

Environments, Opportunities, & Support

IOC Consensus Statement on Youth Athletic Development:

“Encourage children to participate in a variety of different unstructured (ie, deliberate play) and structured age-appropriate sport-related activities and settings, to develop a wide range of athletic and social skills and attributes that will encourage sustained sport participation and enjoyment.” (Bergeron et al, 2015)

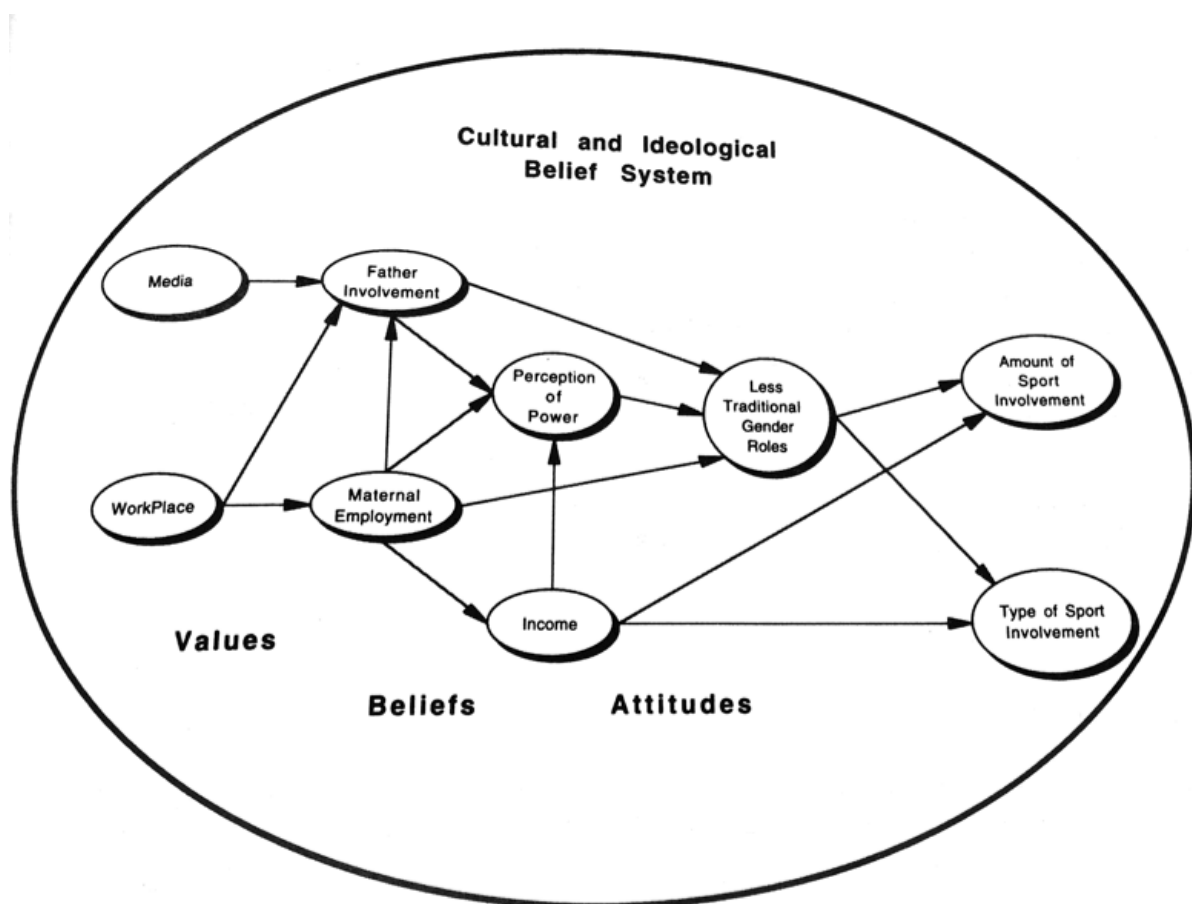


FIG 1 - Model of Influences (Smoll & Smith, 1996)

Report To PGI Following Visits to Surabaya, Medan, and Papua

This brief report will be framed around (1) an obvious necessity to create opportunity for kids to participate in sport (golf), and for this to be for their own personal reasons (as opposed to that of coaches, admin, parents etc); (2) an understanding (and application) of the Bio-Psycho-Social dimensions involved in sport participation and how these impact on participation and development; (3) an understanding of nourishing environments and a necessity to provide this in place of constricting and mis-directed approaches to development (e.g. early sport specialisation and some of the associated practices). There needs to be a much greater appreciation of the underpinning reasons that kids play (and choose to stay in / or leave) sport and we should be using this as a guiding light to increase the numbers involved. We also have to grasp the complex dynamic as demonstrated above (FIG 1) in relation to families, culture, and the many sociocultural influences that can impact on a person's socialisation in sport.

Early sport specialisation can be thought of as: an involvement in a single sport to the exclusion of others on a year round basis; possible intensive training schedules; and involving children under the age of approximately 14 years old.

It has been well documented across many sports, by numerous experts in sport, and from associations and professionals within sport medicine and the sport community as a whole, that there are a multitude of hazards associated with single sport participation / early sport specialisation, and there really is nothing to support the notion that it is actually a requirement for reaching elite levels in sport.

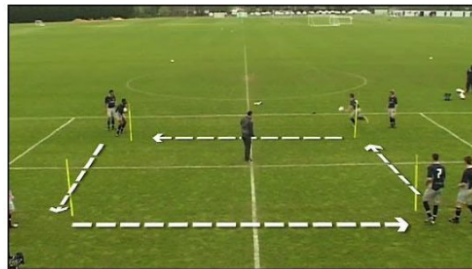
We have to consider that overuse injuries, burnout, and the associated mental health concerns etc that can be attributed to early sports specialisation are a real danger to the developing athletes on a much broader level than just the sport of golf. There are obvious issues for the sport as people can become demotivated and ultimately withdraw from the sport in question, or sport in general, not to mention the damage done by physical injury or psychological stress.

The assumption that those who spend more time in training reap the rewards of higher attainment is flawed thinking that possibly stems from the 'deliberate practice' framework associated with Ericsson et al from the early 1990s, and a handful of popular books (e.g. Bounce, Outliers, The Talent Code) more recently, that have effectively oversimplified / polarised the developmental process debate. This type of thinking can have some pretty serious consequences, especially when combined with practices involved in childhood sport, and we must also recognise that the logic applied by parents and coaches etc is not always based on sound evidence or objectivity.

It is of vital importance that the wider golf environment in this context (Indonesia / PGI etc) doesn't intrinsically promote this type of distorted thinking or create a system that rewards the concept of early focussed training and identification, for inclusion within a 'normalised' talent pathway. This means the coaching environment, as well as the competitive environment, and the expectations of all of the stakeholders involved, all need to be aligned in such a way that the focus isn't on identifying and training at the expense of things like participation and diversity.

There is a need to recognise the ingredients that are healthy for development and to try and promote these where possible, whilst also being critical of the status quo in favour of moving things forwards and not relying on secondhand strategy and a compulsion for anything 'shiny' and new. As part of this it should be implicit that questionable practice is challenged and naturally replaced by more robust and supported approaches.

Moving beyond the Biologically biased training (accumulation of practice hours, physical preparation etc) that appears to be prevalent in most sectors, a greater understanding of the socially complex elements supporting participation would help to ensure there is a more conscious push to provide attractive entries into golf, and keep participants involved in the sport for longer, this could help to make some very subtle changes that are highly specific to each individual situation. Toms (2005) study of young people’s experiences and involvement with a sports club in the UK found that participation was dependant on the social experiences that the kids were subjected to in the early stages, and that their journeys were far from being linear and predictable. A question to ask relating to our conditions here is ‘What are those first experiences of golf?’ OR ‘What is it like being a kid trying to play on a golf course / become a member for the first time?’maybe then we can start to address the bigger picture of nurturing the sport instead of trying to find a magic method of training (that arguably doesn’t even exist).



What (transferable) capacities emerge out of these environments?

What are the players adapting to?

What information are they interacting with?



@GraemeMcDowall - Twitter

The Current Picture

In all of the regions of Surabaya, Medan, and Papua we were met with enthusiastic people involved in golf out of a genuine passion. They wanted to find ways of moving things forwards although there was perhaps an expectation or ready made blueprint to be presented to them.

Access to golf courses, in all three provinces, was not apparently difficult beyond the normal constraints of location, time, financial implications etc The Klub Golf Irian, Papua had in place a way of letting the local kids play golf and practice for little or no cost. This is obviously quite unique but also very useful in being able to level the playing field when it comes to many of the constraints that people can face.

It was not apparent if the clubs promoted unsupervised play on the course as a matter of urgency or if it was left to the individuals to organise themselves. There seemed to be a spirit of friendship at all of the sites where the kids could get together and could be encouraged to further explore free-play opportunities. However, this is something that might not be as highly valued by the adults, who instead might opt for (and promote) a more structured training environment in the form of lessons or range practice. This was one area that I had intentionally targeted in the presentation to try and challenge the thinking of the adults, upon reflection this perhaps didn’t have the impact as intended. It cannot be underestimated how important it is to push for an

environment where the children are encouraged to explore and learn through free-play, and to engage more with each other away from coach / adult controlled situations.

All provinces were very enthusiastic about me conducting some group coaching sessions and also some more personal consultations over the visits. They seemed to welcome the opportunity for a different viewpoint and were very keen on follow up visits where this might be something that could be utilised further, perhaps PGI could use this as a PR exercise to open the door enable even better cooperation between all parties involved in golf.

Access to Golf

In all of the dealings, ShortGolf equipment was actively and enthusiastically promoted as an ideal vehicle to promote appropriate golf in schools and for youngsters to get a non-threatening introduction to the sport. Everybody saw the merits of this approach and liked the delivery of golf in this type of format. When it was used in the short coaching sessions that were conducted, all of the younger participants and some of the adults were really engaged in the activities.

Papua talked of linking with the local schools and they had already done this, in fact the local Phys Ed teacher was keen to become involved in the delivery too.

I personally didn't see much eagerness in Surabaya to provide coaching into schools but this may have been discussed in Bahasa without my being aware.

Medan already were using ShortGolf / SNAG in their coaching and could be encouraged to take up more equipment and promote the use of it between individual clubs and schools.

All of the venues visited were very encouraging of junior golf and it seemed like the key people involved had the passion and influence to be able to encourage this to continue.

Opportunities to Play

Papua were in a fortunate position to be able to offer golf to the kids on a complimentary basis, this included use of the course with some understandable restrictions.

The feeling I got from some discussions and the general tone of conversations around all of the provinces, was one of more importance in finding the 'best training' method ahead of understanding the correlation of allowing the kids to play golf in the form of a game. This form of golf could be a modified version (shortgolf etc) or it could be just creating opportunity for kids to access the course for a few holes regularly, or providing the facility to make a hole on the practice area for example.

I believe that training, psychological factors, and genetic factors are all a major part of expertise and its development - but we must not ignore the influences of context and the socio-cultural variables. These are the support that the major influences need to be able to sustain development. For example, if the kids just enjoy playing golf on the course and don't really enjoy the training programmes they are pushed into, then they may not continue to play because they might avoid the 'boring' aspects, therefore we lose participants. If we understand participation from a longer term perspective and allow the desire to develop, these kids will gain

more opportunity and this may allow for (and actually inspire) greater levels of involvement and practice, and ultimately higher levels of skill.

Opportunities for Socialisation

The feeling I got from the visits were that the kids actually did socialise together at the clubs, it is something that needs to be addressed in follow ups or communication, an area where PGI could take a very important guiding position and utilise links with the Golf Club Managers Association. Helping the clubs to see their vital role in actively encouraging junior members to work together and learn from one another, this had been shown to be a vital ingredient in high level achievement in sport - also seen in 'backyard games' type of environment, where adult involvement is kept to a minimum and the kids negotiate their own development as part of a more holistic and joined up approach to development.

Sport Specialisation / Promotion of diversification

There are some contradictory opinions and beliefs from all involved parties when it comes to offering solutions to some of the perceived problems. My opinion is that this lack of clarity and any robust solutions, come from a inherent misunderstanding of what the actual problems are and what elements underpin this.

There seems to still be an assumption that 'talent' is some kind of identifiable entity and that it can therefore be measured. Most of the existing research suggests that we have a very limited understanding of what talent is and how we identify it. The problem here is that the measures that are used are often highly subjective, biased, and narrow in scope. Kids get labelled as 'talented' and with this come more opportunities etc, others don't fit the standardised mould and get left out of the system. Nothing of validity is used to make these distinctions but it has an effect on the various individuals and consequently their journeys.

Consider the entry into limited field tournaments based on ranking systems (for kids U14 for e.g.) or social comparison of kids by parents. The natural assumption is that those higher on the ranking will get more opportunity and also more social kudos - so the consequence of this would be to assume that more training, more focus, more adult styled approaches will yield better results. This may be true in the short term and will add support to the decisions made, however, if we look at much of the advice from youth sport there is a consistent warning against the need to specialise early, train heavily, or become overly competitive in an effort to reach the higher levels of adult sport. This type of training is more usually associated with burnout and dropout from sport - something that we really need to pay attention to in an effort to support our population and encourage the elite success that is underlying all the initiatives.

Preventing Dropout

As suggested in the previous section, it is my belief and that of numerous experts, that we should be looking more at talent development from a participation perspective.

I didn't really see much in the way of initiatives that are promoting this and my feeling from the presentations that I have given are that whilst people can understand the concept, they would rather have a neat little package

sold to them that promises success. We could draw the parallel with diet pills and fitness programmes that promise much and are always ‘new and improved’ but offer nothing more than sales and marketing of old concepts in an effort to ‘sell the dream’.

Our numbers involved in golf are not large enough and we need to find ways of getting people involved, and keeping them involved before worrying so much about the magical panacea to bring about international success.

What do we actually know of those that have slipped through the net in the past? What have we done / are we doing to mend those holes in the system for the future generations?

Follow Up

There was consistent interest in the possibility of follow up visits for the purposes of offering some coaching clinics etc, this may be useful for PR and to try and keep the message alive of participation. It would also help to serve the facilitation of parents groups, coaches groups, and administrative groups that are involved in golf. These groups all have different needs and these needs are context and location specific depending on the various constraints in place.

I would suggest that PGI look into actively delivering a coherent and robust message of participation through these visits or similar and utilise its network to promote this message across Indonesia. And in addition to this it would be valuable to understand more about causes of burnout and dropout and other health related issues that undoubtedly impact the youth from the sport of golf in Indonesia.

“Design youth athlete development programmes comprising diversity and variability of athletic exposure, to mitigate the risk of overuse injuries and other health problems prompted by inappropriate training and competition that exceed safe load thresholds, while providing sufficient and regular rest and recovery, to encourage positive adaptations and progressive athletic development.” (Bergeron et al, 2015)

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June 2016