

PARENTS PARTICIPATION IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS: CASE STUDY ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

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Abstract

This paper deals with parents' participation in decision making and regulations in sport organizations, besides their presence as board members in organizations where their children participate in elite sport. In some organizations there are no clear paths to become a board member and parents are participating in decision making that are very much related with technical aspects – very difficult not to interfere in technical aspect being a board member.

Theoretical orientation

The increased participation of parents in sport is associated with the high level of financial support (e.g., Grenfell & Rinehart, 1999) that depends on parents especially in order to develop grass root sport (e.g., Brunelli, 1994). In a comparative study of life-styles of aspiring high performances athletes, Broom (1991) mentioned that one of the weakest points of western programs is the lack of "providing financial assistance to potential high performance young athletes at the earlier stages of their career" (p. 47). In most cases the financial assistance is provided when the athlete approaches international standard. However, there are countries in which the assistance is not even provided at high level; for instance New Zealand gymnasts get very little financial assistance (López de D'Amico, 2000). In a radio program, Henny Oldenhove (Director of Participation of the Australian Sport Commission) and Dennis Baker, insisted that parents are there "to protect the kids and keep them on the track, but shouldn't be running out in front of them and getting in the way of them" (Smith, 1999, p. 3). This perspective has been observed in organizations, as well as the fear that parents might work for their own benefits (Basseti, 1999; Ryan, 1995).

Methodology

The perspective of 48 members of gymnastics national federations from six different countries: Australia, Ecuador, France, Indonesia, Italy and New Zealand were studied. They were asked about their opinion related to parents' participation in decision making area, regulations and

board members of their sport organization. The question asked was: "What is in your opinion, the parent's role in achieving gymnastics performance in your country?" Later, according to their answers they were asked: "Should they be involved in regulations?" The comments and reactions from the different participants shared similarities and they were grouped into three categories: 1) Supportive but not to be involved in regulations; 2) Important; 3) Indifferent in terms of their participation in regulations.

Discussion and Conclusion

To the majority of the interviewees the participation of parents was important and supportive however, they believed they should not be involved in regulations. Some of the interviewees' opinions indicated that parents have a tremendous role because of the gymnasts' young age; they have to be supportive; they provide the maintenance of the gymnasts and pay the fees. An administrator remarked that parents "could be the success or the limitation of a nation" because, they should give support to the gymnast but their interventions in the regulations should be avoided. The reason pointed out more frequently was that, "they can participate but not in technical decisions, but of course there are many things that influence the technical aspects" (coach).

There is great concern about the objectivity of parents' involvement in regulations and in the high level structures of decision making. The interviewees have had experiences with parents who became involved in the regulations and became board members in order to benefit their children. The interviewees praised the parents' participation and do not have the intention to marginalise their role but, they are more concerned about the complex characteristics of the sport. Any decision outside the technical environment can have negative impacts on the gymnastics results. The most common worry is the influence of parents in the decision-making areas, e.g., "in (country) it is worse because they become board members. That is why there is a division between the management and the technical sector. The board members do the management, the technical ones work. There is no union among the sectors. But, the board members decide" (judge). Some gymnasts remarked that they would prefer their parents just to develop their parental role remaining outside regulations..

In the conclusions all of them agreed that parents participation is crucial in such a young sport as gymnastics, nevertheless they must stay away from participating in decision making areas or regulations because it is a very complex sport. They must be supportive to their children. Besides, the organizations can also create possibilities for their participation and teach them through courses or seminars about the sport so they can participate more actively in the future..

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