SECTION IV

The support
183

Introduction

Talented young sport participants on the road toward elite sport participation are surrounded by numerous individuals associated to different responsibilities that play an important role in their development. Good coaching and parental support are important resources likely to influence youth sport participants engaging in high quality training to achieve elite performance levels (Baker et al. 2003). In many cases, parents will play a central role in the early development of young sport participants. It is common for children to be introduced to the world of sports by a parent or significant adult. Many parents have stints in different roles, sometimes being involved as a coach, other times as a support crew member or as fan (e.g. Bloom 1985). Parents take pride in their child’s athletic achievements, and many will do what they can to promote a child’s development toward high performance (Baker et al. 2003). With talented children, this initially entails hiring an expert coach, especially in the case of parents recognising perceived limitations to their knowledge and ability to teach high sport expertise. Expert coaches have been found to better plan their training sessions and have clearer goals and methods on how to develop the talent of young athletes (Voss et al. 1983). As young athletes develop further and performance levels increase, the National Governing Body (NGB) for that sport often recruits the athlete into accelerated training programs, or even special schools that emphasise the sport, and the support personnel is increased to include nutritional, physiological, and psychological advice, as well as specific training in the sport. The more elite and senior the athlete becomes, the greater the support entourage becomes. As an illustration, in Norway, one of the most organised and structured sports is cross-country skiing. At a young age, talented athletes are enrolled into elite training programs with access to important support personnel. Even as a teenager, it is increasingly common for athletes to train and compete in an environment surrounded by coaches, assistant coaches, managers/agents, strength and conditioning specialists, physical therapists, massage therapist, technicians, practitioners, and sport psychologists. At the senior level, athletes are used to having such a support team around them.

The support personnel not only includes experts in fields of sport psychology, sport medicine, nutrition, or physiology, it also includes staff from the Norwegian Olympic Program [hereafter Olympiatoppen]. In Norway, the coaches of elite athletes are ‘supervised’ and constantly updated by the Olympiatoppen as most NGBs are small with limited resources. At Olympiatoppen,
coaches interact with the national team coaches individually, and simultaneously with the athletes in order to share best practice. To illustrate the number of people working for optimising an elite athlete’s performance, in 2011, just before the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS) Nordic World Ski Championships, one of the major newspapers in Norway printed a picture of an elite athlete (centre) and his entourage leading up to the Championship (see Figure 10.1). In this case, the newspaper counted 20 support personnel in the entourage from the NGB, Olympiatoppen, and private entourage members. The star athlete went on to win two gold medals and one silver medal. While he is clearly a high-level elite athlete, he is not unique in having such an entourage. In this athlete’s case, it is his father who functions as a manager, his brother as a training companion, and he relies on two mental trainers, five persons responsible for his physical training, two public relations coordinators, three persons in the medical staff, two ski waxing technicians, two administrators within the sports federation who manage and coordinate the needs of sponsors, his landlord and family friend, and finally, a serviceman who takes care of day-to-day needs. This cross-country skiing star athlete serves as an example of how a large support entourage can grow around an elite athlete as they become elite (Smart 2005). This example is one of many. In any major competitive event, such as the Olympic Games or World Championships, there are many stakeholders surrounding established elite as well as young developing stars (Borud 2011).

As Parent and Chappelet point out in the introduction chapter, the difficulty of managing sports events lies in their very different sizes and characteristics and in the fact that they have many stakeholders who co-create the event and whose expectations must be satisfied. This chapter will focus on the athlete’s support system; the stakeholder group this Handbook labels ‘parent and entourage’. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the entourage is defined as the group of people associated with the athlete. In addition to parents and family members, the entourage will typically include managers, agents, coaches, physical trainers, medical staff, scientists, sports organisations, sponsors, lawyers, and any person promoting the athlete’s sporting career (IOC 2011). These all need to be considered as belonging to one stakeholder group who look after the performance components of competing and the welfare of the athlete. According to Clarkson (1995), a stakeholder group is composed of stakeholders having similar interests, claims, or rights. The stakeholder group shares the same interest in helping the athlete reach his/her goals. However, as exemplified in the entourage of the cross-country skiing star, the members of the entourage have different roles to play. These roles may overlap at times and lead to conflicts within the group that may need resolution in order to prioritise the demands of the athlete. Conflicts may easily appear; hence, managers of sports events are faced with several perspectives that need to be aligned. While elite athletes are typically mature individuals able to manage their own conflicts and harness the competitive environment to their benefit, it is not so for young athletes. Typically, young athletes do not have an entourage other than their parents and perhaps a coach. Therefore, young athletes have their own set of demands for the administrators of youth competitions that need to be acknowledged and included in their planning when hosting an event. Young athletes are not miniature adults. Even in mid-adolescence, young athletes have their own unique requirements for competition. Research shows that it is essential for sport organisations to adopt a systematic and strategic approach to better understand and fulfil the roles they play in preparing competitive events for young athletes (Houlihan and Green 2008, Fletcher and Wagstaff 2009).

In this chapter, we begin to explore the development of young athletes and the role of parents and coaches, as this is crucial to understand the following discussion of parents and the support entourage for all athletes. In addition, the development of an athlete and the roles of the support entourage will be discussed primarily from a psychosocial perspective by providing in-depth description of the immediate environment around the athlete for sport management researchers.
Figure 10.1  An athlete at the 2011 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships and his entourage

Photo: ©Nils Maudal/www.drammensbilder.no
and practitioners. Thus far, the literature addressing individual differences in young athletes has been limited. With the increasing incidence of major junior sport events based on championships for adult athletes such as, for example the Youth Olympics, it is important to assess and recognise how the needs and requirements of young athletes are different than those of mature athletes. Although research is limited, some recent work has shown promising findings regarding how youths differ from adults in their experience of sport championship participation.

In one recent study, Parent and colleagues found that younger athletes perceive different and often more stressors in elite sport events than do older athletes (Parent, Kristiansen, and MacIntosh in press). They concluded that managerial aspects surrounding the events as well as decisions made by the organising committee often fail to adapt to the challenges of youth sport participants. The distribution and the form of information needs to be adapted to youth sport participants and their entourage. Stakeholders such as international federations (IFs), National Olympic committees (NOCs), and others fall short in their interaction with younger elite athletes (see Parent, Kristiansen, and MacIntosh in press). Parent, Kristiansen, and MacIntosh concluded that a larger focus on positive championship experiences should be at the core of criteria for such events for youth sport administrators as they are likely to have an important impact on the motivation of young athletes to stay involved in elite sports (see also Schwab et al. 2010). For sport administrators of youth competitions, it is important to recognise the developmental dynamics of children and youth, and why adults need to pay attention to them.

The young athlete and entourage support

The complexity of organising a major sport event, and the short time frame for doing so (e.g. one to seven years depending on the event), means that organising committees are required to take into account a variety of stakeholders to assist in creating and delivering the event (Parent 2008). With young athletes, the stakeholder accompanying entourage is most likely made up of parents, the coach(es), and family members. The athlete entourage will vary according to the age of the athlete, maturity, and competing sport (team sport or individual sport). The roles and responsibilities of members of the entourage may change as the athlete matures. With maturity, the young athlete is often recruited into elite training, and then the entourage increases and roles differ. However, the central component to be taken into account by youth event organisers is that they are dealing with a child-athlete, with an emphasis on the child within the context.

It is well to remember that the single most important event in the lives of children as they prepare for adult life is the onset of puberty. But puberty does not occur at the same time for each child, and it is a fact that the early developers become the best athletes because they are more physiologically mature (Malina et al. 2005). While coaches and managers need to adapt training and competition schedules to the particulars of the developmental state of the child, this has implications for sport organisers too.

One of the best ‘bits of evidence’ that physiological maturity is linked to being the ‘best’ in an age group is the research on what is called the relative age effect (e.g. Helsen et al. 2005). The relative age effect is simply that those children born early in the age group year will be more physiologically mature than those born later in the year and demonstrate higher normative ability, and thereby are more likely to be identified as being the most talented in that age group. In fact, research findings (see Helsen et al. 2005) suggest that if an age group year goes from 1 January to 31 December, which is a popular way of categorizing age groups in organised sports, as many as 40 percent of children selected as the best in their age group will have been born between January and March, 30 percent between April and June, 20 percent between July and September, and only 10 percent between October and December. Clearly, being physiologically
mature helps a child to stand out as being ‘talented’. As an example, in a country like Norway, of all the female football players in U-17, U-18, and U-19 national teams in 2011, only 6 of these 88 elite players were born in the last quarter of the year (Bergh 2013). Relative physical maturity while competing in youth sports represents an important asset. These athletes will more often be selected by coaches and sport organisations, and thus given superior development opportunities.

Children develop at different rates and the young, physiologically immature athletes catch up with their more mature peers eventually. However, these differences in selection opportunity are thought to lead to dropping out. Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2008) report that 70 percent of adolescents drop out of sport between the age of 13–16 as many of them feel that they are not succeeding in their sport. Professional football clubs now recognise this phenomenon. As an example, Manchester United does not make any decisions about their junior players until they reach skeletal maturity. They wait until the player is mature (with a simple skeletal exam) before they decide to keep them or let them go. As another practical example, Lionel Messi (now arguably recognised as the best football player in the world) was perceived as being good but not a superstar as a child because of growth hormone deficiency (Balague 2013).

What are the consequences of this for sport participation and for those hosting the competitions? By emphasising competition and winning, it is the physiologically mature who garner the praise, the coaching expertise, and the plaudits of the organisers. Winning in sports is motivating for the physiologically mature, but only when they show superiority to their peers. Having parents who emphasise being competitive is not a problem for these athletes. But, and this is where it does matter, when these athletes find their peers catching up with them in terms of physiological maturity, and suddenly they are not as normatively successful in competition as they used to be, this is where many lose motivation and want to drop out (Roberts 2012). When emphasising competing and winning, and they win, they are motivated; but it is when they don’t win as easily any more that they are likely to question their motivation and commitment to the sport. In a normative context, dropping out typically occurs in two distinct phases. A first phase happens when children start to recognise that competence is important to succeed (around age 12). If children feel that they do not have the competence to be among the best, they lose motivation and want to give up the sport (e.g. Roberts 1984). If parents, coaches, and organisers solely emphasise competing and winning as indices of success for children and youth sport participants, then the physiologically mature are more successful. When normative success through winning is the criterion, then the losing kids are more likely to be the ones who drop out. The unfortunate issue is that so many of these children are likely late developers and would have become very competent had they stayed in the sport. During this phase, it is very important to keep children motivated. The entire entourage needs to agree on this being an important issue to address in children and youth sports. Effort needs to be coordinated as parents and other adults in the entourage surrounding youth sports must emphasise effort and remind young athletes that they are developing their talents and that important attributes to succeed are trying hard and persisting in their sport (Roberts 2012). This is not always easy, but it is important to allow maturity to develop and not to make decisions about dropping out on the basis of poor performance before young athletes have reached physiological maturity. The second phase of dropping out happens a little later in adolescence (15 to 17 years of age), as sport participants typically get more serious about their competitive sport involvement. It is at this moment that parents and the coaching entourage are a crucial component to lasting sport involvement when they support personal skill development and individual progression and strategies: emphasising that persistence and focus on personal development pays off in the long run.

Very few children succeed on their own, without the support of significant adults. Athletic talent development is a complex interactive process that involves the need for a strong support
network to nurture talent (Gould and Carson 2008). The importance of the contribution of
different stakeholders to optimise the development of talent in young sport participants tends to
differ according to the athlete’s age, and also how the young athlete progresses through specific
stages in developing excellence (Bloom 1985, Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993, Durand-Bush and
Salmela 2002). When in competition, younger athletes have a greater need to gain access to their
entourage than older athletes. Youth sport events need to facilitate these interactions.

At important competition events, the social support provided by stakeholders is important to
ensure a positive sport experience in young athletes. The entourage can help a young athlete
cope with the demands of an important sporting event and buffer stress related to competition

Learning to perform at sport events is an important aspect of sport expertise development, and
social support represents an important facilitator of this skill (Cutrona and Russell 1990). Schaefer
and colleagues (Schaefer et al. 1982) distinguish between three types of functions of social support
that can be typically provided by the entourage of a young athlete: emotional support, tangible
support, and informational support. The essence of emotional support is to feel loved and cared
about, that one achieves through reliance and confidence in other people. Tangible support involves
more direct aid through loans, gifts, driving one to venues, and so forth. Informational support is
when one provides information or advice and gives feedback to the athlete. An athlete will need
all three of them in order to develop and perform well; however, there are research-based recom-
mendations about who should provide what type of support and this will be dependent on the
age of the athlete. Parents tend to fulfil the most significant roles for young athletes in terms of
providing emotional and tangible support (Wolfenden and Holt 2005). Coaches tend to play a
more prominent role as the athletes grow older, providing informational support in the form of
physical and psychological training (Côté 1999). Coach social support has been found to relate
to an athlete’s satisfaction with his/her athletic experience (Weiss and Friedrichs 1986) and to
important outcomes in sport and the ability to adapt to new challenges (Weiss and Friedrichs
tiansen et al. 2008). Providers of social support exist in the competitive environment and they
are not only family, friends, relatives, the coach, and team members, but can also be members of
the clergy as well as medical and mental health professionals associated with the organisation. In
other words, different types of social support may be obtained from different individuals in one’s

To sum up, from research, it is obvious that parents and the entourage fulfil different roles
and have different functions not only in development, but also when the athletes are competing.
To make it even more complex, these roles tend to change over time and parents move into the
background and coaches move into the foreground (Wolfenden and Holt 2005). When it comes
to claims and rights, the coach is essential and considered a key resource for the athlete during
the event (Hanstad et al. 2013), while parents, on the other hand, are less visible unless the event is
for youths. Using a psychosocial approach to present the role of parents and the entourage,
we will further elaborate on the importance of this entourage group at different types of competitions –
and for different age groups.

The parents’ support role

In a competitive setting, athletes are more likely to seek support and advice from people to whom
they feel close (Jowett and Cockerill 2003). Undoubtedly, the young athlete may expect the
parents and family always to act in their best interest, although there are many examples of the
opposite. In addition, as the entourage is a constantly evolving system, the parents may end up
being the closest and most stable supporting actor (IOC 2011). The younger the athlete, the more important the parents are in terms of support because of the limited entourage. Consequently, for competitive events, it is critical that parents and the athlete entourage get reasonable access to the young athletes to provide social support and facilitate learning and development (Knight et al. 2011). At championships, organisers have to plan for parent- and entourage-friendly ‘zones’ to meet up with young athletes in an appropriate setting that allows for support and limits over-involvement.

**The supporting role of parents**

There are many famous athlete–parent relationships that have been successful and resulted in international achievement. For example, Michael Phelps’s mother cheering his every stroke during the London Olympics; Tiger Woods’s father following him around the course at the 1997 Masters Golf Championship; and Andy Murray’s mother tracking his every shot at the 2013 Wimbledon Championships.

For young athletes, parent emotional support is even more important when competing, and by emotional support we mean the athlete’s ability to turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress (Cutrona and Russell 1990). Parents were found to play a key supporting role (emotional, tangible, and informational) for the young athletes participating in the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in 2012 (Hanstad et al. 2013, Kristiansen and Parent 2014, Kristiansen in press). YOG is an innovative development of the IOC to target the age groups between 15 and 18 to give ‘Olympic’ experience to teenagers. The first YOG was held in Singapore in 2010 (Summer Games) and the second in Innsbruck in 2012 (Winter Games). The young athletes participated in all 28 summer and 7 winter sports, though in fewer disciplines, as well as being required to participate in the Cultural and Education Program (CEP), which focuses on five themes: ‘Olympism and Olympic values, skills development, well-being and healthy lifestyle, social responsibility and expression through digital media’ (IOC 2012a: paragraph 3). There are also innovative events in the various sports, such as mixed-gender or mixed-NOC events. Alongside the young athletes are ‘non-athletes’ (young ambassadors, young reporters, etc.) who also participate in the CEP activities (IOC 2012a).

At the 2012 Winter YOG in Innsbruck, the parents were primarily spectators and provided support for their child. However, a recent study indicated that parents wanted to be more involved (Parent et al. in press). They influenced other stakeholders such as the media to respond, to act, and thereby had the IOC consider developing institutional norms for dealing with parents. Parent and colleagues argued that the IOC and the YOG had not planned enough for parents or understood their importance in relation to the athletes, but have now acknowledged this. For example, the Canadian NOC held a reception for parents in Innsbruck, which can be interpreted as a recognition of the parents’ importance and thus as an acknowledgement of their influence as stakeholders.

Norwegian athletes interviewed about what it meant to them for have their family present during the 10 days in Innsbruck underlined getting the extra support when/or if needed (Kristiansen in press). It is important to note that in many cases, it was not only parents, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends, and siblings who were there to support their ‘Olympian’. In this research, parents tried to calm down their sons/daughters in this new and stressful context, and seeing a familiar face helped to keep a new situation more normal. Support was vital the closer the athletes were to the competitive event. One of the female athletes admitted that she was so ‘nervous, but then my family managed to calm me down’. The athletes stayed in an Olympic Village surrounded by a relatively mild version of security (Hanstad et al. 2013).
2013), so it was not easy for the parents to meet the athletes face to face. However, in this electronic age, much texting was occurring, and usually, parents and athletes had time to meet for a few minutes after the athletes had competed, but this was again constrained by the sport, the guidelines given by the coach, and the necessity of security in bussing the athletes to and from the venues from the Olympic Village.

Parents are expected to contribute not only to their own child, but sporting organisations always welcome volunteer effort from parents. It helps the club be more efficient and organised. And in the final analysis, parents contribute in a meaningful way to the education and sport skill development of their child. However, parents should balance their involvement carefully, and always remember that they are role models for their children (IOC 2011). There is the famous case in the US where a parent forged the age of his 14-year-old son as being 12 so that he could pitch in the ‘World Series’ of Little League Baseball, limited to children between the ages of 9 and 12 years of age. His team won, but then it was discovered that the winning pitcher was too old to be in the World Series. Not only had the father broken the rules, but he also violated the spirit of the game. The father was the one who was punished, but what values was he transferring to his son? This aspect will be re-visited after discussing the various roles of other members of the entourage in this stakeholder group. While the parents observed at YOG tended to behave well and be aware of the Olympic ethos, this is not always the case.

**Athletes transitioning out of junior careers**

When athletes transition out of a successful junior career toward the senior ranks, many adjustments are typically necessary. Past research (e.g. Coté 1999) has suggested that the role of the parents will change and modulate the developmental stages of successful athletes. Until young athletes reach legal age, parents often see it as their formal role to protect their child's rights and interests. These situations, depending on the culture of the sport and based on whether this parental involvement is perceived as positive, will either favour or disfavour the athletic progression of the young athlete (Wylleman et al. 2000).

It is also around this career period that individual life- and sport-related responsibilities change. The expectations change as to the appropriate role of the parent in combination to all other changes related to transitioning from a junior level to a senior career, represents a serious potential hazard for young and developing athletes (Wylleman et al. 2004). Young successful senior athletes will often attribute their success to their parents emphasising the right criteria of success, contributing to a mastery-involving climate throughout this important transition period. They partly credit the success to the optimal parental support they received prior and during this period of transition, experiencing the backing of their parents without additional pressure, receiving adequate activity-related advice and emotional support (Bloom 1985, Mageau et al., 2009).

**Support from the increasing number of entourage**

At the senior level, the elite athletes tend to expand their entourage dramatically due to competition sizes and the importance of the event (see our example above). At the 2012 London Summer Olympics 10,500 athletes were followed by 5,770 accredited team officials (IOC 2012b), and most likely a greater but unknown number of non-accredited entourage perceived as important for optimal performance. Research has revealed that expectations, as well as the way an unfamiliar setting is experienced and managed, may be unique to individuals and groups and need to be taken into account (Noblet and Gifford 2002, McKay et al. 2008). As a result, the best athletes usually get a say in who is coming with them and if they get accreditation or not. In this section
we will review some of the vital members of the entourage, such as coaches, managers, medical staff, sport physiologists, sport psychologists, media coordinators, and sport specific personnel that must be planned for when hosting major events. The coach is a central actor coordinating the roles of other adults in the entourage of the athletes.

The coach support role

Of the entourage, the coach is in a special position, as he or she is the only one from the adult entourage who usually is lodged together with the athletes, or at least has the opportunity to freely meet with the athlete. The coach is directly situated at the competition site with an informational and tangible support role. He or she may be the one who has to be in direct contact with the other stakeholders mentioned throughout this book (see in particular Chapters 7 and 11 on athletes and mission staff, respectively).

Coaches and informational support

The aim of the coaching and support staff should be on encouraging continued participation among athletes at all levels. To create an optimal mastery and learning development climate (e.g. Smoll et al. 2011, Roberts 2012), coaches with high technical and people skills are needed. It is important that the coach serves as a coordinator for the different services provided by the individuals within the entourage of the athletes. Coaches need to oversee the involvement of practitioners and other experts in the development process, creating a team that works together toward common goals. Coaches are responsible to help the athletes make sense of the input from different support staff. To the greatest extent possible and beyond providing high-level expertise from their sport, they also need to act as ‘hands-on’ practitioners, and through coaching and guidance help athletes develop at the rates of which they are capable. While it is important for coaches to coach, they are also responsible to seek and provide as much support as possible for the athlete, and optimally delegate responsibilities related to very different tasks that are so often seen as part of modern day coaching.

A coach’s main task is often seen as providing informational support, i.e. advice or guidance about possible solutions to problems (Cutrona and Russell 1990), although they spend much of their time planning and administrating the athletes’ participation in training and competition. When being in the entourage to younger athletes, coaches have expanded roles. Coaches present at YOG 2012 admitted that they did almost everything; they were coaches, team leaders, travel agents, parents, sport psychologists, and trainers (Kristiansen and Parent 2014). Dealing with the athletes’ emotional roller coasters and helping them through the competition was only one part of their extended duties. In addition, the coaches emphasised that providing clear guidelines to parents and athletes, as well as fostering a relationship with both groups, was important for a successful event. One aim of these guidelines is to limit the degree of parental involvement to one of emotional support only.

Medical staff

Different sport cultures have different relationships to the applied medical staff in the context of championships. However, it is more and more common for young athletes to have access to a physical therapist and medical personnel during major events. IFs and NGBs typically provide national representation teams with staff that are responsible for preventing diseases and injuries when traveling to major competitions, as well as treating athletes when ill or injured following
competition rules. Medical doctors with special expertise in sport medicine often accompany teams during competition. Their role is very diverse and will often include monitoring physiological adaptation and recovery for optimal performance and providing medical expertise in line with anti-doping rules. Most medical doctors will be associated with a sport team, a few sport teams from the same nation, or even a national team for athletes competing in different sports and disciplines.

One quick glance of the media guides from the important nations at major international events suggest an important increase in the presence of applied medical staff around athletes of all ages at major championships. On teams with limited resources, it is not uncommon for physical therapists to inherit some of the prevention and follow-up responsibilities related to medical issues. When a medical doctor travels with a team without the assistance of a physical therapist, it is not uncommon for the physician to treat and conduct manipulations typically falling under the responsibility of a physical therapist. Similar to other roles within the entourage of an athlete, individuals with multiple competencies will often be an asset to teams with limited resources. On teams with optimal financial resources, medical doctors will often coordinate responsibilities with physical therapists and sport physiologists. When competing at endurance sport events, teams will typically incorporate sport physiologists to work toward optimizing the physiological state of the athlete prior to competition by monitoring muscular and cardio-vascular adaptation. It is important for organisers to provide teams with the appropriate consulting rooms for optimal medical care and to preserve physician–patient privilege and confidentiality. When the organising committee does not provide this, the team managers will typically provide this for their staff and athletes (see also Chapter 11 on mission staff in this Handbook).

**Sport psychologists**

The collaborations between athletes and sport psychologists, as well as between the coaching staff and the sport psychologists, are typically built over a long period of time prior to a championship. It is usually the case that the NGB or the NOC responsible for the sport hires a sport psychologist to work with the coach and team members prior to and during the major competitive event. For young elite athletes, it is unusual for them to have their own personal sport psychologist. Typically, the sport psychologist will be made available to the athletes and he/she will provide educational experiences in the management of psychological skills prior to the competitive event. Over time, as the athlete develops greater elite status, individual attention and remediation may become available. But for youth events, the sport psychologist is more peripheral and is available ‘as needed’ should circumstances dictate.

For mature elite athletes, as we have seen with the example of the cross-country-skiing superstar, it is usual for an elite athlete to have a sport psychologist available with whom he or she may consult at all times. In order to qualify as an official member of the staff with an accredited access to the competition site and to the athletes, the sport psychologist will typically be labelled as a member of the coaching or medical staff as a function of what type of accreditation is available. For the organisers of events, the sport psychologist needs to have the same access as a coach to the athletes. In Olympic or major tournament events, this means that the sport psychologist needs access to the residences of the athletes, and in ideal conditions, a room in which the two can meet confidentially (Gardner 2001). It has been the experience of one of the co-authors of this chapter that meeting athletes often occurs in coffee shops or dining halls at major events, which are less than ideal conditions for psychological support. Therefore, in an ideal world, it is necessary for the organising committee or national team administrators to provide several rooms for confidential consultations with athletes at the
residential or competition sites (most teams these days have consulting sport psychologists attending major sport events). It is not uncommon for sport psychologists to be creative in finding optimal meeting opportunities and places to preserve confidentiality when providing services. Many successful consultations have taken place in cars, on walks or runs in the forest, or other isolated settings.

**Media coordinators**

Athletes and media representatives have distinct roles as actor and distributor of an interpretation of the act or sport performance, and the truly elite athletes with major sponsors are the ones who have personal publicity coordinators or need assigned ones during major events in order to help out in their relationship with the media. This is important as more recent research has confirmed that athletes perceive journalists as a major stressor when performing at the highest level during an elite event (Greenleaf et al. 2001, Kristiansen and Roberts 2011, Kristiansen et al. 2011b, Kristiansen and Hanstad 2012). First, media demand access to an athlete, both before and during competition, and it is this constant pressure to be available that is experienced as stressful, making it harder for the athletes to focus on the event. This may be particularly stressful when the goal is to refocus following a dip in performance (Greenleaf et al. 2001, Kristiansen et al. 2011b), and even worse when the failure is total. In order to regulate and improve the journalist–athlete relationship during special events like the Olympic Games, some countries develop media rules to control the interaction and also use press attachés (Kristiansen et al. 2011, Kristiansen and Hanstad 2012). This is necessary for the very elite athletes as media typically want a ‘good story’. For example, during the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, the media representatives outnumbered the athletes by almost four to one. For this reason, members of the Norwegian team and the media met according to pre-agreed rules (Kristiansen et al. 2011). Athletes were expected to show up at press conferences two days before events and also shortly after the event. In return, the media would leave the athletes to focus on their respective event(s). As an organiser of major events, it is important to make room and spaces for this interaction to go as smooth as possible. For event managers, it is important to remember that the publicity coordinator has a dual task: to consider what is best for the athletes and for the media.

Norway has had great success with the presence of press attachés to supervise and organise pre-agreed media rules (Hanstad and Skille 2010). As it is the case in many countries, the press attachés are the media coordinators assigned by NOCs for major competitions. They help monitor the balance between ‘the need/desire for public relations and promotion of the sport and athletes with the needs for performance preparation and competition’ of the athletes (Gould and Maynard 2009: 1403). While the athletes consider the structured press meetings and the post competition mixed zone a success, the journalists, on the other hand, had mixed feelings with regard to the use of press attachés. For the journalists, the interview situation became more ‘complicated’ when press attachés ended press conferences with the needs of the athlete in mind (need to warm down, shower, etc.), and they struggled to get access to the athletes (Kristiansen and Hanstad 2012: 239). In the Olympic Games, the Athletes’ Village may function as a fortress to protect the athletes from the journalists. However, and this is often the case with highly elite and visible athletes, when athletes stay at regular hotels, press meetings may be more challenging as there is no space or appropriate conditions to conduct them (Kristiansen et al. 2013). Planning for competitions is not just about what is best for the athletes, it is also important to keep in mind the bigger picture – a picture where facilities allow for efficient exchange between media, athletes, and other team personnel.
Each sport has its subgroup of technical personnel, and in the example of cross-country skiing, the technical personnel includes ‘wax technicians’. In the hours leading up to the different World Cup and World Championship races, you often see the athletes with their personal expert wax technician testing skis, and in interviews after major victories, the wax technician is often specifically mentioned and thanked by the athletes. In total, the Norwegian Ski Federation travel around with over a dozen technicians to test and prepare the skies for a dozen athletes. In order to give the wax technicians an optimal environment to prepare the skies (each athlete often bringing up to 20 pairs of cross-country skis), the Norwegian Ski Federation (and Olympiatoppen) has invested in a new trailer at a cost of 6 million kroner (1 000 000 USD). The trailer is approximately 110 square meters, divided into a waxing room on the first floor of a little over 70m², and a special section on the second floor of roughly 40m² (Strand et al. 2013). The second floor is meant to be used by other members of this stakeholder group: the physiotherapists will get a bench so they can start treatment right away, and it will be a meeting room and a place to eat. According to the Norwegian cross-country skiing performance manager Åge Skinstad, this new trailer will ‘improve logistics significantly and give us the room we have previously been lacking’ (Strand et al. 2013: paragraph 7). Event organisers should therefore remember that sport federations may bring in their own facilities that need to be close to the event site.

Norway is one of few countries in the world that spends so much money on a relatively small international sport like cross-country skiing. The Norwegian economy and previous success by these groups of athletes have made it easy to get enough money for support personnel (see Figure 10.1); however, the money spent raises issues both in the country and among the other nations. Some tend to label this type of support as ‘technological doping’. Not everyone approves of this development and the extensive support some nations are able to provide to their best athletes. Recently, FIS considered taking action to reduce differences between rich and poor countries. Norway’s representative in the FIS, Vegard Ulvang, states that ‘it looks as if the technological trend is towards greater support and Norway seems to be dominant in this area’ (NTBtekst 2012). In comparison, other sports (such as alpine skiing, cycling, sport car racing) have also considered limitations in terms of team infrastructure and technological support to provide for a fair playing field. Rich nations or countries with a close cultural link to a specific sport spend considerable resources to support their athletes, and many have become concerned about the large differences that exist between athletes and teams from different countries.

Just the sight of the new wax-trailer may give the Norwegian athletes a psychological advantage over their international opponents. It shows that Norway supports its athletes in a very important way that is visible to everybody walking around the competition site. In his popular blog, the head of the Norwegian waxing team, Knut Nystad, answers the recent criticism from less wealthy nations by pointing out some sports where Norway has not been very successful:

I do not think that Norway can persuade or have an influence that will result in Finland, Sweden, Russia, Canada and the United States destroying some ice hockey venues so we can beat them more often, nor do I believe the United States and Australia will tap water out of their pools so we become equal in those sports (. . .) The competitive advantage we have in Norway and what we are good to invest in, is the people. However, nothing lasts forever. Let’s enjoy the moment and celebrate our sporting heroes and the people in the support teams.

(Nystad 2012: paragraph 10, emphasis added)
Size and emphasis in support teams as well as support infrastructures will often be dictated by a combination of factors including the requirements and the work of the stakeholders around the athletes, and by the place athletes and their sport have in the society to which they belong. Many resourceful countries have started actively integrating the different stakeholders around an athlete as official members of an athlete’s support team. Many countries have guidelines, courses, and official roles for parents of young athletes in preparation for a championship. In an era where a lot of the focus is on the performance mantra of ‘controlling the controllables’, the possible unpredictable effect of parents and other members of the stakeholder group around the athletes on personal performance may benefit from an official role in a detailed structure to maximise the positive effect on a young athlete’s performance.

If the environment created by the stakeholders is facilitative, then the young athlete can achieve the highest level of performance possible with the potential available. When the environment is debilitative, all an athlete can achieve is a certain survival level, without necessarily experiencing the highest level of performance. The downside is that the athlete is in danger of experiencing negative sport participation outcomes such as burning out (Lemyre et al. 2008). An environment may be a problem that contributes to loading the athlete to exhaustion and by extension underperforming. Such a problem environment will also likely keep athletes from achieving their full potential and a chance at reaching the highest level of performance. On the other hand, a facilitative environment will be the cornerstone leading to the highest levels of performance for the best predisposed athletes. The well-being of the stakeholders around the young athletes may have a direct effect on their performance. For example, a coach experiencing burnout symptoms has been shown to have a negative effect on athletes (Vealey et al. 1998). The environment can present a major challenge for the young athletes when the focus is on uncertain future performance goals. Staying in the moment, and focusing on mastery goals and personal development will likely help athletes appreciate their participation to important sporting events. It is an important role of the entourage to facilitate this process in the young athletes (see also Chapter 7 on athletes).

Theoretical and practical issues concerning the entourage

As a consequence of the research on parents and entourage having mostly been conducted within a sport psychological framework, there are some key trends to report, but also knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. Whether at an elite or grass-root level, it is important that the parents and the entourage are coordinated over roles and responsibilities. Consequently, communication is a crucial factor for an athlete’s success and for coordinating the roles of the various members of the entourage. The larger the entourage, the more people the athlete has to relate to and communicate with. It is difficult to set up a template for how such communication or the ideal sharing of roles among the entourage should be; we share what we know from research by using different sources of support as a framework above.

The coach or a manager for the truly elite athletes may be in charge of internal communication in order to avoid stress. It is clear that when an athlete feels secure and appreciated, and any unforeseen issues are taken care of by the entourage, his/her experience of stress is reduced (Kristiansen et al. 2012). Research has revealed that expectations, as well as the way an unfamiliar setting is experienced and managed, may be unique to individuals and groups (Noblet and Gifford 2002, McKay et al. 2008, Kristiansen and Roberts, 2010). Such variations have to be taken into account by the entourage team. Hence, leaders also need to know the athletes they are planning for in order to avoid ‘game wobbles or second-week blues’ (Hodge 2010).
For the youngest athletes, the accompanying entourage should constantly emphasise effort and persistence, and not compare the child with other children. Using self-referenced feedback, or feedback that is based on the athlete’s previous performance, is preferred (e.g. Roberts 2012): is the athlete getting better, rather than how he or she is doing relative to peers. The other aspect to emphasise is fun and enjoyment, even for adolescent participants. The message given by the entourage should be that meeting new friends, having fun, and learning new skills is important, more important than the result of the competition. This evidence emerges from contemporary motivation research (e.g. Duda 2010, Smoll and Smith 2010) which states that emphasising mastery and learning is better for long-term motivation and reduces dropping out as opposed to emphasising performance and the outcomes of performance. Organisers of competitions should also pay attention to the same evidence; this means emphasising participation, and de-emphasising winning and losing. It might be cumbersome, but medal ceremonies for youth sport should be low-key affairs and not emulate the ceremonies of senior competitive events (Hanstad et al. 2013). Perhaps it might be better to give participation medals to all participants. The focus should be on attending and participating in the event, not solely on who did or did not medal.

The older and more elite the athlete gets, the more complex situations the entourage has to deal with. When athletes participate in major events like the Olympic Games, planning both for the athlete and the following entourage becomes a major issue, and housing is among the most contentious. Actually, the housing of athletes and his/her entourage is a big challenge for participants as well as hosts of minor or major events. For an athlete, these minor details that in many other settings would be considered insignificant can have a major impact on results (Chambliss 1989). When hosting an Olympic Games, the event organisers put much thought into the housing of the athletes and the following entourage with accreditation. The number of accreditations is based on athletes qualifying for the events. Planning for the optimal entourage is complicated by the late qualifications of some athletes. Some support team members will only receive a confirmation of their accreditation a few weeks before the Olympic Games. The IOC (2012c) has requirements for the Athletes’ Village laid down in the Olympic Charter, the Host City Contract, and the Technical Manual on Olympic Village. Participating national teams may to some extent make adjustments within the Athletes’ Village or opt for alternative housing arrangements. For some participating countries, housing considerations is an important part of planning and preparations (Andersen and Hanstad 2011). Gould and colleagues (Gould et al. 1999: 389) found that teams which failed to meet performance expectations were likely to report distractions associated with the Athletes’ Village. However, there are few studies of how athletes perceive different aspects of housing and their impact on performance. What we know is that the Athletes’ Village may be a source of inspiration, but also a source of strain (Hodge and Hermansson 2007, Blumenstein and Lidor 2008). A fear of terrorism at major events is both problematic for athletes as well as the host city and necessitates strict entrance control (e.g. Atkinson and Young 2012). Compact living conditions may cause problems due to noise, sleeping difficulties, and lack of privacy (Hodge and Hermansson 2007, Kidd 2013). However, alternative accommodations outside the Athletes’ Village raise a number of similar issues. For the entourage without accreditation, there are day passes to visit and consult with athletes, but it is almost impossible to access the Athletes’ Village. Furthermore, Kidd (2013) adds that it is often the first-world athletes that complain over the housing conditions, and that athletes are often advised to stay elsewhere if they can afford to stay in hotels (see Kristiansen et al. 2013).

In the 2014 Sochi Olympic Winter Games, the cross-country skiing star’s personal coach was granted accreditation six months prior to the competition. As the country’s biggest cross-country skiing star was considered one of the best Norwegian medal candidates, his entourage had been included in the planning process at an early stage. Both practitioners, researchers, and those
hosting events need to pay more attention to details in the context of individual needs. An important part of this is to develop a better understanding of how to organise planning and preparation in ways that may exploit the best evidence we have at present to enhance the experience for athletes. From an organisational perspective, having the right support personnel and leaders with experience may be essential. This is consistent with other research showing that inexperienced support personnel may end up undermining athletes’ capacity to perform (e.g. Gould and Maynard 2009). Consequently, to overcome that inexperience and the subsequent poor planning, it is essential that the organisers recognise the crucial role played by the entourage surrounding an athlete. Rather than being considered a logistic problem, they should be considered an essential component of modern sport.

Conclusions and implications

In summary, the stakeholder group consisting of parents and the support entourage have different roles and responsibilities toward the athletes depending on the age of the athlete and competition level. Further, the relationship between the different members within this stakeholder group may easily become tense when responsibilities and roles are unclear, and disagreement arises over who should provide support and what type of support. For example, for the youngest athletes, the coach’s informational support should be adhered to by both the athlete and his/her parents. This may be vital during mega events for youths. In order to make the competition a positive experience for the athlete, organisers should prepare for areas where, for example, only the coaches have access. However, families are vital both in helping the young athletes to develop their careers (tangible support) as well as providing emotional support when competing. At grass-roots events, the parents also have a tangible organisational role in driving, feeding, and being part of the support team around a team or individual player.

But when young athletes reach a certain age, parents most likely become less involved; and as a result, other stakeholders within the entourage become more significant, and a more specialised resource to fulfil a more important role when optimizing athletic performance. When these changes are planned for, a significant contribution to performance may result. In elite competition such as the Olympic Games, the importance of the different members is somewhat reflected in their accreditation level. At major championships, only stakeholders providing informational support are accepted and planned for in detail. However, with a general and constant access to other stakeholders through mobile communication technology, the impact of different stakeholders may transcend a mandatory physical presence.

From the foregoing, the coach clearly has a central role in the development of athletic talent. But in these modern times, the role of the coach is multifaceted and may also include that of an entourage coordinator. Does the coach have any responsibility towards the parents, the event organisers, or other stakeholders beyond the performance of the young athlete? Is it the coach’s obligation to involve parents solely when athletes are minors and there is a need to create a meeting place to enhance communication? What we do know is that the coach, and the entourage, must focus on creating a multidisciplinary platform that is conducive for the athlete to perform optimally. And it may well be that the coach has to take the lead in this. The research to date is very clear that to optimise performance of young athletes in particular, the coach should focus on creating an optimal motivational climate around the young athletes, emphasising personal skill development, self-referenced success criteria, and sustained effort over time. The coach must also be aware of the physiological and anatomical constraints on young athletes. Creating a team around the young athlete that shares these basic common views on how to best attain high levels of performance is in the best interest of the individual athlete. But none of this will be successful
unless event managers recognise that when young athletes are involved, they are not organising a sport event, rather they are organising an educational experience for young athletes that involves many stakeholders.

The current chapter provides implications for the different members of an athlete’s entourage, NOCs and/or organisations promoting, planning, organising, and hosting youth sports events. Key lessons include: 1) all members of the entourage working with young athletes should have knowledge about developmental factors and how to make sport a positive experience. Children are not miniature adults, but have their own criteria of what is positive; 2) parents should focus on giving the athletes emotional support and be positive about their performance using self-referenced feedback; 3) the coach’s main role should be to provide the young athlete with informational support and help him/her cope with novel situations; 4) the secondary role of the coach is to help the athlete cope with the rest of the entourage; and 5) the lack of management literature on these issues is a key challenge for event and team managers. This chapter clearly demonstrates the different roles the members of this stakeholder group hold in relationship to the athletes, and that more knowledge is warranted in order to plan better.

A number of future research questions can be suggested that would help develop the sport management literature to be more sensitive to the psycho-social-physical dynamics of young athletes in competitive events. In order to begin to cover the gaps in our current knowledge, the following examples are given. However, we draw heavily from the existing literature in the psycho-social domain:

1 A multi-disciplinary approach may provide a richer context of understanding of how parents and the entourage affect the athletes.
2 We need evidence on whether meeting areas need to be implemented even for adult or senior athletes.
3 With an understanding of an athlete’s developmental process, is it possible for organisers to better control the environment so that all children have a positive experience at the event?
4 The role of the coach is vital for athletes of all ages. However, we do not know enough about how the role changes when the athlete moves from a local sport event to an international sport event.
5 How parents should behave during events is often explicitly stated in literature, (e.g. the IOC’s webpage, the different events pages such as the Norway Cup, etc.). But the various roles of the parents are hardly ever discussed. How can we assist parents to fulfil the multi-roles we have identified above?
6 We need to know more about the differences in roles and responsibilities among the members of the athlete’s entourage for different types of events (e.g. a one-off or a recurring event). This knowledge will have implications for event managers of each type of event.
7 A critical issue for the entourage is housing: What are the optimal housing arrangements for the various members, and how can access to the athlete be implemented?

**Suggested readings**


Sport parents’ and entourage’s perspectives


References


Sport parents’ and entourage’s perspectives


