

# Executive Director's Report



*"A Unified Voice for Youth Sports"*

**Prepared by  
Sally S. Johnson, Executive Director**

**Presented to the  
NCYS Board of Directors and Membership**

**September 16-18, 2009  
Rosen Plaza Hotel ★ Orlando, FL  
S.P.O.R.T.S 2009**

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# Executive Director's Report

NCYS Annual Meeting  
September 16-18, 2009  
Orlando, Florida

*"You are positive, inspired, passionate and zealous to the degree in which you eliminate negative motions from your life.*

*Engage in mountaintop thinking, stretch forward in deliberation, and then act as if it were impossible to fail."*

*Sally S. Johnson, CSA*

Despite the worst recession in modern times and the rise of ethical tumbles from Wall Street to government, I believe in many ways we are in a better place than ever before. People seem to be more dedicated to doing the right thing. There is an air of genuine care and concern, and people seem to be embracing honesty, integrity and transparency.

It is intriguing to note that along with economic woes the unemployment rate is the highest in nearly a generation, families are tightening their budgets, and businesses are cutting back BUT parents are still supporting their children in organized youth sports!

While this is not a good time to be looking for a major sponsor, sports do tend to benefit from a buffer against recession. In hard times, it seems that people need a diversion more than ever. They like heroes to watch and cheer. They love watching their children engaged in sport and physical activity. And still they are willing to pay.

Even in the best of times parents sacrifice for their kids' athletic endeavors. While the spending can be hard to justify, parents are saying, "One of the worst things we could do is pull kids away from sports to save money." Somehow parents are finding a way to keep kids involved. And some families are finding more wholesome, quality time together through athletic events and activities. That is a good thing!

But I also worry that in desperate times people do desperate things. It is more important than ever that we be certain our children are safe while in our care and under our supervision. And we must never lose track of high ethical standards and good, responsible moral behavior.

All of this leads me to the 2009 activity of the National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS). This has been a year of extremes alternating really difficult times with really good times. Credibility, integrity and vigilant visibility have remained at the core of everything we do for our members and our industry. NCYS is unique and we pride ourselves on living up to our Strategic Plan as well as being respected by our members, the media, the government, corporate America and the leaders in and around our industry.

In order to bring everyone up to speed on all the good happenings at NCYS, I will highlight our key areas and flagship programs that have gained NCYS its valued reputation as the proven leader of the amateur youth sports industry. And I will touch on the some of the new projects that are gaining momentum and broadening the NCYS culture. More detailed information is always available at [www.ncys.org](http://www.ncys.org) or by calling NCYS Headquarters.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

NCYS was founded in 1979 by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. It is good to be reminded that in 1988 we had 14 members. In 1998 we had 74 members. Today, September 2009, we boast nearly 200 member organizations that represent more than 60-million registered participants in organized youth sports programs! I ask you to be a part of the NCYS recruitment team and ask others to join the team of who's who in the youth sports industry. Everyone is welcome! Together we are a powerhouse of positive influence! Your membership is our reason to serve.

A most sincere thank you to the entire NCYS membership. The incredible dedication to your work is such an amazing inspiration. When the going gets tough, the youth sports industry leaders are just getting going! At the end of the day, there can be nothing short of extreme pride for those who provide everyday allegiance to children through safe, supervised and organized amateur athletic activities.

We are not a cookie-cutter industry. We are diversified in sport, in skill, in performance, in rules, and so on. But philosophically we are at one with the common purpose – to enhance the youth sports experience in America for the betterment of youth, of sport and of society.

## **THE NCYS STRATEGIC PLAN**

There are five key areas that the Board of Directors identified as priority issues in the NCYS Strategic Plan: "*Vision 2010*" and they are: Identity/Credibility/Visibility; Partnership; Funding; Member Services; and Leadership & Organizational Structure. This is a living document available in its entirety on the NCYS website.

A respectful thank you to NCYS Board of Directors. Beginning with President Wanda Rutledge, Dr. W is completely dedicated to the positive and practical advancement of the NCYS. Each one of the board members is outrageously busy with their own jobs but always make themselves available to assist with NCYS. These are remarkable, unselfish individuals who lead with a true passion, an open mind and great vision to be certain NCYS best serves the needs of our youth sports, youth-serving industry.

## **ADVOCACY/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS/PUBLIC POLICY**

For more than 13 years now Government Relations has been a mainstay area of work for the NCYS. We continue to carry the advocacy banner on pertinent legislative issues. NCYS has become a regular resource in Washington D.C. for the U.S. Senators and House of Representatives, their staffers and the Congressional committees. We are the "go-to" unified voice of youth sports and recognized as such on Capitol Hill.

NCYS and its member organizations have a history as proven effective advocates for favorable public policy which:

- encourages and increases participation in amateur sports and recreation for those of all backgrounds, genders, and economic diversities;
- protects and preserves national, state, and local parks and recreation space for athletic fields and facilities for children and families;
- generates awareness to eradicate childhood obesity and takes action to help our nation become healthier and more active;
- supports child safety issues such as assisting youth sports administrators with rapid, reliable, affordable, comprehensive criminal background checks for volunteers;
- promotes healthy lifestyles through physical activity in wholesome organized, supervised activities.

NCYS promotes tangible opportunities for member organizations to participate, collaborate, and engage in the legislative process, always seeking to maximize industry representation. NCYS produces legislative lobby days encouraging members to come to Washington, DC, and visit with their Representatives on serious issues relating to our business. NCYS also encourages member organizations to cultivate relationships with elected officials by hosting events and inviting Representatives to visit their facilities. The success generated by a collaborative industry approach goes a long way in establishing critical long-term communications opportunities to promote amateur sports and business issues in Washington.

Apparently, our hard work and clean reputation has made its way to the Oval Office! In July 2009, President Barack Obama announced the formation of the White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport. I am proud to tell you that the NCYS is a regular resource for The White House helping to sort through the maze of opportunities and issues. President and Mrs. Obama are committed to engaging youth and parents and coaches in a grassroots initiative for the betterment of society. They are impressed (rightfully so!) with the great, dedicated people in youth sports. NCYS will continue to cooperate in every way possible to be a valued resource to the newly created White House Office.

Going forward we will look to our members for help in mobilizing a grassroots coalition whenever there is public policy that affects our industry, advances our ethical values and good character, and enhances the youth sports experience in America. Obviously with this year's healthcare reform, issues such as encouraging children and families to have "more green time and less screen time" will be at the top of our advocacy list. NCYS strongly supports legislation that empowers Americans to be active, healthy and fit making youth sports and family fitness more affordable.

### **STRIVE AWARDS**

After five phenomenal years of support from Hershey's, their fundraising department gave up all sponsorships for 2009 including NCYS. It has been a difficult battle to find a new sponsor in this economic downturn, but I am optimistic that there is a very serious sponsor on the brink of making an announcement! STRIVE is a real world program with real value! A perfect springboard to drive corporate brand recognition and equity to all ethnic groups, all economic levels, all ages, all sports!

STRIVE stands for Sports Teach Respect, Initiative, Values and Excellence. The STRIVE awards recognize coaches, administrators, officials and volunteers from hometown communities. Each award winner is a remarkable leader, a respected mentor, and has made such a significant positive difference in the lives of children. Youth sports play a vital role in the development of well rounded youngsters, by helping to teach children the importance of good sportsmanship, the rewards of hard work and practice, and the sweet taste of victory. The STRIVE Award recognizes the best of the best as America's hometown heroes!

NCYS encourages everyone to send in nominations. Notify your affiliates of the STRIVE program. Forward our emails to your colleagues. Spread the word! STRIVE is a great program with extraordinary publicity for your program and a fun celebration of youth sports.

NEWS FLASH!!! Look for this year's STRIVE Award to take on a new look. We will be keeping up with the times and are going totally virtual! Nomination forms will be available from the website [www.ncys.org](http://www.ncys.org) as soon as our sponsor is confirmed. Cities and towns can still celebrate with their own local events like a pep rally, or a parade down Main Street, complete with elected officials from every level of government. But look out world....the next NCYS STRIVE Award is going to be a totally virtual experience!

## **SAFETY PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS**

### **Criminal Background Screening, National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI)**

In April 2005, the National Council of Youth Sports announced its creation of the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI) demonstrating its dedication to protecting and keeping our children safe.

NCYS has long been a leader at the forefront of taking on difficult issues and as an untiring advocate for the youth sports industry in America. This current economic climate is high on our list of concerns for our members and their constituents. We have dreaded fears about the impact these dire financial times have on societal problems including increased crimes of violence and abuse. The recent headlines speak for themselves, typically upstanding people involved in horrific acts. Unfortunately, desperate people sometimes do desperate things and, being 'custodians' of young people; it is during these times that we must be on even higher alert within our organizations.

NCYS is most appreciative of those groups who are active clients of NCSI ([www.ncsisafe.com](http://www.ncsisafe.com)). They have done their homework and understand the vast distinction between conducting a 'background check' versus being committed to utilizing a fully-managed program that uses multiple sources of data with up-to-date, comprehensive criminal history information. There is a big difference.

While we wholeheartedly encourage youth serving organizations to be on top of their game with background screening we also place caution to which background screening company one contracts with. Using a vendor who might provide a 'great rate' but doesn't keep their information current and complete may actually do the organization and the children it serves more harm than good by providing a false sense of security. NCSI is the only background screening company endorsed by National Council of Youth Sports and licensed to use our publication, *Recommended Guidelines for Background Screening in Nonprofit and Youth-Serving Organizations*®.

NCSI is the choice of many of the most renowned and reputable organizations in the world. NCSI handles ALL aspects of the screening process from start to finish saving you time, money and the legal issues associated with the many liabilities involved in background screening.

We know you want your organization to be a safe place for all concerned which is why we encourage you to review your background screening policies and procedures and your organization's codes of conduct. Having appropriate controls and best practices in place to protect against potential harm is paramount in avoiding devastating losses.

Background checks are one of the most important services the NCYS has ever offered to its membership. And we are proud to be the industry leader on complete and comprehensive criminal background screening program for youth serving organizations.

### **Safety in Sports Photography**

The advancements in photography from film to digital imagery has created a wealth of opportunities for the youth sports photographers to better serve the photographic needs and wants of their most valued customers, the youth sports participants. On the one hand, these technological advances allow for a more effective and efficient operation. On the other hand the ease of manipulating digital photography along with the wide use of the internet has opened the door for disturbing illegal activity.

While the vast majority of photographers in the sports photography industry conduct their businesses ethically and professionally, there are some who have compromised the integrity and high ethical standards our industry demands. It is hard to believe but true that there are a

few who have taken photographs of youngsters only to enhance them in an unethical, immoral and illegal way.

This is a problem the NCYS is addressing head-on. The NCYS and NCSI are working with a photo industry advisory committee along with various national and international photography associations to eradicate this problem before it gets out of hand. At the forefront of this issue is the need to assure a kid safe environment in which our children can be fostered in good sportsmanship and learn the tremendous upsides from team fellowship and athletics.

The objective is to create and market a pipeline at [www.YSPNC.com](http://www.YSPNC.com)—Your Sports Photography Network Connection—for teams and leagues to reference assuring them that their youth sports photographer has undergone a NCSI criminal background check and has done his/her due diligence in providing the organization the best possible peace of mind with professionalism and solid moral character principles.

### **SmartGivingCards**

Patience is a virtue! And for certain patience on this program will prove to have been worth its wait! SmartGivingCards teaches responsible financial spending using a VISA debit card and/or gift card while raising money for organizations, teams and leagues. This program is sponsored by Locker81 Fundraising Solutions owned by NFL great, Heisman trophy winner, and successful businessman Tim Brown who has a sincere desire to give back to youth sports in a meaningful way.

Already a huge success in its pre-launch state, some organizations are mandating its use for payment to their orgs for registrations, etc. No one needs to sell popcorn or magazines or candles door-to-door. This is such a make-sense program. People continue with their normal spending—groceries, gas, entertainment, retail, sporting goods, team travel, gifts, and whatever else—using a debit (not credit) card and the organization makes money. And the SmartGivingCard is a VISA card so it can be used anywhere.

The card processing company is First Data. First Data is the largest merchant processor company processing about 70% of the cards! It is a \$6.5 billion company, moving more than \$1.7 trillion annually. They have an extensive client list providing gift cards to Wal-Mart, Blockbuster, Starbucks, Burger King, McDonalds, Foot Locker, Best Buy, Sears, Disney, Dicks Sporting Goods, etc.

This is a clean, first-class, very credible program designed to safely bring in dollars for your organization and your members organizations. Remember it is a debit/gift card/prepaid program; there are no credit cards to get one into financial trouble. One simply uses a VISA debit card for their regular spending (gas, groceries, team travel) and simultaneously generates dollars for their organization.

The right players with the right credentials and for the right reasons are now in place and I am thrilled to be a part of it all. For the first time, organizations staff, leaders, volunteers, coaches, managers, teams and leagues will be able to focus on quality youth sports programming versus fundraising. And the best news is that those who will benefit most are the children of all backgrounds, genders, and economic diversities as well as the sports industry and society at large.

## **S.P.O.R.T.S. 2009**

NCYS proudly continues the ever-popular S.P.O.R.T.S., produced by SportsEvents Magazine and cosponsored by NCYS.

S.P.O.R.T.S. 2009 is a Town Hall Meeting format specifically designed to bring problems to the floor and solutions to take home. S.P.O.R.T.S. 2009 will bring the Generation Y's who are tech-savvy, optimistic, skeptical, entrepreneurial, naïve, entitled and opinionated together with the seasoned execs that will bring wisdom, intuition, knowledge and experience. We will take a hard look at where we have been, where we are going, and how we are going to get there. The attendees will help chart the course for how we become a bigger, better, stronger industry in the future.

Previous institutes have provided topics presented in a high-energy educational environment for attendees to learn how to consistently produce highly successful sports events and exceed the expectation of participants, sponsors and volunteers.

These high energy educational training conferences will continue to move across the country gaining momentum and reaching the grassroots sports organizations as well as cities and towns looking to host events in their communities. S.P.O.R.T.S. 2009 is the third such meeting following prior locations in Birmingham and Palm Beach County. Each one has built upon the previous and this year's event has attendance up over 30% despite a down economy!

## **CERTIFIED SPORTS ADMINISTRATOR**

The NCYS continues with its Certified Sports Administrator program. We know that the rapidly changing sports market is requiring more sophisticated marketing and greater fiscal responsibility from sports organizations. At the same time, sports industry administrators, coaches and managers do not often have the time, resources, or opportunity to earn an advanced management degree.

CSA courses have been developed for NCYS by the internationally renowned The George Washington University to develop and deliver a customized, flexible and affordable educational program that provides management related courses to youth sports executives.

Courses offered are: Marketing Sports Organizations; Sponsorship & Negotiations; Risk Management; Event Management; Funding Sports Organizations; and Management & Leadership of Sports Organizations. They are conveniently offered online through the NCYS website. Completion of all six courses earns one the prestigious CSA designation along with a signed and sealed Certificate from NCYS and GWU.

## **SPONSORSHIPS and PARTNERSHIPS**

Throughout 2009, the majority of our work has been focused on sponsorship/partnership recruitment. In today's difficult economy it is more important than ever for all corporations to re-evaluate their budgets and business practices. There is a growing need to stay true to our missions and simultaneously seek opportunities that set us apart from our competition. NCYS partnership opportunities are available to those desiring to achieve superior brand recognition by aligning themselves with responsible, ethical, credible, and reliable quality youth sports programming in America.

Partnerships/sponsorships are one of the best ways to create brand awareness, goodwill, advertise one's services, as well as reaffirm the company's reputation as a responsible corporate citizen in the business world. We also suggested companies consider bundling a couple corporate brands together and all share in the partnership to support youth sports in America. Cross-marketing company brands with others can provide added value without breaking the bank!

Well, I can't tell you that the checks were flying in but I can tell you that there are dozens and dozens of corporations, marketing firms, PR agencies and the like who never heard of NCYS before who now have us on their radar screen! While it is exciting to make new connections, it has been discouraging as companies have been in a financial holding pattern. Nevertheless, I am impressed at the level of sincerity as well as the sophisticated credibility, image and respect that NCYS has in the market place.

Our efforts certainly have not gone without notice. There are some rock-solid companies who have NCYS in their sights as well the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Entertainment, HBO Sports, and others in the entertainment and broadcast industry. And I do believe that once this financial crisis opens up, NCYS will be zealously accepting new corporate partners!

### **D'HONDT MOTORSPORTS (DMS)**

DMS and NCYS teamed up in April 2009. D'Hondt Motorsports race car driver(s) compete in the ARCA REMAX Series and the NASCAR Nationwide Series. DMS boasts a niche market of women in motorsports. This is a growing segment that offers up a unique and non-traditional opportunity for cities, towns, communities, CVBs, sports commissions and youth organizations! Team D'Hondt is selling a movement billing itself as the first and only female team in motorsports.

The D'Hondt Motorsports team of drivers are delivering a message of the importance of maintaining a healthy, wholesome, physically active life as well as having a good work ethic and setting goals to achieve the American dream. Any time we deal with "sports celebrities" there is a risk. NCYS expects the DMS Drivers and DMS to consistently exhibit good ethical character as well as being a positive role model maintaining a high standard and honoring the highest traditions of sportsmanship.

We look forward to broadening our reach and expanding the NCYS brand throughout the motorsports market while building our partnership with the DMS team for increased exposure.

### **ZOOSSE**

What is Zoose? Zoose.com is way more than a social networking site. Zoose.com makes the Athlete the Hub of their Sports World by connecting the athlete to their complete sporting needs - information, equipment, teams, and individuals - via a powerful set of internet-delivered communication tools and services.

Zoose delivers safe, family-friendly, sports social networking connecting everyone involved in sports: athletes, coaches, parents, mentors, friends, fans, scouts, and sponsors. Zoose consolidates resources through sports portals for rules, training resources, coaching and mentoring, news and events, and equipment for all your favorite sports from archery to yoga and every sport in between. It is powerful, fun, and free to use!

Zoose also has a team and league management tool for all levels, for all sports. Zoose provides secure sharing of photos, videos, blogs, scores, statistics, radio shows, and books. There are coaching, training, and competition resources; scheduling, tournament, and field/venue management tools; registration and event management services; and Zoose facilitates interaction between leagues and regional or national sport organizations. Through its Rings of Safety, Zoose is committed to building as safe and secure a site as possible, with layers of protection for athletes of all ages.

NCYS does have an agreement with Zoose. We applaud their ingenuity and attention to servicing the athlete and we look forward to its much anticipated launch.

## **MARKET RESEARCH**

NCYS is well known for producing credible market research and the "*NCYS Report on Trends and Participation in Organized Youth Sports*" remains a much sought after document. There is absolutely not a week that goes by without numerous inquiries for our research. No other entity produces such a publication by and for the organized amateur youth sports industry.

The research continues to be the leading source for information in organized youth sports. The latest report shows a 10-year comparison on total participation numbers as well as a breakdown by age and gender. The report also provides key insight to the technology savvy and usage of our members. The results provide important data and trends for all NCYS members to use in their planning and projections as well a valued source for market researchers, corporations, event destinations, marketing firms and PR agencies.

## **NCYS WEBSITE**

The NCYS website is our "face" to the youth sports industry we represent, and our website drives new business to us everyday serving as our most valued area of communication, brand marketing, and source of expansion. Clearly [www.ncys.org](http://www.ncys.org) has broadened our visibility, improved our image, and marketed our brand with a positive appeal.

As with any company's website, building, creating, refreshing and effectively maintaining the site is an ever evolving process. We are serving two markets: driving individuals through our site and appealing to the search engines driving more traffic our way. Content is the key to both markets and NCYS receives exceptional feedback on its clean, uncomplicated appearance and the ease to navigate through [www.ncys.org](http://www.ncys.org).

## **IN CLOSING**

It is such an honor to be able to share with you, the youth sports industry leaders, a piece of the excitement and joy that I live with and cherish each and every day.

One of the joys of my job it to bring people within the industry together, to share successes and help build a pipeline with a flow of relevant information from the grass tops to the grass roots and from the grass roots to the grass tops. It was an honor to speak at the U.S. Olympic Assembly last fall. It has been exciting to have dialog with World Sport Chicago supporting their efforts to promote the Olympic ideals and hopefully secure the 2016 Olympic bid! And I look forward to addressing the topic of the *State of Youth Sports* at next week's Utah Sports for Life Sport Summit.

This report is an attempt to highlight some of the activity among our top programs and projects. Obviously membership recruitment and retainment, marketing, administrative responsibilities, securing funding, responding to market research inquiries, public relations, building brand identity-credibility-visibility, staying current with advocacy issues, responding to our sponsors, creating partnerships, providing member services, developing leadership and solid organizational structure, promoting the programs, website maintenance, etc. etc. etc. are all just a part of the daily activity.

Thank you to our generous corporate partners whom we are so appreciative to. Without them, we absolutely would not exist. The people who comprise the sports industry are really unique. I am forever inspired by their dedication, determination, and untiring loyalty. It is this combined commitment of unwavering support that keeps my enthusiasm and passion at its peak motivating me to drive youth sports forward in an optimistic and constructive way.

There are many challenges that lie ahead. It is when we share our knowledge that we discover the most. Everyday is a learning experience. Please continue to exchange good ideas, make new contacts, meet new people, and stay connected. It's easy to get lost behind our computers, PDAs, Blackberry's and Smartphones. Don't forget to pick up the phone and reach out. It is when we come together that we are stronger in our service and the most effective in our mission.

Thank you for all that you do each and every day to make a child's life more fun and more complete. And thank you for this extraordinary opportunity, honor, and extreme privilege to serve the National Council of Youth Sports.

Yours truly for the kids,

*Sally*

Sally S. Johnson, CSA  
Executive Director  
National Council of Youth Sports



### **NCYS Mission Statement**

The National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS) represents the youth sports industry by advancing the values of participation, and educating and developing leaders.

### **NCYS Vision Statement**

To enhance the youth sports experience in America.

*"A Unified Voice for Youth Sports"*