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BENEFITS OF SPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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“Sports teaches you character, it teaches you to play by the rules, it teaches you to know what it feels like to win and lose, it teaches you about life”. –Billie Jean King–

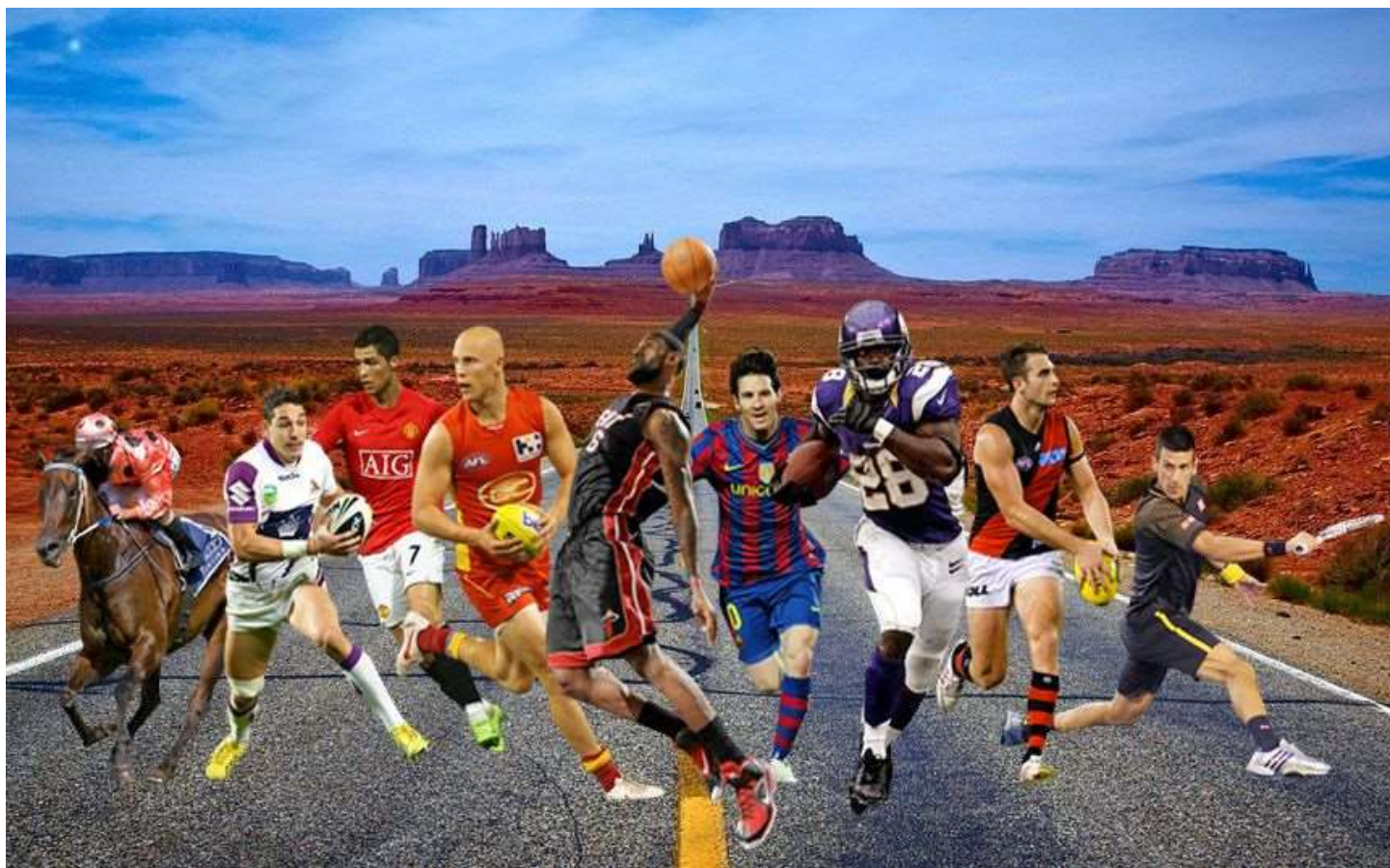
I. Background

We are still excited after the recent results of Central American Women Volleyball Championship where our team got silver medal and defeated Guatemala in an epic final match. Belize was one of the lowest ranked team in this tournament competing against professional teams. Good luck and good fortune are not the same; good fortune can come from a stroke of good luck but is underpinned by hard work. We also enjoy different sports worldwide, but we never realize all sacrifice, discipline, hard work, determination and training hours behind all these excellent sport players that we admire, it motivated this reflexional analysis about the importance of sport practice at early ages.

Sport is a means of personal development. That is, sports can serve as a vehicle for the psychological, physical, cognitive and social development of those who practice it. Sport and physical activity reduce stress, improves the quality of sleep, prevents diseases and has been helpful in the therapy of several chronic diseases. In addition, the practice of sports and physical activity regularly arouses interest in taking care of one-self and staying healthy, which is why it is usually associated with a tendency to eat healthier.

II. Discussion

Sports play a fundamental role in the educational, training and disciplinary process of children. The combat sports in particular are very dynamic, since they require several skills and physical coordination to perform all of their specialized techniques, which require great discipline and will, accompanied by a very good physical training, with a high mental concentration. Sports are the way to perfection through repetition and systematization, it requires the use of both cerebral hemispheres to perform the techniques on the right and left, deepening in the emotional and physical for all its practitioners.





It's well known that 4-5 years old is the stage where there is differentiation between left and right hemispheres of the kids' brain. Specialization allows children to develop a sense of laterality and directionality and improvement of motor coordination and body awareness in space. How to develop: physical exercises that deal with the notion of left and right, up and down, forward and backward, are advisable. Swimming, dance and martial arts help develop spatial awareness of children.

Martial Arts are efficient, ethical, they help to develop respect and discipline. Martial Arts since its emergence, not only took care of the physical part of the sport, for which they created a great system of exercises and techniques, for its development; they also laid the foundations of an ethical and formative code in disciplinary and emotional matters for all its members: federative, sensei, referees, athletes or practitioners. This code is required to apply both inside and outside the tatami, in your private and professional life.

UNESCO has declared Martial Arts in general as the best sports as initial training for children and young 4-21 years and a regular practice at any age, allowing a "full physical education", promoting, through knowledge of the sport, all psychomotor possibilities: space location, perspective, ambidexterity, handedness, playing, pulling, pushing, crawling, jumping, rolling, falling, joint and independent coordination of both hands and feet, etc., and relationship with other people, using the game and the fight as a dynamic integrator element and introducing technical and tactical initiation sports, in addition to seeking a general, ideal suitability.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) also considered that Martial Arts are the more completed sports since they promote the values of friendship, participation, respect and effort to improve. Martial Arts training is much better activity for kids than team sports such as, Baseball, Basketball or Soccer. If you are inclined to sign your child up for some organized sports activity, here are some reasons why you should choose Martial Arts for your kids:

1. Self-Defense: The first reason why most people practice martial art is for self-defense. Not only will the martial arts teach you the techniques to defend yourself, but also the way to think about defending yourself. They also help you build up the reflexes you need if you're ever in a difficulty, and give you the confidence to fight back.

2. Belts and Ranking: Belts are a great way to help children track their progress and motivate them to strive higher. Belts and ranking may help build the child confidence and their desire to succeed. For this purpose, most Martial Arts styles use a system of Colored belts to indicate the knowledge and skill levels of their practitioners. In many cases, the first belt promotion can be attained in few weeks and when children obtain that first belt, it shows them that with the right motivation, they can succeed. One belt is always not enough, once a child passes one belt test he or she is already thinking about the next one.

3. Self-Confidence: As children become more skillful in their selected style of martial arts, their confidence gets increased significantly. They become more self-assured and confident. The Sensei's (Teacher's) encourage their students a lot to help them achieve this goal, but the confidence level will extend far beyond the Dojo (Martial Arts Studio).

4. Exercise: The classical martial arts class will often be comprised of warm-up calisthenics, teaching and practicing of moves and possibly some sparring. The warm up and practice include the bulk of the time, and for that time your child will be constantly on the go, stretching, crunches, punches and kicks. The workout each child gets will not only assist in the natural development of his/her muscles but also help them build stronger cardio-vascular systems. Even in the most active of team sports such as Soccer, Hockey, or Basketball, children don't get that much of a workout simply because they generally don't play the whole game and even if they do, there are still breaks in the action.

5. Emphasis on Individual Achievement: In the martial arts, each child's success is based on his or her own individual qualities. Yes, your kid may not be the most winning in his class, but that will be because he tried and lost, and not because he wasn't good enough to make it off the bench like other sports in which he may not play the game at all because his coach told him so. Knowing that their own ambition and hard work will drive them to succeed, they will be motivated to follow their dreams without the fear of hating the sport or not having the chance to practice it.

6. Discipline: The core of any martial art is "practice makes perfect". There is a constant repetition in drills and practices with emphasis on details and rhythm. Kicking, punching and throwing are practiced and repeated over and over. Those practices teach them the benefits of frequent practice, and the patience to get there. All of this teaches children to respect one another, their opponents and colleagues, and how to play games fair and square.

7. Martial arts isn't about brute force, it is about control: It teaches emphasize the concept of maximum efficiency. This is evident, as the root of many techniques is not necessarily brute force, but using your opponents' movements and strength against him or her. While physical strength and size are important, mental strength is probably the most critical factor in competition.



8. Gender Equity: Most parents consider martial arts for their sons, not nearly as many would consider it for their daughters. However, the martial arts are one of the few sports where both boys and girls can play together. There are also tremendous international opportunities in Women's martial arts as well. Your daughter's yellow belt will not be any easier for her to attain than your son's yellow belt will be for him. It also gives brothers and sisters an opportunity to practice together and learn from one another as well.

9. Respect for Strength: The first thing parents think about when they send their kids to martial arts class is: "Is my child going to use this to hurt others?". Although this is a legitimate concern, it is always addressed early by instructors who remind students that the techniques they learn in the dojo stay in the dojo except in self-defense, and shouldn't be used to intimidate people. As children learn the ropes, they will learn to respect their new-found strength and techniques.

10. Competition: Similarly, to team sports, Martial Arts are all about competition. The latter is great for kids to test their skills and show their progress. Unlike team sports, the loser can't really blame anyone beyond his or herself. But then this gives them a sense of respect for their opponent, as well as motivation to do better the next time. Each tournament is a fresh start, and it is seldom that you get only one match even in the Olympics where there is a single-elimination for the Gold and Silver medals, there is a second-chance round for those who have lost their first matches for them to be able to win a Bronze.

The comprehensive training of the athlete comprises three types of education: knowledge education; physical education and, finally, moral education. These three kinds of education provide their practitioners and especially children, the physical and combative as well as the defensive capacity acquired from the first two educational ones. Respectful, humble, ethical and safe conduct characterizes the majority of those sports; as founder of Judo Jigoro Kano stated: "I am always working to be better than yesterday".

III. Conclusions

Sports are beneficial for children and young people, since it allows: a comprehensive physical education, enhancing, through knowledge of the sport, all psychomotor possibilities (spatial location, perspective, ambidexterity, laterality, throwing, pushing, crawling, jumping, rolling, falling, independent joint coordination of both hands and feet, etc.), and relationship with others students, using play and fight like an integrator-dynamic element and introducing technical and tactical sport initiation of shape adapted; in addition to seeking a general, ideal fitness.

It has been demonstrated that lack of physical activity or sedentary lifestyle is associated with the elevation of many risk factors responsible for diseases such as high blood pressure, increased blood glucose, increased body fat, etc. There is a relationship between the practice of exercise and the improvement of the immune system. In addition, more and more researches are being done as the practice of exercise can slow down the rate of aging and, more importantly, help to age in a more functional way and with a better quality of life. However, we are still investigating what is the "dose" or parameters that define the most appropriate exercise program for the improvement of each of the factors that influence health. Well, the most important thing is effort, perseverance, discipline and teamwork. If these characteristics are met, everyone can achieve what is proposed.

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