Sport participation has many positive attributes including teamwork and leadership as well as aiding in positive character development. Recently, however problems have emerged in youth sport that can cause negative impacts on participants. Sports can cause health concerns in regards to both physical and emotional injuries, like stress and burnout. The Women’s Sport Foundation found children that dropped out of sport listed not having fun as the main cause. Youth sport participants can feel pressure to please parents, perform at high levels, and uphold a competitive edge; this can lead to dropout because the children lose enjoyment in the sport.

This research explored parental behavior in a private baseball and softball lesson setting. Data was collected via observations of parents during one-on-one private lessons and interviews with 10 baseball and softball travel instructors/coaches. A typology of parental behavior emerged from data collection: a) pseudo engagement, b) overly aggressive, and c) supportive. Some parents were distracted by technology while others exhibited passive aggressive behavior. There were some parents who provided a supportive environment during the lesson. The implications of the findings provide guidance to youth coaches and administrators on how to effectively deal with parents in a youth sport setting.

Travel sports teams have become ubiquitous features of the youth sports industry—in virtually every geographical location and sport. For many people, selection to a travel team is considered a sign of true athletic accomplishment. Playing on a travel team can also be a status symbol, for players as well as parents. As a result, the pressure to participate in travel sports can be intense. Adults may sign their sons and daughters to try out for travel teams without fully understanding the consequences. And because children usually continue playing on a travel team for several years, initial decisions connected to this process can have a strong and long lasting impact on families.

Drawing from a two-year ethnographic study of youth travel teams, we will explore the structure of the travel sports world, the options available to families, and the short and long term consequences of the decisions they make. The presentation will focus on the insights gleaned from our interviews with parents who have observed their children’s athletic careers from kindergarten through high school. Our analysis of these interviews is designed to create “a more development centered and kid focused youth sport culture,” one of the goals of the panel.

The Major League Baseball (MLB) amateur draft is unique given that players are eligible to be drafted immediately following high school, also having the option to delay entry into professional baseball by attending college. Since high school baseball players have multiple options, MLB scouts, college coaches, and sports agents have a monetary stake in elite-level high school baseball. Players who are invited to play on top-tier travel teams or attend a national showcase have likely been playing elite baseball since they were 10 or 11 years old. One parent of a drafted high school player recounts his son’s time in youth baseball stating that “when he was 10 years old… someone invite[d] him to play on a club
team... that lead to from fifth, sixth grade, even seventh grade to playing club ball... the Angels have a scout team here... so he played for them in eighth, ninth grade..." Using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and Giddens’s structuration theory, this multi-layered qualitative study examines how the macro-level organizations of MLB and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) affect how meso and exo-level individual teams and colleges have a role in the micro-level experiences of elite youth and high school baseball players.