Coaches Impacting Parental Involvement: A National Study of Girl’s Youth Sports

Jen Zdroik, Minnesota State University, Mankato
Philip Veliz, University of Michigan

Management - Other (Youth Sport) virtual asynchronous
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2020-092 Session: Youth Sport I

Introduction: Youth sport has an important relationship triad essential to success, it is the relationship between coaches-parents-athletes, also known as the ‘athletic triangle’ (Smith, Smoll, & Smith, 1989). This relationship triad is important to student-athletes participation, enjoyment, and their potential (Wylleman & Lavalle, 2004). As youth sport becomes more professionalized, it increases the demands placed on parents and coaches (Brustad, 2011; Smoll, 2011). This increase in professionalization also increases the need for parents and coaches to interact (Knight & Harwood, 2009). The nature of the interactions that exist between parents and coaches can have an impact on the development of a child (Davis & Jowett, 2010). The parent-coach relationship shifts as athletes develop and move to different competitive levels of sport, which changes the nature of the parent-coach relationship (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Wylleman & Lavalle, 2004).

Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to understand how coaches impact parental involvement in sport. In order to understand the athletic triangle of relationships, a call has been made for research in different sport context and studies incorporating all three actors in the relationship (Knight & Gould, 2017).

Methods: An online survey was administered to girls between the ages of 7–13 who currently participate in sports and to their parent to inquire about girls’ and their parents’ perceptions and experiences related to coaching. A nationally representative sample girls (N=1,129) and their parents (N=1,129) participated in the survey by YouGov. The major dependent variable that measured parental involvement was a sum of thirteen items that asked parents a range of questions like “attend practices” to “coach or instruct the team” (Cronbach’s alpha = .626). The measure of parental involvement ranged between 0 and 13 (Mean = 5.27, SD = 2.34). The major independent variables that measured the characteristics of coaches was measured with thirty-one different items that asked parents a range of questions like “your daughters coach is easy to talk to” to “rewards effort over outcome”. Multivariable analysis was used to determine the most salient coach characteristics that predicted parental involvement.

Results: The multivariable analysis found several coach characteristics that were negatively associated with parental involvement (when controlling for confounding factors). In particular, parental involvement in their daughter’s sport decreased as a function of not viewing the coach as ‘encouraging team members to have fun,’ not ‘promoting healthy competition,’ not ‘promoting integrity and honesty,’ not ‘rewarding effort over outcome.’ Additionally, parental involvement decreased if the coach was a woman and if the sport included both boys and girls. Parental involvement increased as the level of competition increased among the sample. Moreover, parental involvement increased the more their daughter did not like their coach.

Implications: The results of this study show that nurturing and maintaining the athletic triangle relationships is not as simple as having a ‘nice’ coach. Further research could look at comparing the same variables for boys and their parent’s involvement.