



Power of Sport Summit 2008: Call to Action

Introduction

On June 14 and 15, 2008 a diverse field of academics, administrators, practitioners, and advocates united for the first **Power of Sport Summit: A Participatory Forum on Sport and Social Change**. The event was hosted by Sport in Society at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. The objective of the Summit was to Raise Awareness, Challenge Thinking, Open Dialogue and Inspire Leadership in order to define concrete actions needed to advance the sport and social change movement. To achieve these goals, the Summit was constructed using a “scholar-educator-activist” framework, in which the passion and experience of all participants was necessary to achieve learning and action.

Throughout the interactive meeting, participants worked together to define what they considered to be the most pressing issues involving the intersection of sport and social justice and developed concrete steps to address them. The following call to action thus represents the unified voice of all participants. It provides a brief overview of the topics which emerged and outlines those actions deemed necessary for effecting positive change in and through sport.

Action Steps

We recommend highlighting and encouraging the values of courage and leadership within the sport and social change community. We believe leadership and courage are essential to embrace healthy conflict, and also necessary in the struggle to promote social justice where there is resistance to implementing practices of human rights, equality and inclusion.

We recognize the need for a specific United Nations Declaration on Sport, defining sport as a human right and indicating sport must be available for all in order for it to effectively serve as a vehicle for development. The language comprising the declaration must effectively demonstrate that sport is indeed a human right, and should also define and articulate the essential role of sport as a powerful avenue for development.

We encourage a focusing effort and attention toward understanding the outcomes and benefits of sport for development programs and initiatives. We thereby recommend that key stakeholders take measures to ensure sustainability and long-term impact, as well as to share and distribute best practices in the field. We encourage a global cross-cultural exchange in sport for development activities. We call for corporations to further their efforts and activities in the area of sport for development.

We recognize a need to further research and promote the benefits of play as essential to healthy childhood development. We define play as self-governed, imaginative, fully engaging activity, as opposed to competitive games and sport. We call for a dramatic paradigm shift within Western culture, necessitating increased education for parents and coaches, opening communication

among "touch points" in young lives and addressing the barriers to play that further inhibit the socio-economically disadvantaged.

We also acknowledge the need to educate adults about the power of the contribution of play to positive, healthy lifestyles for individuals of all ages. We recommend the following steps be taken to do so: consolidate existing research and information about the significance of play; find effective institutions and individuals to "transfer" this knowledge to local communities; advocate for policy changes that demand physical play as a "prescription" for health; and, finally, develop audience-appropriate informational materials (known perhaps as "15 Ways to Play 15 Minutes a Day") and campaigns/events that re-educate adults about the "how" and "why" of play.

We acknowledge a pressing need to provide coaches at all levels with the knowledge and tools needed to become leaders who primarily focus on the mental, physical and social health of their players. In order to create this important paradigm shift within sport, we recommend creating standards, guidelines, educational programs and tools and aligning them with currently existing resources for coaches at all levels. Two concrete tools that could be important next steps are a set of recommendations for how athletic directors can successfully hire coaches whose philosophies extend beyond field-time play and a "Coaching Report Card," explicitly addressing standards all coaches should meet regarding athlete wellness and enrichment.

We recommend continuing increasing attention addressing heterosexism and homophobia in sport and in society. We recommend establishing focused local and global projects to promote the intersection of research, education, and advocacy activities toward fostering a safe, open, and empowering culture and community at all levels of sport and society. We recommend that Sport in Society provide a connecting point for organizations and individuals to come together for ideas and action.

We call for continued research into the advantages, disadvantages and possibilities of gender integration in sport. Women's sports remain separate for a multitude of social, economic, and physiological reasons. Sport organizers need to consider a range of possibilities when evaluating gender integration. We recommend that the sporting community value choice when addressing gender integration within the domain of sport.

We encourage the inclusion, equality and human rights of persons with disabilities in sport at all levels. We promote the need for persons with disabilities to challenge and address ableism in sport and in society and encourage persons with and without disabilities to advocate for and social change and social justice. We recommend examining the negative and segregating language and labels representing persons with disabilities in sport. We also recommend an international meeting to address the intersection of sport and universal design.

We are concerned about the images perpetuated by institutions using violent and stereotypical Native American sport mascots. We believe Sport in Society should continue to take a leading role in mobilizing a collective force to eradicate all use of Native American mascots. To do so, Sport in Society should establish a distinguished panel of Native Americans and provide a public forum for individuals to express their viewpoints on the issue. Additionally, the Center should encourage all sport organizations to make formal statements regarding the use of this imagery.

We recognize that passion for social justice can expedite progress while simultaneously leading to frustration and burn out. We therefore recommend that individuals and employees alike find balance by dedicating themselves to nurturing this passion by seeking/providing outlets for both personal and professional development, networking, mentorship, relaxation, and integrating fun

into the workplace. We are committed to achieving these ends by developing a network of support for individuals working within the sport and social change field or looking to integrate its philosophies into their jobs/lives.

We encourage a connected and coordinated sport and social change coalition, alliance or community for collective information sharing, networking and action. We recommend the group establish a defined set of “sport and social change” values and principles, and be a coordinated network with Sport in Society as a connecting point. We agree the group should have “sport as a human right” as a primary focus and, from this, also promote sport for development. We recommend the mobilization of the group in coordination with the annual Power of Sport Summit.

We recommend publishing a compilation of statements from organizations and individuals represented at the Power of Sport Summit. Each statement would address action-oriented recommendations related to sport and social change.

Conclusion

We, the participants of the first Power of Sport Summit did not simply “learn” about sport and social change from an elite pool of academic researchers. We united and took action under a shared passion for and commitment to the sport and social change movement. By raising one another’s awareness of current and emerging issues, challenging one another’s thinking, and opening dialogue to create healthy conflict, we inspired and embodied leadership. However, we understand that we, as participants, are now left to take that leadership into our life’s work and must have the courage to carry out these actions as genuine means to achieving social justice.