

Preliminary communication

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Miloš Marković (Serbia)

Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Belgrade
miloscj@gmail.com

Živko Misirača (Serbia)

Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Belgrade
zile72@gmail.com

Branka Savović (Serbia)

Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Belgrade
branka.savovic@fsfv.bg.ac.rs

Sandra Radenović (Serbia)

Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Belgrade
sandra.radenovic@fsfv.bg.ac.rs

YOUNG ATHLETES' PARENTS AS PART OF SPORTS AUDIENCE

Abstract

Physical activity is exceptionally significant for a child's regular growth and development and it should be practiced from the earliest age. The importance of physical activity is further accentuated in modern society's living conditions. Technology is becoming increasingly present and children's movement is brought to a minimum. Therefore, children are included in the system of sport, where competition occupies a central role. Parents frequently attend children's training and competitions. The goal of this paper was to determine the influence of parents as part of the sports audience on children who practice sport. The authors wanted to ascertain the extent to which parents arrive at their child's training and matches in order to provide support, in what measure they interfere with the coach's work in training and matches and whether they punish

their child if it makes a mistake in a competition. Also, one of the tasks was to determine parents' opinion on whether insulting referees from the stands is a form of violence and to establish to what extent they give themselves the right to argue with referees during a children's game. Two hundred and fifty-five parents of children from five different sports, all of whom completed a survey, participated in the research. It was established that parents, in large part, interfere with the coach's work during training and matches, despite most of them replying that the coach is competent to do his job in a satisfactory manner. Regarding pressure that is put on children, a small percentage of parents punish their child if it makes a mistake. What should be a cause for concern is the reply of a large number of parents that insulting referees is not a form of violence and that they consider it a normal phenomenon, as well as the fact that one-third of the respondents had witnessed an argument between parents of opposing teams at the stands, an occurrence which is, unfortunately, becoming increasingly present at children competitions.

Keywords: children, parents, competition, sports audience.

Introduction

The significance of sport in the conditions of modern civilization should be pointed out constantly, as people are still not fully aware of the negative consequences brought along by modern society. The lack of movement disrupts some of the basic functions of the human organism, leads to a decline of bodily abilities and disorders in the organism's functioning. Regular physical activity is one of the key factors for a healthy life. Children and young people find it necessary to practice a form of physical activity, of a moderate to high intensity, lasting at least 60 minutes on an everyday basis (Ayers and Sariscsany, 2013).

A large number of children and young people practice sports. Participation in organized sports activities, which include training and competitions, implies an almost each day commitment. Energy and effort that young people invest in sport, and their love towards it, are only some of the factors that contribute to a sports activity having a large significance for the development of their psychosocial characteristics. Unfortunately, the experiences undergone by young people in sport are not always and necessarily positive. The experience of sport experts (coaches) and experts in sport (sport psychologists) indicate that motivation for practicing sport, pleasure achieved during a sport activity, and the possibility to develop and enhance competence through sport, are the key reasons for young people staying permanently active in different ways in various aspects of sport activities.

Sport activity is conducted through interactions between athletes and persons who are significant for sport. Aside from sport coaches, referees, and peers who are participants in a sport activity, significant persons for young people's sport activities are family members, especially parents (Scanlan and Lewthwaite 1984). Family is the fundamental and most important system in which the biggest number of young people are born and developed. Also, the family is the primary milieu in which children and young people socialize. Already at an early age, children most frequently receive their first information about sports from their parents. Research indicates that it is precisely the parents who make the decision that children start practicing a sport (Cote and Hay, 2002; Holt and Knight, 2014).

The theoretical framework

In this paper, sport is considered exclusively from a positive aspect, which means its helpful effects, which influence a child's development very beneficially,

are searched for and shown. Of course, there are different views of sport, especially when it comes to the top level, professional sport that may cause some health issues due to the organism's exposure to maximum effort in a prolonged time period. Certain sociological and psychological research points to the existence of the negative effects of sport, such as insults and discrimination, but they are not the topic of this paper.

Baćanac and Radovanović list some of the benefits that children and young people can receive from practicing sports. These are, above all, physical benefits, which improve motor abilities, general health, coordination, flexibility, etc. Then, there are the social benefits (development of interpersonal relationships, communication skills, creating permanent friendships, development of work habits, etc). The personal gain should also be mentioned and it is reflected in enjoyment and fun (playing, socializing, competing...), self-discipline, commitment, and perseverance which are taught; the decreased likelihood of forming unhealthy habits such as smoking, alcohol consumption, etc. The authors further state that it is not only the children who benefit from sport but their parents as well because they are actively involved in their child's life. They understand that their children are active and healthy, that they are having fun, that they are under the supervision and control of experts etc. However, the effects of introducing children to a sport can also be negative if the principles and rules of working with young people are not followed (Baćanac and Radovanović, 2005).

There is a high number of different factors that can awaken interest in practicing sports in young people. However, in their research (Baćanac et al, 2007, 2009), they acquired a result which states that the influence of the family is paramount. Shortly before starting school, an interest in sport is awakened. The period in which the largest number of children is introduced to the world of sports is the period between the seventh and tenth year of life, and mostly it is under the influence of family and parents who have a positive attitude toward sport.

Family is the fundamental system within which the biggest number of young athletes are developed and socialized. Children receive the first and basic information about sports from their parents when they are at an early age. Research (Côté and Hay, 2002) has shown that parents were precisely those people who decided to include the child in a sport. In most research, there is an apparent connection between parents who had actively practiced sports and their involvement in their own children's participation in sports. One such piece

of research was conducted by Kremarik (Kremarik, 2000), in which he established that the largest number of children practicing sports are from families where at least one parent had practiced a sport actively, and similar results were acquired by Seabra (Seabra et al., 2008), Koprivica (2014) and Ilić (2012).

The other line of research was related to the parents' behavior during matches in their children's competitions. In a research paper by Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011), children put their parents into three categories. The first category consisted of supportive parents who are characterized by peaceful spectating of the match, sitting, supporting, and encouraging the children. The second category involved behavior similar to the coach's and was generally marked as an undesirable category. The third category was also marked as undesirable because the parents are too active. The characteristics of this category are arguing with coaches and referees, insulting and humiliating the opposing team, and, more often than not, insulting and disparaging one's own child as well (Wolfenden and Holt 2005).

As far as interpersonal relationships of the main participants in sport are concerned, an "athletic triangle" is often used in literature. It consists of young athletes, parents, and the coach (Bass, 2008). A coach is a key person during the child's improvement in a sport and therefore his influence on the life of young athletes is enormous. Additionally, coaches also serve as factors of socialization and as a young athlete's role model. Studying the relations within the "athletic triangle", Hellstedt (1987) developed a triangulation theory. He stated that coaches working with parents who are excessively involved in sports come across the most problems. Such parents are often too protective and obstruct the coach-child relationship, whereas the family is mostly oriented around the child as a central figure. For these parents it is characteristic to often go to matches and training sessions, take over the role of coach, instruct their child to try harder, and in case of an insufficient effort by their child in a match, a verbal argument with the coach ensues, more often than not followed by a physical confrontation (Bass, 2008).

Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) obtained interesting results while researching the coach-child relationship. Parents admitted that it was sometimes difficult for them to hide negative emotions because of their child's poor performance but claimed that they were not aware that such reactions can disrupt the relationship between the child and the coach. They also stressed the importance of choosing an adequate coach. On the other hand, coaches emphasize the great power held by parents, and that it is very significant how

they use it because their behavior can disrupt the coach-child relationship in large measure. The relationship between the parents and the coach is a highly complex category. If we take into consideration that each coach has their own way of leading a group, different levels of parents' involvement in their child's athletic life, the relationship of the child with their parents and coach, it is clear that this relationship can exist in various forms. Nowadays, the aggressive behavior of the parents towards the coach is often talked about and numerous examples of verbal and physical assaults are cited. Thus, it can be said that scientific research of such behavior can contribute to the practice of a sport and the well-being of young athletes (Coakley, 2006).

Research method

The goal of the research was to establish the influence of parents as a sport audience on children practicing a sport. Through the tasks in the paper, it was meant to determine the extent to which parents attend their child's training and matches in order to give support, in what measure they obstruct the coach's work at training and matches, and whether they punish their child if it makes a mistake in a competition. Also, the goal was to determine the parents' opinion on whether insulting referees from the stands is a form of violence and to establish the extent to which they give themselves the right to debate with the referees during a children's match. A total of 255 respondents took part in the research. Out of this number, the questionnaire was completed by 134 male respondents and 121 female respondents.

Research instrument

The survey technique was used in this research. An instrument – questionnaire that the parents filled in is not standardized and had been constructed for the purposes of this research. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions. It was explained to respondents before filling in the questionnaire that it is anonymous, that obtained results shall be used for research purposes exclusively, and that it is of great significance to answer the questions as honestly as possible, so the survey results would be valid and a contribution could be made to further research related to this problem.

Research results, followed by a discussion

Research results show that 84.3% of surveyed parents attend their children's training, while a little over 90% attend their children's matches. This is a very high percentage which shows that parents are almost totally involved with their children's practice of sport. Because of such data, it is key how the parents behave during training, and especially in competitions.

Regarding the question "Do you feel that the coach is competent enough to train your child?"; most parents (85.9%) consider that coaches are competent enough to do their job, while only 6.3% of parents disagree and the remaining 7.8% declared they did not know if the coach was competent or not. Such results are very encouraging when it comes to the coach's competence, in parents' opinion, but 66.7% of respondents feel that parents interfere with the coach's work at training and matches. This question is connected to the next one, from which it is apparent that almost 30% of parents react angrily towards the coach when he gives priority to other kids. Such behavior by the parents is absolutely not desirable and it is necessary that they let the coach lead the team. An angry reaction towards the coach when he pulls their child out of play projects a very negative image and can disrupt the delicate relationship between a child and a coach. Parents have to leave the leadership of the team in training and matches to the coach.

The question "Do you criticize your child if it makes a mistake in a match?" was answered positively by 35% (as far as 90) respondents. Out of these 90 respondents, 20 of them punish their child if it makes a mistake in a match. Such behavior by certain parents is completely unacceptable and can have a very negative influence on the children.

It can be seen that 20% of respondents argue with the coach when he pulls their child out of play, and 42% of the respondents had witnessed an argument between opposing teams' parents in the stands. This data has a negative value because it shows that arguments among parents are not a rarity. The question "Do you feel that referees deliberately make decisions to the detriment of your child?" was answered positively by 35% of respondents, and all of them shouted at the referee and made comments letting him know "how they feel about his refereeing".

Almost 70% of respondents consider that insulting the referee from the stands is a form of violence and they feel that parents who create problems on the stands should be banned from attending their children's matches and training sessions.

Conclusion

In this paper, the stress was put on parental support for the child, the pressure exerted on the child, as well as on the violent behavior of parents towards coaches and referees during training and matches.

From the acquired results, it can be concluded that most parents attend training and support their child, and as far as 90.6% of parents attend matches in order to watch their child, which is praise-worthy. However, such a high percentage of parental support and attendance at training and matches can create an additional burden and pressure on the child.

On the other hand, a large number of parents obstruct the coach's work in matches and training alike. Unfortunately, this is an increasingly present occurrence in our fields and parents give themselves the right to insult the coach and damage his reputation and authority with the children, even though he is somebody who the children trust, and is very often idolized.

It is also apparent that a huge number of parents scold their children if they make a mistake in training or a match, but fortunately, the vast majority (92.5% of them) do not punish them.

A big number of parents argue with the referees and insult them from the stands. This is not commendable because these are children's games and children should be given an example on how to act in the stands.

This research could serve as a basis for a more serious study with a larger number of respondents, so measures could be taken at a later date regarding the sanctioning of parents who behave inappropriately at their children's performances. Workshops and seminars for parents ought to be organized, attended also by sport psychologists, pedagogues, and other experts in sport, in which parents would be educated on the correct and desired behavior at their children's performances.

By virtue of this, the children, and parents themselves, would enjoy sport manifestations.

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Miloš Marković (Srbija)

Fakultet sporta i fizičkog obrazovanja, Sveučilište u Beogradu
miloscj@gmail.com

Živko Misirača (Srbija)

Fakultet sporta i fizičkog obrazovanja, Sveučilište u Beogradu
zile72@gmail.com

Branka Savović (Srbija)

Fakultet sporta i fizičkog obrazovanja, Sveučilište u Beogradu
branka.savovic@fsfv.bg.ac.rs

Sandra Radenović (Srbija)

Fakultet sporta i fizičkog obrazovanja, Sveučilište u Beogradu
sandra.radenovic@fsfv.bg.ac.rs

RODITELJI MLADIH SPORTAŠA KAO DIO SPORTSKE PUBLIKE

Sažetak

Fizička aktivnost je posebno važna za dječiji rast i razvoj, te bi se stoga trebala prakticirati već od najmlađih uzrasta. Važnost fizičke aktivnosti dodatno je naglašena u životnim uvjetima modernog društva. Tehnologija postaje sve više pristunom i kretanje djece svedeno je na minimum. Stoga su djeca uključena u sustav sporta, a gdje natjecanje igra središnju ulogu. Roditelji često posjećuju treninge i natjecanja svoje djece. Cilj je ovog rada odrediti utjecaj roditelja, kao dijela sportske publike, na djecu koja prakticiraju sport. Autori su željeli odrediti do koje razine roditelji posjećuju treninge i utakmice djece radi davanja podrške, odnosno u kojoj se mjeri mješaju u posao trenera prilikom treninga i utakmica, kao i kažnjavaju li djecu u slučaju da naprave pogrešku u natjecanju. Također, jedan od zadataka bio je odrediti mišljenje roditelja u pogledu predstavlja li

vrijeđanje sudaca iz gledališta oblik nasilja i do koje razine si dopuštaju ulazak u raspravu sa sudcima tijekom dječje utakmice. U istraživanju sudjelovalo je 255 roditelja djece iz 5 različitih sportova, a koji su u tu svrhu ispunili anketu. Rezultati su pokazali da se roditelji uvelike mješaju u posao trenera tijekom treninga i utakmica, unatoč tome što ih većina smatra da je trener zadovoljavajuće kompetentan za obavljanje svoga posla. U pogledu pritiska kojeg stavljaju na djecu, mali postotak roditelja kažnjava svoje dijete ako učini pogrešku. Ono što bi trebalo biti zabrinjavajuće je odgovor velikog broja roditelja koji smatraju da vrijeđanje suca nije oblik nasilja i da to smatraju normalnom pojavom, kao i činjenica da je jedna trećina odgovorila da su svjedočili svađi između roditelja suprotstavljenih timova u gledalištu, pojavi koja je, na nesreću, postala prisutna na dječjim natjecanjima.

Ključne riječi: djeca, roditelji, natjecanje, sportska publika