CHAPTER 7: ROLE OF PARENTAL SUPPORT IN SPORTS SUCCESS OF TALENTED YOUNG DUTCH ATHLETES

Chris Visscher
Marije T. Elferink-Gemser
Koen A.P.M. Lemmink

INTRODUCTION

Until the middle of the 20th century, it was possible to become an international athlete without belonging to a nation’s group of most-talented individuals (Bouchard et al., 1997). The selection process was less stringent and the level of competition was not as demanding as it is today. As a result of the growing importance of sports success in society, the continuous increase in the number of young athletes and the growing sophistication of training, psychological preparation, equipment and facilities, the level of competition has increased to the point that only the extremely gifted are potentially able to reach elite status. Talented athletes often begin intensive and time-consuming training at increasingly younger ages (Alabin et al., 1980; Hahn, 1990). When a young athlete chooses to develop his/her talent in order to reach elite status, this has major consequences for lifestyle. The process is long, averaging at least 10 to 12 years, and during this interval, significant others, particularly parents, play an important role.

Behavior of parents can have a positive effect on the sport behaviors of their children (Visscher et al., 1996a). Family environment is an important factor in the development of talented young athletes (Ericsson, 1996), parental modeling is an important influence on children’s acquisition of positive values, attitudes and behaviors toward sports and physical activity (Côté, 1999). According to Giljam (1988), however, there is a distinction in parental support between serving as a role model and giving stimulation towards athletic involvement and success in sports.

The present study attempts compares the parental support given by parents of more successful and less successful talented athletes. All athletes were originally designated as exceptionally talented, and the differentiation between them in terms of degrees of success occurred across time. The study addressed two questions: