Understanding the Relationship between Youth Sport Participation and Family Resilience

Jeffrey R. Farr, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
B. Christine Green (Advisor), George Mason University
Julian R. Woolf (Advisor), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Management - Strategic Management (Youth Sport)  Abstract 2021-004
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  Mode: Synchronous
Session: Strategic Management  Thursday June 3, 2021, 8:05 AM - 8:25 AM

Youth sport has long been viewed as an opportunity for families to safely socialize their children while providing them access to the development of physical literacy and sport-specific skills (Kay, 2004; Malina, 2010). America’s youth sport industry is estimated to be a $17 billion market and over 70% of children aged six to 12 years participated in at least one team or individual sport (Aspen Institute, 2020). Much of the money in youth sport is attributed to the rise of professionalism, which has led families to invest more time, money, and effort into providing youth sport opportunities (Farrey, 2008; Gems & Pfister, 2009).

While scholars are familiar with the role that families play in youth sport, little is known about the relationship between families and their youth sport participation, specifically in the ways in which youth sport affects the family as a whole. This is especially true when discussing families considered to be non-“traditional” (i.e., single-parent, same-sex, blended families). Learning more about this relationship would allow sport scholars to aid youth sport managers in the development of family-friendly sport opportunities that would assist in athlete retention.

Developed by family scholars, family resilience results from a family’s ability to adapt/adjust to the stressors in their environment to continue functioning (Patterson, 2002). In youth sport, stressors include increases in resources needed to participate, which can lead to shifts in daily family operations and relationships. If families don’t have adequate resources available to manage the stress associated with youth sport participation, then relationships within the family unit can suffer (e.g., Côté, 1999; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Lally & Kerr, 2008). Existing literature has focused on individual outcomes and examinations of how youth sport affects dyadic relationships within families. Little, however, is known about the ways in which family units as a whole are resilient when faced with increases in stressors caused by youth sport. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how a family’s involvement in youth sport is related to their resilience as a family unit.

Participants in this quantitative study were parents of athletes aged 18 years or under who had participated in youth sport in the previous year and who are in multiple family structures. The survey questionnaire was developed using existing measures of family resilience, family stress, and measures of family sport involvement.

Data collection for this study is in its final stages, after which the variables of family structure, sport involvement, and family resilience will be statistically analyzed. It is expected that findings will increase knowledge about how sport participation affects family resilience in families with multiple family structures. Also expected to be discovered are patterns in the ways that families with different structures participate in youth sport. The findings of this study allow recommendations to be made to develop family-friendly youth sport programming for all families.