

Title: The Development of Volition in Young Elite Athletes

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Aims: To examine the development of volition in young athletes attending an elite sport school. Because volition is important for realising long and intense training loads during the course of an athletic career the question is if the context of a school for young elite athletes promotes its development.

Method: Two studies are described, one with a cross-sectional (study 1) and another with a longitudinal design (study 2). In the cross-sectional study the volitional skills of 327 students attending a school for young elite athletes were analysed according to age and living situation (at home/in the boarding school). In the longitudinal study the development of volition of 63 young elite athletes was compared to that of 122 non-athletic students attending a regular school. In both studies' volition is measured with the Volitional Components Questionnaire (VCQ II). On the basis of a factor analysis conducted in study 1, two factors could be identified, namely self-optimisation, which includes skills needed to achieve goals, and self-impediment, which includes skills addressed in stress situations.

Results and Practical Implications: Study 1 suggests that self-impediment shows a development and that volitional skills develop more favourably in athletes living in the boarding school. These results are confirmed by the longitudinal study. This is likely due to boarding house pupils being more dependent on making new friends, not only in school and

in practice but also in the boarding house. They must assert themselves in all areas and are forced to question their own position. It can be concluded that the boarding house not only has advantages from a time economical perspective but also offers the chance of a favourable self-regulatory development. The second study additionally shows that volitional skills concerning self-optimisation develop more favourably in the young elite athletes when compared to regular students. These athletes show a positive personality development that is beneficial for their athletic career as well as for pursuing their further goals in life. This study sheds further light on the role that the context plays on motivational and volitional development. In addition, the results of these studies shed some light on the debate on the relationship of sport engagement and personality development. It provides data promoting the position that engagement in sport has a positive effect on personality development.

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