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Abstract

There is a bright spot for youth researchers looming among practitioners. This study sought to discover if youth sport directors utilized player development research in youth soccer organizations. If so, what might be the successes and challenges directors may face incorporating youth sport player development models and policies? The findings of this qualitative study revealed three major themes: 1) successes in implementing research-based methods, 2) certain policies that were not being implemented, and 3) factors influencing practitioners' ability to implement research-based policies. The data depicted participants were progressive and proactive in finding new methods for combating barriers to the implementation of practices and were concerned with holistic player development.

Keywords: player development, coaching, youth sport, youth soccer, best practices

The narrative of youth sport in America is an intriguing one. The earliest youth sport organizations were created as a way to provide recreational opportunities for children and adolescents to learn how to play (e.g. Little League, 2014). Also, organizers hoped to provide a wholesome environment that allowed for the teaching of life lessons (i.e. teamwork, fair play) so youth sport could be a worthwhile pursuit for youngsters. However, research has shown there has been a mix of both positive and negative outcomes associated with youth sport participation (Holt & Neely, 2011).

Recent literature has called for a holistic approach to youth participation (Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007; Duerden & Witt, 2010; Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). This holistic view encouraged practitioners to focus on more than just winning games or becoming skilled at sport, and instead viewed healthy sport participation as resulting in positive social, physical, and mental experiences. The new outlook on youth sport participation aligned with the original vision for youth sport participation and has been adopted by sport organizations and governing bodies (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Stringfield & Buren, 2003; Martel, 2015; Snow, 2012; US Lacrosse, 2012;). Unfortunately, negative outcomes have still been associated with youth sport (ESPNW & Aspen Institute, 2014; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988; NFL, 2003).

Researchers have identified the causes of negative outcomes (i.e. inappropriate coaching behavior, too much emphasis placed on outcomes like winning and not enough on other outcomes like positive social experiences) and have developed models that can eliminate the causes and promote holistic development (see Bailey et al. [2010] for review of several models). These models have been successful in penetrating the thoughts and actions of youth sport leaders in America, but the authors' argue the next step for youth sport research is to understand how such research policies are being implemented.

It is important for policy makers and researchers to understand how leaders in the field are incorporating the knowledge gained from research into their day-to-day operations. This investigation aimed to understand what policies were difficult to implement, what policies were successful, and what barriers stood in the way of implementing holistic views of sport participation. The authors' hoped the findings may provide insight into closing the gap between research and practice as it pertains to creating positive youth sport environments.

Literature Review

Holistic models, according to Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin (2006), consider all the benefits of youth sport participation rather than focusing on one or two at the cost of the others. Such models have stressed that youth sport participation is not all about winning games or developing specific sport skills, but that leaders of youth sport organizations should also focus on providing positive emotional and psychological experiences for young athletes (Adie, Duda & Ntoumanis, 2010). With these understandings, youth sport science has moved forward with a new perspective for programming. For example, Burgess and Naughton (2010) suggested, "Each stage of development should be outlined, peer reviewed, and evidence based. These types of models should provide the framework for decision making at every level of adolescent participation in team sports" (p. 112). This emergent theme of holistic programming is clear in recent player development models.

The developmental model for sport participation (DMSP; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2003), and the long-term athlete development model (LTAD; Bayli, 2001) are two widely used models for youth sport participation (Bailey et al., 2010). The theme of holistic programming is prevalent throughout the DMSP and the LTAD. These models are comprised of phases that participants move through as they age to avoid burnout and other negative outcome, thus dictating what types of activities are suitable for different ages. For example, eight-year-old participants engage in simple activities geared toward having fun while learning something specific about their sport, while 15-year olds may engage in more complex activities focused on preparing them to win a game on Saturday. The DMSP is based mostly off the psychological readiness of participants, and the LTAD is based off the biological aspects for the majority (Bailey et al., 2010). There is only a slight difference in the age groups specified by each phase. The DMSP draws a hard line between when youth should engage deliberate practice and deliberate play (see Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch Romer [1993] for research detailing deliberate practice), while the

LTAD specifies exactly when youth are ready for certain physical demands (i.e. increased training loads, etc.). The DMSP would classify deliberate practice as an activity designed to improve an aspect of performance, and deliberate play would be the act of sampling and engaging in different sports for the sake of play.

The argument that holistic programming has fully infiltrated youth sport science is evident in the early stages of the two models. Key words like "play," "fun," and "enjoyment" are littered throughout the DMSP explanation of the early phases. One only needs to take notice of the name of the first phase ("FUNdamentals") in the LTAD model to understand its purpose. This emphasis on fun and enjoyment creates positive outcomes for the youngest athletes who are not prepared for competitive environments. These models provide the roadmap to healthy youth sport participation, thus avoiding negative side effects like emotional abuse, injuries, eating disorders, burnout, family conflict, and general unhappiness to which unhealthy youth sport environments contribute (Tremblay, 2010). These models have significantly impacted leadership, program, and management strategies in youth sport programs.

Many sports have implemented the ideas of the DMSP and LTAD. The national governing bodies of hockey, lacrosse, and soccer have all published models that outline youth sport participation throughout the ages based off such work (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Stringfield & Buren, 2003; Martel, 2015; Snow, 2012; US Lacrosse, 2012). For example, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), the governing body of soccer in all forms in the United States (USSF, 2012), has gone to great lengths to publicize its youth participant development philosophy. In 2003, the USSF published the Official US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Stringfield & Buren, 2003) which stressed the importance of things like age appropriate activities, understanding the development processes of youth, and proper coaching behavior. The USSF soon followed with its Best Practices (n.d.), and Player Development Model (Snow, 2012). Snow's work directly cites the DMSP and the LTAD, and the similarities between the USSF's model and the DMSP and LTAD are striking. For example, the document uses similar key words and phrases like "fun" and "develop a love for the game" at younger ages. Also, one can identify the resemblance between the age grouping in the DMSP (6-12, 13-15, and 16 years and older) and the phases of the USSF Best Practices:

> Ball Control and Creativity: 6-12 years old
>
> Ball Skill, Creativity & Gradual Insight into the Game: 10-14 years old
>
> How to Function in a Group: 14-16 years old
>
> Competition and Outcome: 17 years and older (p. 1).

The USSF has embraced the holistic approach to youth sport. However, there has not been research that details the implementation of such programming. Therefore, the authors argue that investigating youth soccer clubs may detail how youth sport research is being applied at the practical level.

There has been previous research in progressive youth sport environments (e.g. Green, 2005; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2009; Martindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007; Misener & Doherty, 2009), but no study has yet addressed how youth sport research is being applied at the practical level. Researchers and policy makers need to understand the difficulties in real life application of new player development policies. Are leaders in the field making changes to their programs, and if so, what types of changes? Are coaches and parents receptive to these changes? What suggestions do leaders have about implementing these new policies? The authors' focused on answering these questions so that leaders may use this knowledge to continue to improve the management of youth sport.

This study focused on youth soccer clubs and their successes and challenges experienced when implementing research based models into their organizations (specifically the Player development model, Snow, 2012; USSF Best Practices, n.d.). Youth soccer provided a context for the study, but the findings should not be limited to one single sport. The authors' hoped this study would provide a way for leaders in all sports to reflect upon ways to improve the application of holistic programming.

Methodology

The present study examined youth soccer clubs as a gateway into progressive youth sport organizations. As our

literature review showed, the national governing body of youth soccer in America has made a significant effort to incorporate recent youth sport research. For example, the USSF has published player development models that not only cite the DMSP and LTAD, but share similarities with these models throughout. Further, the USSF administers and oversees coaching education in America that teaches age appropriate methods for teaching at all levels, and have created a specific license that educates coaches on how to properly interact, understand, and teach youth at the youngest ages. This National Youth License (NYL) has had a huge impact on youth soccer in America (see Quinn, Huckleberry & Snow, 2012). The present study compared youth soccer organizations' player development policies with the research based model and best practices of the USSF.

Qualitative methodology was best suited for the current investigation because of its exploratory nature. The authors aimed to understand the successes and challenges that leaders were experiencing in attempting to implement research-based player development policies. Further, personal experience and feelings were very important to this study because of the study's explorative nature. Such subjective experiences are best obtained in natural settings through the interactional methodology of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative interviews represent our guiding methodology. Data collection included eight, in-depth interviews. The interviews were quite extensive lasting between 45 minutes to an hour and half. Questions were geared toward getting participants to share experiences, and go into detail about how and why they implemented player development policies. Certain questions like, "what are the main teaching/coaching focuses for 10-year old participants?" were asked to gain specific information regarding player development policies and practices. Also, more open-ended questions like, "Are there any barriers that you face that restrict you from implementing certain ideas or policies within your organization?" were asked to allow participants to reflect and elaborate on their specific circumstance. Thus, we formulated some questions in our interviews to obtain specific answers, some to lead the participant, and some to create dialogue, as suggested by Kvale & Brinkman (2009). This allowed us to gather the information we needed to achieve our purpose, but also allowed us to gather data that otherwise would go unnoticed.

All participants held the title of director of coaching (DOC) except for one who was an executive director. The DOC's all had taken part in the USSF coaching education school, earned several entry level licenses, and currently all held high level licenses from the USSF. The USSF has integrated youth sport research into the coaching schools and licensing program (see Quinn, Huckleberry & Snow, 2012), and into their development models (see Snow, 2012; USSF, n.d.). Thus the DOC's have been exposed to youth sport research regarding appropriate player development strategies. The study featured participants from organizations in Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee. Some organizations competed at elite levels of youth soccer, and some were much less competitive.

The lead researcher contacted 15 directors from various geographic locations and asked for participation. Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews the project gained only eight interviews. All interviews took place in a public coffee shop or restaurant in the participants' city of residence. The questions for the interview were based off of the USSF Best Practices (n.d.), which lays out specific practices that are based off youth sport research (i.e. Bayli, 2001; Côté et al., 2003, 2008). A pilot interview, not counted in the total participants, was conducted with a former DOC to test the structure of the interview and refine questions. These questions allowed the researchers' to specifically answer the research question.

The study followed Creswell's (2013) procedures for analyzing data for a qualitative study. First, the interviews were captured using an audio recorder. The audio recordings were replayed and transcribed into word documents by the lead researcher. Transcriptions varied between eight to fifteen pages. Researchers utilized member checking to ensure accuracy of data by sending follow up communication to participants to confirm the transcriptions. Then, researchers read through the data, made notes, and formed initial codes based on common responses in the transcripts. The researchers converted the codes into themes, and then classified these themes into majority group

statements. This method allowed the authors' to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the authors' wrote analytic memos based off the themes of the data, and compared these to the actual transcriptions to ensure the arguments made in the study were reflective of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Results

The authors focused on uncovering how leaders were or were not having success implementing research into practice. Further, we examined why certain leaders had success and others did not. Specifically, the study compared our findings to the USSF player development models (Snow, 2012; USSF, n.d.), which are based off youth sport research (e.g. DMSP, LTAD, etc.). The results of the study are compiled into three sections: success in implementing player development models, player development research policies that are not being implemented, and factors that influence implementing player development research. This article used pseudonyms for participants to ensure anonymity.

Success in Implementing Player Development Models

The most prevalent success in implementing player development research was the adoption of holistic player development. All participants described player development policies and programming that resembles the holistic suggestions contained in the majority of recent youth sport research. For example, the DMSP and LTAD repeatedly cite positive outcomes of fun and enjoyment (Bayli, 2001; Côté et al., 2003, 2008) in combination with teaching sport specific skills and knowledge. The emphasis on fun is predominantly encouraged at the younger ages, as youth are not ready for certain levels of competition. The group coded "fun and enjoyment" was one of the most frequently cited terms through the interviews.

"It is about getting the kids out there and having fun," Kathy stated. This statement is repeated almost verbatim in the majority of interviews. Moreover, participants displayed a clear understanding as to why fun and enjoyment is key at young ages. When asked to go further and explain the logic behind programming at the youngest age groups, in a matter of fact tone Kathy stated:

> My main goal is to get them out there and have fun. Without providing much structure…We show them where the goal is, show them where the box is. A lot of it is not even soccer. A lot of it is just exercise. You know, getting the parents out there…I tell the parents that are new, don't even worry about which direction they go as long as they are out there kicking the ball. At that age it is just a lot of gross motor skills too. It is learning how to run, how to kick a ball. Not just kick it in a direction, but to actually make contact with it. But, if they are not having fun they are not going to play.

The holistic nature of the programming was also noticeable in the teaching/coaching curriculums. Participants were asked to describe what teaching topics were covered at different age groups and all described teaching practices that were age appropriate. This is in line with the age appropriate teaching focuses in the USSF and US Youth Soccer published documents. The participants depicted how younger age groups were engaging in training that focused on basic, entry-level topics, and older age groups often engaged in more advanced subject matters.

The clubs involved in this study mostly offered services to players from ages 7 – 18 (some offered services to younger ages). Teaching focuses for ages 10 years old and younger were fun and enjoyment. Participants indicated that 11 and 12 year olds were being taught ball mastery and technique. This age group had limited exposure to tactical issues, which is consistent with the suggestions of player development models (Fleck, Quinn, Carr, Stringfield & Buren, 2003; Snow, 2012).

The data shows players over the age of 12 were being exposed to a different environment than their younger peers. Tactical development and decision-making abilities were often cited as main teaching objectives at these ages. Further, the game programming was more competitive at these age groups. Players were being taught not only how to carry out more advanced tactical ideas, but were being trained how to win games more explicitly than before. Ted's quote summarizes the progression of player development teaching strategies:

> At eight and nine years (we want to) develop individual comfort on the ball in an environment that makes them want to come back…At U13-14

> we do a lot of repetition technically…U14-16 we always pound technical development… I don't want to advanced tactics because it makes us sound like physicists or something, but we are playing the game based on what the opponent is trying to do… U18-19 we want to prepare them to play in college.

Lastly, the data depicts how many participants had success in controlling game and practice formats in certain situations. Youth have often been exposed to too many games or practices, and often these activities are carried out for too long (Snow, 2012). Kathy spoke about the need to limit the number of practices and games, "After a certain amount of practice attention span is gone. Whether they are physically or mentally tired, they are done." The participants were also implementing playing formats (e.g. field size and number of players suggested for age group) that corresponded with USSF recommendations.

The data depicts that in many important areas, such as teaching practices and holistic programming, leaders were having success implementing player development research. For example, the most common phrases "create a love for the game" or "to just have fun" used by participants encompassed their desire to create a holistic approach to sport participation as suggested by Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin (2008). This was considered a success in terms of implementing research policy.

Player Development Policies that are Not Being Implemented

Bohlke and Robinson (2009) depicted that exact implementation of best practices from one sport environment to another is difficult. Thus, we expected to find some discrepancy between player development research and the participants' day-to-day policies in this study. This assumption was substantiated by the data.

Free play is an important aspect of youth soccer player development that was largely missing in participants' policy. The DMSP framework was explicit in programming deliberate play into youth sport. Further, Snow (2012) implemented the idea of free play into the player development model for youth soccer players:

> The key to modern youth player development can be found in the lessons of the free play era, where children took charge of games, learning and fun. By participating in endless hours of player-centered soccer, the children of the street soccer generation developed a life-long passion and a practical feel for the game that has been all but lost in the transfer to over-organized sport (p. 6).

Participants' definitions, best encapsulated by Anthony below, of free play were similar to Snow's (2012). When prompted, participants defined free play as child-centered, and engaged free of adult control. Free play, however, was an activity that participants' grudgingly admitted is not frequently offered. Anthony's quote encapsulates the participants' feelings toward free play.

> At the end of the session when they play a game, should there be less coaching and should it look more like free play? Yes. The decisions should be less adult controlled and more player controlled… Is there less coaching? I think it would be dependent upon what was going on in the game like activity. But is it free play? No. My definition of free play would involve no feedback. (Anthony)

Paul and Derek both articulated their desire to implement free play in the future. "It is something I keep bringing up to other club leaders, having one field open for pickup games," stated Paul. Derek described his ideal free play environment to be areas that featured 3v3 fields, where players could start a game at any moment. However, Derek admitted free play was not consistently offered to athletes in his club.

Research policies were being implemented at some ages, but not others. For example, at young ages Kathy, Anthony, Bill, Derek, and Ted all depicted practice frequency and length that were in line with USSF policy. However, many participants stated that often players' practice attendance was monitored, and this was is in contrast to USSF policy. Further, at older ages players often engaged more games and tournaments than is suggested by player development research.

The data depicted a history of over-programming tournaments and games for youth soccer participants. Snow (2012) argued for limiting the number of games and tournaments over specific time periods (i.e. a given weekend), and further depicted the over-programming trend

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that was prevalent in the data. Participants cited the desire to reduce the amount of games and tournaments:

> We have teams that play 30 games a season. That is just way too many. We try to educate the parents about, kids should be excited to play games. It shouldn't be, "Oh, I have to go play another game." One, two games a week they will get excited about. Three, four games a month. Then, training means something. Then, you aren't constantly fighting fatigue in practice. We are working hard on changing that. (Ted)

The data depicted success in certain areas of research implementation, but failure to do so in others. For example, participants were largely not able to set up free play activities for youth players. The lack of free play is especially discouraging for those who believe that free play is an essential part of youth players' development. Further, the data showed that youth players exceeded the recommended number of games. For example, the USSF recommended roughly 30 games per calendar year for all age groups, and also suggested that players should engage in tournament play sparingly. Participants indicated players often play almost twice the amount of suggested games per year, and also participate in more tournaments than recommended. These findings answer the questions of what research policies are not being implemented in clubs.

Factors that Influence the Implementation of Research

The data showed that leaders were operating within environments that influence and restrict their ability to incorporate research into programming and management decisions. Most participants were directors of non-profit organizations, thus much of the organization was comprised of volunteer parents. Volunteer parents also comprised the board of directors in most cases. The volunteer parent aspect, along with limited resources, influenced policy and the culture of the clubs.

The code of "parents/club culture" was one of the most widely cited themes in the data. Participants often made reference to this theme when explaining why certain policies were carried out, or why the organization operated in certain manners. For example, Anthony stated that the board of directors and parents in general affect his ability to implement policies he believed in. Data depicted that all participants were working toward making their organization and staff more professional. However, only two of the clubs were fortunate enough to have more than three full-time youth sport professionals on staff. Therefore, most of the organizations were heavily influenced by parents. The data revealed parents, who in most situations had no coaching education, were directly influencing coaching and player development policies. Only two of the organizations were fortunate enough to not have this problem, and these organizations had "soccer people doing soccer things" (Bill).

The culture of the club and parents were not the only thing limiting research-based programming, a general lack of resources greatly affected this also. Field space was most widely cited as a limited resource. As Paul commented, "Free play is just not happening now because the field space is so tight, and everyone is jammed in." Ted stated that even offering the proper amount of practices and at appropriate times is "limited by availability of facilities." Finances were also very limited for many organizations, "It is hard to have money to provide new equipment or facilities. Year by year it is a battle to stay afloat" (Derek). Interestingly, the issue of limited field space often affected finances, due to these organizations making a significant portion of their annual revenue from tournaments:

> City parks have the final say about tournaments. For example, we had a tournament this spring and it rained all day Friday. For Saturday, luckily we have the backfields. The backfields are fescue. I felt like the fields were fine at a certain point. The sun was up all day, but they still said no. So, we were kind of handcuffed. (Kathy)

Lastly, leaders were limited by the ability to hire and train employees. "Getting good coaches, and keeping them is hard" (Kathy). Participants took it upon themselves to provide leadership that reflected proper player development. Alex talked extensively about training his staff on proper player development, encouraging employees to continue their coaching education, and trying to distribute these things around the organization:

> A couple things that I have done is…I have put a mission and vision statement for the club in writing. Also, I have put long-term goals for each age group in writing. I have spelled it out (for employees). (Alex)

Participants were limited in implementing research -based programming and player development policies mostly by parents and lack of resources. During the interviews, the participants displayed awareness of proper policies, but often reluctantly admitted that they could not implement certain management strategies due to the environment they operated in. These sentiments were represented by Anthony who admitted parental involvement limited his ability to implement desired activities, by Paul who stated he would like to organize free play but could not due to field space, and by Kathy who stated she could not offer incentives to keep good coaches (i.e. ones that implement her player development policies).

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to understand how youth sport research is being applied at the practical level. Leaders were making considerable efforts to implement research-based player development policies, but often faced barriers in doing so. This finding supported research that depicted parental influence, coach influence, and program design as reasons for not being able to achieve positive outcomes in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). However, it did seem that youth sport research has affected the leadership, management, and programming decisions of these organizations. The data revealed participants in this study indeed care about youth sport development research and are currently trying to incorporate research-based methods.

The data collected offers a direct answer to the authors' central research question when compared to the recent literature. For example, the DMSP and LTAD models both suggest the early years of participation should be spent keeping things funs and introducing players to sport techniques, middle ages should consist of more insight into the sport and training, and the older ages should be learning how to compete. The findings in this study provided similarity with the development phases laid out in such recent literature. Clubs were focused on creating skill and enjoyment of the game in the youngest ages, teaching basic principles in the middle ages, and transitioning to training to players to compete and win at the older ages.

Research-based programming was truly evident in the management strategies throughout the organizations studied. The data clearly depicted similarities in participants' player development policies at their young age groups (i.e. 7-12 year olds) and recent research. Holistic programming has been a constant feature of recent youth sport research (Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2003; Bayli, 2001), and was a major theme of the participants' programming as well. The leaders depicted an understanding of proper ways to implement a fun, enjoyable, safe, and well-rounded environment for players at the youngest ages. Participants truly cared about implementing research-based policies to create a positive environment.

This investigation showed that incorporating holistic programming truly mattered to these practitioners. Not only were participants incorporating proper player development in their organizations, but also they were willing to influence change in their broader community. Bill provided an experience that encapsulates this idea well when he chose to expose an organization run by a "win at all costs" mentality:

> There was this club called the Astros. They did not develop talent, they only recruited talent. We got together with other clubs and said, "This is not right. We can assemble a better coaching staff. We can put a plan together to develop these players over the long term."… Through that vision we formed the club… We took over the Astros by the way… We turned those players around. (Bill)

Adults (i.e. parents, leaders, coaches) limited the application of research policies. Adults acted as barriers to implementing research by not being receptive to specific policies (i.e. free play), and by helping to create a culture that favored high ratios of games (i.e. making schedules that consisted of several tournaments). This is not a new finding (see Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988; Tremblay, 2010). It is disheartening that these issues still exist and that this study offered no clear answer to this particular problem.

Possibly the most interesting finding of this study was the way in which DOC's dealt with limitations. Participants were often limited by a lack of resources and/or parental influence, which affected their ability to implement

research-based player development policy. However, practitioners responded with creative programming that seemed to find the middle ground between working within limitations and still incorporating the core ideas of player development research. For example, participants often provided free, entry-level training to future players, new parents, and inexperienced coaches. Participants viewed this training as a proactive way to combat issues (i.e. misunderstanding of soccer, misguided views of youth sport) that might limit successful implementation of player development policies and best practices in the future. The way in which participants creatively found solutions to problems was one of the most important findings of this research, like adding an opportunity for non-mandatory practice by Alex. Perhaps other youth programs could incorporate the same format for free play.

Conclusion

The current study has three important implications for future work. First, holistic programming policies and best practices had an impact on our participants. These leaders genuinely cared about incorporating research-based methods into the every day practices of their clubs. Furthermore, they showed firm understandings of the youth sport research policies, and also were able to apply these understandings into their organizations. It is our hope that youth sport and recreation leaders, advocates, and researchers see the benefit of continuing to investigate and provide solutions to issues within youth sport in light of these findings. This study is a very small sample, but they were open to new ideas and policies that could make sport more beneficial to their athletes.

Second, this paper detailed the issues that leaders face on the practical level when trying to implement proper coaching practices. The exact and direct implementation of best practices into youth sport environments is not likely because of the unique barriers each organization faces (Bohlke & Robinson, 2009), thus it is important to investigate such barriers so that creative solutions might be implemented. Future work should continue to unpack the barriers that affect implementation of research on the practical level. Furthermore, this study showed that parent and coach education is still a very important issue. The authors' argue that penetrating the thoughts of actions of leaders is not enough. Future work must address how to finally remove the barriers of adult influence as it pertains to stopping implementation of research policies.

Lastly, this research displayed how advocates of youth sport research are adapting to restrictive environments. The participants were creative, progressive, and proactive in finding new methods for combating negative issues (i.e. parental influence, lack of educated coaches) and barriers to the implementation of practices suggested by youth sport research. Leaders in this study were not able to implement all suggested player development policies (i.e. free play), but they showed commitment to the ideals of holistic youth participation. For example, Ted had started to offer free play for players who arrived early to practice before field space was an issue. Participants displayed the ability to modify and adapt research policies when such strategies could not be directly applied. This finding provided a new avenue for research. Future research should investigate proactive and creative ways for finding a middle ground when direct application of research policies is not possible.

The current study does come with limitations. There were only eight participants in this study, and they were all part of a specific profession (i.e. directors of competitive youth soccer clubs). Therefore, the findings are limited by both of these issues. The researchers acknowledge the small scale of the study, and understand that these findings can only be used to begin the conversation between youth sport researchers and practitioners. However, the researchers argue that these findings can be useful to other sport professionals outside of soccer because similar organizations exist in travel or competitive youth hockey, lacrosse, baseball, and basketball.

The findings of this study supported the idea that youth sport research has had a positive impact on leadership and management in soccer. The directors in our study were attempting to implement player development policies and best practices throughout their organizations. Youth sport and recreations programs still face barriers when attempting to implement research ideas, but enthusiasts can be optimistic that leaders can meet adversity with progressive and creative management strategies. Thus, the future of youth sport once again looks bright. Researchers who

continue to conduct research will seemingly have a captive audience willing to incorporate the suggested practices and policies.

It must be noted that there are significant changes happening in youth soccer. The USSF has mandated that all youth participants at every level of soccer play in age groups classified by their birth year starting in the fall of 2016 (all players used to categorized by the school year calendar). Also, the USSF has mandated changes to the number of players on the field at different ages, field sizes, and goal sizes. These developments will be of particular interest to youth sport and youth soccer researchers.

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