

1. Provide a brief abstract or summary of your Honors in Action Project including the following components: academic research and analysis, leadership roles, leadership development, action, collaboration, reflection and outcomes.

What constitutes healthy competition when it comes to youth sports? Our research committee found two extremes. One end of the spectrum emphasizes competition that is detrimental to the health of our youth, and the other end eradicates all competition rewarding simple participation. As we researched, we were surprised that physically disabled youth benefit emotionally and physically from modified sports programs yet are ineligible to play in most organized sports. Modified sports programs encourage internal growth through progressive improvement in physical ability as well as social skills and confidence building through team affiliation. Through this project we were forced to challenge our preconceived opinions about what constitutes competition. Our research conclusions inspired our chapter to develop our action component, "It's How You Play the Game!" We collaborated with Grand Strand Miracle Leagues (Miracle League), a Florence County school district special needs educator and Horry Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) professors and staff. Throughout our project, we learned the pitfalls of preconceived opinions, research skills, interview skills and statistical analysis. We created and analyzed a survey of Miracle League parents and shared our data. According to tennis champion Arthur Ashe, "You are never really playing an opponent. You are playing yourself, your own highest standards, and when you reach your limits, that is real joy." While playing alongside Miracle League athletes, they taught us the most about competition as we witnessed their determination to do their best and their love of the game.

3. Why and by what process did you choose this theme?

During our Honors in Action training, officers divided into groups and discussed the proposed themes and questions. After much debate between the Psychology and Sports themes, chapter officers narrowed the focus to sports. We adamantly believed everyone getting a trophy negatively affects the ambition and drive of young people. Our advisors reminded us it is not good practice to use research to validate pre-existing opinions. Through our research we found two extremes in youth sports: either year round ultra-competitive travel teams or non-competitive teams where everyone receives a trophy. The question then became what constitutes healthy competition?

4.

Andrews, James Dr. *Any Given Monday: Sports Injuries and How to Prevent Them for Athletes, Parents and Coaches – Based on My Life in Sports Medicine.* 2013

World-renowned orthopedic surgeon stresses the importance of rest from any single sport or repetitive exercise and shows the debilitating effect of overuse injuries. This helped us to conclude ultra-competitive sports are detrimental.

Chan Tsin, Matthieu PhD. Department Chair Coastal Carolina University, Women's Soccer Club coach. matthieu@coastal.edu. Interviewed by Laura Thareau (July 30, 2013).

This interview reinforced our conclusion regarding ultra-competitive sports. The injuries he saw in his players were the result of twice daily practices in high school without rest from the sport.

Clark, Kathleen, Office of Exceptional Children Instructor, Florence County School District. kclark@florence3.k12.sc.us. Interviewed by Becki Kochan. (July 18, 2013).

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This interview gave us an insider's view of working with special needs children and how the current grading system prevents special needs children from participating in school organized sports.

Downs, Chris. "The Little League® Challenger Division Ensures Children with Disabilities Have Opportunity to Play Ball." in *Palaestra* (Fall 2007): 20-24.

This article explains how the Challenger Division differs from traditional Little League®. Its philosophy of personal growth over winning led us to work with Miracle League.

Friedman, Hilary Levey. *Playing to Win - Raising Children in a Competitive Culture*. 2009.

This book illustrates the pros and cons of a competitive environment: how we got here and where we can expect to see it go. She explores the idea of "competitive kid capital" and how parents prepare their children for life through athletic competition.

Kohn, Alphie. *No Contest - The Case Against Competition*. 1992.

This book reinforces the philosophy of Challenger Division by promoting measurable standards as the goal versus beating an opponent. It promotes cooperation and dismisses the need for any competition.

Murphy, MD, Nancy A., S. Carbone, MD Paul, and Council on Children with Disabilities. "Promoting the Participation of Children With Disabilities in Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activities." in *Pediatrics* (May 2008): 1057-1061.

This study emphasizes the importance of sports participation for children with disabilities and stresses the need for more program availability.

Ryska, Todd A. "Sportsmanship in Young Athletes: The Role of Competition, Motivational Orientation and Perceived Purposes of Sport." in *Journal of Psychology* (May 2003): 273-294

This study showed an inverse relationship between level of competition and sportsmanship. This inverse correlation was promoted partly by the actions of the coaches and adults affiliated with the sports.

5. What conclusions did your chapter reach based on your research and how did these conclusions guide you to select the action part of your project?

We learned children put winning near the bottom of reasons to participate in competitive sports. We found within the culture of ultra-competitive sports, good sportsmanship is often lost on adults, and winning at the cost of children's health is common. A study by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons found, among children aged 5-14, organized sport activity injuries increased 5.9 percent between 2000 and 2010. World-renowned orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews noted almost half of sports injuries in adolescents stem from overuse. This was corroborated in an interview with Dr. Matthieu Chan Tsin, who noted a quarter of his soccer players had knee replacement surgeries prior to college due to overuse injuries. Clearly this is not the definition of healthy competition.

Conversely, we found within the culture of non-competitive sports, significant personal growth stems from the quality of play and is not contingent upon winning trophies. We discovered a subset of Little League® called Challenger Division, established in 1989, that is for both physically and intellectually disabled children. With 900 divisions worldwide,

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Challenger Division measures success in terms of individual progress and effort, for instance, throwing the ball farther today than yesterday. This led us to explore what athletic opportunities are available globally for special needs individuals. We were surprised to find the Special Olympics only caters to the intellectually disabled while Paralympics primarily serves the physically challenged. Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has a league for blind soccer players founded in 2006. Other opportunities exist for the physically disabled based on country and type of disability. Little League® of Myrtle Beach does not have a Challenger Division; however, our research led us to Grand Strand Miracle Leagues.

Miracle League's philosophy also emphasizes individual progress over competition. This organization welcomes both intellectually and physically challenged athletes in baseball and soccer programs. Miracle League is open to residents, ages 3 to 53, of Horry, Georgetown and surrounding counties at no cost to participants. Established in 2001, the James C. Benton Miracle League Field is the second of its kind in the nation and is ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) approved. This all-access field features a flat synthetic surface with painted bases and ground level dugouts and provides a safe, barrier-free place to play. During all Miracle League games, players are paired with a "buddy" to assist them in play and offer encouragement. According to their rules of play, "Everyone Plays. Everyone Crosses Home Plate. Everyone Wins!" We experienced a group epiphany which caused us to define healthy competition as personal growth gained from competing against ourselves rather than against opponents.

6. Summarize your objectives for this Honors in Action project and the process by which the chapter set these objectives:

The impact of sports participation is well researched for the general population of children. We struggled to find academic research on the quality of life impact from sports participation among special needs youth. Even Miracle League lacked statistical data on the impact of their programs. Determined to address this challenge, we concluded that our efforts would be best spent advocating and gathering data for Miracle League. Through the process of weekly research committee meetings and bi-weekly Honors in Action planning meetings, we set the following objectives:

- Provide data through a player parent survey.
- Inform at least 1,000 people about Miracle League.
- Serve as "buddies" in baseball and soccer games.
- Raise \$500 to benefit Miracle League programs.

7. With whom did you collaborate for this Honors in Action Project?

Our collaboration began with Rene Smith, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, and our Information Technology Department to create a special non-credit course in Desire2Learn (D2L), our online learning management system, to facilitate information exchange among committee members. HGTC research librarians Chris Williams and Nicole Romyak created an electronic library guide, accessible through a link in our D2L course, to focus our research. We also collaborated with HGTC Professors Dean Blumberg, Leila Rogers and Matthew Knowlen. Finally, we worked directly with Tory Mackey, Executive Director, and Kate Duggan, Program Director, of Grand Strand Miracle Leagues.

8. Describe the leadership of chapter members that contributed to the planning, preparations, and implementation of this HIA project. The exercise of leadership may come from groups/committees, officers, and non-officers. Leadership roles are not necessarily those that come with "titles"

Kelly Botoulas served as the Honors in Action Committee Chairperson and created the research, fundraising and action subcommittees as the project evolved. Kelly set meeting dates, prepared an agenda for every meeting and kept the project organized by taking meticulous notes. Members Josh Bush, Laura Thareau, Tiffany Mitchell and officers Kelly Botoulas, Becki Kochan, Laura Brooks and Cindy Lomax served on the research committee. After the second meeting, the research committee chair resigned and Kelly assumed the responsibility. She delegated topics to ensure research was diverse. Two members interviewed faculty and staff in the sports and disabilities departments at Coastal Carolina University. Each research committee member was responsible for journaling and posting their findings on the D2L course discussion board. This allowed all committee members to share and analyze our research. The fundraising committee included three officers and one member. Together they organized a doughnut sale and yard sale. Additionally, they made paracord bracelets and keychains and procured a donation of refillable water bottles. Laura Thareau volunteered to design and print informational tags promoting Miracle League for the bracelets and water bottles. There was a misunderstanding regarding the tag for the water bottles, which left out information about Miracle League. We overcame this obstacle by having our Miracle League liaison, Tiffany, visit their office and obtain brochures to distribute with the water bottles. She also contacted Miracle League to confirm game dates and times. Action committee members organized chapter volunteers to serve as "buddies." Kelly created the Miracle League Participation Survey using Survey Monkey software. Two officers and two members served as the survey team. Kelly then input, analyzed and compiled the data for Miracle League.

9. Describe leadership education and training activities taken to specifically help chapter members be more effective leaders for this Honors in Action project.

Our leadership education began with an academic research class led by research librarians Chris Williams and Nicole Romyak who remained available to us for the duration of our project. They instructed us on the proper use of databases and how to determine credible sources. We also learned how to use the PASCAL system to request books from universities throughout South Carolina. Office of Exceptional Children instructor Kathleen Clark provided an inside perspective on working with special needs children. HGTC English Professor Dean Blumberg held a seminar to teach us interviewing techniques and professional communication skills to use when we consulted experts. Tory Mackey and Kate Duggan gave us guidelines for interacting with special needs children during sporting events and enthusiastically approved our data collection via the Miracle League Participation Survey. HGTC Sociology Professor Leila Rogers instructed Kelly in survey design to ensure it was reliable and valid. HGTC Probability and Statistics Professor Matthew Knowlen trained us in data analysis so we could share our survey results with Miracle League.

10. Describe the service "action" components of this Honors in Action project that were inspired by your Study Topic. (Action can also include advocacy.)

How do we compete when we play? Initially, we thought we play to win, but research led us to conclude we win as we compete against ourselves to achieve personal victories rather than against opponents for trophies. From this conclusion, we felt it was imperative to raise awareness, fundraise, volunteer, and gather data for Miracle League. We posted a fact-a-day announcement on Wavenet, HGTC's online portal for faculty, staff and students, each of the five days prior to our first "buddy" night. We wore Miracle League t-shirts while we distributed brochures to members of the Carolinas Region at the annual Leadership Conference. Additionally, we created and posted informational signs during our fundraising efforts. These efforts consisted of a yard sale, a doughnut sale, a water bottle sale and a paracord bracelet and keychain sale. To meet the ongoing need for "buddies," chapter members volunteered to play baseball and soccer with Miracle League athletes. Motivated by the lack of relevant data, we created the Miracle League Participation

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Survey. The executive director agreed to post our survey on their website; however it did not get posted. We overcame this obstacle by creating a written version that our survey team distributed and collected at the games. We uploaded the data and compiled a report including graphs and statistical analysis for Miracle League.

11. What are the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others.

We shared Miracle League facts with over 1,000 HGTC students and faculty as well as Carolinas Region members. We donated \$500 to Miracle League. This Field Sponsor level of contribution enables them to purchase uniforms. In appreciation, Miracle League added a permanent Phi Theta Kappa banner to the outfield. Nineteen volunteer "buddies" played baseball and soccer with approximately fifty children at three sporting events, and we surveyed twenty-one parents regarding their child's participation. Our survey yielded the following results: 55% of parents reported they strongly agree the overall mental and physical health of their child has improved since participating in Miracle League sports; 75% saw improvement in coordination; 55% saw cognitive improvements; and 95% saw improvements in social skills. When asked about long term benefits, responses included, "improved his right arm, energy level increase," and "to keep him active and have a way to make new friends, fine motor skills, and a positive attitude toward sports." These findings indicate a clear positive impact on the overall quality of life of Miracle League participants. One of our chapter members has personal experience with Miracle League and reported, "Sadly many times community activities, especially sports, are not available to children with special needs. Horry County was the first community we have lived in that even offered Miracle League."

From our participation with Miracle League, we learned the organization needs continued financial and volunteer support because they are fully funded by community donations. This means, unlike Little League, participants do not pay to play. This project taught us that competition has multiple definitions, and depending on how you define it, participating in sports can be either detrimental or beneficial. Working with Miracle League affected our chapter in many ways. Humbly witnessing their sheer effort to improve changed our views regarding what youth sports should be. The Miracle League players, who cared nothing about getting a trophy or winning, just loved to play the game and celebrated each other's victories. This is where we learned the most about what constitutes healthy competition. During these games we experienced the wonderment of simple accomplishments over actually "playing," such as keeping your arm down while swinging, crossing each base on your way to home plate and kicking the ball to the green cone. We grew as scholar-servant-leaders when we realized this "do better than you did yesterday" definition of competition extends to all areas in life. And, that is how you play the game.

12. What is left undone or what opportunities remain in the future?

When interpreting the Miracle League Participation Survey results, we realized we did not clearly define competition. Therefore, when asked to rate the competitiveness of Miracle League, parents responded based on their own perception of what constitutes competition. We will revise the survey to clarify this ambiguity and plan to have it posted on the Miracle League website in 2014 to continue our data collection. We were surprised that only 5% of parents surveyed have children between the ages of 6 and 11. This represents an opportunity to advocate to special needs instructors at local elementary schools. Another opportunity exists to expand advocacy and fundraising by partnering with other student organizations from HGTC. We will continue to serve as scholar-servant-leaders by establishing an annual "buddy" night with Miracle League.