prior to the interview.

Parent Participant Sample Interview Questions
- Have you noticed any changes in your child’s confidence?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child’s ability to socialize with others?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child since being part of a team?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child’s school participation?

Other topics addressed include occupations within the home environment, relationship with sibling(s) (if applicable), benefits of participation, and feelings toward playing to gain a holistic perspective.

Analysis
Interviews were transcribed using Google Cloud Speech and saved on a Microsoft Word document. Parent participant interviews were coded using Dedoose. All data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis (2006) to develop themes.

RESULTS

Parent Interview Themes

Sense of Community
- Feeling Supported
- Sense of Belonging
- Opportunity for New Relationships

“We have this level of support you receive from everyone and we can help assist each other. I say it’s like being in a boat we are all in this together and moving forward together.” (Participant 1)

My Eyes Have Grown Wider - A New Occupational Identity for Parents
“I have become much more tolerant, accepting, sympathetic, empathic. I have grown to recognize the fact that my son has different abilities than me, than his brother... My eyes have grown wider to all the experiences here.” (Participant 2)

Positive Feelings
- The Joy of Playing
- A Positive Experience for Parents

“He just gets a smile on his face he gets all excited and giddy... just truly a cloud 9 experience for him.” (Participant 2)

Impact off the Field & in the Classroom
...teachers always tell us that they can tell a Miracle League player versus a non-Miracle League player because they are more team players. They cheer on their other students more, they have learned how to take turns, wait for their turn... just because we don’t see them in the classroom, we are making a difference...” (Participant 7)

DISCUSSION
Findings from this study combined with the lack of research on adaptive baseball demonstrate a clear need for increased advocacy and role that OTs can provide through activity analysis and environmental modifications to support increased participation in the sport and other meaningful occupations. Participation contributed to increased confidence and self-efficacy, greater social participation, and an increased sense of community for the parent and player. These findings can help inform parents, OT’s, and adaptive sports programs on the benefits to help increase awareness and participation.

CONCLUSION
Occupational therapists can play a role in assisting individual’s access and participate in adaptive sports.
- Advocate for participation in adaptive sports
- Educate clients about the benefits of participation
- Evaluate and make environmental modifications to allow for more inclusivity.

Parents’ direct involvement in their child’s life offers a unique perspective as they see firsthand the impact activities have on their child, family, and community.

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Alison Takagaki, OTD, OTR/L for her support and guidance on this project.
Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Athletes

Kristen Yee; Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L; Becki Cohill, OTD, OTR/L, Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

In 2020, a novel and deadly virus called COVID-19 led to a global pandemic. Strict guidelines and restrictions created unforeseen challenges for athletes leaving many with increased negative feelings, feelings that sports initially helped mitigate (Kelly et al., 2020). Participation in sports provides an outlet for individuals to increase their confidence, socialize, and develop a routine and identity (da Silva et al., 2020).

PROBLEM

The COVID-19 virus has become a barrier to participation in sports, meaningful social participation, and community involvement for individuals.

PURPOSE

Understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted athletes to better inform the role occupational therapy (OT) has in helping athletes adjust towards new life transitions within the community and engage in occupations that promote physical health and well-being, social participation, and sense of belonging.

METHODS

Current athletes (adaptive and non-adaptive sport) (n=43) were recruited by convenience throughout the country to participate in an online survey via Qualtrics.

Surveys were part of an IRB approved study. Consent was reviewed by each participant prior to the survey.

METHODS

Sample Survey Questions

• How has the pandemic impacted your mental health?
• During the COVID-19 pandemic what challenges, if any, have you faced as a result of reduced sport participation?
• Since the start of COVID-19 I have felt a decreased sense of (select best answer) that playing sports typically gave me.
• How has your team adapted during this time?
• What do you miss most about participation in sports?

RESULTS

The participants consistently reported decreased motivation, sense of community, self-efficacy, and self-identity due to limited sport participation. Athletes and teams adapted through virtual team meetings, smaller in-person workouts, and a shortened season to reduce the spread of the virus. Participants made efforts to stay connected with their team by communicating daily or at least multiple times per week.

DISCUSSION

The lasting effects of social distancing and reduced sport participation on athletes remains unclear. Many athlete participants expressed changes in their mental health, level of social interaction, decreased self-efficacy, and difficulty sleeping due to the pandemic. Restrictions impacting sports and public gatherings contributed to decreased feelings of confidence, health and well-being, motivation, loss of community, and self-identity. Occupational therapists can utilize these findings to better understand the impact of the pandemic to better support athletes through life stages and transitions.

CONCLUSION

Occupational therapists can play a role in assisting athletes adjust to a new normal within the community.

• Help athletes develop new or modify existing routines that promote self-efficacy and engagement in purposeful occupations.
• Use OT driven models to help guide interventions.
• Provide support during life stages and transitions.
• Focus on aspects that are within the athlete’s control.

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Alison Takagaki, OTD, OTR/L for her support and guidance on this project.