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Too much TV is bad for Little Leaguers

The Score

By SAM BORDEN
DAILY NEWS SPORT WRITER

Zach Gray will probably be fine.

He's 12, by all accounts a great kid and figures to have gotten over giving up the game-winning home run to Frank Smith earlier this week that sent Staten Island - and not Gray's Livingston, N.J. team - to the Little League World Series.



Lester AP

But not every kid is like Gray. And they shouldn't have to be.

The Little League World Series has been on TV since 1963. It used to be a novelty - the championship game was on ABC's "Wide World of Sports" - but it morphed into an ESPN creation in 1997, when the regional-bracket games began airing on ESPN2.

Washington's Lucas Gately reminds us that for the euphoria of every Little League World Series winner, there is the heartbreak of the losing team.

Now it's a full-blown event. This year there will be 45 games of Little League Baseball and Softball aired on one of the ESPN channels. While it's nice that both genders are getting some exposure, all that figure really shows is that boys *and* girls are being put under completely unnecessary pressures.

Let's make it simple:

Cooties.

Boogers.

O
B
T
D
O

BC
FA
EA
FL
PA
MC

WI



The ability to shatter glass with a still-developing voice.

These are the issues that ought be on most kids' minds. Worrying about whether they hung a slider or made an error in a ballgame that happened to be seen by a couple million people isn't on the list.

I've got no problem with winning and losing. I'm not advocating a T-ball mentality for anyone who doesn't wear a jock, nor am I saying there's anything inherently wrong with having tournaments to determine the best 12-year-old team in the land. The Little League World Series, at its core, is terrific.

But putting it on national TV is bad. Little League spokesman Chris Downs says money has nothing to do with the TV deal (it's reportedly worth \$7 million over six years) and adds that the idea of too much pressure on the kids is fabricated because kids typically remember their World Series experiences in more general terms, instead of focusing on one particular incident. "It's only us as adults who do that," he says.

Maybe he's right. But you think kids don't remember their mistakes once they get older? I still cringe every time I hear the word "Portugal" because once, when I was 10, I was asked to point to Lisbon on a map in front of an entire class.

First, I pointed to somewhere in France.

Then I pointed to somewhere in Argentina.

Putting aside my own geographical ineptitude, it's worth noting that that screw-up came in front of about 20 kids and one (not-so-sympathetic) teacher. Want to estimate what my therapy bills would be if it made ESPNNews?

Here's what I do know: Next Sunday, the Little League World Series final will be on ABC, broadcast to millions of people around the world. There's a good chance that, at some point, there will be another hero like Smith. There's an equally good chance there will be another kid on the wrong side of that heroism, just like Gray.

He'll cry, and then later, he'll probably be fine.

Probably.

The Score hears ...

By MICHAEL O'KEEFFE

WCW's DDP goes from wrestling mat to yoga mat

Don't expect former World Championship Wrestling star Diamond Dallas Page to say "Namaste, you pencil-neck geeks!" at the beginning of a "Yoga for Regular Guys" session.

DDP may have traded the wrestling mat for a yoga mat, but that doesn't mean he's gone all New Agey. Page's new fitness program keeps the moves that make yoga

a terrific workout but drops the exotic trappings like saying "Namaste," the Sanskrit greeting used to begin and end yoga classes. He's designed his program primarily for men who think a workout means walking to the fridge for another beer.

"It's a combination of the best of yoga and the best of good ol' calisthenics," Page says.

Page, who was in Point Pleasant, N.J., recently to share his new program at Brielle Sports Club, says he was one of those guys who thought yoga was for skinny supermodels, not men's men. But a few years ago, he injured his lower back and he feared his wrestling career was over. "I had no flexibility. I was in so much pain I couldn't even sit down," he says.

His wife, Kimberly, a former Playboy model who worked with him in the ring as a "Diamond Doll," suggested Page rehab is back with yoga.

"I said, 'I ain't doing that crap. That crap's for girls.' Then I saw the sweat pouring off of her as she did it, and I decided to give it a try," he says. "The first time I did yoga, man, it kicked my butt."

Within weeks, Page said, his flexibility and most of his strength had returned. Within three months he was back in the ring.

"I can change your life in three weeks," says Page, who is heading to Iraq this week to share Yoga for Regular Guys with America's soldiers and sailors. "I don't want to sound too California, but this program has the power to transform people."

Race card played in failure to sell Honus collectible

The vintage card community awaited last week's "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel" with a mix of anger and anxiety. HBO had prepared a segment on John Cobb and Ray Edwards, two African-American men from Cincinnati who have waged a long battle with the vintage card establishment to prove the T206 Honus Wagner card Cobb bought 20 years ago for \$1,800 is authentic.

The dealers and collectors worried that HBO would give legitimacy to two men they considered con artists, and they were also apprehensive about how a hobby dominated by well-to-do white men would be portrayed as racist by "Real Sports."

The stakes, of course, were quite high: A T206 Wagner once owned by Wayne Gretzky sold in 2000 for \$1.265 million, and Cobb and Edwards had hoped to sell their card last weekend for \$300,000 or more at Bob Connelly's Sports Memorabilia Auction in upstate Binghamton.

Collectors and dealers petitioned eBay to remove the card from its auction, and the online marketplace did eventually yank the item the day before the sale. Cobb and Edwards say that's just more evidence that they've never been given a fair shake because they are black, an allegation that has roiled card collectors, who claim to be outraged that the two cousins brought race into the mix.

The sound of silence might have been gold for Simon and Garfunkel, but it was

lead for Cobb and Edwards: No one bid on the card at the auction. No one uttered a word as Connelly solicited bids, a silence that underscored Cobb's and Edwards' defeat and disappointment as it was brought into millions of living rooms across America.

The "Real Sports" piece, meanwhile, was fair, offering a variety of views on why the card might be real and why it might be a fake. On Network 54, an Internet vintage card forum, the reaction was mixed. Some collectors were angry that Cobb and Edwards weren't dismissed as crooks.

Others agreed that Cobb and Edwards may be on to something when they say prejudice has played a role in the debate over their card.

The two have put in thousands of hours digging up research that might help them sell their card. The card may indeed be a fake, but their years of hard work are quite real.

Invincible star goes deep

Many sports fans who have watched an outfielder drop an easy fly ball or a basketball player throw up a brick have thought, "Geez, even I could play better than this guy."

Most of us, however, never get the opportunity to prove our stuff. Vince Papale, however, did. Papale was a 30-year-old substitute teacher, part-time bartender and Philadelphia Eagles season ticket holder in 1976 when newly arrived coach Dick Vermeil held open tryouts for a team badly in need of motivation and talent. Papale had little football experience, but he not only made the team as a wide receiver, his energy and drive transformed an NFL dog into a contender.

Papale's story hits the big screen in theaters nationwide on Friday in "Invincible," a new sports flick starring Mark Wahlberg as a real-life Rocky.

"I was a decathlete and I had played semipro football, so I was in pretty good shape," says Papale, now 60. "Dick held this open tryout to shake up the troops a bit, and to generate some publicity for the team."

Papale said he was a bundle of nerves when he first stepped onto the playing field at the tryout. But he heard his father yell "You can do it, Vinnie!" from the sidelines and his anxiety evaporated.

"I had speed. That was the first thing Dick looked at. I could catch the ball. And I could read defenses," Papale says. "It didn't take me long to believe I belonged in the NFL."

Papale continues to prove he's a fighter: He beat colorectal cancer five years ago.

Vermeil, he says, was one of the first people to call him after his surgery. "A guy who is 60 years old shouldn't feel as good as I feel," he says. "Sometimes I feel like I am living a dream."

Say What?

"The Babe must be looking down and saying, 'You go, guys.'"

Mayor Bloomberg, Wednesday, as he, George Steinbrenner and assortment of politicians broke ground on new Yankee Stadium, taking first step toward demise of House that Ruth Built.

What's Up

TODAY

BASEBALL: A huge weekend continues as the Yanks and Bosox battle in game four of a five-game series at Fenway. 8 p.m., ESPN

GOLF: Tiger Woods and defending champ Phil Mickelson go down to the wire in the PGA Championship's final round. 1 p.m., Ch. 2

TOMORROW

MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL: After a 4 o'clock game on Staten Island today, the Cylones and the S.I. Yankees meet again tomorrow in Brooklyn. 7 p.m., SNY

TUESDAY

BASEBALL: The Mets and Cardinals play a potential playoff preview at Shea. 7 p.m., SNY

FRIDAY

FOOTBALL: The Jets and Giants are head-to-head in preseason action. 8 p.m., Ch. 2

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