

**HOW THIS DAD STUMBLED  
ONTO THE  
GROWING HOMESCHOOL SPORTS PHENOMENON**

By Cliff Aspinal

If you would have asked me seven years ago what I thought of Home Schooling, I probably would have laughed and said that I couldn't imagine any parent wanting to deprive their children of a public school education. After all, I attended public school and considered myself well educated. Sure we hear about the horror stories all around us about the personal dangers at the public schools and about the kids who just don't seem to succeed in the public school environment, but I certainly didn't think that it applied to my family. A distant family relative home schooled her children and I had no problem being critical. I am sure all of you know family members who are unsupportive like I was. Little did I know what the future held for me.

I have a son who is learning impaired. He had just finished 6th grade in public school. His brother had just finished 7th grade. My learning impaired son was in trouble. He was being main streamed - put into class rooms with children his own age, with subjects he couldn't grasp. He had learned that as long as he sat quietly and didn't disturb the class, nothing was expected of him. He could spend the time doodling and it was ok. I participated in labs with him as well as field trips. Perhaps I expected too much of the public schools, but I just knew deep down in my heart that the only way to reach him was through one-on-one tutoring.

We had good friends at church who also happened to home school. All of a sudden, home school seemed a little more acceptable. I wasn't convinced yet, but I was open. Our friends invited my wife and I to a state-wide home school convention and I was floored. Here were all these people who were home schooling their children. They all looked normal enough and the children were very well behaved. There were booths everywhere with home school curricula and colleges recruiting home school students.

My wife and I left that convention with a firm conviction that God wanted us to educate our youngest child. When we sat and explained to the boys that we would be keeping the youngest boy home to be educated by Mom and Dad, my oldest boy said that he wanted to be home schooled as well. This was a surprise to us, but we decided that he could always go back to school if he wanted to (we kind of figured that he would want to attend public high school due to his interest in sports). That summer before we started home schooling, my older son had a falling out with the local Little League program. He had witnessed the coach berate his son's performance during the game and was so shaken by it that he had decided to give up baseball. I tried my best to get him to stay at it as he had picked up a bat when he was three years old and had practically never put it down. He was so into baseball that I couldn't imagine him not being successful in it - he told me of his dreams on playing major league baseball as he was growing up. We played ball in the yard every chance we got. I knew that I needed to get him involved in other sports as he was so used to being physically active.

We joined our local Home School organization and started receiving their monthly newsletter. In that newsletter, we found out about all kinds of local activities available to home schooled children. There were swimming and tennis programs at the local YMCA as well as other activities. We did as many of them as we could fit into our schedule. One of the organized activities was a home school basketball team. My older son had played intramural basketball so he decided to try and play for the home school team that year. At that time, he wasn't very coordinated, but he had a good time playing 8th grade basketball. The next season, we had new parents involved in leading the program. There was one high school team - it was mostly 9th and 10th graders. They played as a varsity team just so they could get

enough games. If I recall correctly, they lost every game that year but one. At the end of that season, it appeared that the parents involved were moving on and that the program would not continue the following season unless someone was willing to step up and organize it. My son enjoyed basketball enough that I couldn't imagine the program going away and thus I volunteered to be the Athletic Director. I really don't know much about sports, but I have administrative skills, can use a computer, and I wanted to see the program continue.

It has been four years since that time. My older son who plays sports has just graduated from home school. He never wanted to go back to public school. Sure we have had our ups and downs. There were times when neither my wife or I could motivate the boys to do their best. But even with the difficult times, we have succeeded in raising and educating two boys. Teaching the boys has inspired my wife and I to better ourselves by reading more and seeking out the educational opportunities. My learning impaired son will still be home schooled for a few more years until we feel that he is ready for a technical or vocational school. I espouse the wonders of home school to any who will listen. It surely isn't for everyone, but it can be for anyone.

And what about the sports? Our Varsity basketball team played in one of the national tournaments for the first time since about nine years ago. We never won a lot of games, but we developed good relationships with many fine home school families. My sons have more good friends than they had when they were in public school. Our sports organization has grown from that one basketball team to include sixteen basketball teams from 5th/6th grade through High School for both sexes. We also have three soccer teams - our girls just won the State Tournament. We had a volleyball team and even varsity cheerleaders. It takes a vision to build a successful program. Our vision was to build a quality sports program that would attract home school students and help them to decide to remain home schooled throughout their high school years. Sports is one of the reasons that many home school students decide to attend public school during their high school years. My wife and I have succeeded in providing an education for our children while building an organization to support home school sports. We aren't done yet, but we are trying hard to pass the vision and the torch onto other parents so that we can spend even more time with our learning impaired son. After all, he is the reason we started home schooling in the first place.

If you have any questions about getting home school sports started in your area, there are several good reference sites available, but probably the best place to start would be <http://www.geocities.com/homeschoolbasketball/>. If anyone wants to drop me a line ([cliffaspinal@earthlink.net](mailto:cliffaspinal@earthlink.net)), I would be happy to try and answer any questions you might have. Please be patient as it can take me a while to respond to my email due to the volume that I receive.

*About the Author: Cliff Aspinall's family has home schooled for seven years. His eldest son has just graduated. He is the Athletic Director for Kalamazoo Home School Sports in Michigan and up until recently was Secretary for the West Michigan Home School Athletic Association (state-wide organization).*