

Jumping through Summer: Challenges of Starting a Jump Rope Program

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Abstract

Jumping rope is a high-energy, endurance-building activity for persons of all ages, but one with particular value for children and youth because of its many varieties and emphasis on fun. Whereas jumping rope was once a typical and normal activity for youth, its popularity has declined in the past 30 years, paralleling to some extent, the drop-off in youth physical activity in general. A partnership between the Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department and the Florida Prevention Research Center at the University of South Florida enabled the start-up of a youth jump rope program in Sarasota County, Florida during summer 2004. This paper discusses the program's components and challenges.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2004, the Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Florida Prevention Research Center at the University of South Florida to implement a jump rope program for its 2004 summer campers in the "tween" (8-13) age group. After reviewing available curricula (see, for example, www.jumprope.com), and purchasing a wide variety of jump ropes, the Department hired Coach Paul Williams in Sarasota (www.speed4athletes.com) to design and implement the program. The course was designed for each camper to participate in a 30-minute jump rope program every day. The original plan called for the coach to provide instruction one day per week at each of five camps, and then the camp counselors (usually high school students) would provide jump rope instruction the remaining four days per week. As expected of any new program, there were some challenges to implementing the program as planned. These challenges are discussed below, followed by a brief evaluation of the program and a discussion of the program's future.

Challenges

The campers' skill level was much lower than expected. Over two-thirds of the campers did not know how to jump, let alone turn a rope over their heads. Rather than focusing on how to jump rope with basic jumping patterns (jumping with two feet together, with one jump for each turn of the rope) and then advancing to more complex patterns (such as single foot hops and running in place), the coach had to begin with the most basic of movements, such as teaching the campers to jump over a painted line and turning the jump rope over their heads successfully.

The camp counselors' ability to teach rope jumping was virtually non-existent. Not only did



Children with limited experience are able to learn skills quickly.

many of them not know how to jump rope themselves, but they did not show a willingness to teach the campers how to jump rope. The Parks and Recreation Department searched for qualified instructors, but those who were qualified did not want to work for just four hours a day at \$7.50 per hour. So, instead of Coach Williams providing instruction one day a week at five camps, he and his staff provided instruction five days a week at one camp, serving approximately 256 youth aged 5-14 in two four-week programs. A couple of the camp counselors also willingly provided assistance.

The time between being awarded the grant and the implementation of the program was so short that

it provided a challenge in getting the program put together. In addition, the funds were not received



Just plain jumping is a lost “art.” Coach Williams teaches youth first without ropes.

before program implementation. However, now that the program has been developed, it should be easier to implement at summer camp next year and in after-school programs throughout the school year.

In evaluating the success of the program in controlling body weight, the Parks and Recreation Department was not allowed to take the children’s body measurements. They might be able to work with the school system in the future to monitor body mass index in those youth who participate in the jump rope program.

Evaluation

Initially, many of the youth did not like to jump rope. Coach Williams attributed this to a lack of self-efficacy; in his words, “they don’t like to do things they don’t know how to do.” At the beginning of the program, the children looked clumsy, fell a lot, and complained about the heat (despite jumping in a fantastic, shaded outdoor basketball court). Most of the youth were not otherwise involved in sports and were typically very inactive. However, as they began to learn the skills, many of them seemed to like jumping rope better. They also seemed to like group jumping better, where the rope is turned for them, in part because someone usually got to rest while someone else was jumping. Whereas the campers did begin to like jumping rope as they learned the skills, they still didn’t care for the stretching and warm-up that the Coach had them perform. Nonetheless, the boys asked for punching bags, because they related the rope jumping to boxing, and the girls did seem to like the group jumping.

See Table 1 for the improvement from baseline after three weeks in the number of jumps performed in one minute and the number of jumps without

stopping. At the end of the program, approximately 99% of the youth had shown marked improvement in their jump rope skills. Two children who had been voted “Most Improved” said that the biggest challenge was learning how to jump on one foot. One athletic girl who practiced diligently at home was able to increase the number of jumps performed in one minute from 70 per minute to 150 per minute.



“Group jumping” is one way to make rope play a social as well as a physical activity.

Table 1: Improvement from Baseline to Three weeks

	Baseline	Three Weeks
Number of jumps in 1 minute	42/127 (33%) can jump > 10 times in 1 minute	120/127 (94%) can jump > 15 times in 1 minute
Number of jumps without stopping	6/127 (5%) can jump >10 times without stopping	120/127 (94%) can jump ≥15 times without stopping

The Future

The short term goal is to take the jump rope program Coach Williams developed and implement it in the after school programs that are run by the YMCA. The youth who participated in the summer jump rope program contributed in the design of a jump rope video, called “Jump 10,” which shows the youth jumping in a variety of manners for 10 minutes. The advantage of using a video is that it can be used in any facility without a trained instructor. However, the coach has learned from years of experience that using a video to learn a sport or

physical activity is only valuable and safe when the learner has first had one-on-one hands-on instruction in correct form and technique.

Long term, the goals for the jump rope program in Sarasota County are for every school and park to have a jump rope club, and then later to form a competitive club. It is rumored that Sarasota County is home to at least two known professional jumpers.

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