

## **Written Testimony of Bryan Finnerty**

Before the House Committee on Education and Workforce  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education  
Hearing: "Field of Fees: Private Equity's Role in the Commercialization of American Youth Sports"

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Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee,  
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I have spent nearly fifty years in youth sports—as a young athlete, professional athlete, coach, father, entrepreneur, facility owner, investor, and mentor. That perspective has allowed me to experience youth sports from many different vantage points, but it has also reinforced one simple responsibility: to leave youth sports better than we found it.

When people learn that I played professional soccer for eleven years, they often assume that is where my passion for youth sports began. The truth is, it began much earlier.

As a young boy, sports gave me something every child deserves: a place to belong. They gave me coaches who became mentors, teammates who became lifelong friends, and a safe environment in which to grow. Long before I understood the words discipline, resilience, accountability, and confidence, I was learning those lessons through sports. Looking back, the greatest gift youth sports gave me was not the opportunity to play professionally. It was helping shape the person I would become.

That experience has influenced nearly every important decision I have made throughout my career.

Twenty-five years ago, after retiring from professional soccer, I founded High Velocity Sports Center in Canton, Michigan, because families in our community needed more opportunities for children to play. Like many entrepreneurs, I invested everything I had, leveraged my home, and partnered with private investors because I was convinced our community deserved that opportunity.

Without private investment, High Velocity Sports Center would never have existed.

Twenty-five years later, that investment continues to serve our community. I have never measured that investment solely by its financial return. I measure it by the hundreds of

thousands of young people who have walked through our doors and by the opportunities we have been able to create for children and families throughout our community.

There have also been times when private investment has filled gaps that local funding simply could not. During the financial crisis, when many communities lacked the resources to build or improve recreational facilities, responsible private investment helped preserve and expand opportunities that otherwise may never have existed. That experience reinforced something I have seen repeatedly over the past twenty-five years: when investment is guided by the right values, it can strengthen communities rather than diminish them.

Today, High Velocity Sports Center is one of the largest indoor sports facilities in the country. While we host national tournaments and elite events, they represent only a portion of what we do. More than eighty percent of the young athletes who participate at our facility are involved in recreational sports, and over the years we have provided scholarships to hundreds of children because we have always believed that success should create greater access—not greater barriers.

That outcome was not accidental. From the beginning, we made a deliberate decision to build a business that served everyday families, not just elite athletes. We believed that if we built a financially healthy organization, we could continue investing in our facilities, our employees, and our community for the long term. Twenty-five years later, that philosophy continues to guide our decisions.

Over those twenty-five years, I have often heard the discussion framed as a choice between business and community. My experience has taught me that it does not have to be. In fact, when they are aligned around the right mission, each makes the other stronger.

**Purpose and profit are not competitors. When they are aligned, they make each other stronger.**

Running a successful sports facility means far more than generating revenue. It means creating an organization that families can rely on year after year. It means meeting your financial obligations, employing great people, maintaining safe, high-quality facilities, reinvesting in your programs, and serving your community with the understanding that children and families are depending on you. In my experience, those responsibilities reinforce one another rather than compete with one another.

That perspective has also shaped how I think about private investment. I do not believe the central question is whether private capital belongs in youth sports. Private investment has helped create facilities and opportunities that otherwise might never have existed, including my own. The more important question is whether that investment remains aligned with the mission of youth sports.

When investment strengthens communities, expands access, improves programming, and creates more opportunities for children, it serves an important purpose. When short-term financial goals become more important than the children and families those organizations exist to serve, it is appropriate to ask difficult questions.

One lesson I have learned over nearly five decades in youth sports is that facilities alone do not determine the future of youth sports. Parents, coaches, volunteers, facility operators, investors, schools, and community leaders all play a role in shaping the experience children have through sports.

For that reason, I do not think the commercialization of youth sports is defined simply by where capital comes from. It begins when the focus shifts away from the children and families the system exists to serve.

One of the greatest challenges I see today is not simply affordability. It is the growing expectation that children must specialize earlier, travel farther, and spend more in order to succeed. Most parents are simply trying to provide the best opportunities for their children, but too often they are left with the impression that doing more and spending more is the only path forward.

My experience has been very different.

Children improve because they love playing. They improve because they have access to great coaches, supportive parents, safe places to play, and opportunities to continue participating year after year. Those experiences build confidence, resilience, friendships, and character—qualities that matter long after a season ends.

To me, the measure of success in youth sports is not how many elite athletes we produce. It is how many children continue playing long enough to discover what sports can teach them about life.

After twenty-five years of building and operating High Velocity Sports Center, I have come to believe that **capital should ultimately be judged not by the returns it creates for investors, but by the opportunities it creates for children.**

When I think back to my own experience as a young athlete, I do not remember who financed the field where I played or how the facility was built. I remember the coaches who invested in me, the teammates who became lifelong friends, and the lessons that shaped my life. Those are the things that stay with us, and they are the experiences every child deserves.

If my career has taught me anything, it is that youth sports are at their best when we keep children at the center of every decision we make. If we do that, we will continue to develop not only better athletes, but more confident young people, stronger families, healthier

communities, and future generations who understand the value of teamwork, perseverance, and service to others.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to answering your questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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High Velocity Sports Center