

Review

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Review

Team Sports as Catalysts for Holistic Student Wellness: Insights from a General Review

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Abstract: This general review rigorously assesses the multifaceted effects of team sports on student wellness, utilizing the Wellness Wheel framework, which covers physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental dimensions of well-being. The methodological approach of this review involves a synthesis of empirical research, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses from the past two decades, sourced from databases such as PubMed, EBSCO (EDS), and Google Scholar. This synthesis aims to develop a nuanced understanding of how team sports foster holistic development in students. Our findings underscore the critical role of team sports in educational and wellness programs, notably enhancing physical health, emotional stability, cognitive functions, social skills, spiritual growth, and environmental consciousness. The review highlights the imperative of integrating team sports into educational curricula to achieve a balanced and thorough approach to student wellness. Furthermore, it pinpoints gaps in existing research, particularly the need for more studies on improving inclusivity and accessibility in team sports to ensure benefits are universally attainable. This study calls for strategic efforts to embed team sports within educational frameworks, stressing their pivotal role in nurturing a well-rounded, healthy, and inclusive student population.

Keywords: holistic development; physical activity benefits; educational strategies; wellness frameworks; student engagement; inclusive sports programs

1. Introduction

1.1. Understanding the Wellness Wheel: A Framework for Holistic Student Development

Recent academic perspectives have expanded the definition of wellness to encompass a holistic view that incorporates emotional, environmental, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions [1]. Emotional wellness focuses on effective stress management and self-esteem maintenance. Environmental wellness concerns our interactions with natural, social, and digital environments. Intellectual wellness promotes ongoing learning and critical thought. Occupational wellness involves finding fulfillment in work that aligns with personal values. Physical wellness emphasizes health maintenance through exercise, nutrition, and preventive measures. Social wellness aims to develop meaningful relationships and a sense of community. Spiritual wellness seeks purpose and encourages self-reflection. These components offer a multifaceted approach to living a balanced and fulfilling life [2]. The Wellness Wheel represents this broad perspective, providing a detailed framework that divides wellness into essential dimensions crucial for holistic

health [2]. This concept of wellness was initially formulated by Sweeney and Witmer in 1991 and expanded by Witmer & Sweeney in 1992, offering a structured model that spans various life dimensions — mental, emotional, physical, occupational, intellectual, and spiritual — and highlights the importance of their interconnectivity for overall well-being [1,2]. For students navigating a myriad of academic pressures, personal development challenges, and uncertainties about their future careers, the Wellness Wheel is a crucial tool for achieving a balanced and fulfilling life [3]. This model's adoption acknowledges the intricate facets of student success and well-being, transcending beyond mere academic achievements. It comprehensively includes physical health, emotional resilience, and social connections, emphasizing a holistic approach to student development [4].

1.2. Rationale for Team Sports

Team sports, encompassing activities where athletes collaborate to achieve shared objectives, are crucial in developing communication, conflict management, and problem-solving within a trusting team environment. Research highlights that sports like basketball, soccer, volleyball, etc., benefit middle school and collegiate students by improving social skills, academic performance, and leadership abilities. These sports promote physical and psychological well-being, which is essential for future teamwork in professional settings. This article focuses on analyzing and discussing these aspects. A growing body of research supports the unique positioning of team sports as a catalyst for enhancing student wellness across the Wellness Wheel's dimensions [5,6]. Team sports also facilitate physical exercise and offer dynamic platforms for emotional support, intellectual engagement, social integration, and more. For example, recent research [7,8] found that participation in team sports is associated with improved physical health outcomes, such as increased cardiovascular fitness and reduced obesity rates, highlighting the direct benefits of physical activity on health. Furthermore, team sports have been shown to enhance emotional well-being by providing a sense of community and belonging, effectively reducing feelings of stress and anxiety [9]. The cognitive demands of team sports, including strategic planning and quick decision-making, have also been linked to improved academic performance and cognitive function, underscoring the intellectual benefits of these activities [10]. Socially, team sports foster the development of essential life skills, such as communication and leadership, contributing to more robust social networks and enhanced interpersonal skills [11]. Participating in team sports contributes to spiritual wellness by giving individuals a deep sense of purpose and fostering connections with a broader community. This engagement enhances spiritual health through a strengthened sense of belonging, unity, and commitment to common goals, enriching participants' spiritual lives [12]. On the occupational front, the discipline and teamwork developed through team sports are converted into valuable skills that enhance collaboration and work ethic. These skills are crucial in academic and future professional settings, providing participants with a competitive advantage and a flexible skill set highly valued in today's workforce [13]. Environmentally, participating in outdoor team sports immerses individuals in natural settings, fostering a deeper appreciation for the environment and promoting environmental stewardship by encouraging sustainable practices and conservation efforts, thereby nurturing a community of athletes committed to preserving natural landscapes for future generations. [14]. Integrating team sports into wellness programs and educational curricula enables schools and universities to harness these multidimensional benefits, supporting holistic student development in alignment with the Wellness Wheel. This approach facilitates well-being across all aspects of students' lives and cultivates academic proficiency, physical health, emotional resilience, social adeptness, spiritual fulfillment, occupational preparedness, and environmental awareness. This review aims to elucidate the comprehensive impacts of team sports on students' holistic wellness, as defined by the Wellness Wheel framework, which includes physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental dimensions. Recognizing the benefits and identifying the barriers to participation, we seek to enhance inclusivity and accessibility in team sports within educational settings.

2. Methodology

2.1. Criteria for Literature Selection

The review primarily focused on empirical studies, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative research, to examine the impact of team sports participation on various dimensions of student wellness. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses relevant to the topic were also incorporated to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing evidence and establish consensus within the field. The literature search was restricted to studies published in the last 20 years (2004-2024) to ensure the inclusion of the most current data, reflecting up-to-date practices, perspectives, and outcomes in the nexus of team sports and student wellness. Due to practical constraints in the review process, only studies published in English were considered, acknowledging that this limitation might omit pertinent findings available in other languages based on the literature's accessibility and the review team's language proficiency.

2.2. Search Strategy Description

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across several academic databases, including PubMed, EBSCO (EDS), and Google Scholar, utilizing a strategic combination of keywords such as "team sports," "student wellness," "student health," "physical activity," and "well-being," alongside terms representing each dimension of the wellness wheel (e.g., "emotional health," "social connections"), with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search. The synthesis findings from the selected literature were synthesized through narrative, aiming to integrate insights from various studies to draw broad conclusions about the effects of team sports on student wellness. This involved thematic analysis to identify and examine key themes regarding the benefits and mechanisms of impact of team sports across wellness dimensions, comparative study to explore differences and similarities in outcomes across sport types, student demographics, and wellness aspects, and integration of evidence to craft a coherent narrative linking team sports to enhanced student wellness. Additionally, the process included identifying literature gaps and areas needing further investigation, enriching the ongoing discussion on this topic, and guiding future research endeavors.

2.3. Selection and Inclusion Criteria

The initial selection process began with a pool of 829 studies. These studies underwent a rigorous selection phase where they were required to meet specific inclusion criteria. The criteria were applied through three successive filters to refine the final sample. The first filter, at the abstract level, checked for (i) quantitative and qualitative research methods; (ii) studies involving school-aged youth; (iii) studies that were not open access or peer-reviewed; (iv) studies published between 2004 and 2024; and (v) studies written in English. This phase included various study designs such as descriptive, experimental, quasi-experimental, ex post facto, and instrumental studies. The second filter, applied at the full-text stage, was restricted to studies featuring systematic reviews, meta-analyses, detailed statistics on measurements, or review studies relevant to the subject matter. Exclusions at this stage included article types such as editorials, brief reports, communications, perspectives, concept papers, and opinions. The final filter focused on the target population, including those studies involving children, adolescents, or collegiate students. Ultimately, 64 studies were selected for this comprehensive review.

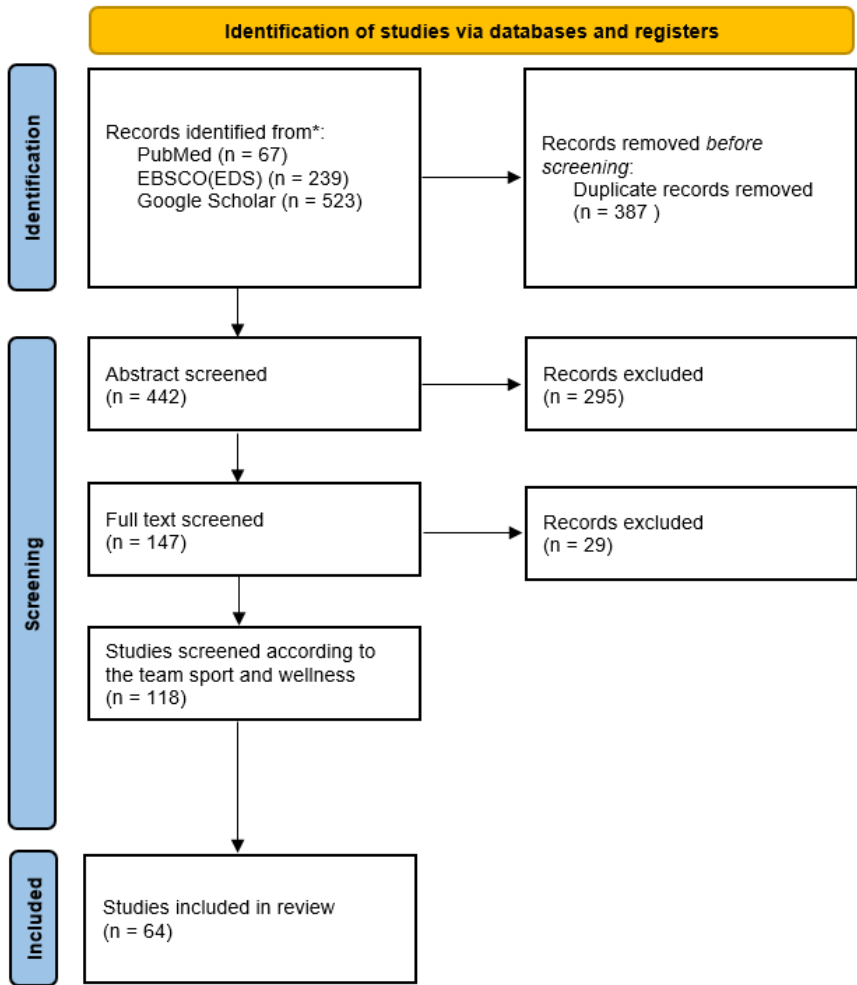


Figure 1. Flow diagram.

3. The Multidimensional Impact of Team Sports: Exploring the Benefits of Team Sports Across Wellness Domains

Team sports stand out as a potent catalyst for enhancing wellness across multiple domains of the Wellness Wheel. By engaging students in structured physical activity within a team setting, these sports offer benefits that extend far beyond the physical to encompass emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental wellness. This section delves into the empirical evidence and theoretical foundations underlying the multidimensional impact of team sports on student wellness.

3.1. Physical Wellness: Strengthening the Body Through Team Sports

In our thorough review, we identified ten studies focusing on the impact of team sports on physical wellness. The relationship between team sports and physical wellness is well-documented, with research consistently affirming the health benefits such as enhanced cardiovascular fitness, increased muscular strength, and improved body composition [15]. Team sports often blend aerobic and anaerobic activities and offer pronounced health advantages. A study examining a training program incorporating both modalities revealed synchronization challenges impacting heart rate and exercise intensity. It demonstrated that specific training types could lead to different physiological responses, with one kind achieving near-normal lactic acid levels and another showing slight elevations [16]. This underscores the importance of optimizing training regimens in team sports to enhance neuromuscular and cardiorespiratory adaptations, considering exercise sequencing, recovery periods, and training specificity [17].

Participation in team sports has been linked to notable enhancements in health indicators, including lowered blood pressure, better lipid profiles, and improved glucose control. These improvements contribute to a reduced likelihood of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Key outcomes of the studies include reductions in systolic blood pressure and interleukin-6 levels due to these interventions. Additionally, engaging in touch rugby decreased fat mass and body fat percentage while increasing lean muscle mass, in contrast to the effects observed with running [15,18]. Studies have demonstrated that engaging in team sports, such as recreational football, offers significant potential in preventing and managing type 2 diabetes along with associated cardiovascular risks. These findings advocate for further research to determine this activity's enduring impacts and ideal frequency [19]. Moreover, compared to solitary sports activities, team sports are recognized for their superior effectiveness in enhancing health and motivating individuals to start and maintain regular exercise routines [20].

Incorporating team sports into educational programs has been linked to enhanced student health and wellness. Research by Rebryna et al. highlighted that significant improvements in cardiovascular (measured by Robinson's index) and respiratory health (assessed by the vital index) were observed in students participating in CrossFit and kettlebell exercises. Furthermore, those involved in powerlifting and arm sports experienced notable gains in muscular strength, as indicated by the power index [21]. A separate investigation involving Sumy State University students revealed that integrating sports and health tourism into physical education resulted in superior physical development, functional status, and overall health versus conventional physical education approaches [22]. An additional study emphasized the benefits of athletics exercises, showing marked enhancements in the respiratory, cardiovascular, and muscular systems, thereby boosting physical health levels among students [23,24]. These outcomes support the notion that team sports are crucial for improving student physical wellness and advocate for their inclusion in school curricula.

The enjoyment and variety found in team sports significantly contribute to maintaining long-term engagement. The joy derived from participating in team sports, alongside the diverse physical challenges they present, substantially increases the chances of ongoing participation in physical activities, in contrast to solitary exercise regimens. This element of pleasure, coupled with the health benefits offered, underscores the vital role of team sports in promoting sustained physical wellness [25]. Table 1 briefly summarizes the principal outcomes regarding the influence of team sports on physical wellness, with references to the corroborative studies.

Table 1. Overview of physical wellness: enhancing bodily strength via team activities.

Aspect	Findings	References
Physical Health Outcomes	Significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, and body composition.	[15,16]
Cardiovascular and Metabolic Health	Lowered blood pressure, better lipid profiles, and improved glucose control; reductions in systolic blood pressure and interleukin-6 levels.	[15,18]
Obesity and Body Composition	Decrease in fat mass and body fat percentage, increase in lean muscle mass.	[18]
Type 2 Diabetes and Cardiovascular Risks	Recreational football offers significant potential in preventing and managing type 2 diabetes and associated cardiovascular risks.	[19]
Motivation and Adherence	Team sports motivate individuals to start and maintain regular exercise routines more effectively than solitary sports.	[20]
Student Health and Wellness	Integration of sports and health tourism into physical education results in superior physical development, functional status, and overall health.	[21–24]
Sustainability of Engagement	Team sports enhance the likelihood of continued involvement in physical activities due to the diversity and pleasure associated with them.	[25]

3.2. Emotional Wellness: Cultivating Resilience Through Team Participation

Engaging in team sports has been found to have significant mental health benefits, including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. This association is attributed to the social support system created within team sports environments, which enhances feelings of belonging and contributes positively to emotional well-being [26,27].

A comprehensive review of 29 studies published from 2012 to 2020 has shed light on the positive effects of sports participation on mental health and social outcomes in adults. This review found that being involved in sports leads to improved psychological well-being, including elevated self-esteem, enhanced life satisfaction, and a better quality of life, while also contributing to reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. It highlights that team sports, in particular, may offer more substantial mental and social benefits than individual sports or other forms of physical activity. These benefits can vary depending on the type of sport, the intensity and frequency of participation, the context and environment in which the sport is played, and the level of competition involved [26,28,29]. Team sports also play a vital role in enhancing social outcomes, such as improving self-control, fostering pro-social behaviors, bolstering interpersonal communication skills, and nurturing a sense of community [30]. The review also addresses the negative impact on the mental health of youth athletes due to the suspension and cancellation of organized sports activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the critical role of sports participation in supporting their well-being [29].

Youth sports involvement has been linked to numerous psychological advantages, such as cultivating emotional competencies, including empathy, emotional regulation, and resilience. These competencies are developed through the team dynamics, challenges, and achievements inherent in sports, leading to comprehensive emotional growth [31,32]. Studies report quantitative evidence indicating that both team and individual sports participation correlate with reduced symptoms of depression in boys, with team sports linked explicitly to decreased depression in girls. Both genders benefit from sports participation through enhanced life satisfaction. Qualitative insights from focus group discussions highlight gender-specific preferences and obstacles in sports engagement, with boys leaning towards competitive, high-intensity sports and girls favoring less intense social activities. Identified barriers encompass excessive screen time, academic demands, cultural expectations, and a scarcity of facilities and opportunities [33]. Additionally, being part of team sports and sports clubs offers vital social and psychological support, beneficial for mental health [34,35]. Regular sports involvement is also associated with improved cognitive function and better emotion regulation, further supporting mental health and overall well-being.

In a longitudinal study involving 167 male rugby league athletes across eight teams, researchers assessed social identity, results content, friendships, team cohesion, self-efficacy, team efficacy, and subjective team performance at three different intervals. It was discovered that a strong sense of social identity was a key predictor of team cohesion, individual self-efficacy, team efficacy, and perceived team performance. Additionally, the presence of friendships within the team was found to enhance team cohesion over time. However, the results content did not show a notable impact. The study concluded that social identity plays a critical role in the functioning and success of sports teams, although the significance of social identity can change based on the team's values and objectives [36,37]. Further research indicated that boys participating in team sports exhibited fewer symptoms of common mental disorders and had lower levels of mental health issues than their physically inactive peers [32]. These results highlight the positive impact of team sports on mental health and the crucial importance of social identity in bolstering emotional well-being within sports teams. Table 2 summarizes the main discoveries concerning the effects of participation in team sports on different dimensions of emotional wellness, backed by references from the literature.

Table 2. Summary of emotional wellness benefits through team sports participation.

Aspect	Findings	References
Mental Health Benefits	Reduced depression, anxiety, and stress; improved psychological well-being, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, and quality of life.	[26,27]

Social Support and Belonging	A sense of community and belonging within team sports environments enhances emotional well-being.	[26,28,29]
Emotional Competencies	Cultivation of emotional competencies such as empathy, emotional regulation, and resilience through team dynamics.	[31,32]
Depression and Life Satisfaction	Sports participation correlated with reduced symptoms of depression and enhanced life satisfaction among adolescents.	[33]
Psychological Support in Sports	Team sports provide vital social and psychological support that is beneficial for mental health.	[34,35]
Social Identity and Team Cohesion	Strong social identity within sports teams predicts better team cohesion, self-efficacy, and perceived team performance.	[36,37]

3.3. Intellectual Wellness: Sharpening the Mind Through Team Sports

In our review, we identified four studies focusing on the impact of team sports on intellectual wellness. Team sports extend their benefits into the intellectual domain, enhancing cognitive functions and contributing to academic achievement. The cognitive demands of participating in team sports serve as a form of physical exercise and a mental workout, fostering the development of various intellectual skills.

Research consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between physical activity and enhanced cognitive abilities in students, supported by several studies [38,39]. Physical activity induces significant changes in the brain, such as increased neurogenesis, synaptogenesis, angiogenesis, and the release of neurotrophins, which collectively improve cognitive functions, including attention, memory, and executive skills. The impact varies with the type and context of physical activity, encompassing aerobic exercises, coordinative exercises, classroom-based activities, active breaks, and extracurricular physical engagement. Practical physical activities are characterized by their intensity—moderate to vigorous—and their cognitive engagement, enhancing students' physical and mental health. Integrating increased physical activity into school curricula is advocated to boost students' learning and academic performance, offering lifelong benefits for physical and psychological health [38,39].

A comprehensive analysis involving a systematic review and a three-tier meta-analysis of 92 randomized control trials was carried out to assess the impact of physical activity on various cognitive and academic metrics. This extensive study revealed that interventions based on physical activity notably enhanced on-task behavior, creativity, fluid intelligence, and working memory. However, no significant improvements were observed in attention, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, or academic achievements. The study further delved into how different characteristics of the interventions, such as their duration, frequency, intensity, the qualifications of the instructors, and the nature of the activities, influenced cognitive and academic results [40]. In parallel, research by Latino and Tafuri identified that physical activity programs could bolster cognitive functions and academic success in school-aged children [38]. James et al. conducted another systematic review, which established that engaging in physical activity for at least 90 minutes weekly at a moderate to vigorous intensity is linked with enhanced academic performance [41]. Collectively, these findings advocate for including regular physical activities, such as team sports, to improve academic outcomes. Table 3 outlines the main findings on the contribution of involvement in team sports and physical activities to intellectual well-being, encompassing enhancements in cognitive abilities and academic success, with literature references for support.

Table 3. Summary of intellectual wellness enhancement through team sports.

Aspect	Findings	References
Cognitive Functions and Academic Achievement	Physical activity produces essential changes in the brain, mediating enhancements in attention, memory, and executive functions.	[38,39]

Types and Contexts of Physical Activity	Aerobic exercise, coordinative exercise, classroom-based physical activity, active breaks, and extracurricular physical activity can affect cognition and academic achievement.	[38]
Impact of Physical Activity on Cognition	Interventions based on physical activity notably enhanced on-task behavior, creativity, fluid intelligence, and working memory.	[40]
Physical Activity and Academic Performance	Engaging in physical activity for at least 90 minutes weekly at a moderate to vigorous intensity is linked with enhanced academic performance.	[41]

3.4. Social Wellness: Building Community Through Team Sports

Our thorough review found seven studies examining team sports' effects on social wellness. Team sports significantly contribute to social wellness, offering a structured environment where individuals can develop and enhance their social skills, build meaningful relationships, and foster a strong sense of community belonging.

Team sports have garnered attention for their capacity to enhance social development, offering participants, especially socially vulnerable adults, a platform to acquire and refine cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Skills such as self-control, coping strategies, and effective communication have been observed to evolve through engagement in sports. Factors critical to this developmental process include the sport's inherent challenges, program structure, coaching quality, participant characteristics, providing a secure environment, and fostering social bonds [42]. In a focused study involving 12 male high school students in a physical education (PE) program, researchers explored an interdisciplinary approach designed to cultivate social skills through physical activities and explicit social skills training. Although the program was not exclusively a team sports class, it integrated various physical education activities with structured socialization lessons. The program's primary objectives were to promote physical development and enhance essential social skills such as communication, teamwork, self-discipline, assertiveness, and social adaptation. This was achieved through an engaging curriculum that included active physical exercises and reflexive sports meditation sessions. During these sessions, students critically discussed and analyzed their interactions during sports activities, reflecting on how different approaches could enhance personal and social growth. The study highlights the program's effectiveness in fostering physical and socio-emotional development in an educational setting [43].

Team sports also serve as a crucial arena for young individuals to discover and affirm their social identities, learning valuable community engagement and contribution lessons. Research indicates that identifying with a sports team can elevate the enjoyment of the sport, reducing the likelihood of dropping out. This suggests the importance of nurturing team identity to enhance sport enjoyment and retention, especially among adolescent girls [44].

A comprehensive survey involving 67,281 students across 135 schools in Shenzhen demonstrated that frequent sports participation correlates with higher subjective well-being, irrespective of gender or grade, highlighting the positive impact of sports on youth mental health. This reinforces the call for families, schools, and government bodies to advocate for sports education and ensure the availability of necessary resources and facilities for sports engagement [45]. Adolescents active in sports tend to show greater school involvement and peer acceptance. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, emphasizing the role of team sports in creating a supportive social milieu and encouraging prosocial conduct [30,42,44,45].

Furthermore, team sports are pivotal in promoting social cohesion and aiding community integration, offering a valuable means to bridge cultural gaps and enhance social assimilation [46,47]. These results collectively highlight the substantial role of team sports in fostering social growth and the development of vital life competencies. Table 4 briefly summarizes the principal insights regarding the effects of participating in team sports on different facets of social wellness, corroborated by references from the academic literature.

Table 4. Summary of social wellness benefits through team sports participation.

Aspect	Findings	References
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Social Skills and Relationships	Enhancement of social skills, meaningful relationships, and fostering of a strong sense of community belonging through teamwork.	[42–45]
Community Belonging and Team Identity	Sports serve as a crucial arena for young individuals to discover and affirm their social identities, learning valuable lessons in community engagement.	[44]
Social Development Through Sports	Sports participation offers a platform to acquire and refine cognitive, emotional, and social skills, contributing to social development.	[42]
Impact on Youth Mental Health	Active involvement in sports is linked with greater school involvement, peer acceptance, and reduced engagement in risky behaviors.	[30,42,44,45]
Promoting Social Cohesion and Integration	Team sports are pivotal in promoting social cohesion and aiding community integration, offering a valuable means to bridge cultural gaps.	[46,47]

3.5. *Spiritual Wellness: Finding Purpose in Team Sports*

In our review, we found four studies exploring team sports' effects on spiritual wellness. Team sports extend their influence into spiritual wellness, where the shared pursuit of goals and the cultivation of shared values contribute significantly to a sense of purpose and connection among participants.

Adolescent engagement in team sports has been positively linked to mental health improvements. Research conducted by Machado-Oliveira et al. demonstrates that boys participating in team sports exhibit reduced symptoms of mental disorders, have fewer mental health issues, and show lower instances of suicidal thoughts than those who are not active [37]. Further, Larocca et al.'s study indicates that involvement in team sports decreases the risk of depression and suicidal thoughts across all youths, including LGBTQ individuals. However, it notes an exception for LGBTQ youths about suicidal ideation. The study underscores the mental health advantages of team sports for LGBTQ youths while stressing the necessity for environments and policies within sports that are inclusive and supportive [48]. Team sports enhance collective spirit, social engagement, and emotional understanding, improving mental health outcomes.

Additionally, participation in sports is associated with personal and spiritual growth, offering pathways to self-transcendence and excellence. A dissertation reveals that UL Lafayette student-athletes display significantly higher levels of spirituality across various dimensions than the general student population, as per Astin's 2007 findings. The study observes that spirituality varies by gender and ethnicity, with female and White athletes reporting higher spirituality scores in certain domains than their male and Black counterparts, respectively. The distinction in spiritual experiences between athletes in team versus individual sports is significant, highlighting the role of higher education institutions in promoting spiritual development among student-athletes through dedicated support and conducive environments. The importance of ongoing research and the university's role in fostering student-athletes spiritual health is emphasized [49]. The connection between sports participation and spiritual development is further supported by research on the impact of transformational leadership in teams on enhancing workplace spirituality and fostering a sense of "spirit at work" [50].

Interview findings [51] reveal five critical themes related to morality in sports: definitions of morality, attributes of a moral athlete, factors influencing moral development, unethical scenarios within sports, and the role of sports in moral growth. The conclusions drawn indicate that young national athletes possess a strong comprehension of morality and its relevance to sports and societal life, suggesting that sports provide a fruitful ground for nurturing moral values and positive experiences. This ethical engagement and introspection are intrinsically linked to spiritual wellness, encouraging individuals to contemplate their values and societal roles [51]. Table 5 encapsulates the critical findings related to the impact of team sports participation on various aspects of spiritual wellness, supported by references to the literature.

Table 5. Summary of spiritual wellness enhancement through team sports participation.

Aspect	Findings	References
Mental Health Improvements	Team sports participation is associated with reduced symptoms of mental disorders, fewer mental health issues, and lower instances of suicidal thoughts.	[37]
Personal and Spiritual Growth	Sports participation is associated with pathways to self-transcendence and excellence, contributing to personal and spiritual growth.	[49]
Ethical Engagement and Introspection	Sports provide a fruitful ground for nurturing moral values and positive experiences, encouraging ethical engagement and introspection.	[51]
Inclusivity and Support in Sports	Involvement in team sports decreases the risk of depression and suicidal thoughts, emphasizing the importance of inclusive and supportive environments within sports.	[48]
Spiritual Experiences Among Athletes	Higher levels of spirituality were observed in student-athletes compared to the general student population, varying by gender and ethnicity.	[49]

3.6. Occupational Wellness: Preparing for the Future with Team Sports

In our review, we identified three studies focusing on the impact of team sports on occupational wellness. Team sports are widely recognized for their ability to prepare individuals for future challenges by fostering essential life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving. They offer a unique platform for developing personal and professional competencies crucial for academic success and career advancement.

Participation in team sports among youth and adults offers multiple benefits beyond physical health. These activities enhance physical well-being, foster interpersonal relationships, and prepare participants for professional success. Key benefits include developing collaboration and strategic planning skills, respecting peers and authority, and achieving set goals. Additionally, team sports cultivate perseverance and determination—traits crucial for success in sports and business environments. Team sports are valuable in equipping individuals with essential skills for professional advancement. [52,53].

Investigations [54] into how sports contribute to developing life skills among secondary school student-athletes reveal significant initiative, identity, and social skills growth. Factors like gender, age, sport type, and competition level critically influence the extent of life skills acquired. This evidence positions sports as a potent tool for life skills enhancement in student-athletes, suggesting the need for schools to amplify sports participation and support. Further research is advocated to delve into the processes and impacts of life skills cultivation through sports involvement [54]. Table 6 provides a concise summary of the primary outcomes related to how participation in team sports affects different elements of occupational wellness, with support from literature references.

Table 6. Summary of occupational wellness benefits through team sports participation.

Aspect	Findings	References
Skills Development	Team sports equip individuals with transferable skills beneficial in academics and future careers, enhancing collaborative abilities and work ethic.	[52–54]
Sport as a Developmental Tool	Sport provides a practical, interactive setting for experiential learning and developing skills and attitudes, making it a valuable tool for development.	[52]
Skills for Life and Business Success	Participating in team sports teaches essential skills like collaboration, strategizing, and leadership, providing a foundation for success in both personal and professional life.	[53]

Life Skills Enhancement	Sports contribute to the development of life skills among student-athletes, showing significant growth in areas such as initiative, identity, and social skills.	[54]
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3.7. Environmental Wellness: Fostering Environmental Awareness Through Sports

The relationship between team sports and environmental wellness presents a critical facet of comprehensive health, emphasizing the collective duty to safeguard our environment alongside enjoying personal health benefits. The theory of biophilia underscores the deep-seated connection between human well-being and our natural surroundings. Participating in outdoor team sports can reinforce this connection, fostering a sense of responsibility toward environmental conservation [55,56]. A study involving 359 Australian participants engaged in nature-based exercise (NBE) revealed that such activities benefit subjective well-being (SWB). This positive effect is further enhanced by a strong sense of connection to both nature and the social community, as demonstrated through a serial mediation model in the research. These findings advocate for the benefits of exercising in natural settings, highlighting the role of nature and social bonds in promoting overall well-being [57].

Additionally, research introduces a sustainable green model designed for the environmental sustainability of sports venues. This model encompasses green management practices, energy efficiency, and recycling initiatives, proposing a comprehensive strategy for the eco-friendly design and operation of extensive sports facilities. The study underscores the significance of cultural considerations, structural integrity, and efficient traffic flow in achieving sustainability goals. Through statistical validation, the model demonstrates its potential for environmental preservation, economic advantages, and enhanced community involvement, offering guidance for integrating environmental sustainability in the sports sector. The model emphasizes the importance of various factors, including foresight, environmental values in sports, compliance with environmental standards, the green sports movement, and contributions from education, research, communication, economics, structure, and organization toward achieving green productivity in sports and improving the quality of life and well-being for the public [58,59].

Furthermore, sports events are positioned as platforms for raising environmental awareness and prompting sustainable actions. By adopting and displaying sustainable practices, these events can influence societal perceptions and behaviors towards the environment, motivating individuals and communities towards embracing eco-friendly habits [60]. Table 7 briefly summarizes the principal findings concerning the influence of sports participation on different dimensions of environmental wellness, backed by references from the literature.

Table 7. Summary of environmental wellness enhancement through sports.

Aspect	Findings	References
Connection to Nature	Participation in outdoor team sports reinforces the connection to nature, fostering a sense of responsibility towards environmental conservation.	[55,56]
Sustainable Sports Practices	Introducing sustainable green models for sports venues emphasizes energy efficiency, recycling, and green management practices.	[58,59]
Environmental Stewardship	Sports events raise environmental awareness and influence societal perceptions and behaviors towards the environment.	[60]
Promotion of Eco-Friendly Habits	Nature-based exercise benefits subjective well-being, enhanced by a solid connection to nature and the social community.	[57]

3.8. Interconnected Wellness: Exploring the Multidimensional Impact of Team Sports on Student Development

The Wellness Wheel provides a valuable framework for understanding the multifaceted impact of team sports on student development by illustrating the interconnections between various wellness

dimensions. For example, the physical benefits of team sports, such as improved fitness and health, directly contribute to emotional wellness by reducing stress and enhancing mood [26,27,32,35]. This emotional stability supports better social interactions and relationships and is foundational for building social wellness through teamwork and communication in sports settings [42,46,47]. The challenges and strategic thinking inherent in sports play enhance intellectual wellness by developing problem-solving skills and cognitive function [38,40,41]. Moreover, team sports' shared goals and collective effort enrich spiritual wellness by fostering a sense of purpose and belonging [37,48,49,51]. At the same time, the collaborative skills developed are transferable to academic and professional environments, thereby bolstering occupational wellness [52–54]. These interconnected impacts underscore that physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, and occupational wellness are not isolated but are enhanced collectively through team sports' structured and goal-oriented nature, contributing to holistic student development.

4. Overcoming Barriers: Enhancing Access and Inclusivity in Team Sports

The potential of team sports to contribute significantly to the multidimensional wellness of students is evident. However, realizing this potential fully requires addressing several challenges and limitations that can restrict access to and the inclusivity of team sports programs. These barriers, ranging from socioeconomic constraints to cultural and structural hurdles, can prevent students from enjoying team sports that offer comprehensive benefits.

4.1. Navigating Socioeconomic and Cultural Hurdles

4.1.1. Socioeconomic Challenges

Economic hurdles significantly impact access to team sports, especially for marginalized communities, restricting their chances for physical activity and the accompanying benefits. A study focusing on adults from low-income suburbs in Finland identified key barriers to physical activity, including low mood, time constraints, health issues, and the absence of companions, with notable associations with factors like native language, single parenting, and household income. The findings underscore the necessity of dismantling social and personal obstacles to ensure everyone can engage in physical activities. Recognizing and addressing these barriers is crucial for creating policies to reduce health and well-being disparities [61].

Despite growing sports participation, certain groups, notably those with lower education, income, migration background, or disabilities, remain less represented. Sports play vital roles in health, social norms, and integration, making access confronting and diminishing social inequalities in sports access necessary. A symposium by the Research Committee for the Sociology of Sport delved into these disparities, focusing on the Swiss population's sports behaviors, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and historical shifts. It also considered specific demographics like children with cognitive challenges and explored structural conditions and inclusive practices within soccer clubs for individuals with migration backgrounds [62].

To counter financial barriers and support inclusivity, targeted interventions, such as community sponsorships, equipment donations, and subsidized sports facility access, have proven beneficial. These measures have notably improved sports participation among economically disadvantaged youths by removing cost barriers and supplying essential resources for sports engagement [63–65].

4.1.2. Cultural Barriers

Research on the "Girls Active" program in UK schools, through feedback from adolescent girls in 16 focus groups, shed light on the effects of cultural norms on sports participation. The study, grounded in feminist standpoint theory, revealed key themes like stereotypes and the need for empowerment, indicating societal pressures often deter girls' engagement in sports. The program seeks to empower girls and enhance activity levels, highlighting the importance of co-creating interventions with girls to overcome systemic barriers and promote health and gender equality [66]. Another study focused on adolescent girls from low socio-economic backgrounds identified barriers to sports participation, such as competing priorities and gender stereotypes, emphasizing the need to address these issues to increase sports involvement among girls in deprived areas [67].

An investigation into physical activity behaviors across cultures, utilizing self-determination theory and goal orientation, compared autonomy and relatedness in the US and Turkey, finding

cultural differences impact physical activity motivations. This underscores the importance of considering cultural contexts in promoting physical activity [68]. A protocol for a multi-year study on Ethnic Minority Youth (EMY) in Aotearoa, New Zealand, aims to explore the diverse identities and experiences of discrimination among EMY, pointing to the need for inclusive sports programs. EMY's marginalization in mainstream sports underscores the importance of equitable and inclusive sports environments [69,70].

Tailored community sports initiatives have proven effective in addressing cultural barriers and fostering social inclusion, demonstrating that culturally sensitive approaches can enhance participation and experiences in sports for underrepresented groups [71,72]. After-school sports programs in diverse settings have successfully promoted social inclusion by building interpersonal skills and relationships across different cultural backgrounds [73].

4.2. Educational and Policy Support

Educational policies that mandate sports participation as part of the curriculum can dramatically increase students' access to and engagement in physical activities. Research explores the role of sports policies in enhancing physical activity and sports participation, viewing sports as a critical public health tool. It outlines 14 policy measures, including infrastructure development, financial accessibility, capacity building, and sector partnerships, to boost physical activity and sports engagement. While these policies have been effective, their reach among marginalized groups remains limited. Thus, integrating sports with other health-promoting policy initiatives is recommended to broaden physical activity participation. The study advocates for a holistic approach in policy implementation to fully leverage the benefits of physical activity and sports [74,75].

Furthermore, another research underscores the need for evidence-based policy-making to highlight the broad value of physical activity. An analysis across cities like London and Auckland quantified physical activity's economic and social benefits, emphasizing its substantial contribution to individual and community well-being. Such insights have already prompted increased funding and strategic planning for sports and recreation, demonstrating the potential of informed policy-making to transform sports and activity programs for children. This evidence-based approach aims to ensure comprehensive access to sports, addressing barriers related to location, funding, and socio-economic status [76].

4.3. Community and Family Engagement

Mass participation sports events (MPSEs) are recognized for motivating inactive individuals to start regular physical activity. This study reviewed the effects of MPSEs on physical activity behavior and health outcomes. A systematic review included searches across five databases, assessing 142 papers for eligibility, with 39 studies ultimately analyzed. Benefits of MPSE participation include improved physical and mental health, fitness, self-efficacy, and social connections. However, the evidence on maintaining activity post-event is limited, suggesting a need for longer-term studies to sustain physical activity levels effectively. [77].

Another systematic review applied the social-ecological model (SEM) to identify factors affecting physical activity among children and adolescents. The SEM framework divides influences into five levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy. Analysis of fourteen high-quality studies highlighted the importance of gender, age, ethnic background, support from friends and family, access to facilities, and neighborhood safety. This review emphasizes the necessity for research and policies focused on enhancing access to sports facilities and ensuring neighborhood safety to support youth physical activity from a comprehensive social-ecological viewpoint [78].

Addressing the challenges highlighted through research, policy initiatives, and hands-on measures offers a substantial opportunity to enhance participation and inclusiveness in team sports programs. These actions are vital for fully utilizing the advantages of team sports for student well-being and creating a more fair and supportive educational environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive. Table 8 briefly summarizes approaches to improve access and inclusivity in team sports, supported by references from the relevant literature.

Table 8. Strategies for enhancing access and inclusivity in team sports.

Barrier Type	Strategies for Overcoming	References
Socioeconomic Challenges	They are dismantling social and personal obstacles to ensure equal opportunity for physical activity through community sponsorships, equipment donations, and subsidized access.	[61–65]
Cultural Barriers	They addressed stereotypes and societal pressures through tailored community sports initiatives and inclusive programming.	[66–70]
Educational and Policy Support	It is mandating sports participation in school curricula and supporting policies that enhance access and engagement in physical activities.	[74,75]
Community and Family Engagement	Promoting mass participation in sports events and ensuring access to sports facilities and safety to support youth physical activity.	[77,78]

5. Expanding Impact: Strategic Approaches to Maximize Wellness Through Team Sports

To fully harness the potential of team sports in enhancing holistic student wellness, as outlined by the Wellness Wheel, a multifaceted strategy encompassing research, policy, and practice is essential. These future directions aim to ensure team sports can be a more effective tool for promoting comprehensive wellness among students.

5.1. Research Recommendations

To fully grasp the enduring influence of team sports on student wellness, future research needs to focus on longitudinal studies that explore the sustained benefits across the Wellness Wheel's diverse areas. Embracing inclusivity by involving participants from various backgrounds will enrich our comprehension of how to adapt team sports to the varied needs of all student groups. Furthermore, conducting thoughtful evaluations of how inclusive team sports programs are will shed light on the most effective ways to remove barriers to participation and create environments that warmly welcome every student. Pursuing these research paths offers a deeper, more nuanced insight into team sports' vital role in nurturing holistic student wellness.

5.2. Policy Recommendations

Educational policy reforms should gently guide the inclusion of holistic wellness education within school curricula, highlighting how team sports contribute to well-rounded wellness across various aspects such as physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental well-being. It's also vital for policies to warmly encourage support and funding for sports programs that welcome students from all walks of life, enhancing inclusivity in sports participation. Moreover, nurturing partnerships between educational institutions, local sports clubs, and community organizations is critical to broadening the range and accessibility of student-team sports opportunities. Such cooperative endeavors will allow team sports to become a cornerstone of holistic education, playing a crucial role in nurturing the growth of well-rounded individuals.

5.3. Practice Recommendations

Adopting thoughtful practices in coaching, program development, and community engagement is critical to fully embracing team sports' holistic advantages for student wellness. Coaches and physical educators are encouraged to pursue ongoing learning about the Wellness Wheel, equipping themselves to weave wellness education seamlessly into team sports. Schools and sports bodies are urged to innovate, using technology and creative approaches to ensure sports are accessible to every student, no matter their physical capabilities. Programs should thoughtfully incorporate elements that nurture emotional health, social bonds, intellectual expansion, and awareness of our environment. Engaging families and the broader community through informative and participatory

events further enriches the holistic impact of team sports. By embracing these gentle yet strategic approaches, team sports can significantly contribute to cultivating well-balanced, resilient individuals, making them a cornerstone of enriching education.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored the multifaceted role of team sports in educational settings, considering the sociological aspects of sports and how cultural influences shape sporting practices globally. While sports like football remain predominant in many school environments due to deep-rooted cultural preferences, there has been a noticeable increase in the popularity of gymnastics and other minority sports such as rugby. This diversification presents challenges and opportunities for integrating a more comprehensive range of sports into school curricula. The trends in team sports vary significantly by country, reflecting both traditional preferences and emerging interests among the youth. Young people's motivation to participate can vary widely despite the acknowledged benefits of team sports—such as fostering teamwork, discipline, and physical fitness. This discrepancy raises essential questions about how sports are presented and promoted in schools. To address this, future research should focus on identifying barriers to participation and developing strategies to make team sports more appealing and accessible to all students. Moreover, as the global landscape of education and physical activity evolves, there is a clear need to reassess and possibly revitalize the incorporation of team sports in schools. This involves introducing a variety of sports and ensuring that these programs are inclusive and adaptable to the changing demographics and interests of students. Schools can lead this change by fostering environments that value physical education and recognizing sports participation's holistic benefits. In conclusion, while it is clear that team sports offer significant benefits, the study underscores the need for ongoing research and adaptive strategies in educational policy to broaden the scope of the sports provided and enhance student engagement. By doing so, schools can ensure that the advantages of team sports are fully realized and accessible to every student, paving the way for a healthier, more inclusive, and dynamic educational environment.

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