

## Tag this one as a bad idea

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*The Facts*

Published November 13, 2006

Friday morning I celebrate the 231st birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps with a “brick,” a 10-mile bicycle ride followed by a 3.2-mile run. In the second mile of the run, I explore some topics in my head. I decide on school recess, tag and childhood obesity.

I attended elementary school in the 1940s. We youngsters had two 30-minute recesses, one at mid-morning and one in the afternoon. School rules segregated boys and girls on the playground. We had to stay on the west side of the campus, and the girls had to stay on the east side. A flagpole divided the playground. We crossed the invisible dividing line at our peril.

While the girls jumped rope or watched us from a distance, we played softball or football. Basketball wasn't that popular then. Boys played a tag game called “Kick it Up and Get Killed.” Someone kicked a football, and we ran after it. The first one to the ball picked it up and ran from a thundering herd of classmates. When we caught up to the one with the football, we gang-tackled him. When he rose from the pile, he kicked the ball, and the pursuit began anew.

I don't recall anyone ever being seriously injured.

Recently some school districts in Cheyenne, Wyo.,

Spokane, Wash., Charleston, S.C., Santa Monica, Calif., and Attleboro, Mass., banned all forms of tag.

In his Oct. 25, 2006, radio commentary on National Public Radio's “Morning Edition,” Frank Deford said these school districts “decreed that the game children have been playing, well forever and ever ... is too dangerous to either the physical or the mental well-being of our little 21st century darlings.”

“Eliminating tag is one of those things that is as inexplicable as it is stupid,” said CBS News “Early Show” co-anchor Harry Smith in his column posted on cbs.com on June 27, 2006. “Shame on those school administrators who think it's a good idea. Wake up.”

Physical activity is as essential as mental activity for the total education of our youth, particularly in the light of a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Education in April.

A study of 8,000 adults and children by the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey in 2003-04 shows that the percentage of overweight boys has increased by more than 20 percent in five years, while the numbers of overweight girls rose by 18 percent.

Survey statistics show the percentage of overweight children more than tripled since the mid-1960s; about 34.8 percent of all U.S. boys ages 2 to 19 are overweight, and about 32.4 percent of girls in the same age group are overweight.

If youngsters aren't out playing tag or participating in other physical activities, how will they fight the obesity epidemic? Sitting all day in a classroom is debilitating, physically and mentally.

Some education “experts” say tag and other competitive games may traumatize and psychologically scar children.

“The pompous protectors of our youth,” Deford said, “refer to tag as an elimination game, which means it can be upsetting if you get put out.”

Such is life and the real world in which both the swift and slow have to live and compete.

I was one of the slow ones in elementary school. When I got the football in “Kick It Up and Get Killed,” the thundering herd quickly caught me and piled on. I have psychological scars but not because I was a slow and a mediocre athlete.

I felt a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie with my peers whether I was the pursued or the pursuer.

Youngsters need recesses and physical activities, including tag.

You're it. Catch me if you can.

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