The Co-Creation of Athlete Development: A Conjoint Analysis of Parents’ and Coaches’ Preferences for Youth Sport Programming

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Introduction and Literature Review

Parents and coaches are the most influential stakeholders in sport development/participation (Côté, 1999). Coaches design and deliver youth sport programming, while parents provide essential resources enabling participation. The parent-coach relationship literature overwhelmingly focuses on their negative actions and behaviors (Lauer et al., 2010). As a result, we lack an understanding of the utility parents and coaches place on key aspects of sport programs. This is especially important in the dynamics of a private, revenue-driven industry where it is in sport providers’ and coaches’ best interests to appease parents (i.e., the consumer) for the purpose of retention (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Evaluating both parents and coaches can elicit valuable insight into how their ability to work together impacts the development of youth athletes in a setting where this appears crucial. The purpose of the study then, was to determine the utility coaches and parents place on key program components, and identify any issues of alignment for effective athlete development.

The study was guided by Ranjan and Read’s (2004) core dimension of co-creation, which is described by three key concepts: equity, interaction, and knowledge sharing. In seeking to determine the importance parents and coaches place on key program features and to identify issues of misalignment, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what degree do parents and coaches align in their views of the importance of youth sport program components?

2. How do parents and coaches compare in the utility they place on individual choice of program components?

Method

A choice-based conjoint model of sport program components, forcing respondents to trade-off program components against each other was used to determine their relative importance for each program component. Components included: (1) annual cost of program, (2) overall responsibility, (3) parent/coach communication, (4) program reputation, (5) coach certification and, (6) total hours of available practice. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to identify parents and coaches fitting the inclusion criteria (athletes with collegiate and/or professional aspirations aged roughly 13-15). Parents (n=240) and coaches (n=198) of youth tennis players completed online surveys. Relative importance was calculated for each of the six program components. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was then conducted to determine if any significant differences existed in the relative importance parents and coaches placed on the six program attributes.

Results and Discussion

Results indicated instances of alignment, including both groups preference for shared responsibility. However, many significant areas of misalignment were also found. Specifically, parents’ and coaches’ differed in their relative importance for the annual cost of programs, the overall responsibility for athlete development decisions, and program reputation. These findings are important, as they highlight for practitioners a desire for greater collaboration between parents and coaches, while pinpointing areas where existing misalignment may act as an obstacle to optimal parent-coach co-creation. Findings also further our theoretical understanding of sport development, particularly with regards to how to establish greater co-creation between the two key facilitators of sport development/participation.