

Sean McGarvey

INTR 423

March 19, 2004

### **Inner City Youth Sports: An Avenue to Hope**

Poverty is best defined as “the deprivation of basic capabilities.”<sup>1</sup> It is the inability of human beings to lead healthy lives of opportunity, growth, and development. In America, poverty is especially prevalent among children. The stories of impoverished youth living in America’s major cities are infinite and horrific. Their names, faces, and hometowns may be different; but the environment facing children in urban poverty remains relatively constant. Their world is one of poor schools, malnutrition, drugs, teenage mothers, destructive family life, gangs, and violence. It ensnares children in a vicious cycle of deprivation and untapped potential.

#### **Young Faces of Poverty**

In Miami, ten-year-old Diamond Pless is a fourth-grader at Santa Clara Elementary School, located in a poor, gang-ridden sector of the city. He lives with his mother and his younger sister, age six, in an apartment in the city. Diamond shares a bed with his sister in a room with a window that opens directly to I-95. Like most children his age, Diamond’s interests include clothes, video games, and football. He has never known his biological father, who left his mother shortly after getting word that she was pregnant. His legal father is a gang member, currently serving concurrent life sentences for cocaine possession, distribution, and using a machine gun to perpetrate a drug crime. His Uncle Durell, who largely serves as a father figure to Diamond, has dealt drugs most of his life and is currently restricted to a wheelchair after being paralyzed in a drug-

related shooting. Occasionally Uncle Durrell will take him to the local park, despite his disability, to have a catch with the football. Diamond cherishes those trips and dreams of being a pro football player.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, in Chicago, eleven-year-old Denise White is the oldest of seven children. Her thirty-year-old mother, Patricia, has repeatedly been charged with neglect, yet still maintains custody of her children. Denise and her six younger siblings live in a rundown apartment, infested with roaches. Patricia will leave Denise alone in charge of the family for long periods at a time, most often in search of drugs. Denise does not know her father. On one particularly difficult day, Patricia forced Denise to have sex with a drug dealer in exchange for heroin, cocaine, fifty dollars, and a pair of tennis shoes. The local public school that she attends is her only refuge from the horrors at home. She loves school and dreads leaving at the end of each day, but her grades are poor and her drive to succeed is hampered by a lack of support and discipline. Without significant after-school programs, Denise returns home each day to a neighborhood where other children her age are looking for money and backing through drugs, prostitution, and gangs. Unfortunately, she has little hope of graduating from high school as long as she remains more attached to her horrific home life than to her school. Like her mother, she may eventually find more hope in drugs than in school.<sup>3</sup>

Across town, a very humble funeral is taking place for a fourteen-year-old boy, named Charles. Charles was shot in the head by a stray bullet at his inner city school. Two years earlier, Charles had watched his older brother hang himself, unable to cope with their heroin-addict mother, their constant shortage of food, their filthy clothes, and constant mockery at school any longer. His brother was largely his only friend. They

had found solace together in schoolyard games, boyish mischief, and dreams of a way out from their life on the streets. After his brother's death, Charles spent some time living with his sister, a mother of seven children. She had been shot in the stomach after getting caught in the crossfire of a gang war. Poverty-related struggles and violence were a constant in young Charles' life, and they eventually ended it.<sup>4</sup>

"The United States, the wealthiest country in the world, has more children living in poverty than any other industrialized nation."<sup>5</sup> Children compose the poorest American age bracket.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, poor, and poorly educated, children are the seeds that allow poverty to continue to grow and prosper in the United States. While it is certain that no single panacea exists to entirely alleviate the plight of poor children, much can be done to reverse the current crippling trend.

The problem is especially widespread in America's cities. Children growing up in poor urban sectors are often part of big families led by a single mother. They often attend poor schools, with little pressure from home to succeed because of their parents' lack of education and career success. Without motivation to pursue higher education and increasing pressure to enter the work force, children often drop out of school early. Gangs and drug-dealing are frequently attractive options to urban youth because they offer financial support and/or a family-like community structure. Such children frequently have children of their own, beginning at a young age, and the cycle begins again.

### **Piecing Together a Solution: The Role of Sports**

Education must be a critical component to any strategy aimed at ending this vicious cycle. Children who are well-educated are less vulnerable to failure, are more

inclined to make better decisions, and are able to find better jobs. Education, though, must not be limited to that which is taught in a classroom. Teaching in schools must be supplemented with fruitful educational experiences in the community after the school day is complete. Children need an outlet for their youthful creativity, energy, and interests. They also need greater attachment to their schools, teams, and peer groups that can both rival and enhance their experiences at home and in their communities. They need activity options that can compete with gang life, drug pushing, and premature sex. Youth sports programs have the potential to provide such options.

Organized sports originated in the United States in the nineteenth century through the efforts of American social workers. Early pioneers organized leagues and “sought to use sports as a means of engaging boys in order to prevent the onset of risk-taking behaviors.”<sup>7</sup> Since that time, the focus of sports has changed significantly. Today, sports are an astronomically lucrative business. Top professional athletes, from both genders and various ethnicities, are celebrities who command multi-million dollar salaries. Network television thrives on huge national sports audiences. College coaches compete to woo top high school athletes to their schools to gain national prestige and play in high profile, high-paying championship games. Even at the youth level, Little League Baseball and Pop Warner Football, for example, have become rather large businesses nationwide, too, and even have games broadcast nationally on cable television.

Whether in a competitive or leisurely setting, sports provide numerous benefits to those who participate. They provide valuable lessons that can be applied to life both inside and outside of the sports world. People who find an interest in sports learn the importance of such values as teamwork, perseverance, and patience. They learn to

communicate, to practice, and to trust and rely on others. They gain self-confidence, discipline, and a drive to improve. More importantly, sports can be played by people of all genders, ages, countries, incomes, languages, and races. Under the right circumstances, sports have the power to motivate and to unify large communities of people around common goals, principles, and values.

The opportunities for children living in impoverished urban areas to compete in organized sports are limited by the cost of equipment, access to facilities, and a general lack of structure in youth programs, among other factors. Nonetheless, America's most visible sports stars compete seasonally in America's biggest cities. They are the heroes of young boys and girls everywhere. Many have come from poverty themselves. This interest in sports among American youth should be cultivated, and made to be a line of defense against the persistence of poverty. Youth sports programs, especially in cities of the United States, can best serve the community and can best combat poverty by providing children with positive athletic experiences and by exposing them to a healthy way to succeed in life.

### **Current Examples**

Two programs in two major American cities have sought to do just that. In Boston, Tenacity uses tennis to teach inner city children life lessons and to nurture them during their developmental years. In Baltimore, The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation provides middle school students with an organized baseball league that promotes academic diligence. While the two programs have substantially different approaches, they share similar missions and some significant common characteristics. Both programs are expanding the role of youth sports in an attempt to heal the wounds of youth poverty.

## Tenacity

In 1997, thirty-seven-year-old Ned Eames of Boston had a pretty good career behind him, as well as in front of him. He had been the captain and star of San Diego State's men's tennis team in 1982 and 1983. From there, he had gone on to play professional tennis on the ATP Satellite Tour from 1983 to 1985. In 1985, Eames made the transition into the business world, and spent five years in sales and marketing before landing a lucrative job as a management consultant to Fortune 500 companies. He had held that position for six years when, in 1997, he suddenly decided to leave the money behind for a chance to assist children in the Boston area through the not-for-profit world.

Founded with the help of Bud Schultz, also a former professional tennis player and head tennis pro at both Longwood Cricket Club in Brookline and Badminton & Tennis Club in Boston, Tenacity was eventually incorporated in January 1999 as a not-for-profit program, qualified under 501(c)3. In an interview with *The Boston Globe*, later that year, Eames said that Tenacity's aim was to "get as many city kids hooked on tennis as possible."<sup>8</sup> The program experienced immediate success. In that first year, alone, 1,226 children participated in Tenacity's summer program.

Tenacity defines its mission as follows: "To improve the scholastic, character, and physical development of urban youth by combining tennis instruction and academic support with a focus on life skills."<sup>9</sup> Since its first successful summer in 1999, Tenacity's program has greatly expanded in accordance with this mission. In 2002, the program began experimenting with the addition of a reading requirement for participants. Today, the Summer Tennis and Reading Program, as it is now named, is a seven week-program offered to children, ages seven to fifteen, from all backgrounds, races, and

income levels in the Boston area. Students in the program are required to participate at least fifteen hours per week, and they are given the opportunity to progress through progressive skill levels, taught by volunteers with varying levels of tennis experience. The program takes place at more than twenty sites throughout the Boston area. Participants are organized into inter-site and intra-site teams, based on skill level, which compete in tournaments throughout the summer. The Summer Tennis and Reading Program culminates with the Mayor's Cup, a tournament held on Boston Common and sponsored by Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

Additionally, the reading aspect of the summer program has expanded to include a thirty-minute, daily reading session at the majority of the program's sites. Tenacity provides participants with books and trains volunteers to help participants at all reading levels enhance their reading skills. Overall, the Summer Tennis and Reading Program has developed a focus on skill-building and life lessons to supplement education, not to provide an alternative to school learning. The program seeks to foster youth interest in tennis, and to use that interest as motivation to learn and grow in other areas.

Following the success of Tenacity's summer program in 1999, the organization expanded its scope. During the school year in 2000, in conjunction with Boston Public Middle Schools, Tenacity began to offer its After-School Excellence Program (ASEP). More so than the summer program, ASEP has provided personal attention to at-risk youth in the Boston area and has emphasized academic success in accordance with tennis skill development. When the program began in 2000, Eames stated that the goal of ASEP was "to enhance academic performance by enabling youngsters to see the connection between excelling on the court and in the classroom."<sup>10</sup> In its first year, ASEP served

sixty-five students. Like the Summer Tennis and Reading Program, though, it continues to grow and expand to fit the needs of its participants.

ASEP is a three-year program designed to serve at-risk Boston middle school students, ages eleven to fourteen. Participants in the program are most often chosen from among the participants in the Summer Tennis and Reading Program. ASEP students are usually selected based on interest in tennis and financial need prior to entering the sixth grade. In selecting participants in the program, Tenacity's staff visit the homes of potential candidates to meet with their families and to discuss the details of ASEP. Upon selection, the students and their families sign a detailed agreement, pledging regular participation in all ASEP activities and maintenance of at least a B average in effort in school over a three-year period.

In exchange for their efforts in the classroom and their commitment to the program, participants in ASEP receive personalized tennis instruction, academic tutoring, planned activities and student mentoring. At minimum, students in the program attend two after-school sessions and a Saturday session at the Reggie Lewis Athletic Center each week. At these sessions, students are offered a unique opportunity to improve their academic and athletic abilities, to make new friends, and to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. Special events and activities are planned at various times throughout the year, as well. In total, each participant in the program receives approximately two hundred hours of structured after-school activities per year. Since its inception, the program has sought to expand its services beyond simply tutoring and tennis. According to Eames, the program attempts to nurture its middle school students to become "not



simply better athletes and students, but conscientious, well- rounded adults, professionals, and citizens.”<sup>11</sup>

While ASEP serves middle school students, Tenacity is also increasingly working to reach out to elementary and high school students as well. Through its Elementary School Tennis Program, Tenacity has partnered with the United States Tennis Association and Boston Public Schools in an attempt to provide tennis instruction to elementary school students in the Boston area. The program currently aims to introduce fifth graders at a select number of schools to tennis in the spring through their physical education classes. In doing so, the program trains the schools’ physical education teachers to teach tennis in their gym classes. Students that benefit from the program are also encouraged to enroll in ASEP and to participate in the Summer Tennis and Reading Program. Although the program is currently only implemented at public elementary schools that feed into middle schools which participate in ASEP, it will likely expand.

Now that Tenacity is in its fifth year of existence, many of its loyal pupils are entering high school with hopes of continuing their participation in tennis. As a result, the organization is currently working on developing its fledgling High School Tennis Program into a success. The program is currently a growing initiative within Tenacity intended to build tennis programs at Boston public high schools. The program hopes to supply schools with the facilities and equipment necessary to support recreational and organized tennis. Tenacity also has plans to formulate a league among the high schools to allow talented players to compete on varsity teams. In 2003, the initiative created two new high school tennis teams in the area, giving the city a grand total of three high school

tennis programs. While the program has a long way to go, it is certainly moving in the right direction in fulfilling a great need within the community.

New growth also brings new costs. The organization has experienced consistently high growth in the number of its annual participants. In 2003, for instance, ASEP served 102 students at a cost of \$2,553 per student and the Summer Tennis and Reading Program served 2,500 students at a cost of \$147 per student. Fortunately, Tenacity has had great success in fundraising since its founding. According to Ned Eames, this is primarily a result of his past career experiences both in the tennis and business worlds. He currently enjoys a strong network of friends and acquaintances that have a keen interest in Tenacity and its projects.<sup>12</sup>

Tenacity functions as a public-private partnership. It receives support from a wide variety of sources. Approximately one quarter of its financial support comes from the public sector. The single largest source of funding, though, is individual donations from wealthy Boston residents and members of the larger tennis community.

Additionally, Tenacity receives financial support from venture philanthropy, corporate sponsorship and foundations in Boston and other urban areas. The organization also receives equipment, facilities, and volunteers from a multitude of sources, which include other community programs, Wilson, New Balance, Harvard, MIT, the Boston Athletic Club, the Reggie Lewis Track & Athletic Center, and the USTA. Tenacity even holds an annual fundraising dinner and other special fundraising events throughout the year which draw some of the biggest names in tennis and in the community. These events, alone, raise approximately ten percent of the program's total operating budget.

While a strong initial network of supporters certainly helped to get Tenacity off the ground, its growing reputation and effectiveness in assisting children in the community has helped it to garner the massive amount of contributors that it currently maintains. The organization's accomplishments have been recognized by the likes of government, community, and educational leaders. It has been praised in *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Herald*, *Tennis Week*, and *Tennis Industry Magazine*. In 2000, Tenacity was named the National Junior Tennis League (NJTL) Chapter of the Year by USA Tennis New England. Two years later, it was named the NJTL National Chapter of the Year by the USTA. Recognition and reputation have sparked a groundswell of support for Tenacity, which has enabled it to grow and improve. By the end of 2003, the organization had raised over \$3.5 million in pledges and donations. An organization that began with only Ned Eames, some fellow tennis players, and a handful of volunteers; now maintains a staff of nine full-time permanent employees, over twenty full-time seasonal employees, and more than 125 volunteers.

Mr. Eames admits that, early on, the organization encountered a certain degree of internal conflict because of its dependence on public support and some of the contrasting visions and ideals that came with this support. However, the organization's ability to raise funds from a wide and varied range of sources has allowed Mr. Eames and the rest of his leadership team to remain steadfast in their vision for the future of the program.<sup>13</sup> That vision was made very clear in Tenacity's five-year strategic plan, entitled *Rallying to Serve*, which Eames and company unveiled late last year. The report lays out a focused agenda for Tenacity from 2004-2008 in accordance with its mission.

According to *Rallying to Serve*, Tenacity plans to raise ten million dollars over the next five years. With this increase in funding, the program plans to serve 4,940 participants annually by 2008. If the plan is successful, the Summer Tennis and Reading Program will grow to a size of 4,000 participants at over 25 different city sites, ASEP will have an enrollment of 240 students from 16 different middle schools, the Elementary School Tennis Program will teach 600 students, and the High School Tennis Program will assist 100 students in 2008. While Eames insists that he has no national ambitions for expanding Tenacity, *Rallying to Serve* calls for the program to become “a national role model and catalyst for other communities.”<sup>14</sup>

*Rallying to Serve* also calls for revamped efforts to chart and measure Tenacity’s performance and progress. In addition to the number of participants that the program has served per year, Tenacity has also begun to focus on other metrics for measuring the success of its initiatives. For example, the administrative staff has made a concerted effort to measure improvements in academic, behavioral, and tennis performance among ASEP participants. The students’ school teachers, Tenacity tennis and academic instructors, and parents, as well as the students themselves are regularly surveyed about the impact the program is having on the child’s performance in all facets of his or her life. Ned Eames is quick to point out that only ten percent of students drop out of the three-year After-School Excellence Program. With an increased emphasis on performance measurement, he hopes to improve on this mark. As the program ages, Eames also hopes to follow its participants after high school and to chart their entry into college, the military, and other endeavors.

Tenacity's leadership team hopes to then use these development, learning, and growth metrics to measure the success of its internal business and financial structure. By using a multi-metric system of performance measurement, the organization hopes to be able to conduct an accurate cost-benefit analysis of its programs in order to grow efficiently and productively. For example, Tenacity does not set a budget for its After-School Efficiency Program based solely on the money that the program saves in preventing juvenile incarceration, grade repetition, or even mental health or substance abuse treatment. The organization also accounts for non-quantifiable factors, such as self-esteem, friendship, and character in determining the cost-effectiveness of its programs. Tenacity's commitment to calculated growth and meticulous internal evaluation and improvement will help to ensure its future success not only in spreading the game of tennis, but also in fostering social mobility among the city's underclass.

#### **The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation**

The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. (Baseball and Academic Student Enhancement-Helping Inner-city Teams) Foundation in Baltimore also maintains a mission that invokes the use of athletics to better the lives of inner city youth. It is the brainchild of Steve Sclafani, a native of Columbia, MD. Prior to starting B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., Sclafani attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a co-captain for the school's baseball team in the early 1990's. During his senior year at Penn, Sclafani also volunteered with a Big Brother program in West Philadelphia. Through the program, he mentored a middle school student who was struggling in school. Sclafani encouraged his "little brother" to get more involved in his school's extracurricular activities, specifically soccer and baseball, and subsequently witnessed a drastic increase in the boy's self-esteem,

discipline, and grades. Sclafani moved on to become an Associate Scout for the Texas Rangers of Major League Baseball after college, but his experience in Philadelphia eventually motivated him to return to his native Maryland in an effort to help at-risk inner city youth.

Established as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization in July 1994, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has grown slowly but significantly. The foundation “was created to give middle school student-athletes hope, guidance, and the opportunity to advance their education and their sports careers.”<sup>15</sup> Today, the organization defines its mission more poignantly: “to promote baseball, education, and the quality of life for youth and amateur baseball players in Baltimore City.”<sup>16</sup> Like Tenacity, the foundation has expanded over time to increase its focus on academics and the life-enriching aspects of sports.

Since its inception, The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation’s primary program has been its Middle School Program. The program provides an organized, interscholastic baseball league for a select number of Baltimore City middle schools in largely impoverished areas. It runs from the beginning of March to the end of the school year in June each year. Candidates for the program attend tryouts at each of the middle schools prior to the season, and participants are then selected based on baseball interest, talent, and academic standards. Some participating middle schools have fairly large pools of talented athletes who compete for spots on the team, while others have less athletes and are able to take most of the students that are interested. During the season, participants are required to attend a one-hour practice every Monday and Wednesday, preceded by a mandatory 45-minute tutor/study session. The middle school teams also compete in games every Tuesday and Thursday throughout the season. The league’s championship game is

played each June at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). While it does not receive nearly the citywide attention that is given to Tenacity's Mayor's Cup, the B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. championship provides similar incentive for students to work hard .

The Middle School Program also includes strict academic requirements. Over the course of the season, participants in the program are required to maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA, 95% classroom attendance, and satisfactory behavior in school. Additionally, the players must have perfect attendance at the league's weekly tutor/study sessions. The foundation receives weekly progress reports from each of the students' teachers, rating their behavior, academic achievement, and promptness as either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." A single mark of "unsatisfactory" forfeits the student's privilege to participate in practices and games until the minimum requirements are reached.

The program held its first season in 1995 with six middle schools participating. Although it reached out to only a relatively small number of students early on, the Middle School Program's impact was almost immediate. In the league's inaugural year, 78 percent of the students involved raised their grades during the baseball season, 83 percent earned improved scores on behavioral skills testing, and each student advanced to the next grade level.<sup>17</sup> The program has since grown to include eleven Baltimore City middle schools and over 120 players. It also now includes multiple after-school field trips for the players, including a night trip to see a Baltimore Orioles home game, to which league coaches/mentors, parents, and school faculty are also invited in an effort to foster community and family involvement in the program. Also, over the past five years, 95-98 percent of participants have remained eligible to participate in the program on a weekly basis and have advanced to the next grade level.

The foundation works closely with the principals of participating middle schools in coordinating the Middle School Program. Like Tenacity, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. feels that it is critical to involve the school system in making its program a success. With the help of the principals, the foundation selects two faculty members for each school, who are all certified Baltimore City or Baltimore County educators, to serve as the coaches/mentors for the individual teams. Once selected, the coaches/mentors are required to attend a series of pre-season training sessions that teach coaching techniques, practice organization, and baseball fundamentals. These training sessions also focus on the core values of the program's teaching, which have been drafted by the foundation's administrators. These values include dedication in both academics and baseball as a means to opportunity, accountability for one's actions and future, sportsmanship and teamwork, and an emphasis on fundamentals. During the season, the coaches/mentors are in charge of running team practices and tutor/study sessions, organizing and reporting on weekly progress reports from the players' teachers and coaching during games. At the end of the season, each coach/mentor receives a small stipend from the foundation.

In addition to coach/mentor training and stipends, The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation also provides the program's equipment, uniforms, facilities, field and umpire fees, and organizational structure at no cost to the students or their schools. Despite these costs, the foundation has remained privately funded throughout its existence. Over the past ten years, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has raised over \$400,000 for its Middle School Program. The sources of its support are varied, like Tenacity, but the foundation primarily relies on three crucial supporters. First, Parks and People Foundation works with the foundation to provide the program with the necessary fields, transportation, and equipment annually.



Second, Association of Baltimore Area Grant Makers helps B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. apply for local foundation support each year. Recent grants have come from the Baltimore Community Foundation and Ronald McDonald House Charities. The foundation's third and most significant contributor, though, is The Baseball Factory.

The Baseball Factory is a for-profit business venture that Steve Sclafani founded and began operating shortly after the The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation was organized. The Baseball Factory specializes in developing talented high school baseball players into college prospects and in helping to place them into top colleges across the nation. The business quickly took off after its founding, uncovering an untapped market of middle and upper class high school students seeking to play college baseball. Sclafani and others who had helped to organize B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. slowly shifted their focus toward expanding The Baseball Factory's success. While The Baseball Factory supplied, and continues to supply, the bulk of the foundation's facilities, equipment, and financial contributions, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. suffered a lull in its growth and expansion largely due to a lack of full-time staff. However, Mr. Sclafani took a significant step to move the foundation forward by hiring Seth McDonnell in 2002 to serve as B.A.S.E.-H.I.T.'s Associate Director. McDonnell's sole focus is the foundation, overseeing its daily operations, drafting its future plans, and fundraising for its programs. Although he does not have a baseball background, McDonnell lends financial credibility to the foundation, having worked for six years as a Senior Account Manager the *Financial Times*.

With Seth McDonnell working full-time, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has advanced to undertake new initiatives to complement its Middle School Program. In 2002, it founded the Baltimore Pride Baseball Program. The Baltimore Pride, a team consisting of twenty-

five elite Division I college baseball players, play professional style baseball at an amateur level in the Clark C. Griffith Collegiate Baseball League. Bringing this brand of baseball to Baltimore benefits both the players and the community. Through the program, the Baltimore Pride's players have the opportunity to showcase their talents in front of professional baseball scouts. Meanwhile, Baltimore families, especially children, are allowed to see competitive and high-quality baseball without steep ticket prices.

More recently, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. and The Baseball Factory have partnered with UMBC to renovate the university's field, which serves as the home field for the Baltimore Pride and the site of B.A.S.E.-H.I.T.'s annual championship game. Under an agreement reached among the partnering organizations, the foundation and The Baseball Factory will receive increased use of UMBC's field, facilities, and signage. They will also receive naming rights to the field and the stadium. Once it is completed, the initiative will provide, among other things, new marketing and advertising opportunities and an enjoyable and inexpensive place for the entire family to go and watch quality baseball. So far, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has already helped to install lights in the stadium to allow for night games. Future renovations will partially be contingent on the effectiveness of fundraising efforts.

Under McDonnell's leadership, the foundation is also making strides in improving its methods of performance measurement and management. The foundation currently tracks its progress and effectiveness through weekly teacher progress reports, weekly reports from the coaches/mentors, student grade progressions up until high school, and surveys from the students and staff. Mr. McDonnell is currently working with a branch of Legg Mason, a prominent global financial services company in

Baltimore, that specializes in assisting endowments and foundations to manage their budget. Together with a small group of volunteers, they are in the process of drafting a thorough, multi-metric system of analyzing the foundation's impact and efficiency. The new system, among other improvements, will begin tracking participants in the program through high school and potentially beyond.<sup>18</sup>

McDonnell admits that B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. continues to encounter some stumbling blocks along its road to success. Most notably, he says that the program suffers from a need for better coaches. Despite the foundation's training sessions, McDonnell estimates that approximately a quarter of the league's coaches fail to abide by the Middle School Program's principles. Such coaches ultimately over-emphasize competitive aspects of baseball and winning, instead of focusing on teaching constructive concepts such as teamwork and sportsmanship. Additionally, transportation costs have become an issue. Each of the eleven teams in the Middle School Program currently plays twenty games per season. The cost of private transportation to and from all of those games will continue to hinder the foundation's growth unless its endowment is greatly expanded. Even then, the organization would benefit greatly from more cost-efficient travel.

The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation cannot grow fast enough, though, to meet the needs of its surrounding community. The organization currently finds itself in a unique position to serve a city in especially dire need of its programs. Baltimore County Public Schools are bankrupt, and the already sparse list of extra-curricular and after-school programs offered to students in the area is certain to shrink even more. Seth McDonnell hopes that budget problems for the public schools will ultimately translate into a boost in donations to the foundation. As a result, he has greatly boosted the organization's

fundraising efforts through increased grant applications, advertisements, and courting of corporate sponsors. In the next five years, McDonnell plans on increasing B.A.S.E.-H.I.T.'s endowment by two million dollars! He also hopes to expand the number of schools participating in the Middle School Program, to add a year-round component to the foundation's services, and even to someday expand across state lines into cities like Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia.

While B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has not experienced the rapid growth that Tenacity has enjoyed, the foundation now seems to be moving in the right directions. During its ten years of existence, it has evolved from a middle school baseball league into an organized youth program with an interest in improving the lives of Baltimore youth. Although it has a long way to go, the organization now seems poised to increase fundraising and to reach out to more children living in poverty. Unlike Tenacity, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. shares its administration with a successful, established business, The Baseball Factory. This can serve both to help and hinder the foundation as it moves forward. Leaders of the for-profit business may have less time to dedicate to the not-for-profit foundation. On the other hand, The Baseball Factory's success will continue to lend stability to the funding and support of B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., allowing it to increase its staff, scope, and programs. It remains to be seen whether the foundation can thrive while its founders split time, attention, and resources between their business and their original vision.

### **The Recipe for Successful Programs**

The ultimate goal of successful non-profit youth sports programs should be to provide young people with a positive experience that enhances their education and fosters long-term success and stability. Such programs must include several components in

order to attain such an ambitious goal. Some of these components have already been implemented in Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Others are necessary in order to reach out to children who are especially at-risk and who are deprived of the basic capabilities afforded to most youth. The Diamonds, Denises, and Charleses of the country can especially benefit from programs that promote responsibility, self-motivation, and a well-rounded education. Without support, discipline, and strong morals at home or in their communities, they need both programs that channel their behavior, support their growth, and unlock their creativity. However, they can only reap the benefits of such programs if these proper components are in place.

#### **1) A clear, quantifiable mission and goals**

A youth sports programs should include, first and foremost, a mission which defines its fundamental principles and direction. The mission should not merely be to allow children to play or to give at-risk youth to play a sport as a momentary refuge from their lives. Instead, the mission of effective youth sports programs should include a commitment to evoke lasting, positive change through athletics. Sports should not simply be used as competition or entertainment, but rather as a medium for enhancing young people's lives in a non-classroom environment. Such programs must also take an interest in the communities and families in which participants live, in order to provide a sports experience that is fruitful and is placed in the proper context. The mission should include a focus on enriching children's lives and expanding their education and their opportunities for the future. In accordance with this mission, programs should also draft goals. Any successful business venture must maintain a vision for the future in order to sustain success over time. Non-profit organizations are no different. Goals should focus

on expansion or revision in accordance with an organization's clearly-defined mission statement. Goals should attempt to provide improved and/or expanded solutions to serving at-risk children in the community.

Neither B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. nor Tenacity has sufficiently defined its mission in the context of inner-city poverty. While both organizations seek to enhance students' academic success in accordance with athletic participation, neither organization has gone far enough to clearly articulate its dedication to helping to lift children out of urban poverty. B.A.S.E.-H.I.T.'s mission is not explicit enough in promoting the non-competitive aspects and benefits of baseball. Tenacity's mission, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned with exposing mass quantities of children to tennis than with improving the lives of the most at-risk children in Boston. Maximizing a program's effectiveness must begin at its foundation, its mission.

More so than B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., though, Tenacity has drafted a detailed and poignant set of goals for its future. Through its five-year *Rallying to Serve* campaign, the organization stands poised to raise significantly greater funding and to serve substantially more students by its 2008 deadline. These goals are vital to inform program staff, contributors, and participants about the future direction and approach Tenacity plans to implement. Mr. McDonnell maintains similar plans for growth in Baltimore, but his goals are not nearly as explicit or defined. Obtainable, ambitious goals that are clearly defined and outlined provide youth sports programs with direction and make it easier to rally support for their cause.

**2) A competent staff that can knowledgeably coach and instruct (preferably one that also includes, but is not limited to, members of and volunteers from the community)**

High-quality instructors and staff members are vital to a program that seeks to educate and to foster growth. An effective staff lends credibility to the program through past experience and proficiency, sound moral values and character, and a genuine desire and motivation to improve the lives of children. Successful programs will also include local volunteers, qualified community members, and even past participants among its staff. Such staff members serve as a vital bridge between the program's established athletic and academic instructors and the underprivileged communities that they seek to serve.

In both Tenacity and The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation, for example, the credibility of the staff begins at the top. Ned Eames and Steve Sclafani, the founders and executive directors of the two respective programs, have both established success in the athletic world as well as the business world. Below, the executive level, the dynamic of the two programs' staffs differs significantly. Tenacity maintains a highly accomplished and professional staff, including a former college tennis team captain in charge of tennis operations, graduates from the Harvard School of Education heading up the organization's academic programs, and a multitude of qualified volunteers from outside the community. It relies more on paid staff members and professionals than trained volunteers from the community. On the other side of the spectrum, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. is run almost entirely by teachers from within the city school system and the community. It maintains only a single full-time employee. A program with optimal effectiveness will combine professional staff members with trained members of the community, and perhaps even alumni from the program over time. This type of staff diversity would serve to foster positive self-esteem, confidence, and accountability among community

members and program participants as they stake an indelible claim to the organization and its success.

### **3) Support from surrounding businesses, organizations, and citizens**

Support from surrounding businesses, organizations, and members of the community is similarly critical to the success of a youth sports program. Such support allows programs the necessary financial freedom to maintain a sufficient operational budget. This support also assists in developing a communal affinity with the program and encourages the community to play a role in dealing with its own social issues. By involving local community organizations and businesses, a program can even help to create positive peer pressure among citizens to support and participate in its endeavors.

Tenacity has served as a clear example of how to run an effective fundraising campaign since its inception in 1999. It has amassed a huge endowment in less than five years, allowing the organization to expand the number and scope of its programs and to accommodate increasing numbers of participants. In addition to raising a large sum of money, the organization has also succeeded in procuring both financial and non-financial contribution from a wide variety of sources, including public funding, individual contributions, other community organizations, businesses, and universities.

Contrastingly, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. has built its success on a moderate budget from strictly private contributors, but it has remained overly dependent on The Baseball Factory for support and its main program only runs during three months out of the year.

Additionally, some public funding, in addition to private funding, can be positive for a successful organization as long as it does not compromise its fundamental mission and values.



**4) An efficient recruitment plan that seeks to aid those in most need and those who can experience the greatest benefit from the program**

Effective recruitment can be equally pivotal in cultivating and spreading interest in the program. In order to make any significant strides in the long term alleviation of poverty, it is also essential that a program actively seek out children with the greatest need and the most to gain. Perhaps the greatest method of recruiting participants to the program is to ensure the enjoyment and success of current participants and to let word of mouth travel throughout the community. However, some children may be trapped in destructive and harmful situations, which may be remedied by the program. These children must be recruited in order to break the repetitive cycle of poverty. It is also beneficial to successful programs to allow children from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds to participate in order to breakdown social stigma and to breed unity within the larger community.

Tenacity particularly excels in the area of recruitment. It recruits a wide range of children from both genders and diverse backgrounds and income brackets, with a special focus on at-risk youth for its After-School Excellence Program. In terms of race and ethnicity, Mr. Eames points out that the body of participants in Tenacity's most recent Summer Tennis and Reading Program was composed of roughly 40% black students, 30% white students, 20% Hispanic students, 5% Asian students, and 5% from various other ethnicities.<sup>19</sup> The organization already touches thousands annually through its new and growing programs, and it expects to accommodate nearly five thousand students on a yearly basis by 2008. The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation offers a different method of recruitment, which focuses strictly on male students attending middle schools in at-risk

areas of Baltimore City. Interested students are narrowed down to eleven teams of fifteen through tryouts. The foundation's narrower scope in recruitment is largely due to its relatively small endowment. With increased fundraising, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. and programs like it should seek to recruit a broader range of students in order to forge social bonds across socioeconomic lines and to eliminate stigma.

**5) A central focus on recreation as a means for personal development, character-building, and education**

Inner city youth sports programs may have a negative effect on a community if too great an emphasis is placed on the competitive aspects of athletics and/or on the potential wealth that can be accumulated in professional sports. Successful programs seek to supplement education with athletics, and consequently must go to great lengths to deter participants from sacrificing academic success and opportunities for sports.

Athletic competition must be established as a means for enhancing education, personal development, and character. Impoverished young people have a natural tendency to search for a quick and easy ticket out of poverty. Their role models are often athletes and entertainers with exceptional and rare talent and who are paid large fortunes. Especially in sports, talented phenoms are increasingly foregoing higher education to turn professional. To say that such instances are uncommon is an understatement. According to the NCAA, for example, the odds of a high school football player making it into the National Football League are approximately 6,000 to 1. Even worse, the odds of a high school basketball player making it into the National Basketball Association are approximately 10,000 to 1.<sup>20</sup> So much can be gained through sports, yet even more may be lost when children gamble their futures for a chance at the impossible dream of

becoming a professional athlete. Youth sports programs can successfully battle the social ills of poverty, but only by maintaining a healthy approach to athletics.

Both Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. maintain a mission that extends beyond simply athletics and into the academic and personal realms. Both programs maintain close relationships with schools in their area and attempt to focus on sports as a positive teaching tool that can help children to grow into successful people and adults. B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., however, has experienced some problems with over-competitive coaches deviating from the program's core values. Part of this problem stems from the foundation's recruitment process. Any sports program that selects participants based on talent alienates, to some degree, children that are not gifted athletes. Also, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. was initially founded as an organization with a focus, in part, on the furthering of the sports careers of its participants. Such a focus can be dangerous by deviating from the educational, healthy, and positive aspects of youth sports. It could be argued that Tenacity's High School Tennis Program is also too focused on talent and competition, but it is important that such programs exist to push elementary and middle school students to excel both in the classroom and on the court in order to make it to the next level. As that program grows, it will also include opportunities for less athletic high school students who are interested in the game to play tennis in leisurely and/or intramural settings. Under Seth McDonnell's direction, B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. also plans to expand to allow all interested middle school students to participate, and possibly even to branch off into other areas to allow students with talents in other sports to find their niche.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental goals of both organizations remain sound and their programs continues to support children physically and academically.

**6) A plan for community involvement and development**

Any youth sports program that seeks to influence the city that it serves should logically include a plan for community involvement and development. A concerted effort to involve and reform the community is crucial to the construction of a lasting support system for young people in the inner city. Successful programs should seek to empower community members and to promote personal responsibility and character development. A program is ineffective in helping children like Diamond, Denise, and Charles, for instance, if it does not make some effort to reform the communities to which they belong. Effective education and lessons learned can quickly be forgotten in an environment like the streets of American inner cities if proper steps are not taken to curb the negative influences of the community. The development of stronger, safer, more productive communities is an investment in both the longevity of youth programs and in the future of the young people that they serve.

Both Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. could make larger strides in actively involving and developing their local communities, but the two programs also currently make an effort to involve the community as donors and volunteers. Both programs use facility access, granted by community members, involve local school faculty and staff, and recruit volunteer staff members from the area. B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., especially, is also making a deliberate attempt to create initiatives that provide a certain degree of reform in community culture, such as the addition of the Baltimore Pride to the Baltimore area sports scene and the renovation of UMBC's baseball stadium.

**7) A plan for family involvement and development**

Closely related to the need for community development initiatives is the need for family involvement and development through youth sports programs. The family structure in American inner cities is rapidly deteriorating. As a result, city children like the ones mentioned above lack a firm base of discipline and support in attempting to gain an education, to grow as individuals, and to be successful in life. An effective youth program must attempt to strengthen family involvement in children's lives to provide a certain degree of stability and motivation in reversing the trends of poverty.

Furthermore, if a child's family is absent from his/her life or is counter-productive in helping him/her to succeed, then programs must take the necessary steps in the interest of the child to reach out to the family or must take measures to place children in healthier family atmospheres. The children must be the primary concern. A child like Denise, for example, whose mother actually forced her to be raped for drugs, may need to be permanently removed from such a family. At minimum, youth sports programs can give a child like Denise something to live for, to work towards, as well as the self-esteem and the drive to overcome. Children and their families must be shown that a better life exists beyond the city streets.

Family involvement and development is a critical element to any youth sports program and it is not sufficiently addressed in Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. While Tenacity has parents sign on with their children in ASEP, pledging active support to participants in the program, the program does little to involve families in the programs themselves. Perhaps family counseling programs for needy participants in the organization would be a good investment in the future as Tenacity's endowment continues to grow. B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., on the other hand, makes some effort to involve

families by inviting them to the Middle School Program's annual field trip to an Orioles game and by encouraging them to attend the league's games as spectators. Still, not enough is being done through these programs to actively engage families and to strengthen their influence in children's lives.

**8) The provision of future opportunities for participants that promote social growth, mobility, and success**

It is essential that youth sports programs, seeking to evoke lasting change in the socioeconomic landscape of American cities, provide participants with future opportunities that promote social growth, mobility, and success. Programs that simply offer participants a momentary escape from their impoverished neighborhoods and lives are not effective in changing the outlook and future of at-risk youth growing up in inner cities. Participants must have future opportunities to look forward to in order to generate hope and self-esteem. When used correctly, for instance, sports are catalysts for change, growth, and education. If a child is no longer able to pursue a particular sport in any capacity, following the conclusion of a program, then there is a heightened risk of lost motivation and of future failure.

B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. particularly falls short in providing long-term opportunities for its participants. Three months per year is simply not enough to permanently deter children from life on the streets. While participants may meet academic requirements and learn important lessons during the Middle School Program's season, the rest of their school year is not well-monitored, and students may resort to unhealthy means of pursuing a future. Conversely, Tenacity continues to expand its programs to allow children in elementary school through high school to pursue their love

for tennis and to continue to gain valuable instruction and life lessons. Participants are allowed to stay involved in fruitful in-school and after-school opportunities involving tennis during all of their critical developmental years.

**9) A method of measuring success that accounts for multiple metrics and can sufficiently chart the growth and effectiveness of the program**

Socially-conscious youth sports programs should also adopt a system for effectively measuring program success, accounting for multiple metrics. In order to garner support and to grow efficiently and productively, youth programs must be able to chart their own successes and failures in serving participants. Measurement systems such as these must not focus exclusively on monetary aspects of growth and decline, but also take into account the long-term maturation and psychological growth of children, the development of personal responsibility, the character of the children, the honing of team-building and team-work skills, and the general feeling of fulfillment and hope among participants in determining the program's progress. Regular measurements and internal evaluations provide organizations with direction and help them to better serve the community.

Both Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. continue to develop accurate measurement systems that account for multiple facets of the organizations and their programs. The administrations for the two organizations keenly understand the implications that constant program assessment can have with regard to future growth and success. Eventually, Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. hope to be able to track their participants' progress in high school, college, and beyond, in order to improve the quality of the organizations and to help to market their effectiveness in combating poverty.

During these present times of astronomical child poverty that continues to grow in America's deeply urban areas, youth sports programs should play an expanded role in deterring the perpetuation of poverty. Both Tenacity and B.A.S.E.-H.I.T., to a large degree, understand the potential impact that they can have on the lives of inner city children. Still, much more work remains to be done. In Boston, for example, where Tenacity has had great success in aiding underprivileged children, recent studies still point out that one-third of all juvenile offenses in the city "occur on school days between the hours of 2:00 and 6:00 p.m."<sup>22</sup> Sources also suggest, "Although an estimated 17,000 to 20,000 children ages 5-12 currently participate in after-school programming in Boston, at least another 15,000 would participate if enough affordable, accessible, and high-quality programs were available."<sup>23</sup> The absence of such programs only serves to worsen the cycle of poverty in America's cities. While cutbacks in accessible, youth-focused non-profit sports programs may help to save cities money in the short term, the long term effects can be crippling. As Melvin Delgado points out, such cutbacks actually serve to increase costs in terms of "juvenile arrests, treatment, special school-related programs, etc."<sup>24</sup> Youth sports programs with the proper organization and focus are capable of fostering lasting improvements in the lives of the impoverished communities.

Sports can be meaningful and fulfilling activities without strict organization and structure. However, sports take on a new significance when they are offered to impressionable children in conjunction with academic programs. In inner city areas across the United States, the pairing of sports and academics can have a far-reaching and lasting impact on the lives of young people, on the city communities, and on the larger socioeconomic structure of society. With the proper organization and direction, sports



have the unique ability to educate children without them even noticing and to motivate them to look beyond the impoverished cycle that ensnares their communities. Carl Davies captures the significance of sports in the lives of youths, through his description of an after-school baseball practice at Lombard Middle School in Baltimore:

After the after-school tutorial they race down to the gym to grab their equipment and head across the street for practice. The field is lined for lacrosse and soccer, not baseball. A homeless person sleeps in the bushes down the third-base line (until he is stirred by a foul ball). There is broken glass in the dugout area, which is more or less on the sidewalk, and a thunderstorm is blowing in. But the kids are completely unconcerned, throwing the ball around and bantering nonstop.<sup>25</sup>

If youth sports programs commit to reaching out to at-risk children and to playing a larger role in improving their capabilities, the possibilities are endless. Diamond Pless may rest easy after nights of studying to keep up his grades for a chance to play football each week. Denise White may find positive role models in coaches and tutors that stay with her long after school hours, helping her to have a future. Young Charles and his brother may have had the opportunity to grow closer to other young people with their same interests in schoolyard games, and may have found a second home in a safe and healthy sports community made up of their peers. Amidst visible signs of deprivation and despair, sports provide children with a potential escape route from poverty, an avenue to hope.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sen, Amartya. Development as Freedom. Oxford: University Press, 1999. p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Powell, Robert Andrew. We Own This Game: A Season in the Adult World of Youth Football. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003. pp. 31-39, 86-93.

<sup>3</sup> Murphy, Patrick T. Wasted: The Plight of America's Unwanted Children. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997. pp. 75-77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-89.

<sup>5</sup> Lindsey, Duncan. The Welfare of Children. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

- 
- <sup>7</sup> Delgado, Melvin. New Arenas for Community Social Work Practice with Urban Youth: Use of the Arts, Humanities, and Sports. New York: Columbia University, 2000. p. 150.
- <sup>8</sup> Negri, Gloria. "Volleys and Values On Court and Off." Boston Globe. 17 Oct. 1999: p. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Eames, et al. "Rallying to Serve: Five Year Strategic Plan 2004-2008." 2003. The Official Tenacity Home Page. 27 Feb. 2004. p. 2.  
<http://tenacity.org/LinkDocuments/longwood%20event%20presentation%20FINAL-WEB.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>11</sup> Eames, Ned, et al. "Tenacity in Action: Building a Pathway to Excellence." 2003. The Official Tenacity Home Page. 27 Feb. 2004. p. 4.  
<http://tenacity.org/LinkDocuments/Tenacity%20In%20Action%20whitepaper.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> Eames, Ned. President and Founder of Tenacity. Telephone interview. 18 March 2004.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 2
- <sup>15</sup> McDonnell, Seth. "Executive Summary." 2004. The Official B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation Home Page. 5 March 2004. <http://www.basehitfoundation.org/execsummary.html>.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Davies, Carl. "Diamond Vision: The Baseball Factory Foundation Brings America's Pastime Back to the Inner City." City Paper. 21 May 1997. p. 2.
- <sup>18</sup> McDonnell, Seth. Associate Director of The B.A.S.E.-H.I.T. Foundation. Telephone interview. 31 March 2004.
- <sup>19</sup> Eames interview
- <sup>20</sup> Delgado, pp. 150-153.
- <sup>21</sup> McDonnell interview
- <sup>22</sup> Menino, Thomas M., et al. "Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative." 2004. The City of Boston Home Page. 19 March 2004. <http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/2to6/>.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Delgado, p. 150
- <sup>25</sup> Davies, p. 2