

REASONS FOR DROPOUT IN YOUTH SOCCER: A COMPARISON WITH OTHER TEAM SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of our study was to identify the main reasons for dropout in young soccer players and to compare withdrawal motives to those rated important by participants in other team sports. Dropouts (150 males and 159 females, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years) were administered the Questionnaire of Reasons for Attrition by Gould, Feltz, Horn and Weiss (1982). Represented were youth who participated in the sport of soccer (n=127), basketball (n=122), and volleyball (n=60). The most important reasons for attrition from the different team sports were having other things to do, dislike of the coach, and lack of team spirit. Reasons related to the team work were also given high ratings. Less important reasons concerned old age, rewards and competition. Although discriminant analysis revealed some differences between sports, the finding remains that both conflict of interests and aspects of the sports environment are major motives for withdrawal from team sports.

Key Words: Dropout, team sport, soccer.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio fue identificar las razones para el abandono en jóvenes jugadores de fútbol y comparar los motivos de abandono con los descritos en practicantes de otros deportes colectivos. Los sujetos (150 varones y 159 mujeres, con edades comprendidas entre los 14 y los 18 años) respondieron la versión española del Questionnaire of Reasons for Attrition de Gould, Feltz, Horn y Weiss (1982). La muestra estaba constituida por practicantes de fútbol (n=127), baloncesto (n=122), y voleibol (n=60). Las razones consideradas como más importantes para el abandono fueron el tener otras cosas que hacer, las malas relaciones con el entrenador y la falta de espíritu de equipo. También alcanzaron puntuaciones elevadas los motivos relacionados con el trabajo de equipo. Las razones a las que se otorgaba menos importancia se relacionaban con edad excesiva, recompensas y competición. Aunque el análisis discriminante puso de manifiesto algunas diferencias entre deportes, tanto el conflicto de intereses como los aspectos relacionados con el ambiente deportivo eran siempre las razones más valoradas para el abandono de la práctica.

Palabras clave: Abandono, deportes colectivos, fútbol.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical educators, parents, coaches and psychologists have long argued that children's involvement in physical activity and sport leads to beneficial outcomes such as discipline, self-confidence, competence in sport skills and interpersonal skills (Weiss y Duncan, 1992; Coakley, 1998). This is the reason why they have shown a strong interest in understanding the major motives young athletes have for participating in organized sports (Weiss y Ferrer Caja, 2002). To help in the accomplishment of this goal, Gill, Gross, y Huddleston (1983) developed a Participation Motivation Inventory that has been widely used to rate the relative importance of various reasons for youth participation in sport. Results indicate the presence of a fairly consistent set of motivational factors that include competence-related motives, skill abilities, fun, affiliation or social reasons. The same motives do not emerge in all studies and it has been found that reasons for participation motivation may depend upon factors such as age (Gould y Horn, 1984; Brodtkin y Weiss, 1990), gender (Gill et al., 1983; Buonamano, Cei, y Mussino, 1995; Salguero, González-Boto, Tuero, y Márquez, 2003a), perceived ability (Ryckman and Hamel, 1993), type and level of sport (Klint y Weiss, 1986; White y Duda, 1994; Salselas, González-Boto, Tuero, y Márquez, 2007) or cultural environment (Buonamano et al. 1995; Wang y Wiese-Bjornstal, 1997; Kolt, Kirbi, Bar-Eli, Blummenstein, Chadka, Liu, y Kerr, 1999).

While many studies have provided valuable information about the relative importance of various participation motives, less research has been concerned with the identification of motives influencing dropout from a variety of youth sports (Patriksson, 1988; Lindner, Johns, y Butcher, 1991; Hoener, 2002; Butcher, Lindner, y Johns, 2002; Molinero, Salguero, Tuero, Alvarez, y Márquez, 2006; Salguero, González-Boto, Tuero, y Márquez, 2003b; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, y Deakin, 2008a). It has been estimated that over one third of all participants between ten and seventeen years of age withdraw from their sports every year (Gould y Horn, 1984) and this large percentage represents many millions of youngsters in Europe or North America. A children's decision to continue participating or to withdraw seems to be influenced by many motives, including conflict of interests, lack of success or improvement, dislike of the coach, fun and others (Tuffey, 1996). An adequate knowledge of reasons for dropout is necessary to enable youth sport leaders and coaches to design sport programs and athletic experiences for participants that fulfill the athletes' needs and contribute positively to their personal development (Ferreira y Armstrong, 2002), and may also help to develop tools for predicting potential withdrawal from youth sport (Nache, Bar-Eli, Perrin, y Laurencelle, 2005).

Soccer is one the most popular sports in Spain, as in most other European and South American countries. A large number of children are involved in the practice

of soccer both in school and sport clubs and as the number of young participants increases there are also an increasing number of subjects discontinuing their involvement. The purpose of our study was to identify the main reasons for dropout in young soccer players and to compare reasons for withdrawal with those rated important by participants in other team sports.

METHODS

Participants

The investigation surveyed 309 dropouts (150 males and 159 females) ranging in age from 14 to 18 years. The criterion for dropping is that the individual no longer is active in sport in a sports club (Molinero et al., 2006). Represented in the sample were youth who participated in the sport of soccer (N=127, 78 males and 49 females), basketball (N=122, 47 males and 75 females), and volleyball (N=60, 25 males and 35 females), competing at a local or regional level. The age when the former athletes discontinued participation ranged from 9 to 15 years (average 13.5 years). The subjects were drawn from different geographical areas within Castilla y León, Spain.

Instrument

Subjects answered the Questionnaire of Reasons for Attrition of Gould, Feltz, Horn, y Weiss (1982). The original questionnaire included 32 reasons for attrition. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish using the parallel back-translation procedure by individuals that were familiar with participation and dropout studies in sport. The scale was then examined by coaches that were asked to suggest changes to the wording of the items and the directions for responding to them. The coaches expressed some difficulty interpreting three items that were deleted, resulting in the 29-item questionnaire (Salguero et al., 2003b; Molinero et al., 2006) used in the current study. Responses to each of the items were given on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). The construct-related validity of the questionnaire was estimated by means of a principal factor analysis of the data obtained from 66 subjects. This produced six factors based on eigenvalues greater than 1.0 criterion that accounted for 59% of the total variance. The internal consistency assessed by means of Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.58 to 0.87 (Salguero, Tuero, y Márquez, 2003).

Procedures

The authors contacted the directors of sport clubs, explained the nature of the study and asked permission to contact former athletes from club lists. From the original list of subjects contacted, a 78% of youth agreed to participate and were recruited

for the study. Subjects were informed that participation was voluntary and informed consent was received. Parents of subjects younger than 18 were given a summary of the study and were asked to give their permission for their children's participation. Participants fill out the instrument themselves in the presence of authors of the study. They were asked to answer each item as honestly as possible. Anonymity was guaranteed and assurance that all data would be kept strictly confidential was given.

In addition to answering the Questionnaire of Reasons for Attrition, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing demographic information such as gender, age, years in competitive sport, and sport played.

Data analysis

Means and standard deviation (SD) of individual items were calculated for the entire sample and for subjects participating in each of the team sports. Scores for all items were used as dependent variables in multivariate analyses of variance (Stevens, 1992). Significant multivariate effects were followed up with univariate analyses and stepwise discriminant analysis using Wilks' method.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows age of first involvement, age of dropout, and age when interviewed, for subjects participating in the different team sports. A significant multivariate effect was obtained for age of involvement ($F_{2,306}=20.03$, $p<0.001$). Univariate analysis revealed a significant lower age for soccer players ($p<0.001$) and a significant higher age for volleyball players ($p<0.001$). Although there was also a main effect for age at dropout ($F_{2,306}=19.16$, $p<0.005$), values were significantly different only for volleyball players vs basketball players ($p<0.01$). No significant effect was observed for age when answering the questionnaire ($F_{2,306}=2.18$, $p=0.058$).

TABLE 1
Age at involvement, dropout, and application of the questionnaire

	<i>Age of first involvement</i>	<i>Age of dropout</i>	<i>Age when interviewed</i>
Soccer (N=127)	8.1±2.0	13.6±1.8	15.3±1.4
Basketball (N=122)	9.3±2.1	13.1±2.0	15.0±1.7
Volleyball (N=60)	10.0±2.2	14.0±1.7	15.4±1.1

TABLE 2
Mean and standard deviations on the individual items
of the questionnaire for all sports combined

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Had other things to do	2.77	1.47
Did not like the coach	2.40	1.55
Not enough team spirit	2.18	1.35
No teamwork	2.00	1.30
Did not get enough recognition	1.91	1.27
Not interested in me	1.90	1.27
The training was too hard	1.87	1.07
Was not popular	1.85	1.23
Did not like to compete	1.84	1.03
Did not win enough	1.84	1.14
Not as good as wanted to be	1.83	1.04
Did not compete enough	1.82	1.21
Not enough fun	1.78	1.13
My skills did not improve	1.77	1.08
Not able to be with my friends	1.76	1.13
Did not feel important enough	1.76	1.09
Not in good enough shape	1.75	1.05
Wanted to play another sport	1.75	1.13
Did not travel enough	1.75	1.32
Not exciting enough	1.74	1.03
Did not like being on the team	1.71	1.22
Friends no longer compete	1.72	1.13
Did not like the pressure	1.71	1.17
Parents or friends no longer wanted me to compete	1.66	1.21
It was boring	1.40	0.86
Did not receive enough rewards	1.58	1.02
Did not meet new friends	1.52	1.01
I was too old	1.40	0.92
Did not like the awards	1.61	1.06

Means and standard deviations for the individual items of the questionnaire in the whole sample are summarized in Table 2. Reasons given a higher importance for dropout were “had other things to do” (mean rate 2.77), “did not like coach” (2.40), “not enough team spirit” (2.18), “no team work (2.00) and “did not get enough recognition” (1.91). The less important reasons were “did not like the awards” (1.40), “I was too old” (1.40), “did not met new friends” (1.52), “did not like to compete” (1.54), and “it was boring” (1.57).

In order to determine whether attrition motives could be differentiated by gender, age and type of sport, scores for all items were used as dependent variables in a 2 (subject gender) x 3 (type of sport) MANCOVA, with age at dropout as covariate (Tabachnick y Fidell, 2000; Stevens, 1992). The effect of the covariate itself was non-significant ($F_{9,274}=1.19$, $p=0.132$), and no significant effect was ob-

tained for gender ($F_{29,274}=1.01$, $p=0.441$). Results revealed a significant multivariate effect for participation in the different team sports ($F_{58,548}=1.56$, $p<0.007$).

When all items entered the discriminant analysis (Wilks lambda=0.69, $F_{58,556}=1.99$, $p<0.001$), standardized coefficients and univariate analysis indicated that six motives differentiated the groups (Table 3). "Had other things to do" or "Wanted to play another sport" were given the highest ratings by volleyball players. "It was boring" or "Did not get enough recognition" were rated higher by basketball players, and "Not interested on me" or "Parents or friends no longer wanted me to compete" by soccer players.

TABLE 3
Discriminant analysis of differences between team sports

	p	Discriminant coefficeint	Mean Soccer	Mean Baskettbal	Mean Volleyball
Not interested on me	0.006	0.20	2.54	2.21	3.36
It was boring	0.004	0.26	1.80	1.45	1.95
Wanted to play another sport	0.045	-0.39	1.77	1.99	1.25
Had other things to do	0.001	-0.63	1.81	1.52	1.76
Did not get enough recognition	0.011	0.71	1.77	2.72	1.60
Parents or friends no longer	0.031	0.46	2.03	1.22	1.40

The seven more important reasons for dropout in soccer players are given in table 4. Rank, given in brackets, is compared with the other two sports. The three main reasons given in all cases were "Had other things to do", "Did not like the coach", and "Not enough team spirit". "No team work" was rated fourth by basketball players, and seventh by soccer and volleyball players.

TABLE 4
Most important reasons for dropout in the different team sports

	soccer	baskettbal	volleyball
Had other things to do	2.54 (1)	2.72 (1)	3.36 (1)
Did not like the coach	2.33 (2)	2.54 (2)	2.26 (2)
Not enough team spirit	2.05 (3)	2.34 (3)	2.11 (3)
Not interested on me	2.03 (4)	1.99 (8)	1.40 (11)
The training was too hard	1.93 (5)	1.88 (11)	1.70 (6)
No team work	1.85 (7)	2.35 (4)	1.65 (7)
Did not win enough	1.87 (6)	1.93 (9)	1.61 (8)

DISCUSSION

When identifying the most important reasons for attrition it is particularly noticeable that two main factors basically applied to participants in our study: conflict

of interests and dislike of the coach. The former is the most frequently encountered reason in the literature (Gould et al. 1982; Klint y Weiss, 1986; Burton y Martens, 1989; Johns, Lindner, y Wolkof, 1990; Martin, 1997, Salguero et al., 2003b), including youth soccer players (Narciso, Otto, y Mielke, 1984). Basic work for a later professional career normally takes place in the same phase of life in which it is necessary to devote a lot of time to training and competition in many sports. This often coincides with the phase of school and/or higher education and could explain why the reason for dropout most often adduced is the time problem.

The relationship between athlete and coach is extremely important in competitive sport (Barber, Sukhi, y White, 1999). It has been found that no less than 75% of the female athletes and 57% of the males athletes estimate the coach's share in the athletic success as high or very high (Bussmann, 2004). The importance for dropout of an inadequate coach-athlete interaction has been previously shown in swimmers (Petlichkoff, 1992; Martin, 1997; Salguero et al., 2003b). Our data confirm that the coach may be not only responsible for a successful career in competitive team sport but may also be responsible for the termination of a career. Excessive control and negative feedback are aspect that can lead to increased dropout rates among child athletes, because children are unable to put the situation in perspective and begin feeling down about their performance (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, y Deakin, 2008b). A study on dropout in adolescent swimmers has shown that those who persisted in swimming perceived their coaches as more autonomy-supportive, while those who withdrew perceived their coaches as more controlling (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, y Briere, 2001). For this reason coaches should focus their comments to the children on positive aspects of performance and not on mistakes or on the character of the young athlete (Barnet, Smoll, y Smith, 1992).

Team work and team spirit were also rated high by players in the different team sports tested. Importance given to the team atmosphere could be linked to personality characteristics that determine the choice of participation in individual or team sports. It is known that team-sport athletes tend to be more extroverted than individual-sport athletes (Morgan, 1972) and they are also more field-dependent, being socially aware and more affected by the social environment (Caño y Márquez, 1995). This further supports the relevant role played by the coach. Children should be part of a team that is comprised of other children of the same skill level, because if this is not the case, mismatching can occur and a child can feel left out or have a sense of being left behind. Moreover, the environment must be as carefree and enjoyable as possible and the athletic experience fun and rewarding.

Over organization is another situation that can lead to high dropout reasons and coaches must ensure that practices are not boring or that children do not become physi-

cally inactive. Lack of fun and boredom were not considered as most important reasons by participants in our study. However, boredom was a reason rated higher in soccer players when compared to subjects practicing other team sports. Boring practices can remove the fun component from the athletic experience (Tuffey, 1996; Gould, Medbery, y Tuffey, 2001; Wall y Côté, 2007). The coaches should concentrate on more active teaching and drills than just simply talking the children through it. Overworking the children and too much pressure to perform well can also increase dropout rates (Butcher et al., 2002). Coaches should avoid the two extremes of the spectrum in order to facilitate the learning process and to stimulate the enjoyment that young athletes can experience.

In summary, our data indicate that motives for sport dissociation in youth soccer programs are similar to other team sports and to those previously reported in different sport situations, confirming that not only dissatisfaction with elements within the sport itself, but also non sport influences are strong motives for discontinuing involvement. The role played by coaches can have an important effect on whether or not a child chooses to continue with sport or to withdraw, and an adequate structuring of the training environment is of the highest importance to foster continued participation.

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