Program Evaluation of a National Sport Organization’s Sport Participation Program: The Case of Baseball5™

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Introduction and Context

To ensure sport organizations remain viable for communities, strategies must be employed to attract new participation (Vail, 2007). As such, to engage new youth participants, Baseball Canada implemented a pilot program called Baseball5™, a faster street version of the classic game of baseball. It is an accessible introductory version of baseball, requiring less space, equipment, and players per team. The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the Baseball5™ pilot program, guided by three research questions (RQs):

RQ1 – What was the participants’ overall satisfaction with the Baseball5™ pilot program?
RQ2 – What were the participants’ experiences with the Baseball5™ pilot program?
RQ3 – What were the coordinators’ experiences with the Baseball5™ pilot program?

Methods

In April and May 2019, Baseball Canada implemented the Baseball5™ pilot program in five different communities (i.e., Richmond, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta, Montréal, Québec; Trois-Rivières, Québec, Halifax, Nova Scotia). Each program was operated by a local coordinator within a school or community center. The Baseball5™ pilot program was evaluated using a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), including three points of data collection (i.e., post-program survey, focus groups, semi-structured interviews).

Data were collected post event from youth through surveys (n=179; RR= 81.3%) and eight focus groups (n=42). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight coordinators. Survey items addressed youths’ overall satisfaction with the pilot program and preferences for future participation (Cardinal & Kosma, 2004; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Focus groups discussed youths’ experiences with Baseball5™. Semi-structured interviews addressed the coordinators’ experiences with the program and their perceptions of youth participants’ experiences.

Results

Youth participants were on average 11.9 years old (SD=1.25) and evenly split between male (51%) and female (49%). Results indicated Baseball5™ was an accessible program but might be ineffective at developing physical literacy skills. Both male and female participants were more likely to participate in Baseball5™ over baseball if given the future option.

Focus groups revealed choice in participation (i.e., voluntary registration, versus required as part of physical education class) and program structure (i.e., during physical education class, outside of class time) influenced program enjoyment; the more autonomy youth felt over their participation, the more satisfied they seemed to be with their experience. Most participants enjoyed the accessibility of Baseball5™ and found no challenge in co-ed participation.

The coordinator interviews highlighted Baseball5™’s ability to make baseball fun, simple, and an accessible activity for youth. Coordinators suggested that holding future Baseball5™ programs before the region's baseball season may help youth transition to playing baseball in their community.
Discussion and Conclusion

This study offers insight into effective strategies for practitioners to engage local youth with new and future sport participation. Findings demonstrate the importance of program registration and program structure to engage youth. Moreover, the alternative format of Baseball5™ seems to mitigate potential constraints to participation (e.g., equipment, space). Such findings inform practitioners to develop and implement accessible community participation programs to increase new sport participation.