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THE ATHLETE'S VIEW

CORNER

ATHLETE'S

There's a big difference between throwing a fastball and throwing a knuckleball.

With the fastball, you don't want to throw the ball to the catcher's mitt. You want to throw the ball *through* the catcher's mitt. So when you're throwing a fastball, it's a maximum-effort pitch.

The feel of throwing a fastball is much different than throwing a knuckleball. It's a feeling of power, exploding off of the rubber, doing everything as hard as you can.

Now when you're throwing a knuckleball, you're throwing *to* the glove. You're not trying to overthrow the ball, you're not trying to throw it as hard as you can. Throwing a knuckleball is like an overexaggerated game of catch. It's like catch-plus.

With a knuckleball, you can almost talk to yourself when you're going through your windup. You're saying to yourself, "Okay, the leg's coming up, the arm's coming back, the fingers are on the ball, take it to the zone." You can do this because everything is done without much effort. You're not forcing it. It's so natural.

The first thing that's unique about throwing a knuckleball is the signal from the catcher. For the usual pitches—fastball, slider, curve, change—the catcher puts down one, two, three, or four fingers. For the knuckleball, when I look in to get the signal, he just wiggles his hand.

Every knuckleball pitcher grips the ball in a



Tom Candiotti

SEE CORNER, INSIDE

Why We Send Kids to School and a Lesson From Sport

Imagine having the ability to ask each and every middle and high school student in America this question: Would you say you are excited with school and what goes on in your academic classes or bored with school and what goes on in your academic classes?

If you're a parent of a schoolbooks-toting teenager, you already know the answer. If you're not, national studies show that most kids are bored with school. So what's going on here? Why are our kids so bored?

This is an issue of major concern for parents and educators. Parents want the best for their children. They want them to grow up, have successful careers and personal lives, and not ever go wanting for a lack of food, clothing, shelter, health, happiness, and love.

Dedicated educators know their job is to provide the learning that will give the parents what they want for their children. The educators know this is a tremendous responsibility. They, too, want the same things for their students.

When asked why their child or student says he or she is bored at school, parents and educators tend to say, "Oh, he says he's bored with *everything*," or "She wouldn't say she likes school, but I know she does," or "Oh you know, it isn't cool for kids to say they like school."

These are adult rationalizations for something that is of real concern to them. The truth is that most of our children are often bored with school and that this boredom indicates a major failing in our educational system.

We are all born to learn. Perhaps more than

anything else, this innate desire to explore, to understand, to create is what makes us human. Watch the joy with which a young child learns to talk or solve a puzzle or operate your computer and you'll wonder why this joy ends at the schoolroom door.

There are many reasons why our kids are bored with school. A major one is the future-oriented perspective that motivates formal learning.

No matter how often concerned parents and educators deny it, kids know they go to school to get a job, not for the joy of learning. They go to school to compete in the job marketplace, not to find out who they are and what they're about.

This is learned even at the elementary school level. From all that takes place around them during their early years in school, these young children grasp the unstated message: "You're in elementary school to move on to middle school. You go to middle school to move up to high school. You go to high school so you can go to college. You go to college to get a job. You get a job to . . ."

In today's schools, education is about earning an income, not about learning for its own sake. And paradoxically, learning that is accomplished for its own sake, joyfully, is what eventually produces success in the most practical aspects of life.

John Dewey, the father of modern-day education, once wrote, "Education is a process of living, not a preparation for the future." Referring to the same concept only in a larger context, American writer and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson

In today's schools, education is about earning an income, not about learning for its own sake.

Message from the Director...

As the PASS program expands to benefit more students and teachers, ASI staff are intensifying their efforts to create widespread awareness among educators and the public.

We've made presentations about PASS at conferences and annual meetings of the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), Autodesk's Project-Based Learning Conference, and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Everywhere we go, PASS gets rave reviews.

The challenge is to influence conventional wisdom, which currently calls for increased emphasis on higher standards, assessment, and longer school days. Arguing against this trio is like taking a stand against motherhood and apple pie. However, PASS kindles interest because it goes beyond the dull and droning demands to study simply to get through the test about DNA, algebraic equations, or Justinian law.

PASS teaches children the *how* and *why* to learn. Dave Brunner, incoming PASS teacher from Broughton High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, explains why he wants to be a PASS teacher.

"My experience in education and in industry has enabled me to see the importance of integrating physical and emotional well-being into one's intellectual development. I have often reiterated to the students that I work with on the athletic fields the lesson that Vic Bubas, the former head basketball coach at Duke, taught me in 1966.

"Bubas said, and I am paraphrasing, 'You can't be a hero on Saturday night and a bum the rest of the week.' Anything that can be done to instill a sense of accountability, responsibility, and focus for all-encompassing achievement in our students must be done."

Must be done, indeed! As the country mourns the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, we're all called on to intensify our efforts to create a world that reflects goodness, compassion, honesty, and integrity. It's never too late to start and there's plenty of work to be done.

Susan Kirsch is the Executive Director of the American Sports Institute.



Celebrity co-chairs Al Attles, Jennifer Azzi, and Merton Hanks enjoying themselves at the PASS Benefit.

10th Annual PASS Benefit a Success

Steve Young scrambled for yardage against a throng of some 500 PASS Benefit guests eager to say hello and get autographs at the 10th Annual PASS Benefit at the Argent Hotel in San Francisco. Young was joined by celebrity co-chairs Merton Hanks, a 49er teammate; Al Attles, VP for the Golden State Warriors; and Jennifer Azzi, guard with the former San Jose Lasers. No matter what direction you turned, you were likely to see a celebrity—Master of Ceremonies Mark Ibanez, Channel 2 sports anchor; Giants pitcher Shawn Estes; Raiders Russell Maryland, Eric Allen, and Perry Carter; soccer great Eric Wynalda; columnists Joan Ryan and Scott Ostler; and coaches Mike Montgomery and Ben Braun, among others.

Volunteer or Come to Dinner!

What are you doing Monday, June 7?

You're invited to spend the day as a spotter for the Fourth Annual ASI Golf Classic at the prestigious Olympic Club, site of the 1998 U. S. Open.

If you can't get away for a full day, then join us for a delicious prime rib dinner in the spectacular Olympic Club Dining Room.

Bid on terrific items—trips, golf packages, dinners, wine, sports memorabilia, and more—in the silent and live auctions.

Tickets are \$75 and a portion is tax-deductible. It's a great way to support a great cause! Call 415-383-5750 for more information.

Every year, sponsors donate tickets to send PASS students to the PASS Benefit. This year, sponsors made it possible for nearly 100 students to meet and spend time talking with their sports heroes.

A very special thanks to PASS Benefit chair Dave Morrison and all the sponsors who made the event a success:

Co-Sponsors—Dresdner RCM Global Investors, 24 Hour Fitness, Wareham Development

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Playbills to Play Ball—An Actress Raises an Athlete

Growing up as a Hollywood hills child of the 50's, I saw my future at MGM or Disney studios, acting with Debbie Reynolds, singing and dancing on television in Mickey Mouse ears, my footprints on a star in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater.

As it turned out, I ended up in a long-running family play in Marin County, California, as the single mother of two energetic, athletic young boys.

I taught drama classes in the Mill Valley schools, dragging the boys along, casting them in plays until they rebelled. Soccer, football, basketball, and baseball soon became their lives and mine, replacing acting as the central focus of my days. Though the stage was different and they, not I, were the stars, the strong connection between athletics and theater arts became clear as I guided my talented younger son, Tony, toward a promising career in professional sports.

At 10 years old, Tony was a proud member of the Mill Valley Giants Little League baseball team. In the opening-day parade, the other boys kept their cool, shuffling along, heads and arms hanging. Tony stood out when, with joyful abandon, he thrust his arms into the air in a victory salute as the teams paraded through town. Grinning from ear to ear, he was a confident champion before play ever began.

Though we didn't know it then, this self-confidence, determination, and love for the game, along with my resolve to keep him focused on the sport, would be the driving forces that carried us through some difficult teenage years and beyond.

Tony's athletic talent was clear at an early age. A natural, the coaches called him. Concentration, instinct and rhythm flowed easily on the playing field. He won every award—All-Star, First-Team All League, Athlete of the Year.

In the classroom and in other areas of his life, things weren't nearly so smooth. I struggled in unfamiliar territory to help my son realize his potential on and off the field. Year after year, as I watched him play, what I was learning about sports was what I already knew about theater—practice, teamwork, and passion for performance resulted in a lasting sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. Perhaps an artistic-only-girl-child could successfully raise an athletic, young man after all.



Ten-year-old Tony Coscia with arms raised.

As a drama teacher, I saw my students benefit both on and off the stage from lessons in concentration, balance, relaxation, power, rhythm, flexibility, instinct, and attitude—all principles of success in theater and of athletic mastery as well. Though most of my students never became great actors, with this training, all of them became great human beings.

If my son could only make the connection, he would realize his potential in all aspects of life through his success in sports. Knowing this, I knew I could help. He had my complete support to become a great athlete. The rest would follow; I knew it.

Tony played every sport in elementary and middle school, excelling in them all. By high school, he had settled on baseball, announcing that this would be his career.

As a parent, I was apprehensive. As a teacher, I wasn't surprised. After all, hadn't I been inspired as a student by success on the stage and dreamed of a glamorous career for which many strive and few succeed? But I didn't follow my dream. I sensed, somehow, Tony would.

As a toddler on family camping trips, Tony spent hours throwing rocks into streams and lakes, honing the natural pitching motion he would later perfect on the mound. If there was a better place to throw, when my back was turned, off he'd go.

From those years on, a headstrong determination and fearlessness caused many setbacks that threatened his life, waylaid his career, and aged me beyond my years. Before he could swim, he dove confidently into the pool. He ran and he rolled down hills and down stairs, got up and kept right on going. His pace kept me running.

As he grew, so did the danger—his leg cut to the bone by the point of a surfboard, a broken jaw from a mountain bike crash, a broken hand from a hard hit ball, a crashed car from too much speed. Through high school, college, and independent ball, dedicated coaches helped me keep him focused. His hard work, strong belief in

himself, and love for his sport kept the dream alive. My faith in him, in his talent, and in something higher than both of us kept me sane.

The call we'd been waiting for finally came one day last October. It erased all those from before that had brought news of accident, injury, or worse. The San Francisco Giants would sign the fine young man who began his career as a Mill

Valley Giant 14 years ago.

In an instant, the future was worth all the pain of the past. The next step would be a giant leap for the determined, young athlete and a giant reward for his artistic, proud mom.



Tony Coscia with his mom, Marnie McArthur.

put it this way, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

Even Mike Ditka, the hard-driving, former pro football great and current head coach of the New Orleans Saints, knows what Dewey and Emerson meant. Ditka has been quoted as saying that the two worst days of the week are yesterday and tomorrow.

Sport teaches us that planning is necessary, but that attention to the moment, to the here and now, is of the essence, both in practice and during a game. In football, if a wide receiver focuses totally on a pass thrown to him and watches the ball all the way into his hands, most likely, he’ll make the catch. If he thinks about running with the ball *before* he catches it, he’ll probably drop the pass.

In softball, if a batter starts her swing in sync with the pitcher’s delivery and the pitch is in the strike zone, if she swings at it, most likely, the swing will be at the appropriate speed to make solid contact with the ball. If she starts her swing too early, she’ll probably end up overcommitting before she can recognize the speed and location of the pitch and will probably miss the ball.

Athletes from all sports say that in order to maximize their chances for victory, they must take everything one game at a time. If they are thinking about the previous game or about a future game, this will distract them from the tasks at hand that must be done to be victorious in the game they’re in right now.

If the wide receiver watches the ball all the way and waits to catch it before he runs, if the

...the two worst days of the week are yesterday and tomorrow.

batter doesn’t get ahead of herself and starts her swing in sync with the pitcher’s delivery, if the team focuses on the current game at hand and not on what happened with the last game or might happen with their next opponent, they have a better chance of being successful.

This is true for education as well. If we send kids to school to be fulfilled, to enjoy learning about things that are relevant to their lives *right now* instead of focusing on something and sometime in the future, they will catch on to learning for its own sake, they will make contact with that which fulfills them, they will know they can be what they are right now—kids who are getting something out of going to school.

As sport teaches us, if we focus on catching the ball before we run with it, if we start our swing at the right time, not too early nor too late, and if we stay focused on what we’re doing right now instead of what happened before or what might happen later, and we do all these things consistently, then the final scores will take care of themselves.

Naturally, we are concerned with our children’s future. But we need a change of perspective. We need to focus on the moment of learning itself. We adults—parents and educators alike—need to teach our children the joy of learning. We need to work out ways to make learning an adventure—because, in truth, it *is* an adventure, the ultimate human adventure. When boredom is replaced by excitement, when our children look forward eagerly to Monday morning, the future will take care of itself.

ATHLETE’S CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

different way. For me, once I’ve gotten the signal for a knuckleball, I grip the ball in my glove by digging the fingernails of my index finger, middle finger, and a little bit of my ring finger into the cowhide of the ball, not into the seams. Also, the ball is far back in the palm of my hand so I can put a lot of pressure on it.

As I start my windup, I’m visualizing a triangle peaking at the catcher’s mask, down to both of his knees. And when I throw a knuckleball at the catcher’s mask, it’s usually going to go down-left, down-right or straight down. So that’s the triangle that I’m visualizing when I’m throwing a knuckleball.

So when I’m in my windup, I’m concentrat-

ing on the catcher’s mask. That’s my focal point when I’m throwing.

As I go throw my motion, I’m not exploding off of my back leg like a fastball, like a maximum-effort guy. I’m concentrating on the feel of my fingernails on the ball.

When it’s time for the release, my wrist tightens but I don’t throw the ball. It’s more like a motion where I kind of thrust the ball, push it out. My wrist is taut and I’m trying to take the spin off of the ball. That’s your goal as a knuckleball pitcher—to get the ball with little or no rotation heading to that triangle.

Tom Candiotti is a knuckleball pitcher for the Oakland Athletics.

PASS Profile

Through the PASS program, I’ve learned important things. Nothing major, but things that have always helped me out and made me more successful.

I always knew that I should try my best, but I didn’t take the idea seriously. In the PASS class, I learned that you have to be committed to what you’re doing or you won’t be as successful as you could be.

I’ve improved in school and athletics after going through the PASS program.

I joined the PASS class in order to help my athletics. For the most part, the class did just that. I was prepared for any athletic event I participated in. I was used to warming up my muscles before competing, but not my mind. The PASS program helped me do that.

I started doing special techniques before my wrestling matches. I would do a concentration practice and breathing techniques. Doing these things really made a difference.

The class also helped if I started getting frustrated with my performance. When this happened, I learned that I could always calm myself down. I’m a better athlete after taking the class.

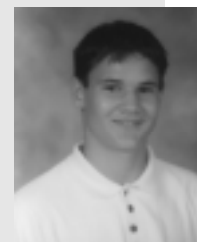
My grades have also gone up as a result of being in the PASS class. Since my freshman year, my grade point average has gone up almost one full point.

Before taking the class, I always wanted to do well in school, but until I set a goal of an actual grade point average, I never knew how well I could do. Setting the goal gave me a specific number to strive for. And I learned how to develop a plan to meet the goal.

I also learned how to concentrate more on what I do. Before, when I would do school assignments, I would get distracted easily in class or when doing homework. Now, I don’t get distracted so easily; my focus is much better.

The class has helped me so much. I have nothing but positive things to say about PASS and would recommend it to everyone.

Ryan Hlinak is a junior at Antioch Community High School in Antioch, Illinois. Last year, he qualified for the state finals in wrestling. This year, Ryan elected to take the PASS class a second time.



PASS[®]

Beyond Passing—Sports Come Off the Sideline, Into Classrooms

Sports have long offered a way for people who perform poorly in the classroom to succeed, at least financially.

A unique program begun in central California and spreading to other regions regards sports in an entirely different light: as an effective path direct to academic excellence.

The unorthodox approach is showing promise here at James Logan High School, a large public school in the low-income community of Union City, on the east side of San Francisco Bay.

"I wasn't a real strong student, but now my grades are going up," says Tino Figueroa. Adds fellow senior Amir Shiekh, "I feel better prepared for college."

Both are beneficiaries of a curriculum that takes a page from the ancient Greeks and attempts to reintegrate sports into academia, not just as an extracurricular activity or an easy grade for star athletes, but as a vital discipline that helps students become better all-around achievers.

The general idea is to take principles that students can readily see at work in sports, like balance, concentration, and attitude, and demonstrate how they apply equally to success in the study of algebra and biology, for instance.

Classes like the one at James Logan are now taught in 18 schools, mostly in central California where the program was born in 1992, but also in Chicago, San Diego, and Long Beach, Calif.

In the widening array of efforts nationwide to "reform" the public schools, this one argues for a holistic approach—balancing insistence on high standards and more-rigorous tests with activities outside the three R's, like the arts or sports. Such activities, say advocates, intrinsically appeal to many students and motivate broader success.

The program is called Promoting Achievement in School through Sports, or PASS, and was created by the nonprofit American Sports Institute, based in Mill Valley, Calif. Schools that accept the program incur a one-time cost of \$6,800 for teacher training and preparation and

then an annual fee of \$300 thereafter for ongoing support and materials. The class runs for a full school year and is offered as an elective.

"It's one of the best programs I've been around," says Rudy Guevara, who teaches the PASS class at Santa Teresa High School in San Jose. "It really teaches kids how to balance life academically, personally, and athletically."

A study by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) in Aurora, Colo., one of 10 federally funded labs around the country dedicated to improving teaching in public schools, has given it a glowing recommendation, calling it "a model for total school reform."

Barbara McCombs, who conducted the 1997 McREL assessment, says, "The program is constructed to build on things the learner feels are relevant. That gives it a leg up right from the start." Ms. McCombs also commended the program for high-caliber teacher training.

Also, studies done by the schools—comparing the grade point averages of students in a PASS class to a group of students outside the class but similar in age, gender, and ethnicity—show better grade improvements for PASS students.

The first noticeable feature of the PASS class at Logan High School is the silence. The first 10 minutes are spent in total, hear-a-pin-drop silence. The exercise in concentration not only seems to keep the class focused but also teaches a skill for other situations, whether preparing for the SAT or the opening kickoff of a football game.

Concentration is just one of the fundamentals that make up the core course work. The others are balance, relaxation, power, rhythm, flexibility, instinct, and attitude. Typical assignments require students to identify how those qualities apply academically, athletically, and personally.

Today's topic at Logan is flexibility, and the discussion focuses on how doing things "outside the norm," such as being open to new ideas or accepting constructive criticism, not only enhances athletic performance but also can set someone apart in a classroom or workplace.

John Goulding, a veteran biology teacher and Logan's PASS instructor, says the class is harder work for the teacher than other classes because many of the exercises require broad knowledge of the student and tracking of his or her progress through the school year. For instance, a student is chosen to be "athlete of the day," which calls for discussion among the teacher and fellow students about how he or she applies the class's skills in other aspects of school life. Many, but not all, of the PASS students are on athletic teams.

The concept underlying the PASS program is ancient, says Joel Kirsch, president of the American Sports Institute. "We're trying to correct an error that occurred between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C. in Greece, when sports began to lose their status as an integral part of the humanities," he says. The separation was propelled by the changing nature of sports as money began to flow in and an emphasis on winning took over, he says.

Kirsch has nothing against professional sports and has worked in the past for the San Francisco Giants baseball team. But he's convinced the

commercialization process has blinded educators to the real value of sports as a forum for teaching principles broadly applicable in education.

For students at Logan, the program is a magnet, drawing more than 100 applicants this school year, though there were only 25 slots.

"It really teaches kids how to balance life academically, personally, and athletically."

—Rudy Guevara, PASS teacher

"The program is constructed to build on things the learner feels are relevant."

—Barbara McCombs, McREL