

Running Interference: The Impact of sports on people with Autism & NDD

Mike Vratsinas, Self-Advocacy Trainee

Research Mentor and other collaborators

Justin Jensen, Mike Hoenig, Edward Esbeck, Judy Warth

Objective

The purpose of this literature review is to show the findings on kids with neurodevelopmental disabilities (NDDs) and autism (ASD) and how they are involved in sports.

Methods

A literature review was conducted using the following methods:

- Google Scholar
- Google search offered additional information

I also used my own life experience while reviewing the literature to see if the research matched my experience.

Results

- "Physical intervention can be used to treat autism, which can significantly improve the physical and mental health of children, improve their neurological function, and increase their self-confidence, thus playing a better role in promoting autism rehabilitation." (Wang, 2020)
- Participation in sports (football- team and archery - individual) seem to help children with NDDs and ASD to feel happier and more emotionally controlled which may help them establish better interpersonal relationships. (Wang 2020)
- Students who participated in sports seemed more focused when returning to class and wanted to share their successes with others. (Klinek 2021)
- Children with NDDs and ASD were less likely to complete a season but that may have been due to disability-related environmental factors more than truly their disability. (Sivaratnam, 2021)
- "Integration into mainstream schooling settings provides an opportunity for typically developing children to act as role models and children with ASD are provided with more of a chance to mimic social skills and learn social rules which can improve mental health" (Howells et al, 2021)
- I found I was scared but after I played, I was more confident, and it taught me to be more confident in schoolwork and life in general.
- For all the benefits, working as a team was hard because I'd never done it before. Listening and following instructions were especially hard but as time went on, it taught me that it takes more than just me to be successful.

Conclusions

- Playing sports can be scary for kids with NDDs or ASD. These kids may be nervous to try, but if they can, they should try. The research literature and my own personal experience support

the potential benefits of increased self-confidence, neurological function, and emotional well-being.

- More research is needed in this area to determine short-term and long-term impact.