



SPECIFICITIES OF MOTIVATION PROFILE OF YOUNG ATHLETES OF SERBIA

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Abstract The research is done in order to describe motivational profile of young athletes defined by the influences that led them to sport, basic reasons (motives) for their practicing sports and expectations, long-term aims related to sport. The sample consists of 400 athletes of both sexes, the participants of the sport camp organized by the Ministry of Education and Sport named "Karataš 2004". The sample consists of young talented athletes of different sport disciplines, at the age from 12 to 18 and with sport experience of at least one year. The data about young athletes' motivation are obtained by means of the SSMS/97 Questionnaire which has 30 questions of open and closed type designed to estimate the family, accommodation and financial situation of the athletes, to explore their sport activity and the basic reasons for going in for sports.

The results of the preliminary descriptive analysis confirm that the decision for going in for sports is, above all, a matter of personal (inner) nature, because approximately 59.3% of young people decide to go in for sports on their own initiative, i.e. to satisfy their personal needs and motives. Among other important persons under whose influence they mostly go in for sports, we can mention parents (22.3%), peers (7.0%), other important persons and sport idols (6.1%) and P.E. teachers (3.6%). The structure of motivation of subjects is obtained by rating several motives according to their importance to each individual, and the data related to the frequency of naming a motive at the first place look like this: health (48.4%), love for sport (30.1%), achieving success (9.6%), aesthetic reasons (4.6%), making friends (3.6%).

The data unquestionably confirm the fact that young people see their sport activity as a factor of improving and maintaining the health, as well as an area for achieving success and confirming their own competence. Money, popularity, fun and traveling do not belong to the list of priority motives. The data related to long-term aims and aspiration levels do not belong to the priority motive group. The data related to long-lasting aims and aspiration levels also confirm the fact that their motivation is above all intrinsic. In most young athletes task and mastery orientation and self-competence are dominant. Competitive or ego orientation is more present in experienced and female athletes, whereas a number of athletes with instrumental aim orientation (sport in the function of meeting the more important existential needs) is negligibly small.

Key words: young athletes, motivation profile, long term aspirations, goal orientations, gender, sports experience.

INTRODUCTION

The investigations showed that the motives that induce children and young people to go in for sports are numerous and various. Young persons possess internal (intrinsic) motivation and strong need for games, motion, sports and challenge, so it is no wonder that interest for sports appears very early and as a lot of people say, represents "an anthropologic constant of the youth". The interest for sport is the most intense at the age of 12, and we know that that age is critical for children and has significant consequences for their self-respect and social development. According to the data of American psychologists [10] most children enter sports at the age from 10 to 13, and it is estimated that around 45 % of American children at the age of 6 to 16 go in for organized sport [8]. Pursuant to our data for 1988, from the total number of active members of sports societies 43.6% are young athletes up to 19 [2]. Although we do not have reliable data of how many of our children and young people go in for sports systematically today, we believe that the percentage is much bigger, since the participation of

children in sport is ever so massive, and the interest of parents, experts, media and researchers in children sport is getting more accentuated.

Although it is believed that going in for sport have positive effects on physical, psychological and social development of the young, it should be stated that such influence does not appear automatically. In order to put the youth sport in function of their optimal psycho-social development, it is necessary to harmonize their contents, organization, aims and expectations of children and young people. The first steps, in our opinion, involve the adoption of humanistic approach to youth sport and positive attitude towards training. The positive approach towards training means recognition and satisfaction of basic motives for which young people go in for sport, right relation towards success, victory, competition, awarding, punishing, faults and respect of each child's personality.

The research into the reasons that make the young go in for sports, as well as reasons for abandoning it were intensified in 1970s and 1980s in the USA [3, 5]. They tell us that the majority of American children go in for sports to have of fun, because they like to do something they are good at, to improve their sports abilities, for challenge, to keep fit, have company and make friends. Up to 1990s domestic studies of motivation were mostly directed to investigation of the level of expression of the motive of achievement in adult athletes at different levels of successfulness, to its connection to other personality dispositions and methods of measurement [1, 6, 7]. At the beginning of 1990s Bačanac and assistants [2], determine, on the sample of 417 young athletes, the basic reasons for which the children and the young of Serbia, most frequently opt for participation in sport. They found that our young begin practicing sport primarily because they want to achieve success (continue towards higher level), for attractiveness of sports competitions, to improve condition, for their need to do something they are good at and for company (staying with friends). We do not know whether recently there have been some more extensive investigations of motivation of young athletes, therefore we do not know if it has changed compared to the situation ten years ago, whether today's children observe sport as the area in which they can have fun, meet friends or they still put promotion, achievement of top results, competition and victory at the first place.

The understanding of motives for which the young start practicing sport, as well as of the reasons for which they abandon it is a necessary presupposition for creation of good sports programs that will meet those requirements and motives, reducing thus the negative experiences, disappointments and abandoning of sport. Our intention with this paper was to get an insight into the most significant motives that make the young opt for sport, to determine who influences them to go in for sport (P.E. teacher, peers, parents, sports idols etc.) and what are their long term aims or expectations connected with their sports practice.

We expect that the motivation profile of young athletes will show certain specificities depending on their gender, while long term sports aspirations and goal orientations will be connected with the length of sports practice, conditions in which they train and degree of content by sports development so far.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

SUBJECTS SAMPLE

In order to fix certain determinants of the motivation profile of the young, which we defined as: influence that assigned them to sport; basic reasons (motives) for which they go in for sport and expectations, the long-term goals they connect to sport – we examined the sample of 400 athletes of both genders. The research was done in the sports camp organized by the Ministry of Education and Sport "Karatat 2004". The sample consisted of young, talented athletes from 17 sports disciplines, aged 12-18 and with at least one year of sports experience. Table 1 shows the basic parameters that define the sample of the tested athletes.

Table 1. Structure of the sample of the subjects

	Age			Sports experience		
	N	M (yr.)	SD	N	M (yr.)	SD
Male	242	15.26	1.64	241	5.07	3.17
Female	158	15.05	1.59	160	4.98	3.22
Total	400	15.18	1.62	401	5.03	3.19

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE

The data on motivation of young athletes were obtained by the Questionnaire SSMS/97 consisting of 30 questions of open and closed type intended to estimate family, residential and economic status of the athletes, exploration of their sports activity and basic reasons of going in for sports. SSMS/97 is primarily the construct for the estimation of the social status of young athletes and presents a constituent part of the battery of psychological tests. Besides the principal identification data on athletes, their gender, age, length of sports practice, the subject of our attention were answers to the questions about the person that influenced their decision to start practicing sport, the conditions in which they exercise, whether they are satisfied with their sports development so far and what they would like to achieve in sport. The questionnaire contained the list of 9 most frequent reasons for practicing sport, and they should be ranged according to the level of importance for their involvement in sport.

The basic indexes of descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages or arithmetic means) were calculated for all the tested variables of motivation, while the influences of certain independent variables were checked by calculating hi-square test, student t-test or by calculation of correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

JOINING SPORT

Although the interest for sport already arises at the age of 5, this research proved that our children involve in sport most intensely at the age of 6 - 10 (around 66%), then in the period 10 - 13 (20.3%), while at the very early age (4 - 6) that percentage is low (6.8%), and in late teenage years (14 - 16) is irrelevant (5.1%).

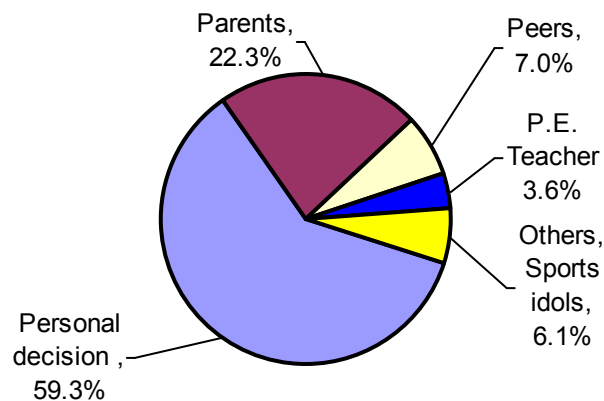


Figure 1. Who influences the decision of the young to start practicing sport?

Figures 1 and 2 show that the decision of involvement in sport at children of both genders is primarily their own (59.3%), then strongly influenced by parents (22.3%), moderately influenced by peers (7%) and negligibly influenced by P.E. teachers (3.6%) and other non-identified persons (5.1%) and sports idols (1.0%). In order to test the zero hypothesis that there are no significant differences in factors that initialize their going in for sports, between athletes of different gender, we united the last two categories of answers (others and sports idol) and calculated χ^2 - square test. Since the obtained value $\chi^2 = 13.86$; $df = 4$ is significant at the level of 0.01 we can conclude that according to the importance of factors that initiate sports practice, boys and girls are statistically different. Closer observation of the picture 2 reveals that girls, compared to the boys, are more independent in opting for sport (62.8% : 57.0%), i.e. that their involvement in sport is significantly less influenced by their peers (3% : 9.6%) while the influence of other important persons and sports idols is far more present (8.5% : 4.4%). Generally speaking, the data show that the orientation for sport is mainly of personal (internal) nature, while the influence of other persons is proportionally lower. Among other important persons who influence entering into sports most frequently, the first place belongs to the parents, then

peers, other non-identified persons (most frequently these are the persons from the family), P.E. teachers and sports idols.

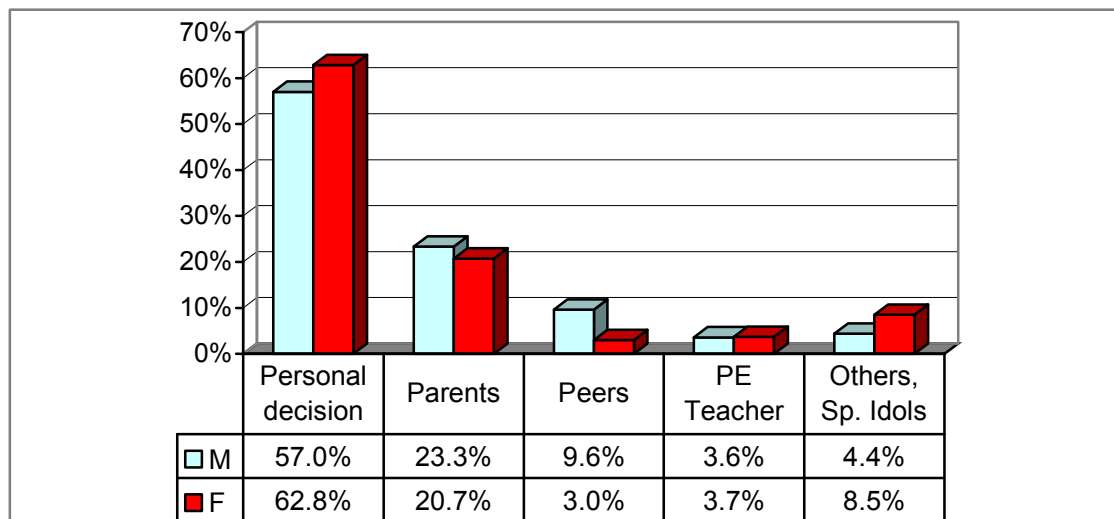


Figure 2. Comparative survey of the main influences at involvement in sport depending on gender

BASIC MOTIVES FOR GOING IN FOR SPORTS

The results presented on the Figure 2 prove that the motivation structure of our athletes is dominated by the intrinsic (internal) motives such as health, love for sports, need for affirmation and company. Having in mind our previous researches [2] and the fact that we still have not opted (both in professional practice and normatively) for humanistic approach to the youth sports, we are not surprised by the fact that having fun is the lowest ranged reason for practicing sports. Bear in mind that with American athletes [3, 10] entertainment and fun together with learning and improvement of sports abilities represent the most important motives for which the children become involved in sports, whereas our young athletes do not consider sport as an area in which they will satisfy their inherent requirements for entertainment, fun, play and challenge. Both boys and girls consider sport primarily in the function of promotion and prevention of their own health (formation of such an attitude is decisively influenced by adults, family), they practice sport for "love" and need for achievements (affirmation and success).

When we observe motivation profiles of young athletes with regard to their gender, then the value of χ^2 – test ($\chi^2 = 16.63$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.02$) tells us that they possess certain specificities that cannot be considered accidental, but we can treat them as differences determined by gender. Although the most important motives (health and love for sports) for which the young opt for sport, are the same for athletes of both genders, only through finer analysis of χ^2 – square table we can see that significantly higher percentage of girls than boys qualifies love for sport as the most important motive for their sport performance (see Table 2), significantly higher percentage of male athletes consider the necessity for affirmation or success the most important reason of their sport performance, and the differences are registered during the assessment of the necessity for fun. Fun, for 3.2% of boys compared to far lower percentage of girls (0.6%) is the most important reason for sports performance. Pursuant to our outcome, male young athletes, compared to female young athletes differ in their stronger need to get affirmation, achieve success and have fun through sports while with female athletes those motives are less accented and almost negligible with regard to their love for sports and its evaluation as a factor of maintaining their health.

Table 2. Reasons for going in for sports **a.** Ranged according to the percentage of putting in the first place of the rank order and **b.** According to the overall number of athletes who ranged them in their motivation list notwithstanding the rank order

a. Reasons for going in for sports indicated according to the number (%) of placing in the first place					
Boys (N=219)			Girls (N=161)		
Motives	f	%	Motives	f	%
1. Health	106	48.4	1. Health	73	45.3
2. Love for sport	66	30.1	2. Love for sport	65	40.4
3. Personal affirmation (success)	21	9.6	3. Esthetic (nice appearance)	8	5.0
4. Esthetic (nice appearance)	10	4.6	4. Personal affirmation (success)	6	3.7
5. Company	8	3.6	5. Company	6	3.7
6. Fun	7	3.2	6. Travel	2	1.2
7. Travel	1	0.4	7. Fun	1	0.6
8. Popularity	0	0.0	8. Popularity	0	0.0
9. Money	0	0.0	9. Money	0	0.0

b. Reasons for going in for sports according to overall number (%) of athletes who influenced them notwithstanding the range					
Boys (N=219)			Girls (N=161)		
Motives	f	%	Motives	f	%
1. Company	161	73.5	1. Company	142	88.2
2. Love for sport	156	71.2	2. Love for sport	141	87.6
3. Health	153	69.9	3. Travel	123	76.4
4. Fun	144	65.7	4. Health	120	74.5
5. Travel	123	62.5	5. Fun	109	67.7
6. Esthetic (nice appearance)	131	59.8	6. Personal affirmation (success)	100	62.1
7. Personal affirmation (success)	125	57.1	7. Esthetic (nice appearance)	91	56.5
8. Popularity	86	39.8	8. Popularity	60	37.3
9. Money	64	29.2	9. Money	41	25.5

LONG-TERM SPORTS GOALS – EXPECTATIONS

Although the role of goals in motivation of achievements is primary, the fact is that very small number of people set themselves short-term, middle-term and/or long-term aims. In order to succeed in sport, secure improvement of performance, structure and maintain their motivation and effort for hours and hours of intensive training and preparations for competitions, it is necessary that the athletes set themselves personal aims and define their priorities. For it is only if they have set clear goals that the athletes can know if they make progress, if they approach their most important and most distant goals. It is sure that if they do not have clearly defined goals even the most talented athletes can waste their talent. The goals and expectations motivate them to make effort and continually practice sport, while their realization confirms their competence, strengthen their sports self-confidence and orientation to achievement.

In order to get an insight into the nature of long-term goals and expectations that connect young people to sport, we asked them a simple question: "What would you like to achieve in sport?" We classified the collected answers into 8 categories, and since the results of comparative analysis showed that there are statistically significant differences with regard to gender of the athletes ($\chi^2 = 24.13$; $df = 7$; $p < 0.001$), we presented them in Table 3 to see their nature and meaning.

Table 3. Comparative review of goal orientation depending on athletes' gender

Boys (N=223)			Girls (N=148)		
Goals	f	%	Goals	f	%
1. The most they can, top results	97	49.5	1. <i>Participate at great international competition</i>	43	29.1
2. <i>Participate at great international competition</i>	61	27.3	2. Most they can, top results	37	25.0
3. Become good athlete	20	8.9	3. Become good athlete	28	18.9
4. <i>Get into the national team</i>	19	8.5	4. <i>Get into the national team</i>	27	18.2
5. Play abroad	10	4.5	5. Play abroad	5	3.4
6. <i>Become popular</i>	7	3.1	6. <i>Become popular</i>	5	3.4
7. Stay in sport (as coach, have own club)	7	3.1	7. Stay in sport (as coach, have own club)	3	2.0
8. Play in great domestic club	2	0.9	10. Play in great domestic club	0	0.0

As it is seen in Table 3, what dominates among the long-term aims of athletes is the orientation towards mastery, competence or task, i.e. their attempt to achieve in sport as much as they possibly can, to master the sports ability, to become good athletes and to demonstrate personal competence (task involved or sport mastery orientation). Differently, with the girls the goals directed to demonstration and confirmation of their own abilities by entering the national team, participation at great international competitions and popularity gaining (ego involving competitive ability) prevail. Besides these two goal orientations (sport mastery and competitive ability), we notice another goal at our young athletes, that can conditionally be called instrumental. To play abroad or in a great domestic club implies certain financial profit, so young people see their sports career in the function of solving certain existential problems in the future. Connection of future profession to sport (coach profession, own club) also represents its instrumentalization for securing other existential requirements. Around 8.5% of young male athletes and 5.4% of female athletes in Serbia see their future sports careers in the function of meeting important existential requirements (to earn more by playing either in a great domestic club or abroad and/or expect their future professions to be linked to sport).

When we analyze long-term sports goals from the aspect of sports experience (Table 4), then the results of statistic analyses show that athletes, categorized in three groups according to the length of sports career, statistically significantly differ ($\chi^2 = 44.22$; $df = 14$; $p < 0.00$), because those with the shortest sports experience ($M = 1.97$ years) are mostly directed to task involvement and personal improvement (to achieve as much as possible and become good athletes – totally 54.3%), and only then at demonstration of competitive abilities against the opponents (40.2%). The greatest number of athletes with average length of sports career of 4.5 years as dominant goals still put improvement of personal performance, i.e. they are task oriented (50.5%), and then at obtaining high competition results (39.4). However, the category of athletes with the longest sports career ($M = 8.3$ years) is dominated by those whose long-term goals are connected to ego orientation, i.e. for manifestation and confirmation of their high sports abilities through participation and winning at great international competitions, gaining popularity and playing for national team (49.2% competition oriented; 42.7% personal mastery).

Therefore, the results confirm that the beginners are primarily focused on performance and task mastery (sport mastery, improving or perfecting a skill) while those who have practiced sport longer and confirmed their sport mastery, still consider sport performance in the function of competitive confirmation and manifestation of high capabilities, primarily by comparing with the opponents and beating them. For those athletes whose motivation orientation is connected to competitive abilities, winning at competitions represents the most important criterion of success.

Table 4. Long-term goals of athletes depending on the length of sports experience

Goals	Sports experience of 3 years N=127		From 3.5 - 5.5 years N=99		6 and more years N=138	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
The most they can, top results	48	37.8	38	38.4	45	32.6
To become a good athlete	21	16.5	12	12.1	14	10.1
<i>To participate in great international competition</i>	32	25.2	20	20.2	51	36.9
<i>Become popular</i>	10	7.9	1	1.0	1	0.7
<i>Enter the national team</i>	9	7.1	20	18.2	16	11.6
Play abroad	5	3.9	7	7.1	3	2.2
Play in a big domestic club	1	0.8	1	1.0	0	0.0
Remain in sport (as coach, own a club)	1	0.8	0	0.0	8	5.8

By analyzing the connection of goal orientations of our athletes with their age, estimation of conditions of their training and content with sports development so far, we found that they are not significantly influenced by the aforesaid variables. Long-term sports goals which the young link with sport, their expectations and levels of aspiration, predominantly depend on the length of their sports experience (perception of the achieved success and own competence) gender and characteristics of general motivation of achievement (orientation towards ability, victory, competition, ego orientation; task orientation, personal improvement, mastery).

CONCLUSION

The research in principal characteristics of motivation of young athletes was carried out among the participants of the camp for young talented athletes of Serbia "Karatas 2004". The results showed that the motivation profile of athletes (N=400), of the average age of 15 and with 5 years of sports experience, possess certain specificities determined by their gender and length of sport career. We can summarize them as follows:

- ❑ The young of Serbia enter sport at the age of 6-10 and then in the period from 10 to 13,
- ❑ Their orientation to sport is primarily of personal (intrinsic) nature and only afterwards influenced by parents, peers, other important persons and P.E. teachers. The decision of the boys to go in for sport is more powerfully influenced by their peers than it is the case with the girls,
- ❑ Over 50% of the athletes of both genders state several motives for going in for sports: company, health, love for sports, travel, fun, personal affirmation and esthetic reasons. Although, while listing them according to the level of importance (percentage of placing them in the first place) health and love for sports with athletes of both genders, were evaluated as the most important reasons, with the girls however, love for sports was significantly more frequently cited as the most important reason, while with the boys that was the case with need of affirmation and success,
- ❑ Long-term goals which our athletes connect to sport are influenced by gender and the length and nature of their sports experience. We identified three different goal orientations conditionally named: competition orientation, personal improvement orientation or sport mastery and instrumental orientation,
- ❑ Goal orientation at personal sport mastery or task orientation, improvement and perfecting of personal performance is more present at the beginners, athletes with the least sport experience and male athletes. Ego orientation or demonstration of competitive abilities by beating opponents was more present at the girls than at the boys as well as at the athletes with the longest sport experience. Instrumental goal orientation, i.e. perception of sport in the function of future profession and means for satisfying existential requirements was present at a very small number of athletes of both genders.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

It is very important that the coaches who design and carry out sports programs for children and the young know their basic motives for going in for sport, their expectations from sport, their target orientation and are aware of the fact that their gender and the length of sports experience influence their motivational characteristics. Such information is indispensable for them so that they could think out and realize the program in a more sportive way which better satisfies the needs of young athletes. In this way, the programs will be developed according to the actual expectations of the young, with a balanced ratio between task and ego orientations, which will create their future sports habits and enable utilizing the social, health and psychological benefits of sport.

Having in mind the results of this research, the coaches should structure their sports programs in such a way to satisfy, through positive approach in training, young athletes' needs for socializing, achievement, health and fun. Their love for sports ought to be maintained so that the beginners and those with task dominant orientation and mastery should be directed more to improving and perfecting of their skills, to competition with themselves and breaking their personal records. At the same time, young athletes who are primarily directed to demonstration of competitive skills against their opponents, require particularly sensitive and responsible relation of coaches while choosing competitive situations in which they should be involved. They should be harmonized with their abilities and age, challenging enough but not too difficult, so that young athletes can confirm their competence and obtain positive competitive experience.

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