

**Special Issue Foreword**  
**Family Issues in Amateur Athletics**

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**Travis E. Dorsch** (Ph.D., Purdue University) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies with a joint appointment in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Science at Utah State University. Having documented the impact of children's youth sport participation on parents and families, his present research includes a complementary focus on: (a) the role of youth sport participation on family relationships and interactions (e.g., warmth and closeness, parent-child communication, and family financial decision-making); (b) the role of internal factors (e.g., motivation) and external factors (e.g., families and social contexts) on sport, physical activity, and recreational outcomes, and (c) evidence-based parent education in youth, adolescent, and early adult contexts. Dr. Dorsch's work has been published in academic outlets such as *Family Relations*, the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *Sport, Exercise, & Performance Psychology*, and *Learning and Motivation*. **Jordan A. Blazo** (Ph.D., Michigan State University) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Louisiana Tech University. His research broadly focuses on studying family and child relationships in physical activity contexts. Specifically, he studies the ways that siblings influence and shape one another's physical activity experiences. Currently, he is investigating the role of siblings in developing perceptions of ability in sport, the correlates of sibling relationship qualities in sport, and how sibling relationships inform our peer interactions in the physical domain. His work has been published in academic outlets such as *The Sport Psychologist* and the *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*.

“Organized sport is not merely activity; it is situated activity. Indeed, most if not all human activity requires resources to permit it to occur properly (Fine, 1987, p. 15).”

The family has been described as a primary context for socialization and human development (Arnett, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The study of family relationships, once limited to a small number of fields (e.g., psychology and human ecology), has grown to occupy the interests of researchers from a breadth of diverse specializations (Reis, 2007). As researchers from a range of fields have contributed to the study of family relationships, there has been a transition toward interdisciplinary investigations. Informed by disciplines such as psychology, human development, communication, and sociology, sport and physical activity researchers have pursued research questions that contribute to our understanding of the family in the physical domain (Weiss, 2008). This work is of direct salience to understanding health and well-being, making the study of family dynamics and sport experiences inherently important.

Examining the intersection of families and sport has further demonstrated that amateur sport can provide a useful laboratory for the study of both positive and negative developmental outcomes (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Weiss & Raedeke, 2004). Looking closely at the

family, parents are commonly depicted as the providers and interpreters of the experience, and siblings often socialize or are socialized by a child's early sport experiences. In short, organized sport would not operate as we've become accustomed without various forms of family interaction. Family involvement is an especially integral part of youth sport participation. For instance, parents often serve as coaches, referees, scorekeepers, concession stand attendants, and ticket-takers, whereas siblings are backyard competitors, role models, and confidants. These lifelong fixtures are significant others that are instrumental in shaping and understanding sport experiences and have meaningful influence on other family members' development. Considering the potential for youth sport and families to impact development in tandem, continued investigation of family issues in amateur athletics is needed to better understand the family unit in a dynamic, comparison-laden social environment.

One pathway researchers and practitioners have pursued to optimize amateur sport experiences is to better understand youth motivation in sport. This has led to providing best practice recommendations for coaches and administrators. While these efforts have been fruitful, they largely relegate family members as “hidden” participants in youth sport (Dorsch, 2017). Given the family typically initiates and represents the earliest

setting for sport experiences, family members are vital in one's development of sporting beliefs and behaviors, making them of particular interest to researchers.

Overwhelmingly, amateur athletics is a product of volunteer efforts, and it is clear that organized youth sport would not function wholly without family involvement.

In Western cultures, organized amateur sport provides a rather ubiquitous context for family interaction, whereby family involvement can shape children and adolescents' developmental experiences. According to scientific and popular reports, as families continue to invest social, temporal, and economic resources into the athletic and personal development of their children, the "proper" level of family involvement has become difficult to define. This has spurred multiple investigations of over- and under-involved parents, the quality of parental involvement, sibling relationships in sport, and sibling rivalry. Despite ambiguity in these findings, one thing is certain: families are an inextricable aspect of amateur sport.

This special issue was conceived to address the need for scholarly research and discussion on the role of families in amateur sport. In the issue, we offer our readership a position paper highlighting the importance of parent-child communication in sport, as well as a theoretical paper that enhances understanding of life skill acquisition in a sport-based youth development program. We also include original quantitative

research highlighting family, team, and sibling involvement in amateur sport settings, as well as original qualitative research highlighting the experiences of parents in intercollegiate and youth sport settings. Sport is a cross-cutting phenomenon, and we take pride in the fact that contributors to this special issue come from diverse disciplines (i.e., sport and exercise psychology, sport management, sport pedagogy, human development, family studies, and interpersonal communication) and drew upon a wide range of theories, literatures, and methods in crafting their respective manuscripts.

In the first manuscript, Grimm and colleagues present the need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to understand communication in amateur sport. The authors provide an overview of human development, family studies, and communication theories with guidance of how to integrate these areas. Their efforts take the initial steps to understand the factors (e.g., involvement, investments, and communication) that impact parent-child relationships in organized youth sport, and how this may permeate outside of sport. This paper offers a useful framework for future researchers as they investigate questions pertaining to the parent-child relationship in organized youth sport.

In the second manuscript, Jacobs and colleagues explore sport-based youth development (SBYD) programs and their congruence with school, family, and community systems. The authors propose a

conceptual model for understanding the role family and school contexts play in promoting and facilitating the transfer of life skills learned through SBYD programs. In doing so, they argue that congruence across these systems maximizes the opportunity for transfer while identifying contextual factors that will support or possibly hinder the transfer of life skills taught in SBYD programs.

In the third manuscript, Holst and colleagues investigate the degree to which short-term situational contexts may affect children's behavior in sport. Specifically, the authors identify numerous impacts of parenting behavior on child outcomes in the context of competitive motocross. Results suggest that parent hostility is associated with negative emotional responses in children (e.g., crying), whereas factors such as family cohesion are associated with positive emotional responses (e.g., celebration). Additionally, the authors demonstrate that situational factors influence these outcomes over and above the influence of family factors.

In the fourth manuscript, Elliot and Drummond draw on descriptive data to highlight the contemporary experiences of adults who coach their own children in amateur sport settings. Through a lens of social constructionism, the authors illustrate how parent/coaches intentionally demonstrate differential behavior toward their child in contrast to the rest of the team (e.g., via deliberate criticism or limited recognition). The authors conclude this is

not only problematic for the parent-child relationship, but it may also have a reinforcing influence on how other parent/coaches negotiate the dual role.

In the fifth manuscript, Osai and Whiteman explore a generally understudied sample, siblings, both within and outside of sport. Because most youth sport research has primarily focused on parent-child, peer, and parent-athlete-coach relationships, it is generally unclear how sibling relationships are related to youth sport participation and adjustment. To address this gap Osai and Whiteman examine how sibling relationship qualities influence participation in organized youth sport, both concurrently and prospectively.

In the final manuscript, Parietti and colleagues investigate parental over-involvement in intercollegiate athletics. The authors utilize a case-study approach to examine parents' involvement in the academic and athletic lives of their NCAA student-athletes. Findings highlight different types of parental involvement, parents' increasing involvement, the impact of over-involvement on student-athlete well-being, as well as the fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement.

Individually, these papers touch on salient family issues that have the potential to guide research and practice in amateur sport settings. Collectively, they convey the importance of understanding and acknowledging the role of family involvement in amateur sport. When investigating the salience of family

relationships in the physical domain it is shortsighted to conceive family interactions as uniform and limited to those between parents and children. There is the additional developmental function of *how* and *why* family members interact with one another in the ways they do. Given that one cannot easily break ties with family members, and the strong emotional bonds that often exist in sport settings, the study of the family unit is well suited for further investigation in achievement domains such as amateur sport. As such, this special issue represents a snapshot of where the field stands, and offers a roadmap for where it might head in the future. It will be incumbent upon present and future scholars in the field to chart a course that recognizes the important role of families in the enactment of sport, in all its varied forms. Indeed, we are confident this is a path worth pursuing.

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