

Familial, social, and environmental factors in the development of elite Australian cricketers

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Previous research characterises elite athletes by a favourable socio-developmental background (Bruce et al., 2012; Hopwood et al., 2012), with effective support structures (Weissensteiner, 2009). Little work has investigated support beyond parents and siblings, including extended family, mentors and peers, or the types of support provided, such as emotional, technical, financial, and informational. A large-scale online survey collected information on player development in Australian cricketers. This analysis presents the data for the elite male cohort, between the ages of 17 and 35 (N = 81). Just under 50% of the sample indicated that their father was a significant source of all types of support and commonly played competitive cricket (32% at community level, 10% at elite level). Twenty six per cent of fathers had also coached cricket, whether from community up to elite levels. Although a significant source of financial and emotional support, only two players indicated that their mother played competitive cricket. Thirty per cent of the sample indicated that supportive extended family members played cricket, with 14% at community, and 11% at elite level. Supportive mentors who played at elite levels were relatively frequent (38%) and commonly provided emotional, informational and technical support. Similarly, over 50% of the sample identified supportive peers who commonly acted as fellow participants in developmental play and practice, with 46% of these having competed at elite levels. Siblings also provided support as fellow participants and played cricket at community level, and three reported to have played at an elite level. Notably, 41% of the sample indicated they deliberately changed community level clubs to improve their chances of playing at higher levels. None of the participants cited that their parents were the main decision makers in the move, showing autonomous decision making. Those who changed clubs cited opportunity specific to higher levels of competition (64%), better coaching (58%), better playing opportunities (49%), and better training facilities (46%). Only 24% indicated having friends in the new team was a catalyst for changing clubs. The findings from this study demonstrate the breadth of support (sources and type) required to complement the development of elite athletes. While receiving strong support from multiple sources, these elite performers took ownership, sought better developmental opportunities and were relatively autonomous in their decision making specific to their career planning/strategy. These findings support current results in the literature which characterise elite athletes as highly self-regulated (Mathews et al., 2012). Discussion will focus on potential links between support and self-regulation.

Bruce, L, Farrow, D., & Raynor, A.(2012). *An investigation into the influence of family background on expert performance*. North American Society for the Psychology of Sport & Physical Activity Conference. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Hopwood, M, MacMahon, C., Baker, J., & Farrow, D. (2012). *Talent and expertise: Following in their footsteps? – Sport expertise and parental participation in sport and physical activity*. North American Society for the Psychology of Sport & Physical Activity Conference. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Mathews, A., Farrow, D., MacMahon, C., & Weissensteiner, J. (2012). *Examining the barriers and facilitators of the junior to senior transition experience in Australian tennis: An in-depth analysis of the journey towards a professional tennis career*. North American Society for the Psychology of Sport & Physical Activity Conference. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Weissensteiner, J.R., Abernethy, B., & Farrow, D. (2009). Towards the development of a conceptual model of batting expertise in cricket: A grounded theory approach. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 21, 3, 276-292.