

Sports for Youngsters

There's Nothing Like Competition

By Francis Sugrue
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In the gentle but persuasive voice of a man who is certain he's got the truth of the matter right in his hand, Edward Michael "Mickey" Norton says: "Kids must be exposed to sports and there must be competition. You can't give kids competition too early, because it is there right from the beginning. They are competing for attention when they are babies, later for each other's toys, and for marks in school, and then for girls, and always for jobs."

WIN

"There is competition all through life and children must learn how to handle it. The younger they are the easier it is for them to learn how to win graciously, and be prepared to lose. They must be given the idea that it is good to improve themselves in order to win. But they must also understand that when they lose it is often to a better team."

Seven years ago—when he was 24—Mr. Norton quit his job with the YMCA in Huntington in order to carry out his own concept of a sports program for kids. It was that important to him. For this purpose he would form the Long Island Athletic Club, but he had to come up with a means, a vehicle—if like—for making money. He needed some money to

support himself, and he needed even more money to support his little-league project, because he didn't intend to charge fees, or sell uniforms, or ask parents to pay for the insurance that was needed, or to pay for anything. "A day camp," said Mr. Norton, "that's what came to mind. From the camp I would make my living and the camp would also provide the money I needed to sponsor all the other things—the teams I had in mind."

Norton's Day Camp? He now has 15 acres in Northport, with two baseball fields, courts for basketball, tennis, volleyball, and land for field hockey, lacrosse, soccer, horseback riding, and a big swimming pool. There are no arts and crafts at this camp, because it is sports "oriented," as the educators say, and the emphasis is on instruction and competition. But there is also a day nursery, which is play oriented. Last summer 270 youngsters through fourteen years, attended the eight-week camp, paying \$190 each.

NUMBER

There are about 1,000 boys and girls participating in this program today, with five football teams for various ages and weights, 30 basketball teams for boys and girls, 18 baseball teams for boys, and eight softball teams for girls, and there is also a women's softball team, which

travels all over the state, and has been the champion of the Long Island Women's Softball League for the last three years.

START

How did Mickey Norton get this way? A personal tragedy was mainly responsible. When Mickey was a young boy he dreamed of being a great athlete—the kind of athlete that made a career of sports. This was to be his life. He not only had this devotion, feeling, desire, love or whatever it is—for sports, but he had the talent to go with it. His was a dream that had every chance of coming true. And then—in his thirteenth year—he contracted polio in his legs, his arms and his stomach. The manner in which Mr. Norton met this challenge is found in what is going on in Norton's A. C. today. But there is no need to become sentimental. And first there is this short story to tell.

Mickey Norton was born in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, where he learned those rather specialized sports endemic to New York. Stick ball and roller-skate hockey with the manhole covers as goals. His father, Edward Vincent Norton, studied physical education at Springfield College, played professional basketball and football in 1920s for the Wheeling, W. Va., team in the old American Federation League, coached high school

and college football in various sections of the country. Then, in the 1930's, Mr. Norton became a recreational director for New York City, and wrote a book called, "Play Streets," which told of all the games that could be played in a "confined area," meaning the normal playground area of a New York youngster—the neighborhood block.

FATHER

Remembering those years, Mickey Norton said, "I loved sports from the beginning. There was nothing forced, but by exposure I assumed my father's feeling for this kind of life. We were in Miami during the war. My father was a lieutenant commander in the Navy and he worked with the USO organizing recreation for servicemen. . . . After the war we came back to Brooklyn. I remember the year—1946. That is when it happened. I came down with polio. I had no movement in my arms. It affected my stomach and attacked both legs. For a couple of months it was tough and go."

Mickey was thirteen years old and physically helpless. From the agony of his shattered childhood he asked his father a pertinent question: "Why did this happen to someone who likes sports? I wanted my father to tell me. I demanded, 'Now I can never play again.' I said, 'Why did-

n't it happen to someone who wants to sit around and read books?' My father said, 'It happened to you, perhaps, because God thought you'd be stronger than some other boy—that you'd be strong enough to handle it.'

There is no doubt that Mickey was strong enough. He has a brace on his left leg now, and the other leg is weak, but he drives a truck and with the aid of a cane he certainly gets around. And for this Mickey gives almost reverent thanks to his parents, Edward Vincent and Rose, a school teacher.

MOVE

The Nortons moved to Huntington, where Mr. Norton organized and became director of the first YMCA in town, and Mickey began coaching some of the youngsters at the Y, coaching and organizing sports becoming a definite substitute for his own desires in sports. He covered high school sports for the local weekly "The Long Islander," went on to Princeton and then to Hofstra, where he received his bachelor's degree, majoring in journalism. He returned to the Huntington Y to become director of physical education, but some time was stirring in him. This sire to run his own sports program for kids. This idea that competition controlled by good leaders was the right thing for kids. He made a move and now he has it.

