

## **Beyond the Professional Athlete: Introducing Middle School Students to Sports Related Occupations**

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Even though the odds are astronomically high against it ever happening, many middle school students harbor hopes of some day playing professional sports. What students frequently fail to realize is that there are numerous sports-related occupations in addition to that of the professional athlete. The classroom career awareness activities presented here are designed to help students discover that there is more to sports than being an athlete.

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**KEY WORDS:** sports careers; occupations in athletics; middle school career awareness.

A major goal of career development in the middle schools is helping students to expand their levels of career awareness by identifying career pathways and specific occupations within these pathways (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC), 1992). Career awareness interventions at this level focus on introducing students to a broad range of career options organized around occupational themes, while at the same time allowing students to clarify career interests and values (Brown, 2003; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003). Niles and Harris-Bowlsby (2002) stressed the importance of involving middle

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school students in career activities designed to stimulate their curiosity. Students who are curious about their career interests and values are more likely to engage in career exploratory behaviors, which, in turn, allows them to better cope with the career developmental tasks confronting them (Super, 1990). Niles and Harris-Bowlsby (2002) also noted that teaching students how families of occupations can be clustered according to factors such as interests and/or training enables students to better understand the complexities of the world of work and the interrelatedness of occupations.

By middle school, students begin to form ideas about their career intentions based upon their interests, values, and abilities (Herr & Cramer, 1996). Given that sports are America's national pastime, it is not surprising that large numbers of middle school students watch, play, and are interested in sports. In fact, approximately 22 million students nationwide (Stratton, 2002) are avid fans. While many of these students undoubtedly harbor visions of "turning pro," the reality is that very few will ever become professional athletes. Cedric Dempsey, former President of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, noted that the odds of a high school football player making it to the pros at all—let alone having a career—are about 6,000 to 1; the odds for a high school basketball player—10,000 to 1 (Dempsey, 2003). But all is not lost for those many students whose love of the game alone will not carry them to the professional ranks—there are scores of sports related occupations open to both men and women.

The three action-oriented classroom career awareness activities that follow are designed to acquaint students with a variety of sports related occupations. The activities enable students to expand their awareness of themselves and a cluster of sports occupations. "Sports Jeopardy!" exposes students to sports related occupations that are associated with school subjects. "Teamwork" illustrates the interrelatedness of work and workers (i.e., how many different occupations contribute to the production of a single product, which, in this case, is an item of sports equipment). Lastly, the "Sports Values Auction" allows students to identify occupations in the sports field that correspond to Holland's (1994) six personality types.

### **Sports Jeopardy!**

The main goals of "Sports Jeopardy!" are to expose students to occupations in the sports industry and to see how these occupations

are related to school subjects. "Sports Jeopardy!" follows the same general format of the popular television game show "Jeopardy!." The use of games as instructional tools is effective because middle school students enjoy action-oriented activities, plus games foster student interaction, enhance motivation, and promote content retention (Miller & Knippers, 1992; Sandler, 1990). Because the TV show "Jeopardy!" is so widely-watched, many students will already be familiar with the game format and rules.

The time required for this version of "Sports Jeopardy!" is approximately 45 minutes, although categories and/or questions may be added or deleted to fit a specific time frame. One large facsimile Jeopardy Board (Appendix A) constructed from poster board or used as an overhead projector transparency is needed. A volunteer will be needed to keep score on the chalkboard. Once this is done, the leader divides the class/group into two or three teams, depending on class size; and determines the order in which the teams will participate (i.e., who goes first, second, etc.). The leader also must review the following directions with the students: (1) a member of team #1 selects a category and either a \$100, \$200, or \$300 item; (2) the counselor/teacher, using the corresponding answer card, reads the response for the chosen category; (3) the team, working as a group, will have five seconds to supply the correct answer (in question form); (4) the team may continue to select items as long as it supplies correct answer; (5) once a question is answered correctly, the counselor/teacher removes the dollar amount from the game board to show that it cannot be chosen again; (6) the game continues until the board is empty; (7) the winning team is the team with the most money at the end of the game. Each answer card contains, in addition to the question (Q) and answer (A), a nugget of information (I) that the counselor/teacher may use when elaborating on the correct response (see Appendix B for sample Sports Jeopardy! categories and questions).

Additional rounds of "Sports Jeopardy!" may be created to focus on other sports related occupations or to highlight other aspects of occupations in the sports industry (e.g., jobs that are outside; jobs that focus on data, people, things; jobs that require a graduate degree). The following sources may prove useful in developing additional game cards: Clay (1995), Cylkowski (1988), Field (1991), Girl Scouts of the USA (1997), Greenlee (1996), Karlin (1997), Roberts (2000), and Rowh (2001).

## Teamwork

This activity illustrates the interrelatedness of work and workers (i.e., how many different occupations contribute to the production of an item of sports equipment). In order to complete this 30 minute activity, the following items are necessary: a duffle bag or similar large bag containing several pieces of sports equipment (e.g., football, baseball, basketball, jersey, tennis racket, golf club); a set of "Teamwork" cards (Appendix C) associated with the production of each piece of sports equipment in the duffle bag; and several copies of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) or the O\*NET (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).

Introduce "Teamwork" to the students by telling them you are going to show them certain items associated with specific sports related occupations and that you want to see if they can name the occupation. Take each piece of equipment from the duffle bag and have students suggest the occupation to which it relates. For example, if you were to pull out a Cleveland Cavaliers basketball jersey with number 23 on it, many students would immediately associate it with LeBron James, a professional basketball player. After students have associated each piece of sports equipment with a particular occupation (baseball player, tennis player, etc.), hold up any piece of sports equipment, for example, a baseball, and have students talk about how many occupations and how many workers it took to produce a baseball and get it to the ball-park so Barry Bonds could hit it for a home run. For example, talk about the occupations associated with the horse hide cover, the cork center, and the cutters and sewers that worked to produce a single baseball. You might also discuss the various occupations associated with the game of baseball: announcer, umpire, groundskeeper, concession worker, trainer, ticket taker, security officer, TV crew member, etc. Once you have made your point about the interrelatedness of occupations, divide the class into 4 or 5 groups and give each group a set of "Teamwork" cards and have the students arrange the cards in what they consider to be the proper sequence necessary to produce a certain product ... their ultimate goal is to identify the product represented by their set of cards. When students have identified the sports equipment represented by their cards and have placed the occupations in their proper sequence, have the groups report to the class as a

whole. Each group should first name the sports equipment they identified and then discuss the various occupations that were involved in making the item and getting it to the consumer.

To ensure that the discussion focuses the students attention on the salient points, impress upon them how important it is to recognize that many different workers must work together to produce a product or to provide a service. Have students discuss the importance of teamwork and what qualities good team members possess. Lead the students in a discussion about each of the occupations involved in the production of sports equipment. Discuss the occupations in terms of skills required, education required, physical demands, inside/outside, etc. Talk about the characteristics particular to each sport represented (e.g., physical abilities, training, duration of a professional athlete's career, and the odds of making it as a professional athlete).

### **Sports Occupations Values Auction**

Brown (2003), in his discussion of how people make career decisions, concluded that career decisions are essentially values based decisions; thus it was not surprising that Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2002) stated that helping middle school students to clarify their values will be increasingly important in the 21st century. Additionally, Herr and Cramer (1996), NOICC (1992), and Super (1990) stressed the importance of providing middle school students with a variety of experiences aimed at helping them to clarify their interests and values. The "Sports Occupations Values Auction" does just that.

The items for sale at the Sports Occupations Values Auction correspond to Holland's (1994) six personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC). Ideally, the auction is employed after students have taken the middle-school version of The Self-Directed Search (Form CE) (1994) and have discussed their inventory results with their counselors.

The first step in carrying out the values auction is to have students peruse a list of "values items" that are up for sale (see Appendix D) to determine which items they would like to purchase.

Students are given \$1,000 each to allocate as they see fit amongst the items for sale. After the students have recorded their anticipated bids on their auction sheets, the auction commences with the counselor/teacher serving as auctioneer. It does not take long for the students to realize that their projected bids may have to be revised (e.g., a proposed bid of \$150 may quickly need to be changed if the opening bid is for \$200). When all the items have been sold, students review their bid sheets to see how much they ended up bidding on certain items. Utilizing the scoring key, students are able to identify the Holland categories that correspond to their highest valued items (items 2, 9, and 13 are Realistic; 1, 11, and 18 are Investigative; 3, 6, and 16 are Artistic; 5, 10, and 17 are Social; 4, 8, and 15 are Enterprising; 7, 12, and 14 are Conventional). Lastly, students are directed to turn to the "Sports Occupations Grouped by Holland Codes" sheet (Appendix E) to see which sports related occupations match the values on which they bid the highest amounts of money. In essence, this is a fun way to get students to prioritize their values and, then, relate selected values to specific occupations in athletics.

### **Conclusion**

Many middle school students enjoy playing, watching, and/or reading about sports. While not everyone has the ability, skill, and/or interest necessary to become a professional athlete, there are numerous sports related occupations available to just about anyone. From aerobics instructor to Zamboni driver, the list of sports occupations is extensive. The activities presented here expose students to clusters of sports occupations in order that they might understand that they do not have to be athletes to have careers in athletics. By having students explore their values, expand their awareness of occupations associated with their interests in sports, and learn how teamwork is essential in the workplace, it is believed that the goal of having middle school students increase their career awareness is accomplished in a way that piques the curiosity of students to continue to engage in career exploratory endeavors.

**Appendix A**  
**Sports Jeopardy Board**

<i>Arts &amp; Sports</i>	<i>Math &amp; Sports</i>	<i>Science &amp; Sports</i>	<i>English &amp; Sports</i>	<i>Physical Education &amp; Sports</i>	<i>Sports Occupations Potpourri</i>
\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$200
\$300	\$300	\$300	\$300	\$300	\$300

**Appendix B**

**Sports Jeopardy!**  
Categories, Questions, and Answers

Arts and Sports

- \$100 A: This worker “captures” sporting events and athletes in motion.  
Q: What is a Sports Photographer?  
I: A college background or degree may be required for some positions. Working on a school newspaper can be helpful. Creative people who enjoy sports and taking pictures are well suited for this occupation.
- \$200 A: This worker designs the clothing professional athletes wear.  
Q: What is an Athletic Apparel Designer?  
I: A college degree in art, design, or fashion is preferred. People who are artistic and who are interested in clothing design are ideal.
- \$300 A: This worker films practices and games usually for performance analysis, teaching, and scouting purposes.  
Q: What is a Sports Cinematographer?  
I: People who are good with audiovisual equipment and who have specific knowledge of the sport they will be covering are preferred.

### Math and Sports

\$100 A: This worker collects, analyzes, and interprets sports data.

Q: What is a Sports Statistician?

I: A minimum of a two-year college degree and experience working with computers are ideal. Good math skills are essential for this occupation.

\$200 A: This worker handles ticket sales and keeps accurate records of tickets sold.

Q: What is a Ticket Manager?

I: Some positions require a high school diploma while others require a college degree. Experience working in a box/ticket office is important. People who are detail oriented, organized, and personable are preferred.

\$300 A: This worker develops programs to raise money for college athletic programs.

Q: What is an Athletic Development Director?

I: A college degree in business and experience in fundraising is preferred.

### Science and Sports

\$100 A: This worker counsels athletes on nutritional problems and needs.

Q: What is a Sports and Fitness Nutritionist?

I: Educational requirements vary from a one-year program to a master's degree in nutritional science. An understanding of athletics, exercise, and fitness as well as good communication skills is preferred.

\$200 A: This worker evaluates injuries and makes sure athletes are ready to play.

Q: What is an Athletic Trainer?

I: A minimum of a four-year college degree is required, and an apprenticeship may be helpful. People with first aid skills and knowledge of and physiology are ideal.

\$300 A: This worker mows, fertilizes, and preserves playing fields.

Q: What is a Groundskeeper?

I: No specific degree is required but knowledge of turf maintenance and machinery is essential. People who enjoy working outside are ideal.



## English and Sports

\$100 A: This worker reports news in the sports world and attends games and tournaments in order to write about them.

Q: What is a Sports Writer?

I: Generally, a minimum of a two-year college degree is required for a position as a Sports Writer. Excellent writing skills are essential for this occupation.

\$200 A: This worker handles the logistics necessary to put together a sporting event and oversees details involved.

Q: What is a Sports Event Coordinator?

I: A four-year college degree in public relations, marketing, or event coordination is preferred. People who are detailed oriented and who possess good written and verbal communication skills are ideal.

\$300 A: This worker may report sports news, scores, and event information, or may give commentary during games to the listening public.

Q: What is a Sportscaster?

I: A degree in broadcasting from a four-year college is required for most positions. People who have good speaking voices, who possess good communication skills, and who have knowledge of the sports they cover are ideal.

## Physical Education and Sports

\$100 A: This worker is responsible for helping clients, on a one-on-one basis, attain their utmost levels of fitness.

Q: What is a Personal Trainer?

I: A background in exercise, fitness, health, and nutrition is helpful. Experience working in a gym, health club, or spa is preferred. People who are energetic, enthusiastic, physically-fit, and health conscious are ideal.

\$200 A: This worker plans the curriculum for different grade levels in areas such as physical fitness and health.

Q: What is a Physical Education Teacher?

I: Teacher certification and advanced degrees are required to work as a Physical Education Teacher in most school settings.

\$300 A: This worker keeps the water safe for swimmers and over-seas activities at beaches or pools.

Q: What is a Lifeguard?

I: There are no formal educational requirements for Lifeguards, but certification from the American Red Cross is required. People who are strong swimmers, who enjoy working with people, and who have good eyesight are ideal.

### Sports Occupations Potpourri

\$100 A: This worker chooses team members, develops game strategies, and motivates athletes.

Q: What is a Coach (high school, college, or university)?

I: A minimum of a degree from a four-year college is required for most positions, and experience as an athlete is helpful but not always necessary.

\$200 A: This worker finds and evaluates outstanding athletes for sports teams.

Q: What is a Scout?

I: No formal education is required, but experience as an athlete or coach is preferred. People who are persuasive and articulate are ideal.

\$300 A: This worker leads water trips and expeditions often in National Parks.

Q: What is a White-Water Rafting or Canoeing Instructor?

I: No formal education is required but training may be extensive, and an apprenticeship is preferred. People who are personable, who are physically fit, and who are good swimmers are ideal.

## Appendix C

Teamwork Cards			
<u>Golf Club</u>	<u>Bowling Ball</u>	<u>Baseball Glove</u>	<u>Basketball Jersey</u>
Head Former 732.381-018	Grader and Marker 732.381-014	Reverser 732.687-066	Patternmaker 781.361-014
Grip Wrapper 732.684-082	Weigher and Packer 732.487-010	Lining Stuffer 732.687-042	Sewing-Machine Operator 787.682-046
Caster 502.482-010	Engraver 732.584-010	Inspector 732.684-130	Cutter 781.684-014
Assembler 732.684-078	Inspector 732.684-130	Tanner 582.482-018	Steamer 582.685-078
Club Head Weighter 732.687-026	Mold Cleaner 732.687-046	Lacer 732.687-034	Embroiderer 782.684-018
Inspector and Adjuster 732.384-014	Molder 556.685-018	Shaper 732.684-106	Designer 142.061-018

Note: Additional card sets may be produced by the counselor. The “Occupations in Fabrication and Repair of Sports Goods” section of the DOT (pages 750-754), or the “Entertainers and Performers, Sports and Related Workers” section of O\*NET (2002) may prove helpful.

### Appendix D Sports Occupations Values

<i>Amount you plan to bid</i>	<i>ITEMS FOR SALE</i>	<i>Your actual bid</i>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I would like a job which requires analytical and technical skills.</li> <li>2. I would like a job working with tools and machines.</li> <li>3. I would like a job which allows me to draw and design.</li> <li>4. I would like a job persuading or directing others.</li> <li>5. I would like a job helping or serving others.</li> <li>6. I would like a job which requires creative ability and imagination.</li> <li>7. I would like a job working with numbers.</li> <li>8. I would like a job which might lead to financial success.</li> <li>9. I would like a job which involves physical activity.</li> <li>10. I would like a job working with people.</li> <li>11. I would like a job which requires independence.</li> <li>12. I would like a job which involves following directions and routines.</li> <li>13. I would like a job which requires common sense and practical skills.</li> <li>14. I would like a job working in an office.</li> <li>15. I would like a job which involves risk-taking.</li> <li>16. I would like a job that allows me to sing, act, or dance for others.</li> <li>17. I would like a job teaching others what I know.</li> <li>18. I would like a job which focuses on knowledge and learning.</li> </ol>	

## Appendix E

### Sports Occupations Grouped by Holland Codes

Social	Realistic
Athletic Development Director (SEC)	Groundskeeper (RCE)
Athletic Director (SER)	Sports Massage Therapist (RES)
Athletic Trainer (SRI)	Enterprising
Coach (SRE)	Equipment Manager (ESR)
Nutritionist (SEI)	Harness Racing Judge (ESC)
Personal Trainer (SRE)	Health Club Manager (ESR)
Physical Education Teacher (SER)	Lifeguard (ESR)
Scout (SEC)	Rafting/Canoeing Instructor (ESR)
Sports Broadcaster (SCE)	Ring Announcer (ESR)
Sports Psychologist (SIA)	Scorekeeper/Statistician (ESC)
Conventional	Sporting Goods Salesperson (ESR)
Concession Worker (CRE)	Sports Agent (ESC)
Ticket Manager (CES)	Sports Event Coordinator (ESR)
Timekeeper (CSE)	Sports Marketing Director (ESR)
Sport-Equipment epairer (CRS)	Water Safety Instructor (ESR)
Investigative	Artistic
Doctor of Sports Medicine (ISC)	Athletic Apparel Designer (AER)
Exercise Physiologist (ISR)	Choreographer (AES)
Sports Statistician (IRE)	Sports Cinematographer (AES)
	Sportswriter (AES)

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