



Copyright 2008 Toronto Star Newspapers, Ltd.
The Toronto Star
July 5, 2008 Saturday

Fewer joining sports teams

By Andrea Gordon, Toronto Star

Here are some facts about children and sports:

Participation in organized **youth** sports is falling, recent Statistics Canada figures show. In 2005, 51 per cent of kids ages 5 to 14 regularly took part in teams or sports clubs. That's down from 57 per cent in 1992.

In the U.S., about 70 per cent of kids in organized sports drop out by age 13. Among the top reasons cited in a survey of players by Michigan State University: It's no longer fun; there's too much focus on winning; coaches are too negative.

In Canada, kids' involvement in sports is more prevalent among families with higher incomes and in households where parents are athletic. Children of immigrants are less likely to participate, with only 32 per cent joining clubs and teams.

Soccer is the most common sport for Canadian kids.

Roughly 90 per cent of Canadian children and youth are failing to meet health guidelines for daily physical activity, according to the 2008 report from Active Healthy Kids Canada. The major reason: screen time.

Incidents of bad behaviour in **youth** sports are usually instigated by coaches and parents rather than players. Justplay Sport Services Inc. of Burlington, which has been accumulating data from game officials for eight years, found that three-quarters of reported critical incidents originated with adults.

Streaming young children into elite competitive levels is not good for kids or society, some experts warn. It produces kids more at risk of burnout and discourages late bloomers. It also overlooks the harsh reality that later success depends largely on how puberty affects strength and speed. The more kids you have participating early without streaming, the greater base you have of lifelong enthusiasts and potential top athletes.

A 2006 survey of 5,275 high school athletes by the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Los Angeles found that the most competitive sports produce kids who are more prone to cheating in school, deceit and cutting corners. These sports also are more open to forms of bullying to motivate people.