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MILITARY PERSONNEL

DOD Needs to Establish Performance Measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program

Accessible Version

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Why GAO Did This Study

For nearly a century, the U.S. Armed Forces (i.e., the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard) have organized and participated in international and national sporting competitions in part because of the intended benefits for servicemember morale and the unique opportunity that participation provides to foster diplomatic relations.

House Report 114-537 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for GAO to review the Armed Forces Sports Program and its impact on the military services' readiness. This report assesses the effectiveness of DOD's implementation of the Armed Forces Sports Program. GAO analyzed participation data for fiscal years 2012 through 2016 and cost data for fiscal years 2014 through 2016, compared DOD data with attributes of successful performance measures, compared roles and responsibilities specified in policy with those being implemented, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop and implement performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program that, at a minimum, demonstrate linkage to the program's goals or mission, have a measurable target, and include a baseline that can be used to demonstrate program performance. DOD concurred with the recommendation, noting potential limitations on establishing measures. GAO acknowledges these limitations, but continues to believe that measures are important to evaluating the program's effectiveness.

View GAO-17-542. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has data on participation in and costs of the Armed Forces Sports Program, but has not taken steps, including developing performance measures and clarifying roles and responsibilities that are needed to help ensure the program is implemented effectively. DOD officials stated that they use sport and competition participation data to measure the performance and effectiveness of the program. According to these data, servicemember participation changed from 968 servicemembers in fiscal year 2012 to 848 servicemembers in fiscal year 2016, and program costs ranged from about \$2.1 million to about \$2.8 million in fiscal years 2014 through 2016. While these data provide important context about the program's size and reach, they do not exhibit several key attributes, such as linkage, a measurable target, and baseline and trend data that GAO has found are key to successfully measuring a program's performance.

- First, these data do not exhibit **linkage** because no relationship has been established to show how the number of servicemember participants contribute to achievement of the program's objectives, such as promoting goodwill among and a positive image of the U.S. Armed Forces through sports.
- Second, these data were not associated with a **measurable target** that would enable program officials to determine how far the program has progressed toward a desired outcome or end state.
- Third, while DOD has program participation data, it does not track **baseline and trend data** for measures that are able to assess the program's performance and progress over time.

Without performance measures that demonstrate these attributes, DOD will be unable to effectively demonstrate that it is achieving the intended benefits of the program, such as improving readiness, recruitment, and retention as well as promoting the goodwill of the U.S. Armed Forces. Officials cited the program as aiding recruiting because it showcased unique opportunities open to those in the U.S. Armed Forces. However, outside of participation and cost data and some anecdotal examples, officials did not have specific measures for or data on the Armed Forces Sports Program's contribution to the services' readiness, recruiting, and retention efforts.

The roles and responsibilities that are currently being implemented for the program differ from the program's roles and responsibilities specified in DOD policy. DOD Instruction 1330.04 specifies that the program includes training or national qualifying events in preparation for participation in International Military Sports Council events, the Pan American Games, the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games, and other international competitions. While this is how the program is defined in key program documents, DOD officials stated that all responsibilities, including costs, associated with servicemember participation in the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games are handled by the services. DOD officials stated that they plan to review DOD Instruction 1330.04 and make necessary updates, but have not yet determined what specific changes would be made to clarify the program's roles and responsibilities.

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U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W.
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June 8, 2017

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

For nearly a century, the U.S. Armed Forces¹ have organized and participated in international and national sporting competitions in part because of the intended benefits for servicemember morale and the unique opportunity that participation provides to foster diplomatic relations. The concept originated with the U.S.-led effort to organize the Inter-Allied Games of 1919 in France as a way to promote unity of effort among U.S. soldiers during the lengthy period of demobilization at the end of World War I, and to help enrich the U.S. relationship with the Allies. In continuing these efforts, in 1948 the Armed Forces Sports Program, originally named the Inter-service Sports Council, was established. In 2010, the Department of Defense (DOD) issued DOD Instruction 1330.04, which states that the Armed Forces Sports Program includes actions such as training or national qualifying events in preparation for servicemember participation in International Military Sports Council events, the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games, and other international competitions.² Currently, the program offers 24 team and individual sports for men and women; annually

¹ The U.S. Armed Forces include the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard (including when the latter is a service in the Department of Homeland Security). For the purposes of this report, we refer to the U.S. Armed Forces as the “Armed Forces” or the “services.”

² DOD Instruction 1330.04, *Armed Forces Participation in National and International Sports Activities* (Aug. 31, 2010).

administers 16 Armed Forces Sports Championships; and participates in 9 U.S. national championships and in 16 International Military Sports Council Military World Championships.

House Report 114-537 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for us to review the Armed Forces Sports Program and provide a briefing by February 2017 on the impact the program has on the military services' readiness. We briefed your committees in February 2017 and this report expands on the information provided in that briefing. This report assesses the effectiveness of DOD's implementation of the Armed Forces Sports Program.

For this review, we analyzed participation data for fiscal years 2012 through 2016 and cost data for fiscal years 2014 through 2016.³ Based on responses of officials in the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat (Sports Council Secretariat) to data reliability questionnaires, we determined that the data we obtained are sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our reporting objectives. We compared DOD's policy for the program against the federal standards for internal control⁴ that state among other things that managers should establish activities to monitor performance measures.⁵ We interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Sports

³ Cost data were provided only since fiscal year 2014 because officials said that not all services had data prior to that.

⁴ See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.; Sept. 10, 2014) and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.; Nov. 1, 1999). Internal control is a process affected by an entity's oversight body, management, and other personnel that provides reasonable assurance that the objectives of an entity will be achieved.

⁵ Our prior work emphasizes key attributes of performance measures, such as measurable targets and baseline data. See GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002), p. 45, for a description of how we developed the attributes of effective performance goals and measures and GAO, *Defense Health Care Reform: Additional Implementation Details Would Increase Transparency of DOD's Plans and Enhance Accountability*, [GAO-14-49](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 6, 2013), p. 17 for a description of why the baseline measure was added as an attribute of effective performance measures. See also *GPRA Performance Reports*, [GAO/GGD-96-66R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 1996); *Missile Defense: Opportunity to Refocus on Strengthening Acquisition Management*, [GAO-13-432](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 26, 2013); *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011); and *Agency Performance Plans: Examples of Practices That Can Improve Usefulness to Decisionmakers*, [GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-69](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 26, 1999).

Council Secretariat, and each service to discuss performance measures used to assess the program's effectiveness, including the effects of program participation on services' readiness. Specifically, we interviewed 13 randomly selected servicemembers from the services that participated in the program in calendar year 2015 to gather information related to program participation and readiness effects on the services. We also interviewed ten commanders who had approved a randomly selected participants request to participate in the program to gather information related to participation and its effect on unit readiness.⁶ Further, we assessed program policies and interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Sports Council Secretariat, and each service to discuss policies, including roles and responsibilities for implementing the program. Specifically, we analyzed DOD's implementation of department policies to determine whether these policies were implemented as intended. We also examined the extent to which DOD has clearly defined key areas of authority and responsibilities and established appropriate lines of reporting for the program, in accordance with federal standards for internal control.⁷ A more detailed description of our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2016 to June 2017 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁶ We used calendar year 2015 data to randomly select servicemembers who participated in the program since this was the most recent year for which the program had a complete set of participant data.

⁷ See [GAO/AIMD-00-213.1](#) and [GAO-14-704G](#).

Background

Roles and Responsibilities for the Armed Forces Sports Program

DOD instruction 1330.04 outlines the following roles and responsibilities regarding the Armed Forces Sports Program:

- Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness: Provides guidance and oversight concerning the participation of servicemembers in Armed Forces, national, and international amateur sports competitions.
- Senior Military Sports Advisor: Serves as the Service Personnel Chief who is responsible for the management and operation of the program and reports to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.
- Armed Forces Sports Council: Serves as the governing body of the program, and is composed of the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation⁸ representatives from each service or their designated representatives.
- Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat: Serves as the executive office for the council and serves as the U.S. liaison to the International Military Sports Council.
- Armed Forces Sports Council Working Group: Serves as the staffing body of the Armed Forces Sports Council, which is composed of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation representatives from each service.
- Secretaries of the Military Departments: Develop sports programs based on specific needs and mission requirements that provide the opportunity for servicemembers to prepare for and compete in national and international amateur sports competitions on a voluntary basis.

According to Sports Council Secretariat officials and the policies for managing servicemembers' participation in national and international amateur sports competitions, the Sports Council Secretariat and the service sports offices each have responsibilities for managing the Armed

⁸ The Coast Guard refers to its program as "Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation." For consistency, we use "Morale, Welfare, and Recreation" to refer to these programs when the military services and the Coast Guard are discussed collectively.

Forces Sports Program. Table 1 further describes the responsibilities of the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat's and the service sports offices for the Armed Forces Sports Program.

Table 1: Description of the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat's and the Service Sports Offices' Responsibilities for the Armed Forces Sports Program

Office	Program-related responsibilities
Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advises the Armed Forces Sports Council and Armed Forces Sports Council Working Group• Serves as a steward of the program's budget• Maintains program social media accounts and perform public affairs activities for the program• Provides meeting agenda items• Orders uniforms, athletic gear, medals, and trophies <p>For Armed Forces Sports Championships and U.S. national events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinates with host installations• Arranges for the payment and transportation of sports officials• Ensures that Armed Forces Sports Championships conform to the Armed Forces Sports Council's standard operating procedures• Communicates with each sport's national governing body regarding Armed Forces Sports Program participation in civilian national competitions <p>For International Military Sports Council events and other international competitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Processes travel clearances• Conducts all direct communication and agreements with organizations, such as the International Military Sports Council• Ensures that competition delegations have a servicemember of appropriate rank and are provided with needed administrative information• Serves as the U.S. Chief of Delegation to the International Military Sports Council and votes at the General Assembly• Co-authored the International Military Sports Council Strategic Plan and Business Plan• Serves on the Para-Sport Advisory Team
Service sports offices	<p>For Armed Forces Sports Championships and U.S. national events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receive applications from servicemembers to participate in the program• Determine servicemember selection• Secure orders for participating servicemembers• Fund transportation and lodging for servicemember to participate• Assemble all-service sports teams to compete in Armed Forces Sports Championships• Serve on the Armed Forces Sports Council Working Group• Track program participation• Develop service sports office budgets• Perform service-specific public affairs activities

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-17-542

Notes: According to Armed Forces Sports Program officials, the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat performs public affairs activities for the entire program, whereas the service sports offices perform only service-specific public affairs activities for their servicemembers' participation. The officials said that they may request public affairs assistance from the base where an Armed Forces

Sports Championship is hosted; however, this assistance (if available) is provided at no charge to the program since it is considered part of the public affairs offices' responsibilities.

Number of Staff Members Working for the Armed Forces Sports Program and Team and Individual Sports Offered

The number of staff members working in the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat and the service sports offices and the percentage of time staff members spend working for the Armed Forces Sports Program varies. For example, the Navy Sports Office has two staff members who work on the program nearly full time, while the Army Sports Office has four staff members who work on the program part time. In addition, the staff members working for the Armed Forces Sports Program include both civilians and active-duty servicemembers. Table 2 provides further details on the number of staff members and the estimated percentage of time they spend working for the Armed Forces Sports Program.

Table 2: Number of Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat and Service Sports Office Staff Members Working for the Armed Forces Sports Program

Office	Number and type of staff members (civilians and servicemembers)	Percentage of time spent working for the program	Duties other than for the program
Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat Office	2 civilians	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None
Army Sports Office	4 civilians	15 – 50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs and 234 fitness centers• Provide garrison support• Conduct quarterly garrison budget reviews• Provide guidance to garrisons• Procure sports apparel and gear
Navy Sports Office	2 civilians	85 – 95	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee all Navy Sports Office programs• Provide installation support for sports• Perform general headquarters duties
Marine Corps Sports Office	2 civilians 1 servicemember	25 – 85	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee all Marine Corps Morale, Welfare, and Recreation fitness and aquatic programs and 56 fitness centers^a• Provide installation support• Provide general headquarters duties

Office	Number and type of staff members (civilians and servicemembers)	Percentage of time spent working for the program	Duties other than for the program
Air Force Sports Office	1 civilian 2 servicemembers	20 – 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide administrative support to the Air Force World Class Athlete Program and to the Athlete of the Year program including sponsorship, marketing, budget preparation, and executionProvide fitness center trainingAssist with military obligations
Coast Guard Sports Office	1 civilian 1 servicemember	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oversee Coast Guard Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation programs and funding requirementsProvide field Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation supportDevelops policy and procedures for managing Morale, Well-Being, and Recreation programs

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-17-542

^aAccording to Armed Forces Sports Program officials, one civilian on the Marine Corps Sports Office staff oversees all Marine Corps Morale, Welfare, and Recreation fitness and aquatic programs and fitness centers.

Servicemembers from each of the services may participate in any of the following 24 sports:

Archery
Basketball
Bowling
Cross-Country
Cycling
Golf
Judo
Lifesaving
Marathon
Modern Pentathlon
Orienteering
Parachuting
Rugby
Sailing
Shooting
Skiing
Soccer
Softball
Swimming
Tae Kwon Do
Track and Field
Triathlon

Volleyball-Indoor
Wrestling

DOD Has Participation Data, but Has Not Developed Performance Measures or Clarified Roles and Responsibilities to Help Ensure Effective Program Implementation

DOD has data on participation in and costs of the Armed Forces Sports Program, but has not taken steps, including developing performance measures and clarifying roles and responsibilities, that are needed to help ensure that the program is implemented effectively.

DOD Has Data on Participation in and Costs of the Armed Forces Sports Program

Sports Council Secretariat officials provided us with data for fiscal years 2012-2016 on servicemember participation in the program, including on the number of days servicemembers are away from their unit participating in the program and on civilians supporting the program, and data for fiscal years 2014-2016 on program costs.

Servicemember Participation

In analyzing the number of servicemembers participating in the program, we found that servicemember participation changed from 968 servicemembers in fiscal year 2012 to 848 servicemembers in fiscal year 2016. Table 3 provides further details about the number of servicemembers who participated in or supported the Armed Forces Sports Program in fiscal years 2012-2016.

Table 3: Number of Servicemembers Participating in and Supporting the Armed Forces Sports Program, Fiscal Years 2012 through 2016

Service	2012		2012		2012		2013		2013		2013		2014		2014		2014		2015		2015		2015		2016		2016		2016	
	Athletes	Coaches	Staff																											
Air Force	224	15	5	174	10	5	137	5	4	183	12	6	218	18	6															
Army	225	21	9	198	20	16	159	12	12	210	19	11	215	17	11															

Service	2012		2012		2013		2013		2014		2014		2015		2015		2016		2016	
	Athletes	Coaches	Staff	Athletes	Coaches	Staff														
Marine Corps	202	15	1	137	8	2	86	3	1	158	10	5	145	10	5					
Navy	187	6	6	155	6	7	113	6	1	161	6	1	166	7	7					
Coast Guard	48	4	0	22	4	0	32	1	1	32	2	0	21	2	0					
Total	886	61	21	686	48	30	527	27	19	744	49	23	765	54	29					

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-542

Notes: The Armed Forces Sports Program includes servicemembers from the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. Officials said members of the Reserve Component are also able to apply but need to be on active-duty orders. Staff refers to servicemembers serving as athletic trainers, service representatives, Chiefs of Mission, match delegates, or medical staff.

We also found that servicemember participation ranged from an average of 6.8 days per event in fiscal year 2013 to 13.2 days per event in fiscal year 2016. Sports Council Secretariat and service officials stated that the servicemembers who participate in the program are in peak physical shape and that they were unaware of any additional recovery time that a participant has needed after competing. Table 4 breaks out these data for each year from fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

Table 4: Number of Days Servicemembers Were Away from Their Unit Participating in the Armed Forces Sports Program, Fiscal Years 2012 through 2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total staff days^a	179	183	138	186	435
Number of events	21	27	20	23	33
Average staff days per event	8.5	6.8	6.9	8.1	13.2

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-542

Notes: Officials said that the increase in staff days for fiscal year 2016 is related to participation in several events at the Military World Games in South Korea, the amount of time required to travel to South Korea, and the requirement for servicemembers to participate in opening and closing ceremonies at the Military World Games.

Sports Council Secretariat officials stated that these data do not include any additional training or recovery time associated with a servicemember's participation in an Armed Forces Sports Program competition.

^aOfficials said that staff days refer to the time servicemembers are away from their unit to participate in Armed Forces Sports Program events.

Civilians Supporting the Program

According to officials, DOD civilians provide various types of support to the Armed Forces Sports Program and may include employees who work for the program on a full- or part-time basis, as well as those who serve in

a volunteer capacity. Civilians who support the program as volunteers may serve in a variety roles, as coaches or as staff, for example, which include athletic trainers, service representatives, or medical staff. Table 5 provides further details on the number of civilians who supported the Armed Forces Sports Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

Table 5: Number of Civilians Supporting the Armed Forces Sports Program, Fiscal Years 2012 through 2016

Service	2012 Coaches	2012 Staff	2013 Coaches	2013 Staff	2014 Coaches	2014 Staff	2015 Coaches	2015 Staff	2016 Coaches	2016 Staff
Air Force	11	20	7	5	10	9	10	11	12	23
Army	6	15	4	10	3	7	5	12	4	14
Marine Corps	9	19	9	7	7	8	7	3	4	7
Navy	16	13	6	6	10	7	14	12	13	9
Coast Guard	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total	42	84	27	28	31	31	37	67	34	53

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-542

Program Costs

Sports Council Secretariat officials stated the program covers the cost of servicemembers participating and units do not have to provide any funding. Program costs ranged from about \$2.1 million to about \$2.8 million from fiscal years 2014 through 2016.⁹ Table 6 provides additional details about these costs.

Table 6: Armed Forces Sports Program Costs, Fiscal Years 2014 through 2016

	2014 (dollars)	2015 (dollars)	2016 (dollars)
Armed Forces Sports Program Office Administrative program costs	132,571.10	190,820.05	309,090.31
Armed Forces Sports Program Office Office staff travel	19,122.94	21,582.12	28,674.82
Armed Forces Sports Program Office Office staff salary	259,000.00	262,000.00	266,000.00
Air Force Participation in events	330,155.00	515,795.44	375,751.00
Air Force Office staff travel	2,600.00	9,100.00	6,308.00
Air Force Office staff salary	64,441.58	65,092.50	65,570.00

⁹ According to DOD officials, the services primarily use non-appropriated funds to cover costs related to the Armed Forces Sports Program.

	2014 (dollars)	2015 (dollars)	2016 (dollars)
Army Participation in events	351,549.17	500,347.11	407,401.61
Army Office staff travel	12,826.46	15,216.14	18,422.40
Army Office staff salary	126,923.00	128,205.00	129,500.00
Marine Corps Participation in events	197,063.16	411,224.86	432,927.77
Marine Corps Office staff travel	14,402.74	27,671.95	33,088.72
Marine Corps Office staff salary	153,626.80	161,799.20	164,910.80
Navy Participation in events	247,694.68	424,171.44	392,799.00
Navy Office staff travel	11,495.88	22,389.29	18,785.99
Navy Office staff salary	156,294.66	158,961.57	158,961.57
Coast Guard Participation in events	0.00	2,046.22	2,119.93
Coast Guard Office staff travel	1,629.89	1,968.00	2,168.27
Coast Guard Office staff salary	26,614.00	26,882.00	26,997.00
Total	2,108,010.66	2,945,272.89	2,839,637.19

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-542

Notes: Armed Forces Sports Program officials said that office staff salary costs reflect the cost for each service's office staff members based on the percentage of time they indicated that they work for the Armed Forces Sports Program. A Coast Guard official said that rugby is the only sport that the Coast Guard participates in. If servicemembers are selected for higher level rugby competition, the Coast Guard pays for the servicemembers' participation. In fiscal year 2014, there were no higher level rugby competitions. According to DOD officials, in fiscal year 2014, the government shutdown resulted in the cancellation of 3 events, resulting in a reduction of expenditures for that year. Also, officials said in fiscal year 2015 DOD provided \$755,000 to the Armed Forces Sports Program in support of the 2015 Military World Games in South Korea (these funds were executed at the end of fiscal year 2015 and the beginning of fiscal year 2016). This expense typically occurs approximately every 4 years and is not an annual recurring expense.

Armed Forces Sports Championships are hosted by one of the services and must include at least three of the services in competition for all team sports and most individual sports. Higher level competitions are attended by the most competent athletes from the Armed Forces Sports Championships or athletes selected based on other qualifying events or criteria and may include U.S. national, International Military Sports Council, or other international events. In table 7 we break out the costs for participation in events from table 6 associated with Armed Forces Sports Championships and higher level competitions for fiscal years 2014 through 2016.

Table 7: Armed Forces Sports Program Participation Costs for Armed Forces Sports Championships and Higher Level Competition, Fiscal Years 2014 through 2016 (in dollars)

2014 Armed Forces Sports Championship	2014 Higher level competition	2015 Armed Forces Sports Championship	2015 Higher level competition	2016 Armed Forces Sports Championship	2016 Higher level competition

2014	2014	2015	2015	2016	2016
Armed Forces Sports Championship	Higher level competition	Armed Forces Sports Championship	Higher level competition	Armed Forces Sports Championship	Higher level competition
885,270.36	241,191.65	1,310,482.94	543,102.13	1,204,378.16	406,621.15

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-542

Notes: Higher level competition refers to U.S. national events, International Military Sports Council events, and other international events. In fiscal year 2015, the Office of the Secretary of Defense provided \$755,000 to the Armed Forces Sports Program in support of the 2015 Military World Games in Korea.

DOD Has Not Developed Performance Measures to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of the Armed Forces Sports Program

While DOD has data on program participation and cost, these data are outputs and not outcomes and therefore do not exhibit important attributes of successful performance measures that are necessary to demonstrate that the Armed Forces Sports Program is being implemented effectively. Federal internal control standards state, among other things, that managers should establish activities to monitor performance measures.¹⁰ Furthermore, our prior work on performance measurement identified ten key attributes of performance measures, such as clarity, objectivity, having a measurable target, and having baseline and trend data in order to identify, monitor, and report changes in performance and to help ensure that performance is viewed in context.¹¹ Table 8 identifies each attribute of effective performance measures along with its definition.

Table 8: Attributes of Effective Performance Measures

Attribute	Definition
Balance	A suite of measures ensures that an organization's various priorities are covered.
Clarity	Measure is clearly stated, and the name and definition are consistent with the methodology used to calculate it.
Core program activities	Measures cover the activities that an entity is expected to perform to support the intent of the program.

¹⁰ See [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) and [GAO-14-704G](#).

¹¹ See [GAO-03-143](#), [GAO-14-49](#), [GAO-13-432](#), [GAO-11-646SP](#), and [GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-69](#).

Attribute	Definition
Government-wide priorities	Each measure covers a priority such as quality, timeliness, and cost of service.
Limited overlap	Measures provide new information beyond that provided by other measures.
Linkage	Measure is aligned with division- and agency-wide goals and mission and is clearly communicated throughout the organization.
Measurable target	Measure has a numerical goal.
Objectivity	Measure is reasonably free from significant bias or manipulation.
Reliability	Measure produces the same result under similar conditions.
Baseline and trend data	Measure has a baseline and trend data associated with it to identify, monitor, and report changes in performance and to help ensure that performance is viewed in context.

Source: GAO | GAO-17-542

Sports Council Secretariat officials stated that they use data on the number of servicemembers and services annually participating in each sport and competition to measure the performance and effectiveness of the Armed Forces Sports Program. While these data provide important context about the program's size and reach, they are outputs and do not constitute performance measures because they do not exhibit several of the key attributes previously discussed.

First, we found that the Sports Council Secretariat's use of participation data does not exhibit the attribute of linkage in that there is not clear alignment between the number of participants and how it affects the program's ability to achieve its goals and mission. For example, while DOD Instruction 1330.04 does not specify goals or a mission, the Armed Forces Sports Council's standard operating procedures identify that the five objectives of the program are to:

- (1) promote goodwill among the Armed Services through sports,
- (2) promote a positive image of the Armed Forces through sports,
- (3) provide the incentive and encourage physical fitness by promoting a highly competitive sports program,
- (4) provide a venue for military athletes to participate in national and international competitions, and

(5) engage in valuable military-to-military opportunities with International Military Sports Council member nations through sports.

However, Sports Council Secretariat officials have not established a link between the participant data that they stated are used to measure program performance and the achievement of these objectives.

Further, our prior work has shown that linkages between goals and measures are most effective when they are clearly communicated and create a “line of sight” so that everyone understands what an organization is trying to achieve and the goals it seeks to reach. During meetings with the Sports Council Secretariat, officials stated that they use data, such as servicemember participation in the Armed Forces Sports Championships, International Military Sports Council Championships, U.S. Nationals, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games to measure the performance and effectiveness of the Armed Forces Sports Program, and that they have created performance measures on an as-needed basis when it has been necessary to prioritize the allocation of funds for individual sports. However, none of the documents we were provided on the program identify participation or any other data as a performance measure, and these efforts do not exhibit a deliberate, four-stage performance measurement process that involves (1) identifying goals, (2) developing performance measures, (3) collecting data, and (4) analyzing data and reporting results.¹² Further, servicemember participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games is not a valid performance measure because, according to officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Sports Council Secretariat, and the services, the Armed Forces Sports Program does not have responsibility for these games.

Second, participation data do not exhibit the measurable target attribute because they represent a summary of the program’s activity and are not associated with numerical goals, which are needed to gauge program progress and results. Our prior work has shown that numerical targets or other measurable values facilitate future assessments of whether overall goals and objectives are achieved because comparisons can be easily made between projected performance and actual results.¹³ While the Sports Council Secretariat’s data included the “actual” number of program

¹² GAO, *Managing for Results: Analytic Challenges in Measuring Performance*, GAO/HEHS/GGD-97-138 (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 1997).

¹³ See GAO-03-143.

participants, they did not identify projected performance targets that would enable program officials to determine how far they have progressed toward a desired outcome or end state. In response to our analysis, Sports Council Secretariat officials stated that they consider the list of 24 sports and total number of competitions that servicemembers may participate in to be the target—the attainment of which is based on variables such as available funding and the extent to which each service agrees to provide teams to participate in the competitions. However, this is not a valid demonstration of this attribute because neither the target in this sense nor the variables affecting participation (e.g., funding and service branch involvement) demonstrate how well the Armed Forces Sports Program performs or carries out its mission.

In addition, officials from the Sports Council Secretariat and the services stated that the program directly benefits the services' readiness, recruitment, and retention efforts. Specifically, officials cited the program's emphasis on a higher level of physical fitness than is otherwise required by the services as contributing to individual servicemember readiness, and involvement in national and international sports championships as aiding recruiting efforts because it showcases some of the unique opportunities open to those in the services. Further, officials stated that the opportunity to participate in higher level competitions through the program helps retention because it provides an incentive for some servicemembers to stay in the services. However, outside of participation and cost data and some anecdotal examples, officials did not have specific measures for or data on the Armed Forces Sports Program's contribution to the services' readiness, recruiting, and retention efforts.

Third, while DOD has program participation data, it does not track baseline and trend data in order to assess the program's performance and progress over time. Our prior work has demonstrated that by tracking and developing a performance baseline for all measures—including those that demonstrate the effectiveness of a program—agencies can better evaluate progress made and whether or not goals are being achieved.¹⁴ Further, identifying and reporting deviations from the baseline as a program proceeds provides valuable information for oversight by identifying areas of program risk and their causes for decision makers. According to Sports Council Secretariat officials, many of the program's benefits—such as helping with readiness, recruitment, and retention—are

¹⁴ GAO-14-49.

not measured, and commanding officers are responsible for determining and managing the program's effect on the readiness of their units. Thus, given the relatively small number of program participants and participation being contingent on obtaining commanding officer approval, Sports Council Secretariat officials stated that they do not believe that the services' readiness is negatively affected by servicemembers participating in the Armed Forces Sports Program.¹⁵

We acknowledge that the measurement of the program's performance may be difficult, but DOD's participation data do not include targets allowing program performance to be measured and do not assess the intended benefits of the program. Without effective performance measures that demonstrate linkage with the program's goals or mission, have measurable targets, and an established baseline of data, DOD will be unable to effectively demonstrate the benefits of the program and will not have the information needed to ensure that the department is allocating resources to its highest priority efforts.

DOD's Implementation of Armed Forces Sports Program's Roles and Responsibilities Differs from Those Currently Defined in Policy

The roles and responsibilities that are currently being implemented for the Armed Forces Sports Program differ from the program's roles and responsibilities specified in DOD policy. DOD Instruction 1330.04 and the Armed Forces Sports Council's standard operating procedures specify that the Armed Forces Sports Program includes training or national qualifying events in preparation for participation in International Military Sports Council events, the Pan American Games, the Olympic Games,

¹⁵ During our review, we spoke with commanding officers who had a servicemember who previously had participated in the program, and they confirmed that they have the authority to approve or deny a servicemember's participation in the program, and stated that they would not approve participation if it would negatively affect their unit's readiness. Further, commanding officers we spoke with stated that they monitor the participation of servicemembers who are authorized to participate in the Armed Forces Sports Program and may recall a member if the needs of the unit change, but data are not tracked to show how many times this has occurred.

the Paralympic Games, and other international competitions.¹⁶ While this is how the program is defined in key program documents, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Sports Council Secretariat, and service officials stated that all responsibilities, including costs, associated with servicemember participation in the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games are, in practice, handled by the services.¹⁷

According to these officials, the program's primary objective when it was established was to support the Olympic movement by providing servicemembers the opportunity to compete in the 1948 London Olympic Games. Further, DOD Instruction 1330.04 specifies that the Armed Forces Sports Program includes, among other things, training or national qualifying events in preparation for participation in the Pan American Games, the Olympic Games, and the Paralympic Games. However, officials stated that over time, the services assumed responsibility for their respective servicemembers' participation in the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense and Sports Council Secretariat officials stated they plan to review DOD Instruction 1330.04 and make necessary updates but did not indicate what specific changes would be made to clarify the program's roles and responsibilities. Further, these officials stated that they were not sure whether they would remove the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games from the Armed Forces Sports Council's standard operating procedures because of the potential for responsibilities to shift again in the future.

Conclusions

The Armed Forces Sports Program provides a means by which servicemember athletes can participate in national and international

¹⁶ Officials stated that even though the program does not manage servicemember participation in the Pan American, Olympic, and Paralympic Games as defined in program policies, the program manages servicemember participation in Armed Forces Sports Championships and national qualifying events that prepare servicemembers for participation in International Military Sports Council events and other international competitions.

¹⁷ DOD officials stated that the services do not bear all the costs of participation in the Olympics by servicemembers. When a servicemember makes the U.S. Olympic Team, the U.S. Olympic Committee funds the servicemember's expenses for lodging, food, travel, and team apparel, while the service funds the temporary duty.

competitions while representing the Armed Forces. However, the program currently does not have performance measures with linkage, measurable targets, or a baseline. Without measures that address the desired outcomes and include these attributes, it will be difficult for DOD and Congress to determine whether the program is meeting the desired goals or benefiting readiness, recruitment, and retention.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve the management of the Armed Forces Sports Program and better determine whether the program is achieving its desired results, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to develop and implement performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program that measure the desired outcomes for the program and, at a minimum, demonstrate linkage to the program's goals or mission, have a measurable target, and include a baseline that can be used to demonstrate program performance.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

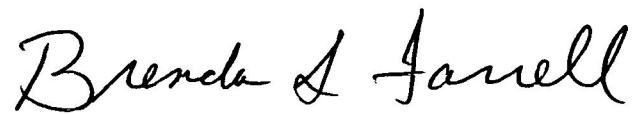
We provided a draft of this report to DOD and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for review and comment. In its comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with our recommendation and their comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendix II. DOD and DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report as appropriate.

DOD concurred with our recommendation to develop and implement performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program that measure the desired outcomes for the program and, at a minimum, demonstrate linkage to the program's goals or mission, have a measurable target, and include a baseline that can be used to demonstrate program performance but also noted potential limitations on establishing measures. Specifically, DOD said that it will explore the development and implementation of performance outcome measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program and that it will review Department of Defense Instruction 1330.04 for potential opportunities to incorporate appropriate guidance regarding performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program. However, DOD stated that there are limitations on establishing metrics for several of the program's objectives, such as

goodwill and positive image, which are challenging to measure. Further, DOD said that quantifying outcomes for some objectives, such as the “spirit” of the program, also will be challenging, but that the lack of a performance measurement does not negate the importance of pursuing objectives that contribute to demonstrating the program’s overall effectiveness. In our report, we acknowledged that measurement of the program’s performance may be difficult but also necessary to produce the evidence-based support that is needed to objectively demonstrate how the specific activities that comprise a program are contributing to its effectiveness. Exploring the development and implementation of performance measures and reviewing DOD guidance regarding performance measures are positive steps, but we continue to believe that DOD needs to develop and implement performance measures in order to demonstrate if the Armed Forces Sports Program is being implemented effectively. While it may be challenging to develop performance measures, our prior work has demonstrated that even for highly complex areas such as DOD’s reform of its medical health system and prevention of sexual assault, developing and implementing performance measures can be done, and if implemented correctly, can enhance decision-making. Until DOD does develop and implement performance measures, it will be unable to effectively demonstrate the benefits of the program and will not have the data needed to monitor the program, make decisions about program management and ensure that the department is allocating resources to its highest priority efforts.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of Homeland Security; the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Commandants of the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard; and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff members who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



Brenda S. Farrell
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of the Department of Defense's (DOD) implementation of the Armed Forces Sports Program, we reviewed DOD and service (including the Coast Guard) policies and procedures related to the administration of and participation in the program. We interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat ("Sports Council Secretariat"), and each service about these policies and procedures.

We also discussed the extent to which any performance measures had been established to assess the program's effectiveness, including any effects of program participation on the services' readiness. We obtained and analyzed data from DOD on the number of active-duty servicemembers, by service, who had participated in the Armed Forces Sports Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016 as well as on the number of days servicemembers had spent away from their respective units participating in the program during the same time frame. We also obtained and analyzed data from DOD on the number of DOD and Coast Guard civilians who had supported the Armed Forces Sports Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016. Further, we obtained and analyzed data from DOD on program costs for fiscal years 2014 through 2016, including the administrative, travel, and salary costs incurred by the Armed Forces Sports Council Secretariat, program-related travel and salary costs for each service, and participation costs of travel participants, which according to program officials include transportation and lodging costs. The time frame of the participant and cost data that we obtained differs because DOD officials stated that fiscal year 2014 was the most recent year that cost data were available from all the services. Based on responses from the Armed Forces Sports Program office to data reliability questionnaires, we determined that the data we obtained were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this review. We compared DOD's policy for

the program against the federal standards for internal control¹ that state, among other things, that managers should establish activities to monitor performance measures. Additionally, we compared DOD's participant data—the department's measure for demonstrating the effectiveness of the Armed Forces Sports Program—with our prior work on performance measurement to determine the extent to which these data exhibit the ten key attributes of successful performance measures.²

To obtain servicemembers' perspectives on the Armed Forces Sports Program and its effect on individual readiness, we interviewed 13 randomly selected servicemembers who had participated in the program in calendar year 2015 since, at that time, this was the most recent year for which the program had a complete set of participant data. To understand any effect that a servicemembers' participation may have had on unit readiness, we also interviewed ten commanding officers who had approved one of the randomly selected servicemembers' requests to participate in the Armed Forces Sports Program. While the information that we obtained was nongeneralizable, it provided perspectives from individuals with first-hand experience with the Armed Forces Sports Program.

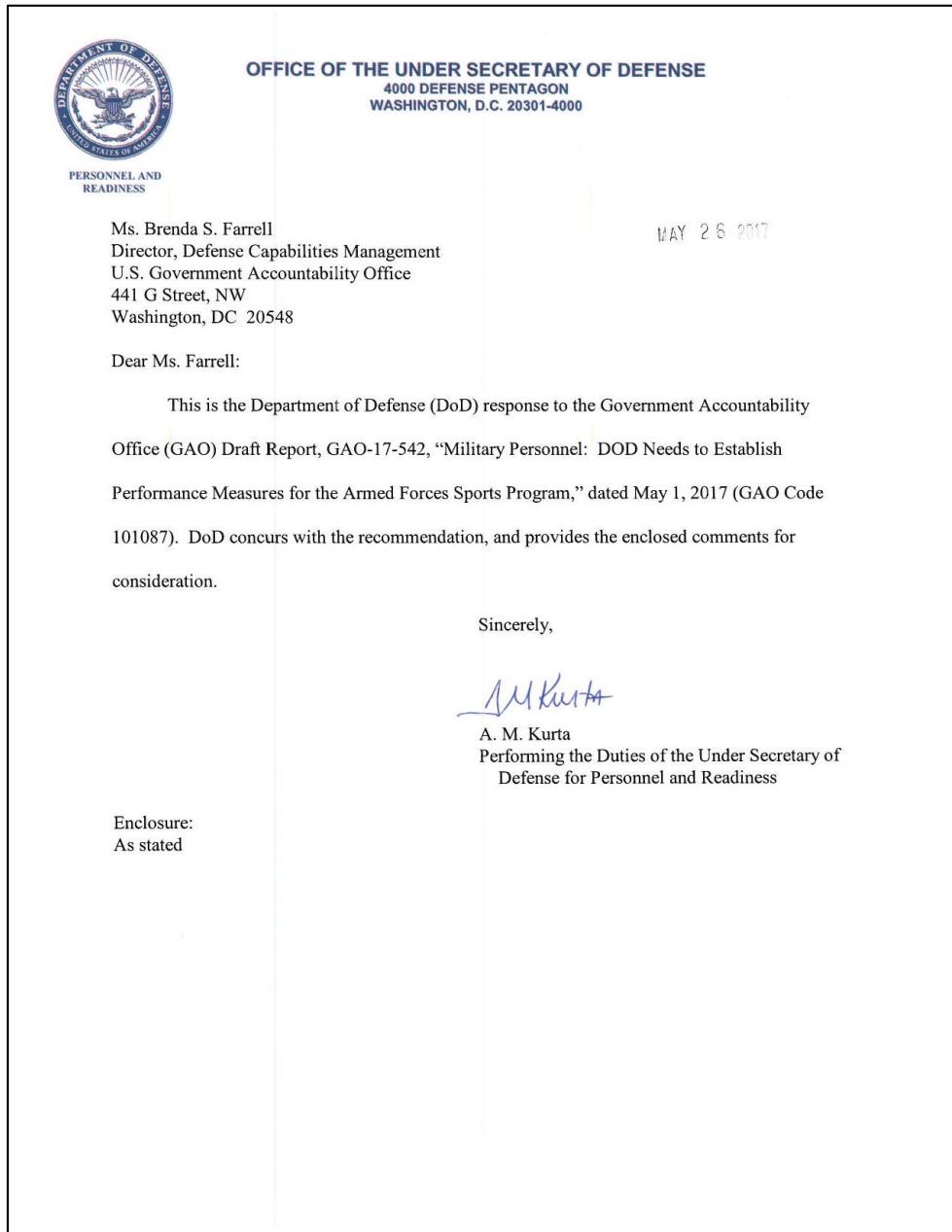
We also reviewed DOD and service policies and procedures to identify roles and responsibilities associated with implementing the Armed Forces Sports Program. Further, we interviewed officials within each organization to discuss how designated roles and responsibilities were being implemented.

¹ See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.; Sept. 10, 2014) and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.; Nov. 1, 1999). Internal control is a process affected by an entity's oversight body, management, and other personnel that provides reasonable assurance that the objectives of an entity will be achieved.

² Our prior work emphasizes key attributes of performance measures, such as measurable targets and baseline data. See GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002), p. 45, for a description of how we developed the attributes of effective performance goals and measures. We also reviewed the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. See also *GPRA Performance Reports*, [GAO/GGD-96-66R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 1996); *Missile Defense: Opportunity to Refocus on Strengthening Acquisition Management*, [GAO-13-432](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 26, 2013); *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011); and *Agency Performance Plans: Examples of Practices That Can Improve Usefulness to Decisionmakers*, [GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-69](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 26, 1999).

We conducted this performance audit from August 2016 to June 2017 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 1, 2017
GAO-17-542 (GAO CODE 101087)**

“MILITARY PERSONNEL: DOD NEEDS TO ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR THE ARMED FORCES SPORTS PROGRAM”

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION 1: To improve the management of the Armed Forces Sports Program and better determine where the program is achieving its desired results, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to develop and implement performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program that measure the desired outcomes for the program and, at a minimum, demonstrate linkage, to the program’s goals and mission, have measurable targets, and include a baseline that can be used to demonstrate program performance.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The Department will explore the development and implementation of performance outcome measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program. However, there are limitations on establishing metrics for several of the objectives listed on page 11 of the draft report. For example, it will be challenging to measure “goodwill” and “positive image;” however, these remain desirable objectives, especially when working with members of the international community. Similarly, quantifying outcomes for some objectives such as the “spirit” of the program also will be challenging, but the lack of a performance measurement does not negate the importance of pursuing objectives that contribute to demonstrating the program’s overall effectiveness. The Department will review Department of Defense Instruction 1330.04 for potential opportunities to incorporate appropriate guidance regarding performance measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program, where possible, and require the Military Departments to update their associated policies as necessary.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kimberly A. Mayo, Assistant Director; Christopher H. Conrad; Mae Frances Jones; Stephanie Moriarty; Shahrzad Nikoo; Shane T. Spencer; Andrew Stavisky; and John W. Van Schaik made key contributions to this report.

Appendix IV: Accessible Data

Agency Comment Letter

Accessible Text for Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense

Page 1

PERSONNEL AND READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

Ms. Brenda S. Farrell

Director, Defense Capabilities Management U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548

MAY 25

Dear Ms. Farrell:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GA0-17-542, "Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Establish Performance Measures for the Armed Forces Sports Program," dated May 1, 2017 (GAO Code 101087). DoD concurs with the recommendation, and provides the enclosed comments for consideration.

Sincerely,

A. M. Kurta

Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosure: As stated

Page 2

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 1, 2017 GA0-17-542 (GAO CODE 101087)

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