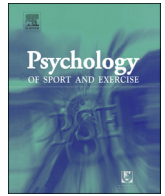




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Psychology of Sport and Exercise

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

Parenting in youth sport: A position paper on parenting expertise

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 September 2013

Received in revised form

27 January 2014

Accepted 1 March 2014

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Sport parenting

Expertise

Youth sport

Talent development

ABSTRACT

Objectives: In line with the aims of this special issue, the purpose of this paper is to forward a position on the concept of sport parenting expertise through the presentation of six key postulates.

Design: Literature review and position statement.

Method: By adopting methods associated with an academic position paper, a statement is presented that we believe encapsulates sport parenting expertise. Six key postulates of parenting expertise, formulated from critically reviewing and interpreting relevant literature, are then presented.

Results: We propose that sport parenting expertise is dependent on the degree to which parents demonstrate a range of competencies; namely that parents, (a) select appropriate sporting opportunities and provide necessary types of support, (b) understand and apply appropriate parenting styles, (c) manage the emotional demands of competitions, (d) foster healthy relationships with significant others, (e) manage organizational and developmental demands associated with sport participation, and, (f) adapt their involvement to different stages of their child's athletic career.

Conclusion: Expertise in sport parenting requires parents to develop knowledge and utilize a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational skills in order to support their child, manage themselves, and operate effectively in the wider youth sport environment. Recommendations for applied researchers to further investigate these postulates and substantiate the components of sport parenting expertise are offered.

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Over the past decade, scientific investigations of youth sport have been largely informed by two differing yet complimentary research strands that champion the role of sport within important social, health, economic, and commercial outcomes. The first strand focuses on the processes of talent development in sport. Such research is often driven by the acknowledgment that professional, international, and Olympic success leads to substantial economic rewards and pride for the athlete and the country he or she is representing (Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007). With such a focus on results in the elite sport industry, an understanding of the mechanisms behind successful talent development has represented a fertile and critical challenge for researchers (see Bailey & Morley, 2006; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010a, 2010b).

The second of these strands focuses on youth sport as a vehicle for positive youth development. That is, research focuses on experiential learning of psychosocial competencies and life skills

through sport that enable young people to effectively manage adolescent-to-adult transitions and positively contribute to society (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Holt, 2008). An important and additional element to this strand is the role of youth sport participation in physical activity and health outcomes, beyond the development of cognitive, social, and emotional assets (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Johnston, Harwood, & Minniti, 2013).

Although the fundamental goals of each research strand bear divergence on philosophical grounds, there is congruence with respect to the role significant others play in facilitating both 'talent' and 'positive youth' development objectives (Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004). Namely, the quality of the environment shaping the child-athlete through appropriate adult role models and supportive relationships is perceived as vital to the growth of psychosocial attributes relevant to each goal (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; MacNamara et al., 2010b). Two of the main adult protagonists in these fields of research are coaches and parents, and there is burgeoning literature devoted to the roles, experiences, and behaviors of these significant others (e.g., Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2001; Côté, 1999; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

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Given the importance of coaches in the lives of young athletes, it is unsurprising that extensive research attention has been given to understanding the components, development, and outcomes of coaching expertise (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Horton, Baker, & Deakin, 2005; Portrac, Jones, & Armour, 2002). Although the academic study of sport parenting is less extensive and historically established than sport coaching, the literature reflecting parental influence and involvement in youth sport has grown substantially in recent years. Researchers have not only explored the perceptions and consequences of sport parental behaviors (e.g., Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009; Leff & Hoyle, 1995), but have also begun to demonstrate the complexities and challenges of being a sport parent (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008; Knight & Holt, 2014).

Nevertheless, a potential limitation of the literature on sport parents is the absence of a specific focus on the notion of parenting expertise. Over the last decade, through a collection of separate studies, scholarly knowledge has been shared on the behavioral preferences of athletes regarding their parents at competitions (Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011; Omlil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011), coaches perceptions of positive and negative parenting practices (e.g., Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006, 2008), and adaptive versus less adaptive parenting styles and practices (e.g., Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010a, 2010b; Sapieja, Dunn, & Holt, 2011). Researchers have also established lines of research into parents' experiences, stressors, and emotions associated with parenting in youth sport (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Omlil & LaVoi, 2012; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). This body of research has separately illustrated several pertinent components of parenting in sport. However, researchers have not taken an integrated approach that synthesizes parental strengths and configures the concept of sport parenting expertise as a totality. Therefore, in line with the literature examining coaching expertise, the purpose of this paper is to forward a preliminary position on the concept of sport parenting¹ expertise.

In keeping with the process of an academic position paper (see Tucker, Derelian, & Rouner, 1997), we will first present a statement that we believe encapsulates sport parenting expertise. Then we will build the case for our position by critically reviewing and interpreting relevant literature, and by applying our academic and professional experience in youth sport. Literature on parenting in sport was identified through a keyword and abstract search using the terms sport or athletic and words relating to parenting, such as parent, family, mother, father, son, daughter, stepfather, stepmother, stepparent² in Scopus, PsycInfo, and SportDiscus. The search, limited to journal articles and dissertations written in English, returned 1996 articles in Scopus, 3114 articles in PsycInfo, and 1442 articles in SportDiscus. All article titles were reviewed and unrelated articles were discarded, leaving 95 articles in Scopus, 239 in PsycInfo, and 256 in SportDiscus. The abstracts of remaining articles were then reviewed and any duplicate or unrelated articles were removed. The remaining articles were used to guide the development of the subsequent position statement.

Using a similar method to Côté, Lidor, and Hackfort (2009) our case will be made by proposing six postulates that we believe represent the components of parenting expertise and that are based on our interpretations of the available literature. Within each postulate, and conventional to position statement methodology, we will appraise the strength of the supporting literature and propose

recommendations for further research where our evidence is weaker. Finally, we will summarize the key theoretical considerations by drawing together the postulates to provide a broader overview of sport parenting expertise and will highlight the implications of our position for practitioners, organizations, and researchers interested in this area of study.

Sport parenting expertise

We propose expertise in sport parenting is demonstrated through parental involvement that increases the chances for children to achieve their sporting potential, have a positive psychosocial experience, and develop a range of positive developmental outcomes. Such involvement requires parents to develop specific intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational skills that are demonstrated through fulfillment of the following six postulates.

Postulate no 1: parents select the appropriate sporting opportunities for their child and provide necessary types of social support

We believe a primary component of sport parenting expertise is a parent's ability to provide their child with appropriate opportunities in sport and offer the types of support that allows children to optimize their enjoyment and performance. As one of three key sport parenting roles ascribed by Fredricks and Eccles (2004), there is extensive evidence of how parents serve as providers of a young athlete's experience (e.g., Baxter-Jones & Maffuli, 2003; Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Hellstedt, 1987; Rees & Hardy, 2000; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, we contend that parents with greater expertise not only support children's opportunities, but also select the sporting opportunities that are appropriate for their children.

Selection of correct opportunities

Our contention is informed by studies within the talent development literature (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), which have indicated that children progress through different stages as they seek to become elite performers, and these stages are characterized by different factors. The extent to which parents provide children with opportunities that align with these different stages is likely to influence the extent to which children can achieve their sporting potential (cf., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999). The appropriateness of opportunities children are afforded can also influence the longevity of children's sporting involvement, their psychosocial experiences, and the chances of experiencing injury (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008).

For example, research has indicated that children who participate in a range of fun and enjoyable sporting activities early in their career (rather than specialize within one sport or commit to structured training and extensive competition) are likely to have more positive experiences and better developmental outcomes (Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009). Similarly, studies with elite performers consistently illustrate the value of sampling a variety of sports during their formative sporting years (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wuerth et al., 2004). Thus, by interpreting the available literature, there is growing scientific support to propose that during children's initial sporting experiences expertise in sport parenting is displayed when parents initiate opportunities for their child to participate in a range of activities, with limited competition and a focus on learning through play.

As children progress it is apparent that those children seeking to achieve an elite level begin to decrease their range of activities and

¹ Parent/parenting is used to refer to parents, legal guardians and primary caregivers.

² Boolean search was conducted for all terms.

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