

Study shows that girls in sports develop conflict-resolution skills

May 12 2009, By Quinn Phillips

(PhysOrg.com) -- Most parents understand the importance of keeping their kids active in a time when childhood obesity is becoming a serious problem. But one University of Alberta researcher wants to go a step further and find out how sports also teach social skills.

Nick Holt and his research crew from the Faculty of [Physical Education](#) and Recreation followed two girls' soccer teams for one season to monitor how they interacted. Nolt said the teams fit well into his study because they were competitive.

"These teams were made up of different people who wouldn't normally be friends," he said. "We found some interesting stuff."

The biggest finding was that the [girls](#) learned to manage [conflict](#) like grown-ups: "They figured out, if situations came up, how to go to the other person and try to resolve them."

These girls dealt with conflict so well that Holt's research team, the parents and the coaches didn't know there was a problem until researchers did post-season interviews.

"The girls realized when someone was having an argument with someone else, and that it wasn't helping the team. So they'd group together and try to mediate the conflict. In sport you've got to work with the people you might not get along with."

Holt and his team also found the girls would make an effort to accommodate new team members. The researchers focused on girls because there is a higher drop-out rate among [teenagers](#) and adolescence, and it's particularly important to understand what is going on with girls since they tend to place greater emphasis on their social lives.

"We know [social relationships](#) are more important to girls than they are to boys," said Holt.

He says these findings are most important for coaches and parents of young athletes and advises them to encourage girls to face conflict and deal with problems head on.

"It's not about being afraid of conflict and just keeping everyone happy all the time; it's about encouraging the girls to deal with conflicts when they arise because those are growth experiences. Those things will transfer outside of sport, because that's what you've got to do when you start working."

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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