An Exploration of Experiences in Sport Environments for Adults with Physical Disabilities

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Recreation Therapy Best Practices: Supporting Appropriate Sports Environments for Adolescents and Young Adults with Physical Disabilities

Specific Features of Sports Environments

Mainstream Sports
- Recreational level of competition
- Participation typically with peers without disabilities
- Coach may or may not have knowledge of appropriate accommodations
- Client may need to educate coach & peers about disabilities
- Sense of friendship/community
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

Disability (Adapted) Sports
- Recreational or competitive level of competition
- Participation with peers with physical disabilities
- Coaches at the grassroots level may not know about disability sport but may have a collaborative learning experience
- Peers may have differing disability experiences which may or may not be relatable to client
- Possibility of claim to disability community & networking opportunities
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

Integrated Disability Sports
- Recreational level of competition
- Participation with peers with various types of disabilities
- Coach may or may not know how to accommodate a wide range of disabilities at one time
- Client may need to advocate for specific accommodations
- Develop diverse friendships
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

General Considerations
- Specific client needs/wants
• Specific client goals & objectives towards performance & psychosocial domains
• If client has no sports experience, trying it all mentality should be suggested at first
• Client sports agenda
  o Wants to be considered an athlete
  o Wants to be considered an athlete with a disability/disabled athlete
  o Does not care about being an athlete or not

Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (APIE) Process in Deciding Appropriate Sports Environment

Step 1: Assess your client
Important client considerations
• Sports interests
• Type of disability
• Perception of disability
• Peer preferences (with or without disability)
• Desired level of competition
• Personal performance & psychosocial goals & objectives

Step 2: Planning with your client
Practical Considerations
• Availability of desired sports programs/environments
• Cost
• Needed equipment for participation
• Available support systems
• Coaching style/attitudes
• Transportation options
• Expected level of competition of team/program

Step 3: Implement
Topics to check-in about with clients during participation
• Coaching/instructor relationship
• Sense of community
• Networking
• Finding special sports-based moments
• Learning to advocate for self
• Accommodations needs being met
• Social connections/friendships

Step 4: Evaluate
Final thoughts to consider in relation to sports environment

- Was the environment appropriate?
- Was the level of competition appropriate?
- How was the coaching/instructor relationship?
- Did the client have a support system to assist in negotiating potential barriers to cost, transportation, & provide psychosocial support?
- Were friendships developed?
- Was a sense of community cultivated?
- Were special sports related moments made through participation?
- Did self-advocacy occur?