

## Analysis of the needs for intervention in parents of young athletes

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### Abstract:

The role of parents in sports initiation is essential for proper athletic and personal growth of children and adolescents who venture into the complicated world of sport and physical activity. Parents play an important role in the formation of the child's personal characteristics. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the needs for intervention with parents of young athletes. In the study 131 parents of sons/daughters who play football, basketball and gymnastics have participated. It has been administered a battery of questionnaires to measure cognitive and affective aspects, and those concerning guidelines and actions. The results show that it is necessary to intervene in the formation of parents to optimize the comprehensive sports development of their children. Among the areas for improvement there are included the establishment of goals and objectives, the negative feelings and feelings of indifference, the competition pressure, the transfer of responsibility and autonomy, the respect for significant others (other parents, coaches and referees) and conflict resolution.

**Keywords:** Parental educational behavior in sports, intervention with parents, intervention in sports.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the main objectives of the youth system is to promote and provide integral development for young athletes. To achieve this, it is important to work with the principal agents involved in the athletic and integral development of young athletes—including parents (Smoll, 1991). The role of parents in sports initiation is essential for the proper athletic and personal growth of children and adolescents who venture into the complicated world of sport and physical activity (Ortín, 2009), as they play a very important role in the formation of the personal characteristics of the young athlete (Cruz, Boixadós, Torregrosa and Mimbreno, 1996; Romero, Garrido and Zagalaz, 2009).

**Objective:** The objective of this study is to analyze the ideas and educational practices of parents on the sports development of their children and to detect needs for interventions when these practices could be improved.

### METHOD

A total of 131 parents of children who play soccer, basketball and gymnastics participated in this study. The COPADE questionnaire was used (Lorenzo, 2012; Lorenzo, Cubero and López, 2012, 2013). This is a set of Likert-type tests (scales of 1 to 5) to measure parents' attitudes towards the athletic activ-

ities of their children. Some of the aspects evaluated include cognitive variables like the reasons for doing sports; competition as a way to do better at the sport or to achieve results; the achievability of the parent's expectations and goals; and satisfaction with the results obtained. There are also emotional variables (feelings associated with practice and competition) and guidelines and action variables (motivation, responsibility, autonomy, respect for significant others, communication and problem resolution).

The data were gathered with informed consent at the sports schools and clubs during training and at competitions. The test was self-taken with the researchers present. Data treatment consisted in a means comparison using the SPSS v.17.0 package.

### RESULTS

The analysis of means and standard deviation corresponding to the variables described above are shown on Table 1. Aspects requiring improvement (and therefore, intervention) are those variables with an average score of 3.5 or less. A score of less than 3.5 indicates that in terms of the aspects analyzed, the parents' attitudes are poorly adjusted and could have a negative influence on the integral development of the young athletes.

With regards to the cognitive contents, the variables requiring improvement proved to be encouraging success and prioritizing results in sports competition over the process. In terms of the emotional variables, the intervention needs were negative feelings and indifference. Finally, the guideline and action variables that need improvement are pressure during competition, excessive control, disrespect for significant others and the authoritarian and permissive problem resolution styles.

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Table 1. Intervention needs for parents of athletes. Analysis of scales.

		M	DT
Cognitive	Encouraging success	3.08*	0.94
	Results-oriented	3.07*	0.80
	Process-oriented	4.12	0.71
	Achievability of goals	3.75	0.82
	Satisfaction with goals	3.88	0.81
Emotional	Pleasant feelings	4.85	0.39
	Unpleasant feelings	3.46*	1.20
	Feelings of indifference	3.44*	0.83
Guidelines	Motivation to practice	4.12	1.12
	Motivation to compete	3.15*	0.74
	Autonomy	3.80	0.85
	Control	3.15*	0.89
	Supervision	3.59	0.98
	Respect	3.41*	0.58
	Communication	3.65	0.98
	Democratic	3.96	0.85
	Authoritarian	3.08*	0.62
	Permissive	2.61*	0.94

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results show that parents require interventions in order to optimize the integral development and sports progress of athlete sons and daughters.

The results associated with encouraging success indicate that parents expect their children to be professionally successful at their sport, setting goals and objectives that turn out to be unattainable by their children. Similarly, they prioritize results in a competition as opposed to valuing the positive elements of the sports process itself or the integral development of the young athletes. It would thus be necessary to work on the negative feelings that parents experience about the suffering or lack of enthusiasm that often appear in sports in order to analyze how these feelings arise and give them effective coping strategies.

On the other hand, the aspects that were highlighted when parents were asked about specific guidelines or actions include excessive pressure to win and disrespect for referees, judges, trainers and even for other parents. These attitudes mean not respecting the actions and decisions of those responsible for the sport and they are often accompanied by critical comments, offensive gestures, insults and arguments with the other agents involved in the sports development of the young athletes. These parental behaviors on the sports field are generally associated with actions at home such as

excessive parental control over the children's preparation of their sports gear and parental planning of sports schedules, norms and healthy living habits. These behaviors, in turn, can lead to a lack of autonomy and responsibility among their children. Finally, this behavior is also reflected in authoritarian and/or permissive parenting styles that complicate healthy conflict resolution and the learning of effective strategies among children.

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