

## Editorial by former President Stuart G. Robbins

York University

from the CAHPER Journal May-June 1975 page 31-33 Vol. 41, No 5

### IF THE HAT FITS WEAR IT. BUT IF NOT – WHAT?

We tend to laugh and smile benignly when we look at the Victorian pictures and see children dressed as miniature adults. But if we looked carefully at many of our physical activity programs both in schools and within the community we find that perhaps we have not moved that far from those times. Soccer in most programs is played using regulation goals and close to regulation fields, ice hockey is played on the same size ice surface and with the same size goals as the “pros” and we don’t have to look far to see numerous basketball hoops placed for Wilt Chamberlain rather than Mary at four foot nothing.

So often our games tend to be watered down versions of the “pro” game. We tend to overlook the fact that children differ from adults in physical, mental, social and emotional aspects. As Dettmar Cramer,(1) F.I.F.A. international coach, has said, “*A boy of ten years is Not a little adult... He is a perfect human being of ten years.*” Let us look at game programs from three standpoints: modified equipment and playing areas, modified rules and modified structures.

The sight of the eight year old struggling with a baseball bat, of which Mickey Mantle would be proud, clearly indicates the foolishness of the size of equipment so often used by children. One problem is, however, that kids dressed for the game tend to look cute. This often masks the ridiculousness of the situation. Usher(2) at the University of Alberta, wrote a paper on the size of facilities and equipment for soccer. He compared field size, goal size and size of ball using norm tables for children of various ages and for the adult. Taking a tongue in cheek approach, at first he suggested that if an eight yard by eight foot (regulation size) goal is good for a ten year old (average height 54”) then proportionally the adult (average height 70”) should be playing in a goal thirty one feet wide by ten and one half feet high. True averages are somewhat misleading but gives us, as adults, something of the feeling of that ten year old. Usher then went on to give proportional sizes of playing area, goal and ball based on the regulation equipment being of ultimate size for adults. The following table indicates the results of these calculations.

| Age   | Playing Field |        | Goal  |        | Size of Ball  |      |
|-------|---------------|--------|-------|--------|---------------|------|
|       | Length        | Width  | Width | Height | Circumference | Size |
| 8-10  | 80 yds        | 48 yds | 6 yds | 6 ft   | 21-22 ins     | 2    |
| 10-12 | 85 yds        | 50 yds | 6 yds | 6 ft   | 23-24 ins     | 3    |
| 12-14 | 100 yds       | 58 yds | 7 yds | 7 ft   | 25-26 ins     | 4    |
| 14-16 | 105 yds       | 65 yds | 8 yds | 8 ft   | 27-28 ins     | 5    |

Obviously, work is being done in other areas such as Biddy Basketball, and mini volleyball. Feedback from people returning from China where there were modified table-tennis tables, baskets of varying heights, etc, etc, show us how far we have yet to go.

Modified equipment is part of the picture. Adaptation of equipment to the size of children will help but is not the total answer. Many of the rules or laws used in adult games were developed to keep the contest fair and prevent players from gaining unfair advantage. What does the offside rule in soccer, offside in hockey, icing the puck, or three second rule mean to the six year old. We need to do more work on the development of children’s play and to investigate the

ways in which children assimilate rules into their play. Piaget has given us a start. We, as physical educators, must continue and refine his work. The rules to be used in children's games should be meaningful to them and necessary for the playing of the game at that level. Modified equipment and rules will take us past the Victorian image but still do not complete the picture. We need to look at modified **structures** for games.

MacKay(3), a member of Canada's National Soccer Team, examined the size of playing area in soccer related to the number of touches a player made with the ball, the amount of time a player was in possession of the ball and the distance traveled by a player. He used groups of young children playing the regulation eleven-a-side game, on a modified field. The results indicated that, when playing on the modified field, the young players touched the ball significantly more times, were in possession of the ball significantly longer period of time and there was no significant difference in the distance travelled. If children are to improve their playing ability it is important that they touch the ball as often as possible and are in possession of the ball for as long as possible in order to exercise their skills and gain satisfaction from the activity.

A study in hockey showed that in a sixty minute game any one child was in possession of the puck for a total of no more than two minutes. If this is true, many kids get less than one hour of time with a puck in a whole season of ice hockey!

Surely we must modify the structures to meet the needs of children. Many baseball leagues have made a start with T.ball.

Instead of looking at the major games and moving down we might look at basic skills of footwork and body work, projecting, receiving and retaining and build up. Children would first play individual games and games with free and loose association. As skill, understanding and social development mature, the children would move into cooperative and competitive situations. Some of the games the children would create for themselves defining such things as the playing area, equipment and rules so that they could play against others. Other games would resemble games that we already know. The games would be at their level, on their terms.

According to Wickstrom(4), *"children are continually being allowed and even encouraged to play games involving basic skills which they have not yet learned. Currently, there is a strong tendency to push children into sports skills before they have achieved the mature pattern of the basic skills. Immature, unskilled movements become an integral part of the pattern used and the child, perhaps, never progresses to the mature form"*.

I hope that I am not suggesting an airy fairy approach in which anything goes. Rather an approach based on the needs of children that will lead to more skill, more understanding, more fun form more and more people.

We are in exciting times with great numbers of children starting to pay (and dropping out of) many sports and game programs. As a physical education, health and recreation association, we must speak loudly on the subject and get involved. This may be in small ways, such as ensuring that elementary school grounds have at least some grassed area in every school. In this way we may force some sports associations to change.

If the hat fits – wear it. But if not – let's modify!

## REFERENCES

- (1) Cramer, Dettmar. "A boy is not a little adult", **Canadian Soccer News**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1973.
- (2) Usher, Peter. "The size of equipment for soccer". Unpublished paper, University of Alberta, 1972.
- (3) MacKay, Ike. "The Effects of Modified Soccer Games". Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Alberta, 1974.
- (4) Wickstrom, Ralph. **Fundamental Motor Patterns**.