



# The Volleyball Festival

Experiences that Inspire  
Competition that Empowers  
Relationships that Unify

It Happens  
by *Design*

**David Canning Epperson, Ph.D.**  
With a Foreward by **Bernice Reiff Epperson, M.A.**



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# Foreward

In the late 70's when our daughters first began their sports careers at their elementary and junior high schools, volleyball was nowhere to be found on our radar screens. At that point Dave and I were deeply involved in our own lives in sports, at the local tennis club. However, very soon we found that little time remained to invest in tennis since our free time was being consumed by helping our daughters develop an appreciation for sports.

As we got involved in our daughter's lives in sport it became clear that 8 years after the enactment of Title IX (the legislation that granted women equal rights in sports) there were very few resources available to support girls' sports in most schools. Our oldest daughter, Anna, began her basketball career as the only girl on a 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys' team. By the time Anna and Lara reached junior high school the experienced coaches were assigned to coach the boys' teams while the girls teams were assigned teachers who either had never played the sport they were coaching or had no coaching experience, or both. We were at a major transition point in the implementation of Title IX. Dave and I decided that we needed to work closely with the school to help them develop their girls' sports programs. Very soon a retooled swimming coach, Jan Furman, came onto the scene to introduce our daughters and the community to club volleyball by organizing a USVBA club in Davis, California. Anna and Lara were 12 and 14 at that point. These early experiences helped us develop the passion we still possess for taking initiatives to reduce the inequities that 25 years later still exist in sports opportunities for women. Yes, we have made progress, but we still have "a long way to go, baby."

For the next two years our efforts were devoted to helping Jan organize and develop the Davis Volleyball Club. We invested both time and energy to help mobilize parents in support of the program that Jan was putting together. During that period we developed a great appreciation for the incredible beauty of the sport of volleyball. This helped us begin to think of sports as an art form not as a battle for dominance.

Very early we became aware of the constructive role parents can play in supporting athletes and coaches to create cohesive teams where coaches and parents work together, driven by a passion to provide the girls with the benefits of being a part of a vibrant sports community. It was then that we came to realize that the family-friendly climate that was being created in this pioneering club volleyball initiative added greatly to strengthening family bonds and to connecting our family to the school and

community. We learned that sport can indeed be more than sport, that it can do much to heal the social fractures that modern life has created.

As we worked with coaches and other parents in expanding sports opportunities in our community we discovered that the young girls who were participating in our daughters' athletic programs were extremely competitive, but at the same time, not at all contentious. To the contrary, they were very devoted to supporting one another and to treating their teammates and opponents with respect and dignity. This was at a time in the history of American sports when high profile professional athletes were beginning to display "in-your-face" and "look at me" attitudes on the playing field. This corruption of the spirit of sport had already begun to invade boys sports at both the school and club levels. We were delighted that we were able to be a part of a very wholesome activity for our children, their schoolmates, their coaches and the other sports families who did not reflect any ugly elements. We decided we wanted to invest our time in the development of sports programs that promoted, celebrated and perpetuated a highly respectful and civil approach to sports competition.

In 1981 we volunteered to lead a fund raising effort to send the Davis volleyball team to Omaha for the Junior National Championships. Shortly thereafter, I was invited by Gary Colberg, the founding father of the USVBA Junior Olympic movement, to assist him in administering the national qualifiers and championships scheduled for 1982. I accepted this assignment and helped Gary organize events in Knoxville, Davis and Santa Barbara. The next year Dave joined with Gary and me in preparing for the 1983 Junior National Championships headquartered at UCLA. At the conclusion of that championship a decision was made by the USVBA to hold the 1984 championships in Rhode Island. Since moving the event to the east coast made it difficult for many teams from the West to travel east for the championships, Wink Davenport (the father of tennis star Lindsey Davenport) who at that time was the commissioner of the Southern California Region of USVBA, asked Dave and me if we would organize an event in Northern California to accommodate those teams that could not afford to travel to Rhode Island. He chose to locate the event in Northern California because he did not want to over-extend the volleyball community in Southern California at the time they were hosting the 1984 Olympic Games. We accepted Wink's invitation with the provision that we would have the freedom to develop the event in a way that reflected the values and ideas we had developed through our experiences in volleyball. In June of 1984 we administered the first Festival at Santa Clara and San Jose State Universities.

One of the major concerns from our experiences with the National

Championships was that the teams that most needed playing experience were quickly eliminated during the first or second day of competition. That made sense since the primary objective of the tournament was to determine which teams were the most accomplished and deserving of being crowned national champions. As a result of our observation that with the championship model “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer,” Dave came up with a tournament format that allows all teams, regardless of their win-loss record, to continue to play throughout the entire event. This was a significant departure from previous volleyball competitions at all levels. We have been pleased that this innovation has now become the standard for all major volleyball tournaments at both the junior and adult levels. By employing this opportunity expanding approach the festival is able to provide athletes with nearly a full high school season of competition over a six-day period. This competition model has allowed us to administer over 100,000 volleyball matches over the past 23 years. This competition has put junior volleyball in high gear so that girls throughout the nation are being provided with the experience they need to maximize their potential. One of our original goals was to provide girls with an opportunity to play “catch-up,” since when we began the Festival the sports careers of girls were launched much later than boys. Fortunately, today girls are offered opportunities to develop their athletic abilities at a much earlier age in volleyball, soccer, softball and basketball, with some programs offering training to girls as young as four. Thankfully our granddaughters are benefitting from the remarkable growth of youth sports in their communities.

In the pages that follow Dave has described the principles that are guiding the administration of the Festival. Reviewing these principles from time to time allows us to remain focused on the issues that have been central to our mission. It is our hope that this manifesto will allow you to achieve a better understanding of what we aspire to achieve through this annual celebration of possibilities for young athletes and their families.

Bernice Reiff Epperson, CEO  
The Volleyball Festival





# The Festival is Guided by a Vision of Opportunity Expanding Sports

To create opportunities for our children where they can be inspired, enabled and closely connected to nurturing people is *the* assignment for everyone who assumes protective, mentoring, and educational responsibilities. That includes those parents, coaches and sports administrators who are working with the 40 million children currently enrolled in school and youth sports. This assignment is taken seriously by the dedicated Festival staff who assemble each year in June to administer this annual celebration of women in sports. From the very first Festival in 1984 the staff have assumed responsibility for creating a climate of *civility and conviviality* in which all those associated with the event can find support for their efforts to contribute to creating a mutually supportive climate. This type of social and emotional support allows all Festival participants to be inspired and renewed by their shared experiences.

An ideal sports community should provide young women with inspiration to embrace victory. Sport can offer girls opportunities to engage in disciplined physical training where they learn to prosper in aggressive, demanding, and highly competitive situations. Historically, many girls have been uncomfortable with the pursuit of victory. Too frequently they have avoided competitive situations because they fear they might compromise their relationships with their teammates or opponents. Mariah Burton Nelson, in *Embracing Victory*, invites women to follow the Champion's path by engaging in "right competition,"

*Right competition that conquers no one. Right competition that respects all contestants, including the self. Right competition that honors the process as well as the outcome. Right competition that limits women to neither stereotypical male nor stereotypical female ways of competing. (p. 33)*

I would add,

*Right competition that nourishes the soul. Right competition that strengthens family and community ties.*

Sport needs to be enacted in an arena that brings out the best in all of us. It needs to be an activity that *links* participants to their sports partners. It needs to allow us to connect, in meaningful ways, with those people who are important to us. Sport should be a sublime experience where hungry souls feast on a diet of spirited competition, good fellowship, and opportunities to imprint the playing field with their special gifts and grace.

If sport is approached as *art* rather than as *war*, it can “blow away the everyday cobwebs of the soul,” (as Picasso has suggested about art) rather than “blow away” an opponent. In a civil, convivial, and considerate atmosphere sport can feed the soul and at the same time help heal fractures that modern life has caused. Good sports experiences can help us avoid anxiety, boredom, and loneliness. In short, sport, when built upon a solid foundation of basic human values, can be a truly involving, empowering, connective and expansive experience. That is what the Festival aspires to achieve. Everything we do is designed to help everyone remain focused upon the basic principles elaborated in this manifesto.

Sports participants benefit most when they are invested in the success of their fellow explorers of the “sportscape,” teammates and opponents alike. When they have developed the skills needed to embrace one another’s dreams, they have a greater tendency to provide the type of support needed to bring out the best in their fellow competitors. Furthermore, they free themselves from the heavy burden of their own achievement drive. This kind of connective experience allows them to become everything they can be while strengthening the fabric of their teams, clubs, families, schools, and communities.

Early in our experiences with youth sports, my wife and I recognized that some of the established traditions in women’s sports lend themselves to providing an ideal context in which women and their families can grow and prosper. It is a place where young women can shed their stereotypical feminine masks. We reasoned that when the challenges of competition are tempered by young women’s natural propensity for care and compassion, sport has the potential of becoming a utopian world for young women, where the best in each participant can be brought out. I have come to conclude that it might be more appropriate to use the term that Riane Eisler introduced in *The Chalice and the Blade* to describe the ideal climate we aspire to create for young women athletes at the Festival. Eisler proposes using the term *pragmatopia*, which she defines as “a realizable scenario for a partnership future,” to describe an ideal world in which to grow and prosper. (p.198) She contrasts a *partnership future* (based upon the traditional female ethos) with a dominator future

(based upon the traditional male ethos). Sport can indeed to be guided by partnership values if parents, coaches and athletes take initiatives to create a realizable sports scenario for a partnership future. Those of us administering the Festival aspire to create a realizable sports scenario for a partnership future among athletes, coaches and parents.



## **The Festival Gives High Priority To Creating a Sense of Community**

Unfortunately, along with the radical increase in opportunities for women in sports over the past 30 years there has been a tendency for women's sports programs to emulate the atmosphere and values of the men's games. We have sensed that the toxic influences of male-inspired "in-your-face" sports, rooted in the Cult of Dominance, were beginning to find their way into women's sports as early as 25 years ago. Many leaders in women's sports, in efforts to gain acceptance from male athletic directors, who at that time controlled nearly all athletics budgets, were importing into the women's games policies, practices, attitudes and values that compromise the sane, humane, and balanced traditions of pre-Title IX women's sports.

We caught a glimpse of what sport could become during our early days in girl's sports and were inspired by what we saw. We saw the world of women's sports as a place where our daughters could learn to compete without developing the ugly patterns of conduct that had become widespread in male-inspired sports. It was our hope that these young women could learn to prosper from aggressive competitive situations while at the same time preserve their natural caring and nurturing ways. We wanted to participate in the shaping of a sports climate that reflected the best of the male and female sports traditions. We aspired to help effect a synthesis of the *Culture of Conquest* and the *Culture of Care*. It was this *image of opportunity* that inspired us to accept the challenge of developing a major sporting event for young women. Our commitment to this project was rooted in the belief that sport may be one of the best avenues for women and men to come to a mutual appreciation of what each brings to the playing field and to their relationships. In the process, women can benefit from the challenges of competitive experiences. At the same time, the playing field can become a more nurturing and hospitable place for everyone, if more female athletes, coaches and administrators are allowed to imprint sport with their traditional caring values.

In 1984 my wife and I were invited to initiate a national girls volleyball event, which we named the Volleyball Festival because we wanted it to be viewed as more than simply a tournament. This provided us with the opportunity to attempt to put into place a sports event for women that reflected the values we had come to embrace. We aspired to create our own "pragmatopia," if you will, where the best of the *female tradition* could be synthesized with the best of the *male tradition* in a

*family-friendly* atmosphere that places high priority on creating a *sense of community*. The image of an extended family inspired our early thinking about the ideal sports environment where each family member takes a genuine interest in every other family member's well being.

This image is deeply rooted in the *Culture of Care*. The extended-family model served us well during our early days in administering the event. It allowed us to recruit eager staff and participants who shared our vision of what sport could become. We tried to avoid the pitfalls of established youth sports events that focused almost exclusively on crowning a champion. Instead we urged celebrating a common commitment to providing opportunities for all women athletes, regardless of their level of development.

In the face of the remarkable expansion of the “Festival Family” over its 23 years we have been challenged to reevaluate the *extended-family metaphor* we have been using to guide the organization and administration of the Festival. The event has grown from a modest youth volleyball tournament, serving 1200 girls in 1984, to the largest annual sporting event in the world where 7000 volleyball matches were administered for over 9,000 competitors in 2006. The event requires a staff of 350 and 130 volleyball courts at five separate venues in the Greater Reno Area. Our challenge is to discover ways that the expansive and inclusive spirit of the Festival can be maintained as more and more families choose to join in this celebration of the possibilities of sport.



## **The Festival Places Effectiveness over Efficiency**

In recent years we have been engaged in a systematic assessment of how the Festival can be organized to accommodate the changes that have occurred over the years. We have been proceeding with caution, since we are concerned that something might get lost in transition if we abandon the extended-family model without carefully putting into place a new model.

Our legal and financial advisors have been advising us to adopt a more “corporate” model, as our operations have become more complex. While we understand their concerns about enhancing organizational efficiency by employing standard business practices, the movement toward greater staff specialization and standard management and accountability procedures has seemed out of sync with our original extended-family model. Clearly this model has serious limitations at this point in the Festival’s history. To continue to be guided by this model could be counterproductive, even disastrous, for the organization. However, none of us wants the participating coaches, athletes, and parents to be treated as “customers” of our services, nor do any of us want the Festival staff to be treated like “employees.” There is, however, a need to rethink how the spirit of the event can be maintained as it continues to grow, how we can still be effective as we work toward becoming more efficient. Like all organizations, throughout the history of the Festival we have experienced the unavoidable tension between trying to be effective while at the same time being efficient. We have been ideologically committed to participatory decision-making, and do not want to compromise that approach. We want both the staff and the participants to remain invested in the event, to feel that their inputs are valued and are acted upon. We are concerned that we run the risk of losing the participants’ sense of ownership of the Festival if we short-circuit the tradition of shared power.

Over the years various components of the Festival have been put into place to ensure that the experiences orchestrated for young women athletes, their coaches, and their families build close bonds among the various participants. It has been our goal to create an “enclave of enchantment,” “a commonwealth of civility, conviviality, and consideration,” a “sanctuary” for young women sports lovers and their families. We have aspired to form a viable “pragmatopia” where all participants leave the event reinvigorated, inspired to enjoy sport, better equipped to “embrace victory” in all aspects of their lives, and better connected with their team, their family, and the larger community of volleyball lovers. We want Festival participants to

develop a hearty appetite for sports.

One overriding objective of the Festival, throughout its 23 year history, has been to make this gathering a time when families are strengthened and enriched by their shared experiences. We also want the Festival to be a time when families are inspired to use sports opportunities to extend their daughters' readiness to successfully negotiate the challenges of competition in all aspects of their lives. We want to administer "Right competition" that inspires, educates, and unifies.



## The Festival Promotes Partnership Values

Let's now consider how the goals of creating a sports community that serves the interests of athletes, coaches, and parents are being pursued through the vehicle of the Volleyball Festival. I will describe the efforts being made to maintain the original spirit of the Festival as the *extended-family management model* is being transformed into an *alternative community* that serves as an exemplar of partnership values. We want to negotiate this re-formation of the culture of sport in a manner that enhances our ability to create a climate of civility, conviviality, and consideration that can provide the inspiration to embrace and carry one another's dreams. We want to achieve a personal investment on the part of all participants in promoting gender-just sports policies and practices.

I have created a *Declaration of Principles* that outlines the values of sports that empower, connect and unify, which I like to refer to as *Opportunity Expanding Sports*. This perspective has been shaping the evolution of the Festival's policies and practices. This declaration is meant to be a document-in-progress, that from time to time is circulated to the various "investor" groups so that they can further imprint it with their ideas and values, as they have been doing since the outset of the event in 1984.





# Experiences that Inspire

## Article I.

*A youth sports community should be a source of inspiration for all participants*



PRINCIPLE # 1  
**Provide all participants with experiences  
that uplift and renew their spirits.**

Festival policies and practices are based upon the assumption that the major role of sport is to uplift and renew the spirits of all participants. When sport provides expansive experiences they not only inspire the immediate participants in that particular sports community, but they also uplift the spirits of the groups with whom the participants associate, that is, their friendship groups, families, schools, and communities.

At the Festival the importance of this upbeat climate is underscored by awarding “Festival Spirit” tokens that are distributed to participants by staff members who identify actions that have had the effect of uplifting the spirits of fellow Festival participants. At the conclusion of the event a large trophy is awarded at the televised finals to that team that has accumulated the most spirit tokens over the course of Festival Week.



## PRINCIPLE # 2

**Emphasize participating in sport for its own sake, not for the glory, the applause, the economic gains (scholarships, professional contracts) or even the trophies, but for the intrinsic satisfactions that expansive sports experiences offer.**

Optimal sports experiences are achieved by setting goals, concentrating one's psychic energy, paying close attention to feedback, and making sure that the challenge is appropriate to one's skills. (See Csikszentmihalyi's descriptions of optimal experiences in *Flow*, pp.190-191) The Festival has invented a playing format that allows each team to seek its own level as the event progresses. This innovation allows Festival teams: 1) to set realistic goals, 2) to focus their efforts on achieving these goals, and 3) to pay close attention to the feedback they get from attempting a variety of strategies for meeting the challenges of competition. When the top teams compete against the lower level teams on the first day of the event it allows the upper level teams a safe place in which to try new things and to experiment with different combinations of players. At the same time it allows the less experienced teams to compete against the very best athletes in the country, thus helping them establish standards of performance to guide their future training and match preparation.

It is the distinctive "Festival format" that puts teams of like ability together as the tournament progresses that establishes a framework for achieving optimal sports experiences. The focus is upon the *experiences* participants have at the Festival, not upon their "success" or "failure." Athletes can compete with abandon and become totally caught up in the flow of the moment when they are confident that they have a chance to be competitive. This does not mean that zealous coaches, ambitious parents, irresponsible staff, or out of control athletes cannot spoil the atmosphere that the Festival attempts to create. But by promoting and celebrating optimal sports experiences and structuring the event so that the teams are evenly matched, the Festival increases the prospects of participants enjoying their competitive experiences.

### PRINCIPLE # 3

**Create a sanctuary that isolates participants from the anxiety, boredom, and loneliness of everyday life so that their spirits can be renewed.**

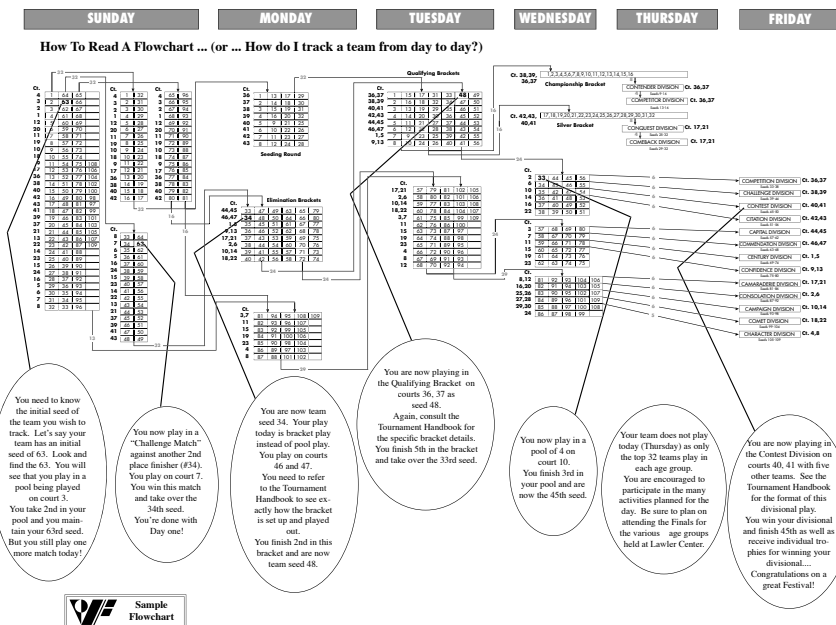
By creating a safe and highly energized community, in which everyone is an active participant, it is possible for individuals to get the most out of their sports experiences. A sports community becomes a sanctuary when opportunities for success are maximized; fairness is ensured; caring, process-oriented people are administering the competition; mutual concern, cooperation, and investment in the Festival community are rewarded; features of competition, other than winning, are celebrated; opponents are urged to understand, establish, and embrace the common ground of all participants; clear and accurate information is provided so that all participants can reliably plan how to effectively invest their time; expressions of rage and hostility are discouraged; a friendly, hospitable, physically comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing environment is created; and finally, athletes and their parents are encouraged to share precious athletic moments.



# PRINCIPLE # 4

## Maximize opportunities for success through the design of the competition format.

Fairness is assured by adopting effective seeding practices (which presents a real challenge in an interregional event where teams have not had common opponents), by employing a format design that makes it necessary for a team to *lose twice in one day* before being eliminated from competing for the highest level division (the championship division), by recruiting the most competent referees available, and by rewarding good sportsmanship.



Caring, process-oriented people are chosen to administer competition. In addition, a staff-training program is put into place where Festival values are underscored.

To ensure that mutual concern, cooperation, and personal investment in the Festival community become common practice, as many individuals as possible have been involved in evaluating and establishing Festival policies and practices. Input is systematically solicited from staff members. A web site is being used to maintain a regular flow of information, both ways, from administrators to participants and from participants to administrators. Face to face, and voice-to-voice communication is being encouraged whenever feasible. The web has provided an efficient means of maintaining a high level of investment by participants in the Festival community.

To ensure that a variety of features of the competition, other than winning, are celebrated, communications to Festival participants underscore the importance of all dimensions of the event, not simply the



on-court outcomes. This task is a major undertaking, because historically, on the American sports scene, win-loss records and the star system have been the focus of the lives of coaches and sports lovers. A whole new outlook has to be advanced. In order for coaches to receive recognition within their ranks, it has been necessary for them to remain attentive to winning, while subordinating all other considerations. In a variety of ways the Festival organization attempts to identify and recognize other

dimensions of sports, especially the experience itself. More often than not that shift in perspective is a hard transition to make for experienced sports participants. Old ways of viewing the sports enterprise change ever so slowly. One has to be patient and persevering if one wishes to help usher in alternative ways of conducting sport.

Opponents need to be urged to participate in establishing norms that support the creation of a sanctuary where they can be safe and free to test themselves in competition. All participants are urged to discover, understand and embrace the common ground that exists among them. Two different approaches can be employed in establishing a common ground. One way is to supply participants with common experiences and a context in which they can share their experiences with one another. Another way is to draw out attitudes and values that the participants already share and build upon these in establishing a common ground. The Festival employs both strategies. It puts all of the participants through common orientations and celebrations to establish shared meanings. The opening ceremony does much to establish that common experience and mental images. In addition, opportunities are provided at different points throughout the event that allow athletes and coaches from different communities to interact in intimate settings. The sister-team program, as well as the informal picnic and barbecue, create opportunities for athletes and coaches to bond. The coaches clinics help establish additional shared meanings for the coaches. The parent workshops, since they are interactive sessions, provide parents with opportunities to freely express themselves about both sport and child rearing issues in a safe context. It is rare in the lives of most club coaches and parents to be provided with a forum where they are free and safe to express their concerns. The Festival not only provides a forum for expressing their concerns, but also actually takes initiatives to encourage lively conversation about what constitutes good sports.

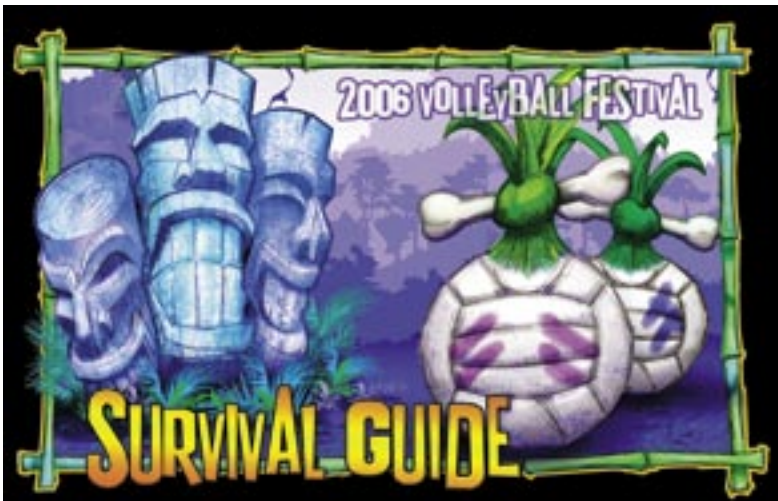






## **The Festival Minimizes Confusion**

The less confusion created in the sports environment, the greater the chance one has of establishing a sanctuary for everyone involved. We understand the need to provide clear and accurate information to all participants so that they can reliably plan their daily schedules. In the hierarchy of needs for participants at a large, complex event, the need to have easy access to information, of all sorts, is a prerequisite to taking full advantage of the shelter provided by the Festival's organizational structure. Several provisions are made to supply that information.





PRINCIPLE # 5  
**Keep everyone informed.**

First of all, the advance information sent to participants provides them with a mental set upon their arrival at the Festival. Next, the quality of the orientations participants receive when they arrive immediately sets the tone. At that time they make a determination as to whether they are going to be comfortable and confident in the decisions they are required to make. These are not high-level decisions. Instead, they revolve around where and when they are going to eat, sleep, and play, and how they are going to get from place to place. The coaches, chaperones and parents are directed to the festival web page and are encouraged to download a *Festival Survival Guide* that provides them with all of the basic information required to manage the logistics of the event: maps, competition procedures, information about housing, food service, parking etc. Hard copies of this handbook are made available to all coaches and chaperones when they attend their pre-Festival orientation sessions and copies are available for sale at the information booths at each venue for parents who prefer a hard copy. After those basics are satisfied then it becomes possible for them to concentrate on accomplishing higher-level goals, such as how to get the most out of their Festival experiences.

The Festival has employed a number of former team moms and club administrators to serve as the nucleus of the information staff. The information staff is easily accessible to participants at all of the playing sites. A daily newspaper is published and made available the first thing each morning. A published competition “flow chart” allows coaches, athletes, and parents to easily track their teams through the event. Also, each day match scheduling information to direct teams to their playing sites is provided as soon as it is available. Real time results on the Internet are made available to participants and to those parents who are following the event from home. The Festival web site offers computer literate coaches and parents with current information that can be accessed at any hour of the day or night during Festival Week.

Detailed playing site maps are available to everyone upon their arrival at the Festival. Also, a player tracking system is in place and is accessible at each information booth. This allows parents and relatives to find where and when their family member’s team is playing.

Signage is created to direct participants to the various special events, and daily schedules appear in the daily Festival newspaper, *The Festival Spirit*. Also college coaches are provided with complete information about each player who is a college prospect. This information

appears on a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) made available by a firm contracted to perform this service for the college coaches.

A sanctuary is most effective when expressions of anger and hostility are held to a minimum. It is understood that in the heat of competition players, coaches, parents, staff, and spectators can be provoked to anger. However, since such outbursts do violence to the creation of uplifting and renewing experiences, every effort is made to discourage disruptive behavior. Not only do participant-generated codes of conduct help clarify expectations, but also the orientation sessions for coaches, chaperones, and staff help establish clear expectations and head off transgressions. The tone of high profile sports in America that tolerates, even encourages, “in-your-face” sports practices, creates a challenge for anyone wishing to depart from that norm. This mainstream sports tradition presents the Festival with one of its biggest challenges. It is a challenge, however, that

needs to be met if the mission of the Festival is to be accomplished.



Friendly, hospitable, physically comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing competition venues must be fashioned by the staff if a sanctuary is to be created for participants. If the staff is grumpy or if they exude an authoritarian,

controlling presence, it is impossible to create a safe and free atmosphere. Therefore, great attention is placed upon the selection of appropriate staff and then on training them to implement the spirit of the event. This is especially important when venue management requires that security personnel be hired. These people need special training designed to re-orient them to perform *hosting* rather than *policing* functions.

Parents can help or detract in the making of a safe and free sanctuary for the conduct of competition. Often times parents do not understand how to position themselves in relation to their child's sports involvement. If they fail to take an interest in their child's sports life they deny themselves and their children wonderful opportunities to strengthen family bonds. On the other hand, if they allow their egos to get heavily involved in the achievements of their children they can be intrusive and in some cases disruptive. The Festival leadership understands this dilemma and has put into place workshops for parents to assist them in choosing a growth-enhancing role for themselves and their athletic children. Festival leadership continues to search for ways to encourage more parents to take advantage of these sessions.

## The Festival Forges an Atmosphere of Conviviality

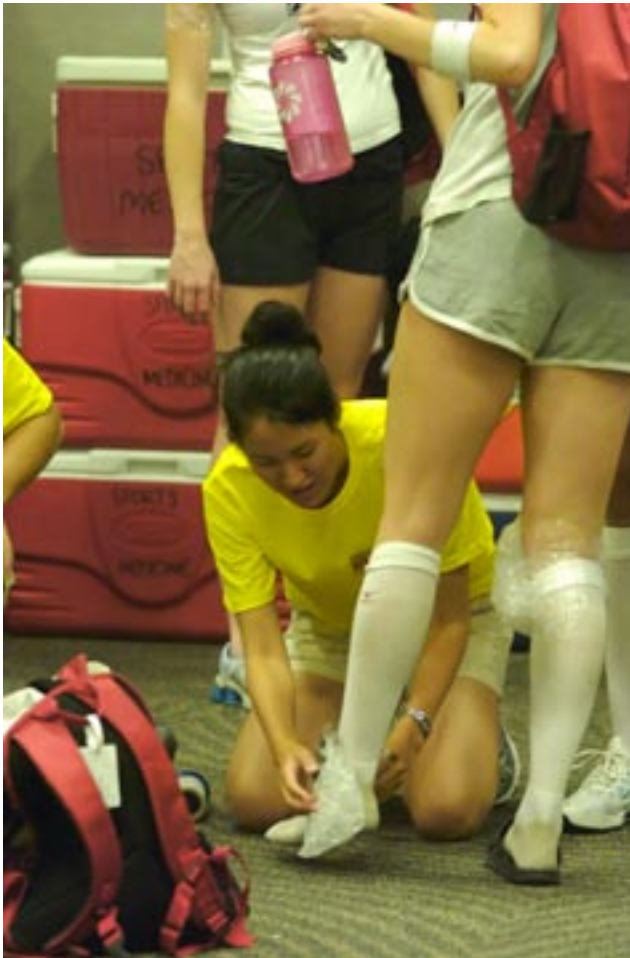
The greatest gift we can give another person is our attention. For most of us, improving our listening skills is a great opportunity to grow. One of the central curriculum items at the Festival for staff, coach, and parent training sessions has become the “art of listening.” It is difficult for Festival participants to bond into a synergistic community of sports lovers without developing the capacity to attend to the needs and interests of others. Acts of consideration and kindness go a long way toward creating a sports climate that is truly connective.



## PRINCIPLE # 6

**“Make a fuss” over each participant: athletes, coaches, parents, staff, and spectators. Provide them with experiences that uplift and renew their spirits.**

In order to bring out the best in everyone, a concerted effort is made to orchestrate activities that are *fair, focused, friendly, fun, festive, formative, flexible, family-friendly* and *future-looking*. This is accomplished through special events that foster and celebrate this idealized atmosphere.



## PRINCIPLE # 7

### Create an atmosphere of conviviality

The event begins by orchestrating a hospitable, upbeat, and efficient team registration (for nearly 900 teams). At the registration site coaches are greeted by cordial and well-informed hosts and hostesses who work to make them feel welcome. For those teams arriving at the airport a reception team along with the Festival Mascot greet them with offers of assistance. In addition, a welcoming ceremony is administered by the Airport Authority. This event features a welcoming statement by host community leaders. First impressions often times are lasting impressions. Also the coordinator of Festival housing has a booth to help the teams make last minute adjustments in their housing plans.



On the opening day, the teams are also welcomed at a picnic and are assigned a sister team from another part of the country with whom they are encouraged to enjoy at various points throughout the event. And if they wish a practice time prior to the beginning of competition (which most teams do), such accommodations are conveniently provided at the main playing site.



In order to create a convivial climate we have found it is essential to avoid establishing a hierarchical structure among Festival participants. Each sector of the Festival community is treated with equality, dignity and respect: athletes, coaches, referees, competition staff, parents, and spectators. Inputs for making improvements in the administration of the event are solicited from participants through a variety of means. Each day during the Festival the founders hold drop-in sessions to address any concerns harbored by parents, athletes or coaches. Many of the innovations that have been put into place over the years have originated with staff, coaches, athletes, and parents.



## PRINCIPLE # 8

### **Create a climate of civility, where all participants demonstrate the utmost respect for their fellow sports mates.**

From our experiences at the Festival I am convinced it is possible to create sports rituals that are connective rather than divisive. Well-orchestrated sports rituals renew our spirits and nourish our communities. They breathe life into our souls and strengthening the bonds among us. When an athlete gets into the soul of one of her sports mates, rather than into her face, it allows her to rise above the rules of the game, high above the scoreboard. It takes sport to a higher level. It permits participants to connect with their worlds in ways that renew their spirits. Renewal rites allow them to disconnect from sources of discontent and reconnect with sources of enchantment and awe that were such a natural part of their early childhood experiences.

Principles of civility are modeled by the staff, urged upon the coaches, athletes, and parents at every turn, through formal orientations, printed codes of conduct, and the celebration of exemplary behavior.





## PRINCIPLE # 9

**Create a climate of consideration, where all participants are thoughtful and sympathetic in their dealings with their fellow sports mates.**

This feature of the Festival climate requires personal characteristics and skills that require time and effort to develop. Over the years the staff has been urged to show consideration to all those with whom they deal. This is accomplished by establishing the expectation among the staff to give legitimacy to each and every person's concerns, regardless of how trivial or irrational the person's concerns might first appear. The veteran staff members exemplify this pattern of behavior and urge the newcomers to buy into this tradition. This expectation is reinforced each and every year during staff orientation. The staff is also urged to reward and recognize acts of consideration and kindness whenever they occur.



## The Festival Views Sport as an Art Form

The Festival tries to create an atmosphere in which participants are reconnected with the sense of wonder and awe they experienced as children. Enchantment in sport occurs when our inner most self, our soul, is directly connected with the activities in which we are engaged. We are not preoccupied with the outcomes or with anyone else's expectations. In short, we are doing it because we like doing it. Enchantment in sports is a state of consciousness that allows us to connect passionately with actions on the playing field as we get "into the flow" of what is happening. We feel deeply involved in what we are doing and closely connected to the people with whom we are doing it. That is what is meant by "an excursion into enchantment."





## PRINCIPLE # 10

**Approach sport as art, rather than as war, leading participants on excursions into enchantment rather than into battles for dominance.**

Sculptor Frederick Hart has observed

*If art is to flourish in the twenty-first century, it must renew its moral authority by rededicating itself to life. It must be an enriching, ennobling and vital partner in the public pursuit of civilization. It should be a majestic presence in everyday life just as it was in the past.*

If sport were thought of as art we could then ask of it to “renew its moral authority by re-dedicating itself to life.” Sport could then be elevated to be “an enriching, ennobling and vital partner in the public pursuit of civilization.” Is there any reason why sport should not be “a majestic presence in everyday life as it was in the past?” I think not. I like to think that the *enclave of enchantment* we have created, the Volleyball Festival, can be approached as a work of art “in the making,” one that can “be enriching, ennobling, and a vital partner in the public pursuit of civilization.”

Sport provides each of us with opportunities to imprint the playing field with our own unique style and personality. It allows us to enjoy the aesthetic aspects of human movement, both as a creator of and a witness to graceful athletic maneuvers. The images of sculptor, Fredrick Hart, when applied to the *art of sport*, provide far more texture, richness and guidance than do the images of war that have become the idiom of the playing field.

By avoiding the language of war in conversations with Festival participants and focusing instead upon the importance of creating a climate that is fair, focused, friendly, fun, festive, formative, flexible, family-friendly and future-looking we are establishing the conditions for enchantment to occur. We are inviting our sports mates to place emphasis upon their *personal experiences* with sport, rather than upon *outcomes*. All of us then, athletes, coaches, parents, staff and spectators, share responsibility for orchestrating passionate rites of enchantment. We can think of ourselves as artists who are creating a masterpiece, each contributing in some way to the fabrication of a beautiful mosaic. The founders of a sporting event articulate a vision of the form of the mosaic; the parents provide the background materials for creating a work of art; the athletes provide the color; the coaches direct the creative effort; the staff

members provide the materials for creating the masterpiece; and everyone, through their radiant spirit, illuminate the works of art. It is this mosaic that serves to renew our spirits and enliven our relationships. It is indeed an art to create beautiful athletic moments. But it is also a community project that can contribute to the establishment of a commonwealth of compassion.

By creating a climate of civility, conviviality, and consideration the Festival invites excursions into enchantment. By introducing new language, stories, myths, images, heroes, rituals, and traditions the Festival sets the stage for participants to enjoy excursions into enchantment where optimal sports experiences can occur.



## PRINCIPLE # 11

### **Orchestrate rites of renewal**

The Festival aspires to help participants become better connected to themselves, their families, teammates, opponents, their communities, and their nation through joining in rituals that affirm their kinship with one another. An Olympic style opening ceremony (with 15,000 in attendance in 2006) is administered that includes a parade of teams, a torch run, and the reciting of the Festival oath that reads:

*As a participant in the Volleyball Festival, I acknowledge that the primary goal of this gathering is to uplift the spirits of all participants: athletes, coaches, chaperones, parents, event staff, and spectators which is best realized when challenges are accepted, dreams are pursued, personal ties are strengthened, and individual and team accomplishments are celebrated. I will uphold the Festival Spirit by showing respect for all participants. I dedicate myself to working to transform each moment we share together into an experience we will treasure for the rest of our lives.*

This spectacular opening ceremony is orchestrated in such a way as to promote the values of the event, honoring achieving women, fostering national, state, community and team spirit, celebrating collective achievements, acknowledging the history of women in sport, and pledging to uphold the values being promoted through the Festival. The emotions experienced, the values underscored, and the images provoked during this ceremony, not only set the tone for the event, but also have become the most memorable experiences for most Festival athletes and parents. Long after they have forgotten whether they have won or lost, memories persist of the rituals they have shared.



# Competition That Empowers

## Article II

*Provide learning opportunities for all  
participants.*



To create a developmental focus for the event, educational activities are administered each day and are open to all participants. The focus of these clinics and workshops is upon developing the skills, attitudes, and values that will allow athletes, coaches and parents to get the most out of their sports experiences. In these sessions sometimes the focus is upon skill development, but more often it is upon how to create a positive climate that brings out the best in sports participants. The Festival is not only a sanctuary where young women are insulated from everyday social demands and ugliness, but, in addition, it is a place where young women are urged to test themselves in competition. We aspire to make this testing ground ideal, optimal, or better yet, “pragmatopian.” We try to make provisions for each participant, regardless of her ability: 1) to enjoy success; 2) to be renewed by her Festival experiences, both on and off the court; and 3) to become a participant in writing “a realizable scenario for a partnership future” in sports. We are committed to creating a climate of civility and conviviality where the best of male and female sports traditions are revealed in everything that occurs during Festival Week.



## PRINCIPLE # 12

### **Support the growth and development of all participating athletes, coaches, parents, spectators, and staff.**

The rituals of sport can be structured in ways that help us elaborate, refine and clarify who we are. They also can be organized so that they transform our state of mind in ways that influence our reactions on the field, on the sidelines, and in the bleachers.

Sport puts us in situations where we are forced to reveal our fundamental nature, that is, the very essence of our being, our souls. If we pay careful attention to how we respond in the sports situation, important things will be revealed about us, especially about how we respond when our egos are challenged in a competitive situation. This insight can help us prevent the natural aggression of sport from turning savage and allow us to learn how to embrace victory with grace, dignity, and respect for our opponents. Not only does sport provide us with opportunities to get better acquainted with ourselves, but also to adopt new images of who we wish to become.



### PRINCIPLE # 13

**Help athletes develop greater identity as competent individuals who are capable of engaging in disciplined physical training and who prosper in aggressive, demanding, competitive situations.**

How do we create a climate that will allow athletes to achieve an identity as competent, can-do individuals? First of all, we emphasize the importance of creating a safe environment where young athletes can take risks without suffering put-downs and humiliation. Codes of conduct that are created by representative parents, athletes, and coaches are issued to all participants prior to their arrival. These codes underscore the importance of creating a civil, convivial, and considerate climate for competition. Each parent, athlete, and coach is required to commit to the code of conduct before they are allowed to enter the event. Furthermore, the staff is trained to recognize and reward exemplary conduct. And they are trained to deal with violations of the codes before they are allowed to become a disruptive force. Special attention is given to training those staff who regularly inter-face with athletes, coaches, and parents.





## PRINCIPLE # 14

### **Embrace a balanced approach to sport-in-life.**

The Festival, by its very nature, encourages participants to become major investors in sport. At the same time it encourages maintaining a varied portfolio that allows athletes to invest in their families, schools, and communities, to develop their social, emotional, intellectual, vocational and moral selves as well as their athletic selves.

At the opening ceremony each year a group of Festival athletes are presented as models of the balanced life. They are referred to as “Renaissance Girls.” Their achievements are elaborated and representatives are chosen to speak on behalf of all the achieving young women participating in the event. It is a Festival tradition for the speaker to acknowledge the athletes in the audience who have reached certain levels of achievement. Members of the audience are recognized, en mass, who have accumulated 3.5 or better grade point averages; have held school office; have provided community service; and who have worked to earn part or all of their Festival expenses. In addition, each year the achievements of a Festival alumna are recognized. This alumna is an individual who has distinguished herself both in and out of sport. Also from time to time the achievements of older women, who, in their younger days, competed in serious volleyball, are celebrated. An astronaut, an entrepreneur, a lawyer and other women of achievement have been recognized over the years. The message is “Live a balanced life and use your volleyball experiences to develop the discipline and skills that will serve you throughout your *life*.”





## PRINCIPLE # 15

**Be guided by an “In-your-soul” rather than an “In-your-face” approach to sport, where participants are urged to find sources of strength both within themselves and in one another.**

No “in-your-face” sports heroes are celebrated at the Festival. Care is taken to present the athletes, coaches, and parents with sports figures who model the conduct that is being promoted. Festival publications celebrate achievements that are consistent with this declaration of principles. Coaches who exemplify these principles are chosen to be recognized at the awards presentation. And video clips have been played in past years at the opening ceremony to accent the types of behavior that is consistent with Festival principles.



# Relationships That Unify

## Article III

*Strengthen Relationship Through Sports*



Heartless sports that are played as zero-sum games, where only those who accumulate the best win-loss records are recognized, are divisive and disjunctive. On the other hand, soulful sports, that allow participants to lose themselves in their experiences on the playing field and enthusiastically embrace their sport mates, are connective.



## PRINCIPLE # 16

### **Make sport more connective where participants achieve an appreciation of the importance of collaboration in creating optimal sports experiences**

Singling out players for special recognition, through All-American or All-Tournament honors, is a policy that is divisive, taking emphasis off of joint effort and off of the role that opponents play in bringing out the best performances in one another. The Festival does not recognize individual achievement on the court, only team and club achievement. Each player on those teams winning the various divisions is presented with trophies where no distinctions are made between those who win upper level divisions and lower level divisions. Also, a Club Achievement Award is presented to the club that has the highest cumulative finishes in the various age groups.



PRINCIPLE # 17

**Discourage command and control  
approaches to leadership in sport.**

In America we value authoritarianism (to be a good follower), cooperation (to work effectively with others), and individualism (to be true to ourselves). As children we are told to “be good,” that is, to obey authority. We are also taught to “be cooperative,” to be a team player. And we are taught to “be ourselves,” to have the courage to refuse to follow the crowd. These are often sources of confusion for all of us, young and old alike, because in many situations these values are in conflict with one another. In each era of American history the traditions of authoritarianism, cooperation, and individualism, have been sources of significant conflict within individuals and among groups. The Culture of Conquest, which is of men’s making, continues to sanction and perpetuate authoritarian and individualistic ways, especially in the world of sport. The Culture of Care, on the other hand, celebrates cooperation. Females in our society are usually more comfortable with cooperative ways of solving problems. But paradoxically as women move through life they are provided few opportunities to develop their skills as team players. In the normal course of growing up they learn to be good friends, helpmates, and caretakers, which is not always enough in situations requiring teamwork. Good teammates should not only be available to provide friendship, help, and encouragement, but also to take initiatives to meet internal and external challenges faced by the team. Good teammates sometimes have to be assertive in order to protect their interests, the interests of their teammates, and the interests of the team. Furthermore, learning only to be a friend, helpmate or caretaker serves to reinforce traditional limiting sex role boundaries.

These conflicts between internalized traditional American values can be either exacerbated or ameliorated through one’s sports experiences. They are exacerbated when sports policies and practices continue to be guided exclusively by Culture of Conquest values, when ranking takes precedence over linking, and when the male-led mainstream culture of sport establishes policies and practices without reference to the transformations taking place in the rest of society. They are exacerbated when coaches use harsh authoritarian training procedures. And they are exaggerated when young people have been systematically socialized at home, in school, and on the playing field to yield to care-less dictators. These inner conflicts are promoted by a star system that celebrates individual rather than collective achievement. The expansive sports philosophy that guides Festival policies

requires that traditional sports practices that promote authoritarianism and individualism be reevaluated.

Both authoritarianism and individualism fracture human connectedness. Only when power is shared and collective achievements are celebrated will it be possible to create an enchanted world of sport that allows the souls of participants to connect in meaningful ways with the world they inhabit and the people that make up their families and communities.





## **The Festival Creates a Resourceful and Stimulating Environment**

One of the major features in training the 350 Festival staff members is to impress upon them the importance of serving as hosts and hostesses for all of their fellow participants. When 9,000 teenagers are assembled in one place there is the temptation for adult staff members, many of whom are professional educators, to find themselves assuming the role of gatekeeper or as security officer, rather than as host, model, and mentor. The Festival administration makes every effort to convince the staff that their task is to serve as facilitators in creating a resourceful and supportive environment. If staff members feel empowered and effective, it becomes easier for them to communicate the upbeat spirit we aspire to create.

Participants are encouraged to be proactive in pursuit of their dreams, not simply to react to what is offered to them. These young women are invited to assume full citizenship in this special fellowship of volleyball lovers, and to participate in shaping a climate that will advance their personal and family interests.





## PRINCIPLE # 18

### **Help compensate for the long history of limited opportunity for women in sport.**

The Festival has offered opportunities to nearly 150,000 young women (as of 2007) who otherwise may not have been able to enjoy testing themselves in national competition. It addresses the needs, not only of the top volleyball athletes in the nation, but also of under-served young women as well. For decades young men have been offered opportunities to enjoy the challenges of sport. Until recently, young women have been denied access to the resources to fully develop their athletic potential. The success of the Volleyball Festival has inspired others to offer enhanced opportunities for competition to young women.

Also the Festival encourages participants to imprint the event with traditional caring values they have learned growing up as women. At the same time, the Festival supports those women who have the courage to break away from those stereotypical feminine ways that make embracing victory difficult.



PRINCIPLE # 19  
**Oppose elitism in sports.**

Festival programs provide opportunities to achieve optimal sports experiences for athletes, coaches, staff, and sports parents at all levels of development, from novice to expert. At the time we launched our alternative approach to the administration of a youth sporting event in 1984, the traditional elite model of tournament administration prevailed, where only those teams with distinguished records of achievement were allowed to participate in post-season national competition. Of those teams that qualified to attend these season-ending events the less accomplished teams would be the first ones sent packing. The result, of course, of this prevailing policy was that the “rich got richer, and the poor got poorer.” It is very difficult for an event to bring out the best in young women if they are either not in attendance or are caused to exit before they are inspired by their experiences.

Not only is the Volleyball Festival open to all comers, it allows all entries to benefit from extensive, ability-appropriate competition. These objectives are achieved by constructing a competition format that allows all teams in each age group to begin the tournament on an even footing. As the Festival progresses the teams sort themselves, by their won-loss records, into homogeneous groupings for the next day’s competition, until finally on the last day (day 6) they are grouped with teams at their same level where they compete for divisional titles. This approach not only allows all teams to benefit from extensive competition (typically 14 matches over a six-day period) but it tends to bring out the best in the vast majority of athletes. In most cases the spirits of the teams remain high throughout the entire event, for there is always a tomorrow. Their chances of being more competitive increase as the event progresses. The Festival then is for everyone, not simply the super-elite.

PRINCIPLE # 20  
**Seek diversity among participants.**

The Festival aggressively seeks to recruit teams from across the nation from all economic, ethnic, and religious groups so that participants can expand their range of social experiences. On those occasions when sponsorship funds can be found entry fees are waived for teams who could otherwise not afford to come. In addition, a raffle is administered by the Festival, allowing teams to raise money to cover the full cost of their entry fees. The raffle tickets are made available to the teams at no cost. Also, fund raising strategies are often the topic for seminars administered by the Festival for coaches and parents.

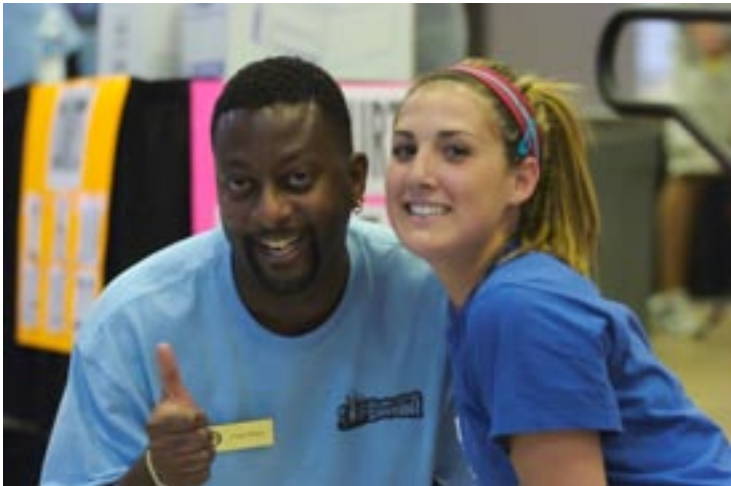
Over the years the Festival has developed a cadre of competent women administrators to assume leadership of the various Festival divisions. From the very top of the organization, women occupy key roles. The following roles are currently or have been occupied by women: Chief Executive Officer, Director of Administrative Services, Director of Sports Medicine, Director of Staff Services, Director of Information Services, Director of Special Events, Associate Director of Competition, Head of the Set-up Crew and Age Group Directors. In addition, an effort has been made to achieve age diversity on staff. Top leadership positions are currently occupied by men and women in their 20's and 30's as well as in their 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's. A few staff members are in their 70's and 80's and one referee retired at 90! Festival leadership has been successful in increasing ethnic diversity among its leaders, and continues to search for ways to increase diversity in this area.



## PRINCIPLE # 21

### **Prepare participants for exercising their citizenship rights and responsibilities in their respective team communities.**

Each year the staff revisits ways participants can be encouraged to exercise their rights and responsibilities as Festival citizens. We have not yet discovered a formula for achieving a commitment to active Festival citizenship. However, regularly revisiting the issue of gaining commitment to Festival norms and expectations creates an interest on the part of the staff in what the various participants expect from the event. It is, of course, impossible to help each and every participant realize her unique dreams when staff members are dealing with such a large and diverse group of athletes, coaches, and parents. Nevertheless, the very fact that the event staff cares enough to communicate an interest in a participant's dreams is often times enough to inspire them to invest themselves fully in making the Festival a positive experience for everyone. Parents, athletes, and coaches often expect little personalized attention at such a big event, so when they get it they feel special and are enlivened by their encounters with the Festival leadership.



## PRINCIPLE # 22

**Place emphasis upon personal and social effectiveness, even if it is sometimes at the expense of technical efficiency.**

In order to create an ideal sports community governed by democratic ideals it is essential to involve participants in shaping policies and practices. This is not always the most efficient way to arrive at decisions. Nevertheless, the Festival has had a long history of consulting with participants before establishing major policies and practices. When one attempts to be a pathfinder, it is sometimes necessary to embark upon a course of action that no one has ever followed. In those cases, it has been Festival policy to alert the participants that an experiment is underway and that we will be seeking their feedback about how this new course of action has been received. In short, the Festival is committed to collaborative decision making, which is never the most efficient way to establish policy, but it has proven to be effective in creating a sense of ownership among staff and other participants.



PRINCIPLE # 23  
**Make sport family-friendly.**

Provisions are made to make the Festival attractive to family members of participating athletes, coaches, and staff. Sport can indeed be a family affair. If families are granted their basic rights and are provided with opportunities to exercise their responsibilities, the events in which they participate can become truly expansive. The Festival aspires to grant parents their rights and to invite them to assume their responsibilities for making the most of their sports experiences.



After the 1996 Festival my wife and I received a letter from a mother of a 14 year-old girl who had attended that year's event. The letter from this effusive Oregon parent reported that her experiences at the event were so inspiring to her, her husband, and her daughter that they proceeded to invite the husband's parents from Florida to join them for the next year's festival. The many things she reported in the letter indicated that the event had indeed fulfilled its objective of becoming family-friendly, at least from this family's vantage point. The letter included the following observations:

*Most refreshing of all .....was watching wholesome teenagers on a natural high doing what they love best: playing volleyball and 'hanging out' with friends. .... The week at (the festival) was truly a life-changing experience for Tiffany. A reticent girl who usually keeps her thoughts to herself, she hasn't stopped bubbling about the Festival and has barely taken off her (souvenir) T- shirt long enough to let me wash it.*

Sport can uplift the spirits of participants if priority is assigned to achieving such outcomes. To replicate the experiences reported by this mother, not only must athletic competitions be structured so that they encourage these kinds of happenings, but coaches, athletic administrators, and parents must collaborate in creating an expansive approach to sport that counters the "in your face," scoreboard-dominated ways of mainstream American sport. Obviously in the case of the family from Oregon the entire support team was attuned to the needs of this young woman and her family. This convivial climate allowed her to be genuinely uplifted by her experiences, both on and off the court. When there is a confluence of support from the key actors in the sports ritual, the athletic experience can truly become a continuing source of growth and renewal for everyone involved.









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*I have created a Declaration of Principles that outlines the values of sports that empower, connect and unify, which I like to refer to as **Opportunity Expanding Sports**. This perspective has been shaping the evolution of the Festival's policies and practices.*

*The practice of making a fuss over each and every participant at the Festival is predicated on the assumption that the greatest gift we can give another person is our attention.*

*The Festival has offered opportunities to nearly 150,000 young women (as of 2007) who otherwise may not have been able to enjoy testing themselves in national competition. It addresses the needs, not only of the top volleyball athletes in the nation, but also of under-served young women as well.*

*Festival programs provide opportunities to achieve optimal sports experiences for athletes, coaches, staff, and sports parents at all levels of development, from novice to expert.*

*Provisions are made to make the Festival attractive to family members of participating athletes, coaches, and staff. Sport can indeed be a family affair.*