

Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this descriptive research was to gain understanding about the methods used to inform youth of their non-selection within youth sport. In this study I investigated the role of team elimination communication methods with regard to the meanings and experiences of those involved. Specifically, the intent was to understand the varying perceptions people have towards their experiences with this, and how, or if, the meanings that are made affect their subsequent sport related decisions.

Specifically:

1. What methods are being employed in order to communicate non-selection within youth team sports?
2. What role does the method of delivery of non-selection play in the creation of meanings, and in further sport experiences for those involved?
3. How are perceptions and meanings similar and/ or dissimilar amongst coaches, athletes, and parents?

STRUCTURE OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Epistemology: Constructionism

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

Methodology: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Design: In-depth Interviews

Participants

15 participants were interviewed as follows:

5 coaches with at least 5 years experiences with team selections for youth aged 12-15

5 parents who have a child, who, when aged 12-15 was eliminated. Happened at least 5 years ago.

5 athletes who, when aged 12-15 were eliminated. Happened at least 5 years ago.

Sports represented: baseball, basketball, football, hockey, ringette, soccer, synchronized skating, volleyball

FINDINGS

Inventory of Methods

Methods of delivering tryout results that were presented in this research:

- Phone calls (with and without parent involvement)
- Face-to-face interactions (with and without parent involvement)
- Letters
- Lists
- E-mail

Athletes, Coaches, and Parents

The responses from the participants did not consistently align according to these three groups; rather the perspectives and meanings discussed were sometimes overlapping and sometimes differing.

Research Themes

- Feedback
 - Deserving to know why one is unsuccessful:

"They just leave you out in the cold and you are like, 'Why didn't I make it?'" (Brett: athlete).

- A lack of feedback can lead to assumptions:

"I didn't know why I was cut. I guessed that it could be because I was a girl and maybe they didn't want girls on their team" (Sarah: athlete).

- Why Coaches Choose a Given Method
 - Logistics:

"'I have papers to mark, I have to get ready for next class', and that is probably why coaches can't spend personal time with each youth" (John: athlete).

- The Role of Parents
 - Informed during pre-tryout meeting:

"You have to be informed on what type of structure you're going into so that you can deal with it as a parent of your child, because you know that if they don't make the 'A' team you can deal with that with your child and explain the development scheme to them" (Mary: parent).

- Message to Walk Away With:

"Maybe an intention should not only be to inspire them to come back next year, but to inspire them to do something this year, or maybe try something else...Because they got cut from one team doesn't mean that they are bad at everything. At this age, they shouldn't be afraid to try new things" (Sarah: athlete).

DISCUSSION

Cutting youth from sport programs is considered to be a very difficult task. In light of the meanings and issues presented in this research, questions were created in order to help guide stakeholders navigate through the process of delivering and receiving tryout results.

Sample Questions for Coaches:

- To what extent does the way that I inform my athletes of their elimination:
 - Answer their question of 'why didn't I make it?'
 - Let me inform them of their strengths?
 - Provide me with the opportunity to discuss alternative programs, leagues, or lessons?
 - Match with the amount of time I can and am willing to spend?