

A Qualitative Examination of Scottish and American Youth Golfers: Why Are They Leaving the Sport?

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Aim

Youth sport plays a huge role in the lives of young people both in the United States and abroad. Research has shown both the positive and negative aspects of sport on development for youth across a variety of sports and many different countries. With sport an engrained part of social and physical culture, it is imperative that research continue. According to the *Institute for the Study of Youth Sports*, the overwhelming reason kids begin to play sport is to have fun. Kids also report the desire to improve at their sport, get in shape, compete and be a part of a team. Unfortunately, kids also drop out of sports, and at seemingly increasing rates. For the past decade, researchers have been examining the steady decline of youth participation in sport. With childhood obesity and diabetes on the rise around the world, the lack of active participation and decreasing physical activity by youth is often seen as a contributing factor to this pandemic. In the UK for example, the government is intervening on behalf of sport with policies to increase participation, although it may actually be that participation rates are rising (Smith, Green & Roberts, 2005). Research has also shown burnout, pressure, anxiety, time commitments, emphasis on winning, poor coaching and cost are all contributing factors to the declines. (Condor, 2004). The aim of this study is to examine youth sport participation, comparing cases in the United States and Scotland for the sport of golf. This investigation looks closely at youth athlete burnout rates, rising costs of sport participation, psychological pressures, and other factors that may inhibit youth from furthering their participation. This study is relevant for a variety of audiences, as the decline in youth sport participation could bear long-lasting consequences, and any data collected could be used to help increase participation worldwide.

Literature Review

Prior research has revealed many contributing factors to the participation rates and/or decline in youth sport participation, but very little has been done comparing European and American trends. The United States and other countries believe youth sport has become “professionalized” rather than focused on educational goals or skill development (Gould & Carson, 2004). A report released by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (2002) addressed many issues in youth sport, including participation rates, using the expression “Americanization of sport.” The term was described as a trend that increasingly defines sport in a way that is at odds with the positive values associated with amateur and youth sport. Sport research supports the physical and psychological benefits of athletic participation. Leadership skills, self-discipline, respect, self-confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to cooperate, physical health and psychological well-being are just some of the benefits of competition (Smoll, Cumming & Smith, 2011; Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Kavussanu & Harnisch, 2000). Other research suggests that youth sport participation negatively impacts altruism and moral development (Blair, 1985; Shields & Bredemeir, 1995). The win at all cost attitudes can have a negative impact on behavior of young athletes. Studies have shown the mental and physical demands can damage self-esteem and result in anxiety and depression (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan).

Methodology

This study is a qualitative examination of factors contributing to the decline of youth sport participation, specifically in the sport of golf. The researchers have access to both American and Scottish athletes and coaches. The researchers examined burnout rates, social pressures, anxiety, time commitments, emphasis on winning, poor coaching and cost. Questions were then compiled and organized in a conversation style to be used during interviews of the subjects. Interviews will take place in the summer of 2018 in both Scotland and the US with former youth participants and coaches. The athletes interviewed will have participated in competitive leagues but chose to leave the sport while competing a high level. The questions are semi-structured and open-ended, encouraging a conversation type style with the coaches and athletes. According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008), interviews with younger subjects produce unique, detailed and trustworthy accounts, improving understanding on a variety of issues. For trustworthiness, a reflexive journal will be kept, member checks will be performed and interviews transcribed, reviewed and analyzed.

Results

There are no results at this time. Data collection begins in May. Initial results will be available in time for presentation. Implications from interviews can add to the body of literature by telling a more in-depth story, rather than just raw data and numbers related to participation rates. Hearing from the athletes themselves and comparing stories from Scotland and the US can provide a new narrative around the topic. The rise and decline of golfing popularity around the world will also contribute to the conversation. Golf is a considered lifelong activity and if youth are quitting it may be relevant for participation rates later in life.

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