Groups Sports: A Fast-Track to Relationship Success

There are many locations that provide favorable situations in which new acquaintances can be made. However, one must take into consideration that relationships formed in different scenarios, can impact a person’s life in various ways. For example, a friendship that initiated in a local sports organization will likely reinforce positive values. While a friendship acquired at a party, where underage drinking took place, will likely have a negative effect on a young adult’s values and beliefs. For this reason, it is necessary to track the value a relationship adds to one’s identity. Some acquaintances and relationships can become toxic and have a negative impact on one’s life. However, a young adult who has developed positive social and emotional well-being, has a greater chance of making acquaintances and pursuing more valuable relationships. According to a 1943 publication of the Psychological Review, Abraham Maslow presented a hierarchy of human needs for motivation. This hierarchy of needs is still relevant in the psychology field\(^1\). Sports fulfill all subservient levels of needs in Maslow’s model\(^2\); therefore, an athlete is on the fast track to building long lasting and successful relationships.

Maslow’s publication, *Theory of Human Motivation*, theorized that a person’s fundamental needs must be met before he or she could begin to yearn for the subsidiary needs. His model is presented as a triangle in which the fundamental needs make up the foundation of

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2 International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition & Physical Activity states that social benefits included positive relationships with coaches, making new friends, and developing teamwork and social skills. Personal benefits included children being emotionally controlled, enjoying exploration, having confidence and discipline, performing well academically, managing their weight and being 'kept busy'. Eime et al. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity 2013, 10:98 Page 15 of 21 http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/10/1/98
the triangle and the subservient needs work their way up based on rank of significance.

According to his model, the most fundamental needs are physiological and are met through parents, relatives, or government. The second level of needs is safety, then is belonging, the fourth is esteem and, finally, self-actualization. Having met the most basic needs, a person can then proceed into fulfilling the next level of needs and so on. Until having completely satisfied all their needs and reaching self-actualization and obtaining emotional well-being. A person is then able to reciprocate healthy social and emotional behaviors. These attributes are consistent with the skills that are required to quickly form healthy, professional and romantic relationships, and friendships. This also encourages a person to become a positive influence in and around the community.

The highest ranking need that sports fulfill, is safety. This level of needs involves a constant feeling of protection through security, law, order, stability, and structure. Every league and association, major and local, has a strict set of rules that must be followed to keep players safe\(^3\). There is structure, disciplinary measures, rewards, scholarships, and mandatory safety regulations associated with the leagues. Because of this, athletes have a sense of stability and structure through their club. Their motivation shifts to the next rank of needs as he or she attempts to fulfill those. This allows the athlete to continue their path to quickly initiate healthy relationships.

One may argue that sports are unsafe and that participation can cause life altering injuries that could potentially lead to depression. Statistics will indeed support that sport injuries make up the preponderance of emergency room visits in the US. However, a person who rides their bike

regularly has a greater chance of injuring themselves than one who plays soccer\(^4\). Withal, one must take into consideration that the bulk of the sports related injuries were sprains and strains. Moreover, because of the vast amount of support athletes receive from their team\(^5\), they are more likely to become more resilient and bounce back from hardship faster than a non-athlete.

Additionally, sports provide a sense of belonging, comradery, and love. The need for love and belongingness ranks in at third. Friendship, trust, and acceptance are amongst the needs in this rank and all are met through playing group sports. Health and government organizations have created programs that develop and encourage group activities to maximize social capital. For example, in 2007 the Family and Youth Services Bureau developed and implemented a program by the name of *Positive Youth Development*\(^6\). Youth.gov defined the program as:

> an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (Positive Youth Development).

Participation provides comradery and affiliation, enabling the athlete to focus his or her motivation on the next need. He or she is advancing to a lifelong ability to creating successful relationships.

\(^4\) According to Stanford Children’s Health, in 2009 30 million children and young adults participated in sports. Of those 30 million, 200 thousand suffered injuries while riding their bikes, 215 thousand injuries were while playing football, and 88 thousand were reportedly soccer related injuries.

\(^5\) July 2010, the *Journal of Athletic Training* performs research on Social Support Patterns of Athletes.

\(^6\) *A Family Thing: Positive Youth Development Outcomes of a Sport-Based Life Skills Program* discusses Positive Youth Development in Parks and Recreation.
Moreover, sports provide a fantastic platform for self-esteem. This rank in Maslow’s Hierarchy includes achievement, status, dominance, expertise, respect, admiration, and leadership. All attributes that can be found in group sports. These characteristics are essential in guiding youth into adulthood successfully. For instance, an athlete getting picked to play forward in their team because of his or her amazing abilities, or becoming team captain, could be considered an achievement or a way of earning respect. It is very important that this, as all the other needs, is met. According to the World Health Organization:

- Promotion of emotional well-being and healthy practices in adolescence… can help protect the health of future offspring;
- Promotion of positive behaviours (e.g. good sleep habits and constructive forms of risk-taking, such as sport or drama) and prevention, early detection and treatment of problems (e.g. substance use disorders, mental disorders, injuries and sexually transmitted infections) can immediately benefit adolescents (Why Invest in Adolescents Health).

Investing in today’s youth through sports programs, promotes successful relationships for generations to come. Fulfilling this need gets an athlete closer to emotional well-being and strong relationships.

Finally, Sports provide the opportunity to fulfill self-actualization. Self-Actualization needs are those that lead to achieving one’s full potential, self-edification, personal growth and acme experiences. The Springer Science & Business Media B.V. published an article while testing the basic needs theory and said, “humans function and develop effectively as a consequence of the social environment and its potential for basic need satisfaction” (Aide et al. 190). Similar to a team captain leading his teammates to a tournament win! For example, in the 2002 World Cup, when Cafu led Brazil to a tremendous win. He celebrated by having his
teammates lift him and the trophy. When asked about this experience he stated: "There is nothing better than being a world champion and lifting that cup. I think it’s been the dream of every footballer, and certainly every captain of Brazil. Without a doubt, winning the World Cup is the highest prize in football. It's the peak - the maximum that you can reach." (Behind the World Cup Record: Cafu). For many athletes, just like Cafu, the goal is to become the best. Fulfilling this need through group sports places the athlete in a beneficial position to strengthen their identity and form healthy long lasting relationships.

In conclusion, it has become quite apparent that sports fulfill all subservient levels of need in Maslow’s hierarchy. This puts an athlete on the fast track to building long lasting and successful relationships. Maslow’s publication, Theory of Human Motivation, theorized that a person’s fundamental needs must be met before he or she could begin to yearn for the subsidiary needs. The highest ranking need that group sports fulfill is safety. One may argue that sports are actually unsafe and that participation can cause life altering injuries that could potentially lead to depression. Withal, one must take into consideration that the bulk of the sports related injuries were sprains and strains. Additionally, sports provide a sense of belonging, comradery, and love. Moreover, sports provide a fantastic platform for self-esteem. Sports also provide the opportunity to fulfill self-actualization. Becoming part of a team, sets the foundation for lifelong skills to create healthy relationships in any setting.
Works Cited


