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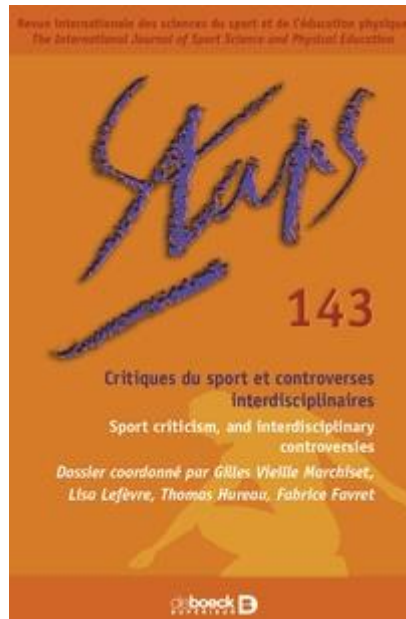
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Advocating for a sports model that focuses on the needs of all children for excellence, health, and well-being

Plaidoyer pour un modèle sportif centré sur les besoins de tous les enfants au service de l'excellence, de la santé et du bien-être

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Abstract: High performance is often the starting point for scientific work and reflection on sports models. Research on sporting excellence has focused on the trajectories of elite athletes and the identification of talent, and has led to sports development programs that have evolved over time. Current knowledge shows the limits of sports models focused on excellence because they only concern a small proportion of the population and have not been able to produce behavioral changes on a societal scale, particularly with regard to increasing physical activity among the general public. In view of the multiple challenges facing society, it seems essential to develop sports models so that they meet the needs of the population as a whole. Recent developmental theoretical models are more comprehensive and incorporate the concept of "physical literacy." They must be used as incubators for reflection within federations and sports organizations to identify ways to develop sports practices to meet the needs of all children, while still allowing for sports excellence.

Keywords: sports model, children, early specialization, performance, long-term development

INTRODUCTION

Several recent studies have highlighted the fact that a large number of countries attach particular importance to high-level sporting performance and invest massively in elite sport¹ in order to achieve significant results in major events such as the Olympic Games, world championships or the football World Cup (De Bosscher et al., 2015; De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019). The growing number of countries involved in this 'medal race' is increasing the level of international competition and pushing each country to invest more public money in research, coaching and infrastructure for top-level sportspeople. The objectives pursued by elitist policies have contributed to the development of sports models² centred on the development process of top-level athletes. The belief is that good sporting results at the highest level will have a positive impact on the population as a whole. Politicians often justify the public spending required to support top-level athletes on the basis of the many benefits to society (De Bosscher et al., 2021; De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019). However, recent studies show that the promoters of top-level sport tend to overestimate the positive impact on society and draw attention to the existence of negative impacts that remain underestimated (De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019). For example, it was expected that the organisation of the London 2012 Olympic Games would be accompanied by an increase in the number of people practising sport in England. Unfortunately, despite the very good sporting results achieved by the host country, this major event failed to attract new participants to clubs or to increase the level of physical activity among the English population (Bauman et al., 2021; Weed et al., 2015). Westerbeek and Eime (2021) point out that the objectives and economic model of elite sport are extremely different from those of community sport and that investment in a specific sector does not automatically imply spin-offs in the other. It has become clear that investment in elite sport alone is not enough to bring about behavioural changes across society and make the population more physically active. One of the most telling examples of this is the United States, which, despite being the world's leading sporting nation (Greatest Sporting Nation, 2022), has one of the highest sedentary lifestyle and obesity rates in the world (>35% among adults) (Global Obesity Observatory, 2022).

Elitist approaches are being introduced at an increasingly early age in many club structures, enabling young sportsmen and women to benefit from specialised coaching and achieve levels of performance that have rarely been seen before. However, these approaches only concern a minority of people, they are not without risk

and they do not necessarily meet the needs of the vast majority of children. Many authors point out that models centred on sporting excellence have a limited impact on recreational sport (Bauman et al., 2021; Nessel, 2021; Veal et al., 2012; Weed et al., 2015). It therefore seems essential to understand the limits of these models in order to allow the emergence of new ones that better meet the needs of the population as a whole.

THE EXAMPLE OF EARLY HYPERSPECIALISATION IN SPORT AND ITS MANY LIMITATIONS

The elitist approach to sport developed strongly in the 1990s, as in the work carried out by Ericsson et al (1993), who looked at the careers of individuals who had achieved a high level of expertise in a series of fields such as sport, music or chess. Expertise is associated with the ability to perform at the highest level observable in the population (Ericsson et al., 1993). According to this study, to achieve excellence, regular and intense practice is required from childhood onwards. This practice should be specific and supervised, leaving little room for other activities. If learning does not take place early enough, there is no catching up. It also postulates that a minimum of 10 years of intense practice in the discipline is required to achieve excellence. Influenced by the knowledge of the time, many coaches advocated the model of early hyperspecialisation in sport. The success of this approach with certain sportsmen and women (André Agassi, Tiger Woods, Amanda Beard, etc.) and the media coverage of their exploits contributed to the promotion of early sports specialisation. This approach, which focuses on performance from a very young age, raises questions because it often involves a 'miniaturisation' of the practices found in adults, which are not necessarily suitable for younger children: high-intensity training, the quest for mastery of movements, the quest for results in competition, selecting the best at the expense of the weakest, etc. Performance is at the heart of everything and parents, convinced that this is what's best for their children, nurture this overly competitive system. The fear of missing out on the good train, or of missing out on the rare pearl, can obsess managers, coaches and parents. The relevance of this system in the long term is questionable, because although a few young prodigies have confirmed their hopes, most of them end up anonymous, which sometimes leads to disillusionment and dramatic consequences. Sports specialisation, which is defined as intensive training throughout the year (8 months or more per year) aimed at improving skills specific to one sport, to the exclusion of other sports, does present a series of pitfalls when it is carried out at an early

stage. One of the consequences most described in the literature is the increased risk of injury (Brenner, 2016; Feeley et al., 2016; Jayanthi et al., 2015; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Myer et al., 2015; Post et al., 2017). The repetitive practice of stereotyped gestures used to automate specific movements can favour the onset of injuries in children who, during their period of growth, regularly have a weakened musculoskeletal system. This risk is increased when the training load is high and recovery periods are reduced. Chronic, hard-to-heal injuries such as stress fractures, apophysitis and tendonitis are common (Feeley et al., 2016; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Post et al., 2017). The risk of injury is increased when the number of hours of training per week exceeds the child's age in years, and when specific practice of the same sport exceeds 8 months per year (Post et al., 2017). In certain disciplines where the training load is particularly high, there can also be significant physiological consequences (Caine et al., 2003; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Malina, 2010). In women's gymnastics, for example, the training load is regularly associated with dietary pressure which can cause hormonal disturbances impacting growth (Bricout, 2003; Caine et al., 2003), but also menstruation (Baxter-Jones et al., 1994).

Early hyperspecialisation in sport can be accompanied by a harmful psychological burden for the child. The excessive importance given to competition and results exerts a high level of stress and anxiety in young people, which can be unpleasant (Gould, 2010; Rice et al., 2019). The impact of an elitist, performance-oriented approach is not insignificant. While early exposure to the reality of competition and all its psychological implications enables young people to develop mental management strategies that could be useful in their future, it can also lead to negative consequences that need to be weighed up. We are also entitled to question the relevance of a system that puts young athletes in a context of competition, rivalry and individualism from a very early age. The pressure of results and parental over-involvement can regularly lead to burn-out and abandonment through loss of interest (Isoard-Gautheau et al., 2015; Larson et al., 2019; Witt & Dangi, 2018). The involvement required by elitist approaches is difficult to reconcile with other needs considered fundamental during childhood, such as having free time, having a fulfilling social life, or having the opportunity to carry out other activities (ONPE, 2016). Thus, the level of commitment advocated by the advocates of early hyperspecialisation leaves little room for play and free play, which are acknowledged to be important for children's well-being and development (Frost et al., 2012).

Early hyperspecialisation in sport can also interfere with the development of basic motor skills during childhood. Indeed, in order to master specific technical movements at a very early age and perform well, many youngsters spend a lot of time repeating stereotyped movements without diversifying their practice. While this approach often produces good results at first, it generally limits progress and access to the top level. Young athletes who perform the same movements all the time and who are not sufficiently exposed to a diversity of sensory-motor stimuli risk being confronted with what scientists call the motor skills barrier (Branta, 2010; De Meester et al., 2018; dos Santos et al., 2022; Goodway et al., 2019; Hulsteen et al., 2018). Indeed, the multiplication of diverse motor experiences supports a neurological basis favourable to the future implementation of complex motor strategies requiring the level of coordination, precision and adaptability desired in top-level sport. This promotes not only the ability to learn specific skills, but also indirectly the capacity for adaptation and creativity that is essential in all open sporting situations (Hulsteen et al., 2018; Savelsbergh & Wormhoudt, 2018). A broad motor base is also useful because it enables development in a greater number of disciplines and facilitates transfers and sporting reconversions during childhood, but also in adulthood (Branta, 2010; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Cury et al., 2022).

Aware of the problems associated with early hyperspecialisation in sport, and in order to better understand the impact of specialisation strategies on the development of performance in the medium and long term, scientists have taken a greater interest in the career paths of athletes (Gulbin et al., 2013; Güllich, 2017; Moesch et al., 2011). Malina (2010) points out that while early specialisation does indeed produce results in young people, it neither predicts nor guarantees high performance in adulthood. Furthermore, retrospective studies confirm that in reality, in the vast majority of sports, early hyperspecialisation is not the path that gives the best chance of success at a very high level (Gulbin et al., 2013; Güllich, 2017; Vaeyens et al., 2009).

THE MANY PATHS TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

Retrospective studies provide a better understanding of the paths that lead to high performance. The work of Gulbin et al (2013) is particularly interesting, as it shows that only 7% of the elite athletes studied had a linear career path, i.e. they had an upward trajectory at a young age enabling them to progress directly to the highest level when they reached adulthood. A majority (57%) reported having experienced at least one episode of regression in

their level of competition. The authors point out that the pathways differ from one sport to another and emphasise that some elite athletes joined their discipline late in life, benefiting from their experience in another sport and the transfer of skills to enable them to progress rapidly to the highest level in their new sport. This confirms that the rule of 10 years of intensive specific practice is erroneous and does not take into account either the different career paths or the possible transfers of skills (Cury et al., 2022). The study by Güllich (2017) goes in the same direction by also demonstrating the possibility of reaching the highest level without specialising from childhood. This study, carried out in 33 sports, compares the careers of 83 athletes who have won medals at the highest level (Olympic Games or world championships) with those of 83 other athletes who have not won a medal in these same competitions. The results show that medallists started specific sports at the same age as non-medallists, but more gradually. On the other hand, they practised other sports for longer, sometimes at a competitive level, and decided to invest exclusively in their favourite sport later (11.9±5.5 years for non-medallists compared with 14.9±6 years for medallists; $p < 0.01$). Güllich (2017) observes that medal winners have a lower volume of training in the specific sport up to the age of 18, while during the same period they practise more other sports. These results confirm the risk of training overload during childhood and of specialising too early (Jayanthi et al., 2015; Moesch et al., 2011), while supporting the benefits of sports diversification for top-level athletes (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). However, some nuances are necessary, as the process of specialisation varies greatly from one sport to another (Vaeyens et al., 2009). A distinction is generally made between early specialisation sports and progressive specialisation sports (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Jidovtseff, 2016).

Early specialisation sports are mainly artistic and acrobatic disciplines such as gymnastics, dance and figure skating. They differ from other sports in that they require children to learn highly complex skills, including rotations, at an early age, when their morphology is advantageous (Mattson & Richards, 2010). Gymnastics is one of the few sports where it has been shown that to reach the top level, it is necessary to start specialising early (Hume et al., 1993; Law et al., 2007). Some gymnastics experts recommend starting between the ages of 4 and 8 and gradually intensifying training to become almost exclusively involved from the age of 11-12 (Law et al., 2007). Such approaches are not without risk, as outlined above, and it is essential that they are carried out with respect for the physical and psychological integrity of the child and that they ensure the child's long-term well-being. All other

sports are considered to be progressive specialisation sports, requiring physical and motor bases that can be acquired through various sporting experiences during childhood and allow specialisation after the age of 12 (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). It is also important to distinguish between sports with a high technical component (football, tennis, hockey, swimming, etc.) and sports with a high physical component (athletics, cycling, rowing, weightlifting, triathlon, etc.). While the latter can be started late without much prior experience (Moesch et al., 2011), sports with a technical component need to be discovered early on to introduce children to specific basic movements, without the need for early specialisation (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Vaeyens et al., 2009). However, the debate remains open in sports with a high technical component: some argue that early diversification is beneficial (Baker et al., 2003), while others suggest that it is not necessary (Ford et al., 2009). The study by Ford et al. (2009), which focuses on football, states, for example, that while this sport should certainly not be the subject of early specialisation, it seems essential that it should be the subject of early engagement, while leaving room for free play.

Many scientists agree that, in the vast majority of cases, it is essential to encourage sporting diversification during childhood, as this approach reduces the risks associated with early over-specialisation in sport, without jeopardising the chances of reaching the top level (Baker et al., 2009; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Voigt & Hohmann, 2016). For a number of years now, coaches and club structures have been trying to find solutions to reconcile the recommended diversification of young people with the essential work of sports specialisation within the structure. The study by Voigt and Hohmann (2016) shows that this integration is envisaged in three different ways: by integrating late arrivals from another sport; by allowing cohabitation with another sport; and by offering sporting diversification within the sports structure itself. The preference for one strategy over another depends partly on coaches' beliefs about the transfer of skills from one sport to another, and partly on the particularities of the sport and the complexity of the technical learning required before sporting maturity. In theory, cohabitation with another sport seems very attractive, but it is only possible when coaches are convinced of the merits of this approach. Increasingly, clubs are integrating "sporting diversity" into their structures without allowing young people to play another sport at the same time. This is particularly the case with many football clubs, which, in order to guarantee complete motor and physical development while allowing progressive specialisation, offer motor education sessions and multi-sport discovery

during childhood. Such an approach is indeed interesting, but it raises questions because it 'traps' young sportsmen and women in a structure whose primary objective remains the construction of sporting elites rather than the personal development of each child.

TALENT DETECTION, SELECTION BIAS AND REORIENTATION

Specialising in sport at an early age is attractive because it enables young people to perform quickly and stand out in competitions. However, it is particularly difficult to reconcile short-, medium- and long-term objectives when short-term sporting results and the selection of the best athletes of the moment remain the priority. The growing importance given to competitions and results among young people exacerbates competition between athletes, between clubs and between sports, which sustains the phenomenon of early specialisation and leads to early systems of selection and identification of talent. The quest for short-term results among young people is a trap: young people who specialise early reduce their chances of long-term sporting development, and selectors, attracted by the strongest individuals, miss out on young talent who emerge later and have greater long-term development potential.

Talent identification programmes have been around for decades, but their effectiveness is still limited. The tools, which are based more on cross-sectional than longitudinal analyses, have difficulty predicting changes in performance factors over time. Detection is particularly uncertain before puberty, as morphological and physiological changes and individual growth dynamics have a major impact on performance. The gap between biological age (linked to biological maturation) and chronological age (linked to date of birth), which can exceed 4 years, completely biases the interpretation of results and selections at the time of puberty (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Ratel, 2018). This phenomenon is sometimes compounded by the issue of relative age (linked to the month of the year in which the child is born), which constitutes a significant advantage for those born at the beginning of the year (Cobley et al., 2009; Ratel, 2018). The identification of sporting talent remains an area of research that is still far from being mastered, and the most promising tools will have to be longitudinal, multidimensional (physical, physiological and mental, environmental) and ecological³ (Johnston et al., 2018; Till & Baker, 2020). Some recent research into talent identification has focused on the analysis of genetic inheritance (Pickering et al., 2019; Webborn et al., 2015). Hereditary factors have a major influence on the final morphology of the athlete, but also on physical qualities,

and can considerably influence the chances of performing and reaching the highest level. For example, tall stature appears to be essential for certain positions in basketball (Zarić et al., 2020), volleyball (Nikolaidis et al., 2015), and sprinters in swimming (Kjendlie & Stallman, 2011), while short stature is an undeniable advantage in most gymnastics and figure skating apparatus (Thomis et al., 2005). If the young athlete's genetics are not favourable to the specific characteristics of the discipline, it is unlikely that he or she will ever be able to compete in this discipline at a high level. While the use of genetic tests to identify talent may seem attractive in theory, it is currently based on very limited knowledge and, above all, poses an ethical problem. According to a group of experts, in the current state of knowledge, no young sportsperson should be exposed to genetic testing as part of talent identification (Webborn et al., 2015). According to Baker et al (Baker et al, 2019), sporting talent is based on 5 factors: innate (i.e. derived from biological elements present at birth), multidimensional (i.e. made up of abilities belonging to a range of broad cognitive, physical and psychological categories), emergent (i.e. involving interactions between factors that combine in a multiplicative manner), dynamic (i.e. evolving during development due to interactions with the environment and random gene expression) and symbiotic (i.e. cultural and social factors will determine the final value of an individual's talent). Genetic inheritance is therefore far from being the only determinant, and childhood experiences and the environment play a major role in sporting determinism and success at the highest level. It is also likely that individuals who benefit from favourable conditions have the potential to develop at the highest level of sport, in several disciplines. Successful sporting reorientations later in life are possible, but are generally in the direction of sports with a high physical component. One example is the American athlete Marion Jones, who gave up basketball at the age of 19 to concentrate on sprint athletics and became world champion three years later. Another example is the Belgian Remco Evenepoel, a football player at the highest youth level, who switched to road cycling at the age of 17 and became world junior champion in his second year. The case of Jim Thorpe at the beginning of the 20th century is also interesting, as it shows an athlete who successfully switched to American football and baseball after becoming Olympic decathlon champion in 1912. This exceptional athlete was able to adapt quickly to develop successfully in a wide range of sporting contexts. Nowadays, such a late switch from a predominantly physical sport to one with a high technical component is much more complicated, as it requires the general and specific motor bases linked to the sport in question to have been acquired during childhood. The

failed attempts by sprinter Usain Bolt to switch to American football, and by swimmer Florent Manaudou to switch to handball, show that it is not enough to be an exceptional athlete, and that in technical-tactical disciplines, years of specific practice are essential to reach the very highest level. There has been recent scientific interest in the possibility of rapid transfer of sporting talent from one discipline to another, and several authors are encouraging the integration of this possibility of rapid transfer into top-level sports programmes, along the lines of what was proposed by the national UK sport agency in preparation for the London 2012 Olympic Games (Cury et al., 2022; MacNamara & Collins, 2015; Vaeyens et al., 2009).

ELITE-CENTRED MODELS CONCERN A MINORITY

Historically, sports development models were initially designed with the primary objective of putting young athletes in the best possible conditions to reach the sporting elite. This was the case with the SMTD model (Standard Model of talent Development) (Tinning et al., 1993), the first version of LTAD (Long Term Athlete Development) (Balyi et al., 2013) and the YPDM (Youth Physical Development Model) (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). The models proposed since the 2010s, such as the Australian FTEM (Foundation, Talent, Elite and Mastery) (Gulbin et al., 2013), have begun to include recommendations for those who are not destined for top-level sport, but remain primarily focused on sporting excellence. However, elite sportspeople represent a tiny minority of the population. In France, this concerns around 15,000 individuals, half of whom are considered to be hopefuls (0.022% of the French population). Among young French people, the quest for performance and competition is far from being the primary reason for taking part in sport (INJEP, 2020)⁴. Statistics from the United States show that the probability of obtaining a scholarship thanks to sporting results is 1% and that the chances of reaching professional level vary between 0.003 and 0.5% depending on the sport (Malina, 2010). Sports models centred on the elite therefore have a major limitation, as they only really concern a small proportion of participants and the population. Yet these models still dominate most sports structures (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). They should evolve to better meet the needs of children and society.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND SOCIETY

In view of the galloping development of physical inactivity worldwide and its health consequences in Western countries (Ng & Popkin, 2012; WHO, 2020), the promotion

of PSA from childhood should be considered a major educational and public health issue. In children, movement is a fundamental need that contributes greatly to their development and balance (Goodway et al., 2019). Neuroscience research has shown that from an early age, varied and repeated sensory-motor experiences contribute to the essential development of many areas of the brain (Khazipov et al., 2004). The development of motor skills and physical know-how (knowing how to roll, how to swim, how to slide, how to climb or how to dance) during childhood is considered by the scientific community to be an essential prerequisite for the acquisition of complex and specific sports techniques, but also for the adoption of an active lifestyle in the long term (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Goodway et al., 2019; Hulteen et al., 2018). These skills are essential because they contribute to people's autonomy, safety, health and personal and social well-being. The development of these physical skills is partly the responsibility of physical education programmes, but the number of hours devoted per week to these programmes is not sufficient and it is important that children also benefit from motor experiences in other contexts of their lives (sports clubs, extracurricular activities, family context and sports camps, etc.).

It is also during childhood, and particularly through physical experiences, that we build up our perceptions of what we are capable of doing and our self-confidence. To develop a positive image of physical activities and sport, it is important to have emotionally pleasurable experiences. The work of Stodden (Stodden et al., 2008) suggests that it is not enough to have a good motor base, but that it is also important to develop children's perception of their motor skills and to foster good self-esteem in order to develop a taste for physical activities and sport. Thus, teaching approaches that encourage fun and that focus above all on individual progress will meet children's needs better than approaches that focus on the development of motor skills. focus on performance, valuing only the best of the moment. Children's enjoyment of physical activity appears to be a powerful determinant of their commitment (Frost et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2016; Litchfield & Elliott, 2021; McCarthy & Jones, 2007). In addition, it contributes to intrinsic motivation and to the adherence process that is essential for long-term practice (Balyi et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016). Other studies have shown that parental support is also an important lever for both investment in sporting activities (Knight et al., 2017) and the child's level of physical activity (Dowda et al., 2011). All of these factors (physical and motor skills, confidence, motivation) have been identified as pillars of "physical literacy", which can be defined as "the

motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that a person possesses and that enable them to value and take charge of their commitment to physical activity throughout their lives" (Tremblay et al., 2018).

When considering the needs of children in terms of physical activity and sport, the issue of competition cannot be ignored. The place given to sporting competitions during childhood is the subject of numerous discussions by scientific experts (Izzo, 2010; Robinson & David, 2004; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). While authors credit competition with a number of educational advantages, such as commitment, emotional management and respect for rules and opponents, they also highlight a number of negative aspects, such as the development of an egocentric ethos, increased anxiety, fear of failure, disappointment, discouragement and loss of self-esteem. The accumulation of these negative elements can, in certain contexts, lead to abandonment of the activity (Butcher et al., 2002; Isoard-Gautheau et al., 2015; Izzo, 2010; Robinson & David, 2004; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). Competition becomes a real problem for children when the objective of winning becomes more important than the notion of learning and enjoying the game. The quest for a sporting result at all costs puts a great deal of pressure on children, and regularly conditions the content of sessions, with the weekend result in mind rather than long-term learning. Placing too much emphasis on winning can encourage selection and sometimes even exclusion from the sport. The forms of competition offered to young people are problematic because they generally correspond to a sort of "miniaturisation" of what is done for adults. By adopting the codes and principles of adult competitions, such as championship systems, tournaments, rankings and/or performance, they give the impression that sporting results are just as important for young people. This has repercussions on practices and expectations. The forms of competition offered to children should in fact be adapted to their age and their particular physiological and psychological characteristics. They should meet the needs of the participating populations and above all value participation, commitment and learning. In athletics, the Kids Athletics proposed by the IAAF appears to be an innovative competition model that departs from the format found among adults and meets children's needs better (Blatsis et al., 2016), in particular by valuing collective rather than individual performances and optimising the high motor commitment of all children, even the weakest. A number of children do not necessarily find themselves in competition models that revolve exclusively around performance and/or winning

(Robinson & David, 2004) and it would be beneficial for everyone to develop new forms of competition based on children's real needs and not on competitive models copied from adults.

ADVANCING SPORTS MODELS FOR SPORT FOR ALL

At a time when a sedentary lifestyle and its consequences on declining physical (Ng & Popkin, 2012) and motor skills (Lopes et al., 2021) are a major health threat to the population, we must question the relevance of systems that mainly support elite sport and competition to the detriment of the needs of the vast majority of the population. It has been highlighted that the objectives and economic model of elite sport are extremely different from those of community sport, and investment in one sector does not automatically imply spin-offs in the other (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). It has become clear that investment in elite sport alone is not enough to bring about behavioural change across society. Sporting models need to be developed so that they take into account the needs of the whole population. Particular attention needs to be paid to the practices recommended during childhood, as this is the time when the foundations for long-term sporting activity can be laid. Aware of what is at stake for society, more and more scientific teams and national organisations are working on sports development models that take into account the needs of everyone, from those who want to play competitive sport to those who want to play sport for pleasure and well-being (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Higgs et al., n.d.; Savelsbergh & Wormhoudt, 2018; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). These models propose recommendations for practices based on the physiological and psychological characteristics of different age groups. Some models have also evolved rapidly in recent years to incorporate scientific recommendations. This is the case, for example, with the Canadian LTAD (Long-Term Athlete Development) model, which in its first version focused on sporting excellence and which has gradually evolved to become, in 2019, the LTTSAP (Long-Term Development through Sport and Physical Activity) model, which now focuses on the participant. This model emphasises, for example, the importance of having fun through sport and the development of physical literacy during childhood (DLTSAP, 2019). The MDPS (Modèle de Développement de la Participation Sportive) (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) is probably the first model not focused on the sporting elite. This model, initially designed on the basis of empirical and scientific data, aims to describe the pathway of sports participation from childhood to adolescence on the basis of 7 postulates, 5 of which focus on the importance of sports diversification and deliberate play and 2 of which

refer to decisive transitional stages in the pathway of young athletes, namely the optimal period for initiating sports specialisation and the age of intensive investment in a sport to achieve high performance. In particular, the MDPS stresses that "early sports diversification", which consists of encouraging general motor skills and multi-sport practice during childhood, has many advantages that apply just as much to those who wish to aim for sporting excellence as to those who play sport above all for the pleasure of movement, well-being and health. This approach is said to be more virtuous, giving more opportunities to perform at a high level (Güllich, 2017), reducing the risk of injury (Jayanthi et al., 2015), encouraging a longer sporting career while reducing the risk of dropping out (Baker et al, 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007), would allow the acquisition of a broader motor base (Fransen et al., 2012), would facilitate sporting discoveries and reconversions and, finally, would offer a greater chance of finding the most appropriate sport for the individual (Branta, 2010). All these elements are in fact essential both for the development of sporting performance and for the acquisition of an active lifestyle. Another model, the ASMPL (Athletic Skills Model for enhancing Physical Literacy) (Savelsbergh and Wormhoudt, 2019) looks at the ways in which motor skills are built through complementary approaches, emphasising the importance of the diversity of play situations for building solid foundations not only in the interests of sporting performance, but also of developing physical literacy. The SPPM (Sport Participation Pathway Model) (Eime et al., 2022) is another model that attracts attention by proposing a description of the evolution of sport practices observed from childhood to adulthood in the entire population, specifying the different structural contexts (school, competitive sport, elite sport, recreational sport, unorganised sport). The SPPM forms the scientific basis for the development of the PASP (Physical Activity and Sport Participation framework), a theoretical framework that offers recommendations for the implementation of sports policies that take account of the specific problems observed in each age group. The aim is to significantly increase the level of physical activity in the population as a whole. The PASP suggests, for example, that strategies should be developed to retain participants from adolescence onwards, but also that practices should evolve so that they better meet the needs of different populations. The authors stress that models based on elite sport and the importance given to competitions are not suitable for many people, and that there is an urgent need to develop more participatory community sport. Of course, these models remain tools that offer sound theoretical recommendations, but they need to be integrated into the various levels of sports

policy and confronted with the specificities and realities of sports federations, clubs and other sports associations. Applying them would give us hope that the sports system will evolve so that it becomes more than just a place for the strongest to express themselves, but an incubator for physical activity, movement, well-being and health for all.

Nations such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Finland, Canada and New Zealand have sport policies that are moving in the direction of these models by moving away from an approach focused on elite sport and increasingly supporting community sport (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). Recent initiatives show that in France there is also a growing awareness of the issues raised, in particular with campaigns to promote sport for all and the fact that funding for sports federations is conditional on the implementation of a dual project: a federal performance project (which concerns top-level sport) and a federal development project (which concerns sport for all and at all ages). It is also worth highlighting the implementation of the Heritage Plan on the occasion of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris (Heritage Plan, 2022), which aims in particular to actively promote physical and sporting activities among all populations, within schools, companies and towns, but also to develop the sports offer throughout the country. Over the coming years, it will be interesting to analyse how this promotion has been implemented, whether it has taken into account the needs of the various target populations and whether it has been truly effective both in terms of sporting performance at the highest level and in terms of increasing the general level of physical activity in the population.

STRUCTURING PRINCIPLES OF A SPORTS MODEL CENTRED ON THE NEEDS OF ALL CHILDREN IN THE SERVICE OF EXCELLENCE, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

In the light of current knowledge and the many challenges facing society, it seems essential to move sports models towards a more inclusive approach, to better meet the needs of the population as a whole. By ensuring the development of a solid foundation of motor skills, encouraging early diversification of sports, giving importance to fun for the very young, offering adapted content, supporting innovative models of competition, taking account of individual growth rates and promoting the development of physical literacy, we can be sure that we will be offering everyone the tools for long-term sporting fulfilment, whether in a perspective of sporting excellence or in a practice for personal development, well-being and health.

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