The on-going debate of dodgeball as an accept-able physical education activity seems endless. Reeducating physical education teachers toward cur-rent best practices has proven a difficult task. Many teachers continue to include dodgeball in their yearly activities and defend it as a curriculum choice by asserting that important basic skills such as dodging, throwing, and catching are part of the game. Other sup-port statements include, "the students enjoy it," "we only use soft balls," or "we modify the rules so children are not eliminated."

Assuming there is some limited validity in these arguments, dodgeball may indeed be shoehorned into a curriculum that purportedly adheres to the National Standards [NASPE, 2004]. However, let’s consider how those who defend dodgeball as an appropriate activity would respond if asked to write an additional Standard, a Standard that would eliminate controversy by legit-imizing dodgeball and other games like it.

**Step One**

Prior to writing this new national standard, it would be instructive to read and study the existing six National Standards. Though much of this article looks at the Standards individually, their overall purpose is to pro-vide a framework for preparing quality physical edu-cation curriculums that result in "physically educated person[s]" [NASPE, 2004, p.11].

**Step Two**

Next, we might look to see what and how components of dodgeball contribute to the National Standards.

**Standard 1**

As noted above, dodgeball includes basic skills such as dodging, throwing, and catching. These skills are part of Standard 1: Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities [NASPE, 2004, p.11]. However, the real intent of the standard is for students to gain competency in basic skills. Competency is achieved through numerous practice opportunities, which seems more likely in small-sided activities than in a game with large teams in which weaker students are typically eliminated early and often. Even in dodgeball games modified to allow reentry, students are usually required to perform calisthenics or other tasks unrelated to the skills they are supposed to be developing.

Dodgeball fails to contribute to Standard 1 due to limited practice opportunities.

**Standard 2**

The intent of Standard 2: Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities [NASPE, 2004, p.11] is to incorporate the cognitive domain of learning with skill acquisition. This would include movement concepts, such as location, direction, levels, pathways, and force (Graham, Holt-Hale, & Parker, 2004) and game strategies. Teaching game strategies and concepts begins with observable objectives in a planned lesson that targets intended stu-dent outcomes. Unfortunately, traditional dodgeball is most often conducted as a free-for-all, in which game strategies or concepts emerge haphazardly if at all.Arguing that desirable outcomes might or can occur in dodgeball is quite different from teaching for learning.

Unless the teacher actively provides instruction that leads directly to desirable student outcomes, dodgeball fails to meet the intent of Standard 2.

**Standard 3**

Participates regularly in physical activity [NASPE, 2004, p. 11] indicates an ongoing commitment to physical activity. The intent of Standard 3 is that students choose to be physically active both in and outside of physical edu-cation in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle is achieved through regular participation fol-low ing a sound program based on exercise principles.
Dodgeball is not a lifetime activity, in the sense that few people play it outside of physical education. Therefore, dodgeball fails to contribute to Standard 3.

**Standard 4**

Personal development of health-related components of fitness is the emphasis of Standard 4: Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness [NASPE, 2004, p. 11]. Students who are eliminated or find themselves hiding in the corner of the gym are unlikely to improve their physical fitness. Rather, personal fitness is improved and maintained by following principles of training such as specificity and overload.

Dodgeball promotes behaviors in lesser skilled students that are contrary to more desirable principles of training. From that perspective, dodgeball detracts from Standard 4.

**Standard 5**

Exhibiting responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings [NASPE, 2004, p.11] seems the perfect antithesis to dodgeball. Dodgeball promotes irresponsible personal and social behavior by the mere fact that its object is to harm or eliminate an opponent. Such team wars too often result in disrespect of others. And, cooperation-oriented modifications simply establish a contradiction in students’ minds about the game’s purpose.

Because dodgeball most often promotes aggressive behaviors, it fails to contribute to the intent of Standard 5.

**Standard 6**

Students’ attitudes and personal values are addressed in Standard 6: Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction [NASPE, 2004, p.11]. The intent of the standard is for all students to experience the joy and sense of belonging to a group through physical activity, ultimately instilling the desire for an active lifestyle. It’s easy to argue the game does promote enjoyment, challenge, and social interaction, but mostly to only the few who dominate the game. And for other students, enthusiasm related to the game is associated more with an opportunity for frivolous play than with the potential for achieving more positive skills or relationships. Thus, Standard 6 is generally not achievable via dodgeball.

**Step Three: A New Standard 7?**

Having exhausted the current National Standards, the challenge in this step is to compose a new standard toward which dodgeball might make a more direct contribution. Examining the game itself, its basic premise is to throw balls at human targets in order to eliminate them from play. Of course, the game derives its name from a defensive strategy of simply attempting to avoid being hit by a ball. While proponents claim that students benefit from practicing these basic skills and strategies, those outcomes are more coincidental than planned. It seems just as likely, whether intentional or not, that skilled students learn to dominate, hurt, humiliate, embarrass, upset, degrade, and overpower lesser skilled students. In keeping with the same format NASPE has established for the standards listed above, a new standard specific to dodgeball might read:

**Standard 7**

Demonstrates the ability to humiliate, hurt and eliminate peers in large group games where the focus is dominating the opponent with aggressiveness to win the game.

Obviously, such a standard has no association with developmentally appropriate practices. However, equating a Standard with the practical reality of dodgeball, regardless of its intent, presents a powerful message for eliminating the game from the physical education curriculum. NASPE’s Position on Dodgeball in Physical Education reminds us that the purpose of physical education is “to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active for a lifetime. The students who are eliminated first in dodgeball are typically the ones who most need to be active and practice their skills” [NASPE, n.d.]. In another resource, NASPE recommends that, “in a quality physical education class teachers involve ALL children in activities that allow them to participate actively, both mentally and physically... . Activities such as relay races, dodgeball, and elimination tag provide limited opportunities for everyone in the class, especially the slower, less agile students who need activity the most” [NASPE, 2000, p. 13].

Changing the philosophies and inappropriate practices of physical education teachers is indeed a difficult task. However, NASPE has published numerous documents that provide guidance for curriculum planning based on developmentally appropriate activities. Physical educators have the responsibility of planning lessons based on goals and objectives that meet the needs of all children. Removing games that are inconsistent with the intent of the National Standards begins the process of change.

**References**


