

Building Bridges Between Sport Parents and Coaches: A Focus-Group Study

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INTRODUCTION

- Youth sports is an entrenched institution in American society with over 60 percent of American youth aged 6-12 being involved in outdoor sports (Physical Activity Council, 2013).
- Significant adults in the lives of children, such as parents and coaches, play an important role in their psychosocial development and achievement motivation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Horn, 2002).
- Both parents and coaches have unique responsibilities, rights, and challenges, that the other dyad member ideally recognizes and considers in order to promote a positive parent-coach relationship (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011).
- Parents can influence a child's readiness for sport, coachability, opinion of the coach, and willingness to work with the coach; all which affect the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).
- Parental influence gradual decreases as athletes develop move through the talent development progression (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).

METHODS

- Six focus groups (N = 25; fathers = 5; mothers = 20) were conducted with recreational youth sport parents who had children between ages 5-12 at the time of the study.
- Parents were recruited using a snowball sampling procedure as well as through posted flyers on a university campus.
- Each focus group had 4-6 parents and discussions lasted from 45- 60 minutes, including ice breakers and targeted questions;
 - a) Describe the ideal relationship between a parent and youth sport coach.
 - b) Why would it be important for parents to have a good relationship with the coach?
 - c) What are the most important aspects of the parent-coach relationship?

ANALYSIS

- Focus group discussions were transcribed and then coded independently by four researchers.
- Four primary themes and ten secondary themes describing positive parent-coach interactions were agreed upon by the research team and raw data were used for support.

Roles and Boundaries

Secondary themes included:

- The friend/coach boundary
- Clear communication of roles for both parents and coaches
- The importance of parents maintaining their role

Respect

Secondary themes included:

- Letting the coach "coach"
- Fostering mutual respect
- Expecting fairness from the coach

One parent put it this way: "It's not my place to step in and say you're doing this wrong or ya know what I mean. I need to, I need to let the coach be the coach because that's first..."

Coaching Philosophy

Secondary themes included:

- Fostering a partnership between parent & coach
- Using a mastery approach

As one parent said, "it's easy to have a good relationship with that [coach] because you know that they actually care that your kid is learning how to do something or whatever that they're not focused on entirely on maybe winning."

Communication

Secondary themes included:

- Honest and open communication
- Two-way communication

DISCUSSION

- Participants expressed the desire to work with coaches in order to provide positive sport experiences and discussed their responsibilities as well as expectations for coaches, which supports previous research that parents want a coach who can effectively manage the athlete's development (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).
- These findings can be disseminated to youth sport administrators and coach educators who can use the information to design educational sessions and programming for coaches and parents that focus on positive youth sport environments.
- The results indicate the need for a formal parent meeting where parents can learn about the coaches' philosophy, the parameters for communication, and the responsibilities parents will have throughout the sport season. Additionally, coaches can learn what parents find important in their child's development and expectations parents have for the coach (Smoll et al., 2011).

Limitations

- Demographics of the sample are not representative of the general population of parents involved in youth sport.

Future Directions

- Consideration of the influence of recreational-level sports versus competitive-level sports on the interactions between coaches and parents, as well as talent development stages.

