Thematic Article

Assessing the Role of the Coach in Terms of Dropping out from Youth Sports

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Abstract

Much of international research deals with the subject, so we can say that probably one of the most important issues in the field of youth education today is to explore the causes of early drop-out from organised sport. The aim of this essay was to test our self-developed measurement tool and gain insight into what coaches see as causes of dropping out within their own sport and what percentage of this phenomenon is experienced in their field. The main question for us is, why junior athletes between the age of 13–16 are dropping out of competitive sports, what role the coach's personality has (in this), and what other reasons might the phenomenon have. In our enquiry, we sought to find out the opinion of coaches of team sports such as handball, football or icehockey, in addition to individual sports, like athletics and karate. In the research, we used only certain parts of the interviews during the analysis, paying special attention to the coaching attitude, the coach-athlete relationship, and the ways of motivation and methods used by the coach. The results confirmed that the causes of dropout should be sought for in the dimensions which we set up earlier. In the respect of the exploratory nature of the study, we cannot draw far-reaching conclusions, but we certainly consider it as a good starting point for our further research.

Keywords: dropout, youth, youth sports, competitive sports, coach, coach-athlete, motivation

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Introduction

Until now, there has been no example in Hungary of a complex study of the causes of young athletes dropping out of youth sports. Although partial research has been carried out, a comprehensive study, even suitable for international comparison, has not yet been conducted. The main topic of our research is the multidimensional study of the reasons for dropping out of organized and competitive sports, including youth sports. The aim of our study is to explore the sociocultural and individual factors related to sports careers and the school environment, as well as social relations, and the pedagogical reasons for dropping out of sports. The study includes the continuously studied international literature, the opinions of spot experts in home youth education, and the 13-16 year olds most at risk of dropping out, based on the statistical data supporting them, involving both individual and team sports. The main question for us is why young people are leaving competitive sports at this age, what are its reasons and which factors arethe most influential.

There are basically two meanings of drop-out from organised sports. The first interpretation is that drop-out in elite sports means that a sporting career is ended before the athlete has reached the peak of his or her individual performance. This type of drop-out is a typical phenomenon among child and adolescent athletes. An important indicator of early drop-out with this type is the age of athletes at the post-graduate level. In contrast, another interpretation is that career termination after peak performance is called retirement. In this case, the retired athletes are usually older than those who dropped out of the same sport according to the first interpretation (Bussmann, Alfermann, 1994). In the present case we would like to focus on the first meaning of drop-out.

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The coach's pedagogical activity in sports

Educational science usually aims to develop the personalities of those involved in education in a specific way, while sports pedagogy examines the effect of sports activity as a potential development factor, and seeks answers to the pedagogical problems that arise. Therefore, sports pedagogy is often apostrophized as an auxiliary science of pedagogy (Biróné, 2011).

One of the most important elements of sport is pedagogy. Therefore, we need to ascribe great importance to its role. Sports professionals who work with athletes, whether being full-time coaches or second-rate physical education teachers, can make great strides in the development of athletes under their care, if they accumulate excellent sense and tremendous experience in the field of pedagogy. In case you manage to develop an intimate relationship with your athletes and manage to build up a relationship of mutual trust between the coach and the student, you will promote your students' spiritual development and opportunities for success in the sport. Considering that at a certain level, every junior athlete can be improved, the key to success depends on the appropriate and varied pedagogical methods used by the coach or educator. It is thus stated that the methods chosen by the educator and, of course, the right attitude towards the children, can be the gateway to an athlete's success, be it school, sport or life itself (Falus, 1993).

Coaching and education cannot be separated, despite the very different goals of the participants. Both coaches who work in recreational sportsand trainers for professional athletes are part of the didactic teaching process, because they teach the technical and tactical elements of sports. Perhaps the difference can be found in the fact that in some cases performance-oriented coaches only deal with smaller groups, while in others with only one competitor. By training one atehlete, they can pass on different sports knowledge at a higher level than that of their colleagues in recreational sports (Bergmann Drewe, 2000).

According to Graham Taylor, the former federal captain of the English national football team, coaching is based primarily on proper communication, continuous learning and active contact with athletes – thinking of it to as a form of teaching. In the study of Graham et al. highly qualified, certified coaches was interviewed.

After analyzing the interviews, it became clear to them that continuous learning in the field of pedagogy is essential for practicing coaching. By this realization, those participating in the study are considered modern educators. Since the job of the coach is much more than passing on the content and methodological elements of a certain sport, and more than simple hands-on training, he places more emphasis on teaching his athletes a broad spectrum of things. According to the coaches involved in the study, the key to the successful development of athletes is to create a caring and supportive training environment (Jones et al., 2004).

In addition, as with teachers, continuous feedback from athletes on the quality of the work done and its implementation is important (Gilbert et al., 2001).

Figure 1. The main functions of the coach-educator
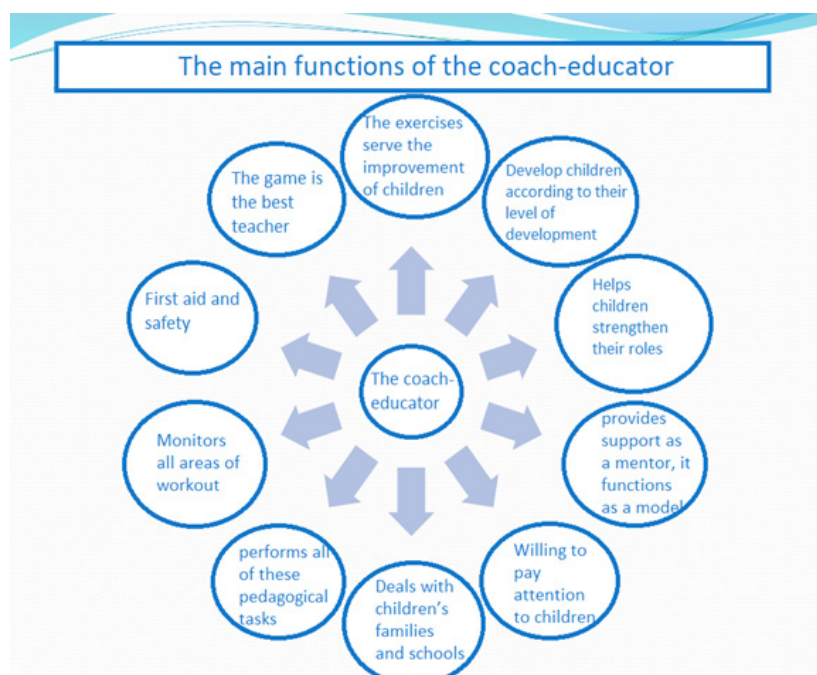
Source: Hungarian Football Federation, 2014; translated by the Author

With the aid of Figure 1, we can get comprehensive insight into the tasks of professionals when training a junior age group. These tasks are essential to perform in order for the pedagogical side of the job to properly work. In our opinion, this figure can be applied not only to coaches training juniors, but also to coaches of adult sports professionals. Unfortunately, the experience gained so far in our research shows that in Hungary only a small number of professionals and of coaches are working in the field of youth education, dealing with the adult groups, and operating on the basis of the above-mentioned criteria.

Generally, the activities of coaches employed in sports in Hungary are organized to serve the association or the youth education program, and thus it is common that their work is judged by the performance of the coach's athletes. We only talk about success in sports if the athlete actually meets all physiological, psychological, pedagogical and moral standards. If the coach achieves this result at the cost of the athlete's mental and physical health, it does not count as success. In latter cases, the humanity and professionalism of the coach likely to be questioned (Gombocz, 2004b).

The relationship between coach and athlete

The relationship between the athlete and the coach greatly determines the athlete's performance. Furthermore, it plays a key role in influencing performance (Jowett et al., 2002; Lyle, 1999). The quality of their relationship facilitates effective collaboration, which then leads to improved performance (Poczwardowski et al., 2006). This is also analyzed and supported by a number of available publications, as well as by interviews with competitive athletes, who consider that relationship a key factor in their sporting success (Balogh, 2014).

In general, the relationship between these two parties is based on mutual respect, esteem and recognition. This relationshihp is dynamic and complex, is nurtured during training (Jowett et al., 2002).

Creating a good relationship and a positive atmosphere for quality training isthe job of the coach, who must always monitor the athlete's performance (Rókusfalvy, 1992).

According to Prisztóka (2005), the basic requirement of an athlete's success is a quality coach-athlete relationship, which must be characterized by mutual trust and respect at all times. If this mutual trust and respect is not present in the relationship there is no guarantee that the athlete will succeed in his sport. In order to develop, an athlete must be cooperative and do their best to meet the requirements of his or her educator and to successfully perform the assigned tasks. The role of the coach is not less important in terms of development than that of any other educator, or even of the athlete himself. The athlete must feel that his coach stands by him, watching every step he takes, giving him continuous feedback on the quality of the work done. (Horváth et al., 2005).

Analyzing the results of a 2003 study conducted with the help of 12 Olympic medalists and their coaches, the researchers found that the interpersonal relationship between coach and athlete plays a key role in the development of the athletes. Institutions involved in the training of sports professionals were advised to pay attention to the areas of effective communication and networking during the training. These institutions also delved into the tactics, techniques and biomechanics learned during practice, so as to enhance the performance of future athletes through better coaches. (Jowett et al., 2003).

According to Bognár (2010), for an athlete to be successful, they must maintain a good relationship with their coach. In his opinion, two important components form this good relationship. The first is a quality interpersonal relationship, and the second is mutual trust and commitment. The extent to which an athlete is committed to his or her sport greatly depends on the professional competence of the coach and his or her attitude toward the athlete (Bognár, 2010).

Research design and Methods

Aims

In the empirical part of the research, we conducted exploratory interviews with coaches and athletes. The aim of the relatively small study was to test our self-developed measurement tool and gain insight into what coaches see as reasons for dropping out within their own sport, and what percentage of this phenomenon is experienced in their field. In addition, we aimed to gain a deeper insight into the daily lives of associations through the eyes of coaches, the problems they deal with, and the solutions they come upon.

Methods

Unfortunately, according to the present situation, we did not have the opportunity to conduct the interviews in person, so we were forced to conduct our investigation by telephone. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the subjects in all cases, and the records were used in our study only with complete anonymity.

We managed to conduct the interviews with 7 coaches and 3 current and former athletes of the Sports Center of a county seat in Eastern Hungary. Based on the years of experience of all the professionals we interviewed as teachers and / or coaches, we were given exhaustive answers to the questions asked during the interviews. It is important to mention that all of the interviewees are currently or have been dealing with youth athletes, young people between the ages of 13 and 16. In addition to individual sports such as athletics, karate, we also sought for the opinions of coaches on team sports such as handball, football or hockey. Among the interviewees the number of years spent in the sports profession ranged from 10 to 40 years, their ages ranged from 35 to 65, and the latter being active as a national team coach.

The self-developed interview outline in the appendix shows that the questions used in coach interviews are quite diverse and complex. In this research, we used only certain parts of the interviews during the analysis, paying special attention to the attitude of the coach, the coach-athlete relationship, the motivational tools and methods used by the coach, and what the coaches see as reasons for dropping out of the organized sport age group we want to examine.

The interview we compiled is divided into four blocks:
1. Exploring social background
2. Institutional background
3. Presenting a contemporary group
4. Mapping coaching attitude

In our opinion, these four areas may, whether individually or collectively, cause the athlete to ponder dropping out of sports before doing so permenantly.

Results

During the interviews with the seven sports professionalswe, based on their responses and behavior, were able to experience the coaches 'commitment to the sport. Right from introduction and invitation, theyaccepted our request, and gladly offered their help. Throughout the interviews, it was felt that they were trying to answer as many of our questions as possible, based on their own experiences. There was no question, however, their intent was to avoid answering. All of the respondents took the issue seriously enough, as they reported that they had not experienced a negligible drop-out rate in their sport. That is why we all felt that they were talking honestly about the phenomenon and the possible causes, even if in some cases they had to shed light on their own fault to understand the causes. Each of the coaches has previously practiced at a high level in the given sport. In terms of their qualifications, 4 out of 7 coaches have some kind of pedagogical / teachingdiploma and work as full-time professionals, yet they only take part in secondary education in youth education. Another three professionals are employed as full-time coaches at their sports clubs.

Social background

After the professional introduction, we were interested in what social factors they see that influence the dropout of young athletes. Initially, we received divided answers. In most sports, children from almost all walks of life can be found in sports activities. Still, according to professionals, there are sports where children from specific social strata can be found. In icehockey specifically, we were surprised to see mainly upper class children. It turnsout that hockey is mainly practiced by the children of wealthier parents, as there are significant expenses for any who wish to participate in the sport. This remains true, even if membership fees seem acceptable and the association supports the parents with a stipend for equipment. In reality though, equipment prices are exorbitant, as is the association membership fee We were also curious about the logistical burden of attending training sessions. Parents appear to be very flexible in these matters, and as soon as their child's age allows them to visit training sites on their own, it isn't too much of a problem for anyone. The real surprise was to see associatons provide sports opportunities for disadvantaged children. Almost all coaches were aware of a child from a disadvantaged family in the group. Besides getting association support, several coaches mentioned the possibility of reducing membership fees or even waiving them completely out of fairness.

Parental pressure

Next, we asked the coaches how well they knew the sports history of the children's parents. Surprisingly, almost every coach was aware of what sport was played and at what level it was played by the parents. In many cases, there was no need to ask, the professionals themselves began to tell all regarding the children brought in by their paents. At this level sought to live vicariously through their childrens' sports successes. All seven coaches confirmed, there are many children in the association for this reason. There were sports with a ratio of two out of ten, but also with four children involved. Most of the coaches detailed what interactions they had with the parents, also mentioning what they usually recommended in such cases. Advice that was given to the parents was: Let your child try out the sport for 2-3 months, and then ask if they feel comfortable in it, allowing them to decide if they want to continue with it or to move on to something else. In many cases though, the parent does not let the child decide, but decides for him instead. A study of the literature shows that this type of "motivation" of athletes is not very rewarding, acting as a catalyst for the athlete's dropout 90% of the time.

Institutional background, the person of the coach

In the next block, the questions were largely about the institutional background. Here we would like to highlight the impact of the coach's personality on the training atmosphere.

A1: "The coach's personality is very, very definitive, for the individual players and the team as a whole. If you have a coach with a bad personality, it can completely spoil the team's mood, play, and development. „

A2: "I think it's absolutely pivotal in every area. This age group we are dealing with is the most sensitiveone. The team takes notice if I'm in a good mood, if I'm less than okay or if I'm tired. Obviously I try to cover it up and always do my best, but it's very difficult to so. "

A3: "Well, the most important thing is, if the coach is persistent and able to speak the children's language, heis going to be successful. If not, you are doomed to failure in all cases. And that's the biggest problem. I'm saying that in today's coaching world, everyone is very success-oriented, and that we don't have group cohesion, where we work as a team and move as a team. "

What makes a good coach? What qualities should he have?

A1: "For me, a good coach starts there with a sense of professionalism and humility towards the sport. If you have those coupled with a good pedagogical sense (…) There are a lot of coaches who have the professional knowledge, but don't necessarily have a good pedagogical sense, meaning that they don't pay attention to these things and assuming professionalism is enough. Unfortunately, if someone can't understand that they have to deal with people and personalities, he will never be a successful coach. "

A2: "Actually, I think there is definitely a level of authority to be gained. It should be professional authority, so that the children know that what we are doing is not in vain but is for their development. However, it is very complex. (…) Yes, professionalism is scarce. Now I would say it's part of a fraction. If I want to express a percentage, it might be only 30 percent. All the others are the plus of regarding them as people and supporting them…"

A3: "Well, maybe not just from professionalism… – The most important thing is to know how to treat children. So they entrust a child with it as if I were completely taking over the child's full physical development. From then on, sometimes I know more about the child than their own parents. Now, it is a very big task to manage and process this information. If someone does that, they have a case to win! "

As it can be seen from the quotations, most of the coaches we interviewed agree with the statements made in the literature that professionalism of sports professionals is really important, but their pedagogical sense, the atmosphere they can provide during training, and the way they can treat athletes as autonomous personalities is just as critical to success.

Coping with difficulties

From the third stage of the interview, we would like to highlight three issues regarding dropout. The first of these is how difficult it is to arouse the interest of young athletes today.

A4: "So practically in a digital world, it's much better for them to punch a tablet screen or a computer keyboard than to sweat. We have to be fully aware of this and admit that we have a very difficult job. (…) And then here comes the very important part that we have already talked about, it is the personality of the coach. So being able to catch that kid with his personality and keep him there for the workout… "

A2: "Yeah, unfortunately it's getting harder and harder, I think. I seems, I am the only one who wants to achieve something here. They keep texting on their cell phones in the locker room, don't concentrate during the training, not really tuning in, just chattering…"

The views of the study participants in this area are completely unanimous. In all the sports we have mapped, the phenomenon can be observed, according to which it takes a lot of effort to keep the athletes and to arouse their interest. Even though the majority of coaches have highlighted the importance of a positive coaching pattern in this area, in many cases independent reasons may play a role in quitting the sport.

Our next question was to deal with the burden of training, competitions, and school expectations.

A1: "These children are very busy (…) They are being prepared in primary school for high school, in high school for university, and they cannot live in the present. These children are constantly burdened, we do not take into account the specifics of the age, so it is easier for them to choose the easier path when they are out from under parental supervision. The harder path to take is going to practice and keeping learning and paying attention, I need to do well in school, I need to do well in training (…) then these kids start missing one workout, two workouts, three workouts, and then they won't go to workouts consequently. But this should somehow be prevented in the initial stages of their lives, so that they shall not be so burdened… "

A2: "He's practically the one who after school goes into training and then goes home and still studies. So it's such a rat race. There are occasions when I say that you can have a day off now, because my training is much more effective for me if they are there mentally. "

A3: "There are one or two students in a weaker group. All the others study very well, they also have very good marks. They inspire and help each other. Countless times, for example, it was L. who helped someone with chemistry. Another helped with Maths. The same is true of other subjects. There was once one of them preparing for an English language exam, and they spoke English during training (…) they regularly talk about learning during training, so neither me or they even have to bring it up. „We always make it clear that the most important thing is to learn because you will make a living from it."

As it can be seen, the question posed above may be one of the key issues in terms of dropout, but not in all cases. There are sports where it shows up more and ones where it appears less. We would like to highlight the idea of the A3 interviewee, as most of the young athletes in the group he trains do not have a problem with coordinating training, competition and learning. We consider it important to mention that this is an individual sport in this case, where the teammates become competitors during practice, yet they maintain such a good relationship with each other. Unfortunately, we also experienced a opposite of this within the same sport, where the coach, due to his personality, was unable to create the training conditions that would be necessary to create a proper work atmosphere. The difference in quality between the two coaches is perfectly illustrated by the retaining force they represent. While either of them talked about a 10% dropout within his group, the second coach had 60%.

Coaches' views on drop-outs

In our next question, we were interested in the experiences of coaches, what reasons they could mention for dropping out within organized sports, and how much decline they saw within their sport.

A1: "For example, we take the kids to competition every week. And here comes the mental problem and the psychological burden again, because these kids will give up after a while. Especially if they don't experience success, and they are not given help. A lot of children are labeled, they are not given new roles, they are not given the opportunity to play, they are not tried out in new positions, so they get stuck in the whole thing and do not have enough self-confidence "

A5: "I think we're making a big mistake here, not trying to assess these factors, but we haven't really dealt with that, and I think it's a mistake. Usually, when you exit the system, it's appropriate to ask why, and most cases, we don't. (…) I tell you that in 15 out of 40 cases, they are likely to stay in the U16, by the time they reach adulthood, there will be a maximum of 5 to stay, so I would say about 60%, and let's not talk about adulthood (…) "

A2: "(…) There were 18 last year. Five have stopped. they realized it wasn't even their sport, luckily none of them were injured. 14 people came over this year, three of them have already stopped, including one who came from the country (…) Returning to the main reasons… practically most of them refer to school, that they are not able to continue learning properly alongside training, but I think they don't want to change. Obviously the coach's personality always comes up, something to look for as a scapegoat. So it also happens that he just

sees my personality in his own failure (…) Looking back at the average of the past two years, approx. 25% crumble for reasons like this "

A3: "The biggest drop-out rate is usually in the eighth school grade (…) there is no longer such strict control neither from parents nor teachers, and the increased curriculum, the increased expectations from parents and teachers causes this kind of trauma. The other trauma, happens at the time of graduation. Applying to a higher education institution, results in more freedom, different challenges, other things, they tend to stop training, these factors divert the child from the goal. (…) This age group in athletics is 15-16 years-olds. There's explosive growth here. Here I say 70% to 80% downsizing "

Based on the answers received, we can say that the drop-out rate is very outstanding in the age group we studied. There are sports where this phenomenon affects "only" 25% of athletes, but we have been able to conduct the study in several sports where this number reaches 60-80%. For what actually causes the phenomenon, we actually got several answers, which we tried to present in the quotes highlighted from the coachs's interviews. Summarizing the answers, we can say that coaches attribute several factors to the causes of dropping out, based on their own experience. One component is the pressure to comply as a result of excessive sports and school expectations, which in many cases places the burden on the athlete to give up the sport for the sake of study, especially if he or she does not succeed in training, does not feel the supportive atmosphere and does not see his or her own development in the sport. In connection with this, we consider it important to mention the concept that was uttered by one of the interviewees in relation to today's educator or even the coaching society, A1: "Actually, a lot of people are livelihood coaches, and unfortunately I see that as the problem. That's one of the main problems anyway! " Although these coaches hold their trainings and may even be professionally trained in their field, if they do not have the commitment, the humility towards sports and educational work, they will never be able to create such an atmosphere in their training and establish such an intimate relationship with children, that would enable them to succeed. The other concept we consider important is "performance constraint". As mentioned in the literature, coaches' work is evaluated on the basis of their efficiency. Unfortunately, this leads to the phenomenon that at an early age, only the achievement of the result counts, and the enjoyment of the game or sport is thus completely killed in the children, who end up tired of the constant expectations and failures.

A2: „(…) That's why we're here, and that's why we have a social problem, because children are mentally ruined and by the time they grow up, they can't be normal adults. (…)"

Discussion

Our main goal was to create a pilot study that would lay the foundation for our future research. We wanted to test our measuring device so that we would not encounter any obstacles in a larger future sampling test. In our view, our measurement tool provided useful data for the preparation of our research. We will most likely be able to use the results obtained in our later work. In conclusion, based on the interviews, it is confirmed that the phenomenon that performance constraints in youth sports (from a very young age U8), training, competitions and excessive expectations from school place a burden on junior athletes that they are not able to bear without assistance leads to burnout in young sportsmen. As a result, they stop playing sports, assuming they have more time to learn, or they can do better. In the end, they start to concentrate on other things. In these cases, the coach would have a key role and the intimate relationship they would have to develop in each case with their athletes growing under their hands would be essential in preventing dropout. In the absence of these, as we can see from the results, the drop-out rate from sports is staggeringly high in the age group we studied. We also consider it important to mention the negative impact of excessive parental pressure on sports habits, which during the interview analysis revealed that the phenomenon appears tangible in different segments of youth sports, to a lesser extent (20%) and to a greater extent (40%). The numbers have made it clear to us that, according to what has been described in the literature, in which case the drop-out rate can be as high as 90%, parental pressure can also be a potential factor in dropping out of sports in addition to the components mentioned above.

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