

Sports can be a path to confidence, connection and community

Northern News Services

Resilience isn't just something we develop in solitude. It grows in the spaces between us, in the high fives, the quiet encouragement, the shared victories and losses.

It grows in community. And in sports, community is everything.

Being part of a team teaches us that we don't have to go it alone. We lean on our teammates, learn to communicate under pressure and support each other, even on the hardest days. That sense of connection — whether it's on a hockey bench, during hand games, or at a squash tournament — is what helps youth navigate challenges beyond sport.

In many of our Northern programs, I've seen children who arrived shy or unsure slowly step into themselves, not because they suddenly became confident overnight, but because someone believed in them. An Elder offered gentle encouragement. A coach noticed their effort. A teammate said, "You've got this."

Some of those same kids are now leading warmups, helping younger teammates or simply smiling more. The change might seem small from

the outside, but inside? It's everything. And I have seen it over and over again, it is beautiful.

Resilience grows in relationships. It grows where there's belonging, safety and someone cheering you on. And when a child knows they matter (#everychildmatters), they begin to believe in themselves, too.

Mental toughness: More than muscle

Sport teaches more than physical skills. It teaches how to breathe through nerves, stay calm under pressure and come back from disappointment. These are life skills, and they matter just as much as the scoreboard.

Techniques like mindfulness, visualization and positive self-talk are tools young athletes carry with them beyond the gym. They help manage stress, stay focused in school, nav-

igate challenges at home and grow into leaders in their own right. And when youth learn to balance emotion with effort, to know when to pause, reflect and reset, they carry a kind of strength that no medal can measure.

Sport is the tool, but what we build with it goes far beyond the gym or rink. Resilience developed through sport spills into school, work, relationships and those quiet,



GUEST COMMENT

Thorsten Gohl is the co-ordinator of Physical Literacy NWT



Karissa Sadowick flashes the thumbs-up at the 2024 NWT Track and Field Championships in Hay River. Photo courtesy of Thorsten Gohl

everyday moments that shape who we are. It becomes the voice that says, "I can try again," even when the world feels heavy.

And the beautiful part? You don't need to be a superstar to access any of this. You don't need medals, trophies or national rankings. You just need to be welcomed — to feel like you belong; to be part of something that sees your potential, sometimes before you see it your-

self. Because in the right environment, sport becomes more than a game. It becomes a path to confidence, connection and community.

So here's my challenge to you: Get involved. Join a community program (yes, even the unofficial Snowball TSO. We see you!). Coach a sport. Volunteer at a tournament. Cheer from the sidelines. Share your time, your kindness, your energy. Help cre-

ate a space where every child knows they're supported, seen and valued.

Because when we talk about physical literacy, we're also talking about resilience literacy. And when we lift each other up, something amazing happens. We discover that resilience isn't just a trait. It's a superpower we can grow. Together. The ripple effect is real, and it's powerful.

Natural and artificial light



The wavy green Northern lights complemented the lights illuminating the Deh Cho Bridge on a clear night in late March near Fort Providence. Photo courtesy of Thorsten Gohl