

SPORTS AND SCIENCE

– Sixth-Graders, Marbles and Potato Chips



ON AN AFTERNOON last April, 45 sixth-graders who are keen on athletics but maybe not so much keen on science arrived on the Auburn University campus as participants in the first-ever “Sports and Science” program, produced by the Auburn University Athletics Department and the academic departments of Agronomy and Soils and Kinesiology. This after-school outreach event was designed to introduce youngsters to the possibilities of careers in which they could combine their love of sports with science. From all indications, it achieved its purpose.

Sports and Science was held on a day when Auburn Athletics’ indoor football practice facility was available and when a number of Auburn student-athletes would be around to help with the event

as part of National Student-Athlete Day, one in which high school and college student-athletes nationwide are celebrated for achieving excellence in the classroom, on the field and in their schools and communities. For the 2-hour event, faculty and graduate students in the agronomy and soils department’s turfgrass program and in kinesiology and members of Athletics’ Sports Medicine staff developed three educational activities designed to show youngsters some of the possible scientific careers related to sports.

- Kinesiology faculty used their state-of-the-art imaging systems to let students analyze and track their athletic motion, using that as a starting point to talk about careers in injury rehabilitation, sports medicine and exercise science.

- Auburn Athletics’ Sports Medicine staff showed youngsters how to wrap pre-

tend injuries and how to wrap to prevent sports injuries and in the process introduced participants to careers in nutrition, physical therapy and athletic training.

- Our turfgrass team, stationed on the outdoor practice field, packed several activities into each 20-minute lesson. We talked about field construction; used potato chips and marbles to illustrate the concepts of soil compaction; helped students take horizontal slices of soil and turf from the field to see the layering of sand and root development in the field; and showed them how to use

Every participant received a special Sports and Science T-Shirt that sported the Sports and Science logo and the Auburn Athletics Department’s sponsorship.

turfgrass measurement devices such as Clegg Hammers and torque meters. Students then got a special treat as a member of Auburn’s athletic field maintenance staff, an Auburn agronomy alumnus, fired up the core aerator and made a pass across the practice field. Students then found the aerator holes and inserted dowel rods into them to measure the depth of the aeration.

The activities began at 4 pm as parents dropped students off at the Athletic Complex. Auburn Director of Athletics Jay Jacobs and a couple of Auburn student-athletes welcomed the group, and then the students were separated into three groups of 15. From 4:15 to 5:15, the groups rotated among the three different 20-minute activities. Student-athletes spent the next 15 minutes running relays with the youngsters, and at 5:30 pm, organizers served the kids pizza and handed out goodie bags.

Every participant received a special Sports and Science T-Shirt that sported the Sports and Science logo and the Auburn Athletics Department's sponsorship.

The day was a success. The students were interested and active, and they asked a ton of great questions. Since the participating sixth-graders were all selected from our local middle school, we got excellent feedback in the days after the event, and many teachers at the school said their students talked about the fun they had and how they learned about new careers in sports science.

THE HOW-TOS

So how do you put together an event like this at your school?

- Get everyone on board. This event never would have been a success without the combined and creative efforts of faculty, the staff of the Auburn Athletics Department and a great number of both student-athletes and graduate students in the respective disciplines.

- Have small numbers and lots of things to do. Sixth-graders do not want a lecture; they want to run and pound big things into small things. When we told them to compact the potato chips (our field soil), those potato chips were *compact*. We recommend one college student to every two to three sixth-graders. This keeps it personal, fun and the students engaged.

Use your students. Our student-athletes helped us move the groups from place to place, and they organized and ran all the games at the end of the education sessions. The graduate students helped to teach each education session, and they made sure each student was actively involved and not wandering around.

- If in doubt, *run*. Any time things got slow, we just told the students to run to the other side of the field and then come back. The chance to run on a pristine, immaculate and green athletic field (or the indoor practice facility) is such an event for a kid. It's just really fun!

- Pizza and a T-shirt seal the deal—especially when that T-shirt is clearly special, was made specifically for this event and advertises that the student attended an event at a major university athletic facility.

THE NITTY GRITTY

Based on our experience, following are some important details to consider when planning such an event:

- Have the legal experts craft the safety forms that parents must sign for liability issues.
- Work with your schools to get the right kids. We focused on students who were interested in athletics but perhaps didn't show that 'science spark' in the classroom. Teachers helped to identify the right kids, and three teachers came along for the afternoon.

- Get everything organized, and have a detailed timeline. Use a boat safety horn to signal when it is time to change groups. Always keep things moving along.

- Make sure the parents have all the correct information, including drop-off and pickup locations and times. Be sure, too, that parents leave emergency contact information



Thanks to the generosity of the Auburn Athletics Department, the entire event cost \$2,200. This included pizza, water bottles and sports drinks and T-shirts for all. ■

For more information contact Elizabeth Guertal, guertea@auburn.edu. Dr. Guertal is a professor in the College of Agriculture at Auburn University.

Turf Maintenance Revolution



**Campey
imants**
Perfecting Play



• New Universe® & Terraplane® rotors available for Koro FTM



• Total clean out of warm season grasses with the new Universe® Rotor



Recycling Dresser



Shockwave



Rotoknife



Line Marker



Email us at: info@campeyturfcare.com or info@imants.com

Visit our websites www.campeyturfcare.com or www.imants.com or www.campeyimants.com