

Elite Athletes? Or Elite Parenting?

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Abstract

Organised sport is a prominent part of contemporary Western childhood, with many families scheduling their leisure time around their children's sporting endeavours. Children who appear talented in a particular sport and find themselves competing at a representative level require a level of commitment and dedication from their parents that matches their own. The amount of time, money and energy parents are willing to invest in their children's elite sporting endeavours can be quite substantial; the reasons behind the investment can also be quite complex.

This ethnographic study of an Under 13 boys' elite football team conducted over the course of a season was undertaken with a view to capturing the experience of parenting an elite footballer in Australia. The study documents the social support structures behind the players and questions the innateness of their talent, exposes the hidden costs in the social production of skill, and explores the identities, relationships and conflicts that emerge in the elite youth football setting. Parents play a crucial role in every aspect of the talent identification and development process, be it in introducing their children to a sport, valuing their sporting ability, funding the professional development of their talent, and logistically and emotionally facilitating their realisation of expert performance. A child's performance on the football pitch was very much a reflection of his parental support. However, a parent's dedication to their child's talent was rarely just about the sport.

Statement of authorship

This is to certify that the following thesis is all my own work, except where acknowledgment has been made to the work or ideas of others. It has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed

Heidi Anne Louise Maguire

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1. Introduction

I think the benefits of playing football go down to this kind of team, and mixing with others that you would not normally mix with. So when John trialled for the team and was accepted, he was elated, and incredibly nervous. 'I don't know any of these kids!' And we saw that as one of life's greatest learning opportunities for John. 'You've every right to be in this team, but really, how you actually mix and integrate with the team is now down to you, ok.' And that, I think, is just the greatest thing that he's been able to pick up, because every kid's different. And yeah, they're a great bunch of kids, but you've got to learn some different skills sometimes. What it's shown to [us] is that John's pretty adaptable and can weigh people up pretty well. But also, I think he can hold his own as well. And I think that's a life skill. So I think really what football has brought to us, and to him, is that. And I don't think he recognises that yet... that they're actually, kind of, just building up a few tools in the tool box.

In his interview, Steve captured the myriad of emotions felt when a child was selected to play for a representative football team and thus formally recognised as 'talented'. Both Steve and his son, John were elated, but for entirely different reasons. For Steve, the excitement wasn't really about the football. Selection was an opportunity for his son to become part of a dynamic community and to interact with others dedicated to athletic excellence outside of his immediate circle of family and school friends. In the process he would be challenged and learn new skills; he would become more confident and develop resilience. Entry into an elite team provided opportunities to develop John's character, not simply his football skills. This passage of our interview shows the complicated mix of aspirations that I argue are at play on the pitch. Selection into an elite team may ostensibly be about playing a sport, but the parents' hopes for their children extend beyond the acquisition of technical skills. The irony is that this opportunity to integrate into a community, and experience valuable life lessons, hinged on the ability to play a sport.

Sport is one of the most salient aspects of Australian culture, and more and more Australian children participate in organised sport every year (Schranz, 2014). Those children who stand out in some way and appear talented may go on to play at the representative or 'elite' level, where they engage in more intense, highly structured

and development-oriented training and competition, which they hope will ultimately lead into a successful sporting career. Australia invests heavily in its sporting talent and is considered to be one of the leading nations in talent identification and development (Collins & Bailey, 2013). However, merely having a ‘talent’ does not guarantee that it will be valued, much less developed. For that, a third party needs to be closely involved. Bridging the gap between childhood dreams to become a professional sportsperson and organisations devoted to identifying, selecting and developing talent are, of course, the parents.

The elite nature of participation in representative youth sport involves both the superior talent of the child as well as the superior investment of resources by the parent. To make sense of either a child’s talent or a parent’s willingness to invest in such requires situating them within their cultural context. Here the cultural context is contemporary Australian society, where childhood is often characterised by innocence and dependence. Significant changes in child rearing patterns over the last few decades have led to contemporary forms of childhood in Western society that are neither natural, predetermined or similar to childhood elsewhere (Dyck, 2012; Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009; Lancy, 2008; Rogoff, 2003; Kessen, 1979).

Although Australia has a high rate of organised sport participation, 81% of Australian children do not meet the recommended guidelines for daily exercise (Schranz, 2014). Even in a nation as sport-obsessed as ours, the consequences of risk-averse attitudes and policies on contemporary childhood – characterised by the child’s shrinking freedom of movement and expanding adult control and supervision – are both damaging to and endangering of those they are designed to protect (Gill, 2007; Lancy, 2008). Despite not being a universal trend, the intensive parenting practices of the Western middle-class can become so socially entrenched they increase biases in the welfare and legal systems as well as disrupt psychological development (Bernstein & Triger, 2011). As Kessen pointed out, “Once a descriptive norm has been established, it is an antique cultural principle to urge adherence to it” (1979: 818).

Childhood in Western cultures often involves a lengthy, and sometimes expensive, education. Many Western parents also invest heavily in structured activities, such as organised sport, music or dance lessons, boy scouts and girl guides. Middle-class parents in particular often take advantage of such activities to “prepare children for later entry in

mature activities” (Rogoff, 2003: 140), or to cultivate certain interests and transmit differential advantages (Dyck, 2012: 52). Structured activities can also be viewed as institutionalised forms of social control (Fine, 2004). Numerous studies suggest that children who engage in sport reap many social, psychological and physiological benefits (Kimiecik & Horn, 2012; Holt et al., 2011; Findlay & Bowker, 2009). In a risk-averse, electronic device-laden society, sport is highly valued by parents because it keeps children off the screens, physically active, and engaged in character-building pastimes. Elite sport, with its higher levels of commitment, occupies children’s time even more effectively.

In addition to focusing on sport as a medium for positive youth development, another dominant strand of scientific investigation into youth sport has been the talent identification and development processes (Harwood & Knight, 2014). A lengthy and ongoing debate in the sports science literature centres on the relative contributions of biological and environmental factors to expert performance, as well as the optimum timing of the different levels of engagement (see Jayanthi et al., 2012 and Howe, Davidson & Sloboda, 1998). Talent identification and development is still far from being a ‘probabilistic enterprise’ (Mills et al., 2012; Maguire, 2009; Vaeyens et al., 2008; Williams & Reilly, 2000).

Although the relative contributions of biological and environmental factors to expert performance and optimum levels of engagement continue to be debated, the assertion that parents greatly influence the development of their children’s talent through their socio-cultural contributions is far less contentious (Côté, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993; Bloom, 1982). ‘Sporting cultures’ are often transmitted through generations as parents with a strong history of involvement in sport facilitate and foster similar levels of engagement in their own children (Bois et al., 2005; Wheeler, 2011).

Yet a love of sport and the recognition of a child’s ability as a talent are not enough to guarantee expertise. The ‘elite’ nature of participation in representative sport also refers to the socio-economic demographic that dominates. Being a sport parent is costly, challenging, demanding and forever-changing as mothers and fathers juggle the extensive demands of their children’s sporting commitments alongside other family, school and professional commitments (Timson-Katchis, 2011). Successfully managing

all these competing commitments often relies on the financial security, professional flexibility and maximum support capacity of middle- and upper-class, intact families.

Being a sport parent also leads to the formation of consociate identities and relationships among parents repeatedly involved in the same sport settings (Dyck, 1995). Parents of children with similar interests and issues often use such ‘forced’ gatherings to perform and refine their conceptions of childhood and parenting, as well as to reinforce the group’s collective identity. Sport parents are an indispensable source of logistical, informational and emotional support for their children (Hellstedt, 2005). However, they can also be an unwitting source of stress for a child and, if overly involved, can actually hinder the development of the child’s talent.

Much of the existing research on parental involvement in youth sport is concerned with how parents’ behaviour impacts on the children’s participation and enjoyment. The challenges and complexities of being a sport parent have only recently begun to be explored (Harwood & Knight, 2014; Holt et al., 2008), including the particular parent stressors in youth football academies (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Harwood, Drew & Knight, 2010) and the benefits and challenges faced by parents and children in low-income families (Holt et al., 2011). Parents’ voices remain under-represented in research. Lindstrom Bremer’s (2012) review of the parental involvement in youth sport literature (much of which emanates from the sports psychology and family studies disciplines) recommends that future studies use mixed research methods to give a richer picture of the complex dynamics that are occurring within sport families. Uehara et al. (2014) and Krane and Baird (2005) specifically recommend utilising ethnographic methods of enquiry.

With a view to better understanding the experiences of parents of young adolescent males playing team sport at an elite level, an ethnographic study of an Under 13 boys’ representative football team was conducted over the course of its 2014 season. The team was situated in tier 2 of New South Wales’ current two-tier premier league system, which is governed and administered by Football New South Wales (FNSW). Fieldwork was conducted by way of participant observation of the team from January to September 2014, as well as through in-depth interviews with parents, players and coaches. The researcher was a parent of one of the players in the team. Ethics approval was granted by Macquarie University’s ethics committee before the study began and informed consent was obtained from all participants interviewed (including consent

from parents on behalf of their children). Inspired by a season of participant observation and enlightened by 40 in-depth interviews with parents, players and coaches, this thesis aims to capture what motivates, challenges, rewards and sustains the parents of elite youth footballers.

Observations and interviews primarily took place at the home ground of the football team in Sydney, where two- or three-weekly training sessions and all ‘home’ matches were held. Observations and interviews were also conducted at various locations across New South Wales during ‘away’ matches and tournaments. In addition to the primary research group of team players, players’ parents and the coach, six parents of children playing in other football teams competing in tier 1 or tier 2 of the premier league or in the regional league (a tier in between club level and representative level) were also interviewed, as were two other coaches with similar accreditation and experience to the team coach. These interviews outside of the primary research group were conducted in order to draw comparisons and contrasts between the parenting and coaching styles of elite footballers in other teams and other tiers, as well as to enhance the anonymity of the primary research group participants. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the thesis.

The 15 families in the primary research group could all be described as middle class. At the time of the study, all players were 12 or 13 years of age. Thus in terms of the three distinct phases of youth sport involvement identified by Côté (1999), i.e. the sampling phase, specialising phase and investment phase, all players had just entered the specialising stage. However, a minority of the team still played other sports in addition to football (i.e. diversified), while a clear majority of the players had been specialising in football for several years. In terms of Bloom and colleagues’ (1985) three stages of parental involvement in the talent development process, i.e. supportive, dedicated and financial, the parents of players were in the dedicated phase.

Within the thesis, both “elite” and “representative” are used to describe players (or teams of players) who are selected via a trial process to play at a higher, more competitive level than local community-organised club football. Representative is the preferred term and reduced to “rep” throughout to reflect common usage as well as for brevity. Elite is the more generic term used throughout the sports literature, and is also the term that FNSW used instead of premier league until very recently. The terms

“football” and “soccer” are also interchangeable. The researcher’s preferred term is football, however the words of the participants have been reproduced as spoken.

Although children’s physical activities in contemporary Western society increasingly take place in organised settings, parents play a key role in the development of their children’s early sport attitudes and behaviours as well as in the cultivation of their “talent”. Chapter 2 illustrates how sporting cultures are transmitted through generations and considers the players’ levels of engagement from within the talent identification and development debate. The substantial amount of time, money and energy parents are prepared to invest in their children’s rep football endeavours, and why they might do so, is considered in Chapter 3. In the process of facilitating their children’s rep football, otherwise disparate individuals constantly interact within the same setting, leading to the development of consociate identities and relationships that are explored in Chapter 4. The challenges parents face negotiating the transition from the sampling to specialising stages of participation in youth sport and, in particular, maintaining the boundaries between the roles of parent and coach, are discussed in Chapter 5. The various findings, patterns and limitations that emerged throughout the study are brought together in Chapter 6.

2. Sporting Cultures and Precocious Talents

We arrived at the football ground late in the afternoon. The coach was already waiting by the training sheds with Harry and Luke. Harry had been dropped off by his mum (who then went for her usual 5km run), Luke by a neighbouring uni student. Oscar greeted the coach with a handshake then traded high fives with the boys, before dropping his kit bag inside the shed in anticipation of Tuesday's post-match analysis. As the boys awaited the other players, they keenly dissected the latest English Premier League round with the coach.

Robbie and Kane were the next to arrive. Robbie's mum must have brought both boys as his siblings were there too. As usual, she stayed in the car working on her laptop. The older brother (who played rep football for a club that trained on alternate nights) took shots at an empty goalmouth. Robbie's little sister retrieved stray balls in between hand stands. When Kane's mum drove the boys she used the downtime to go grocery shopping.

Eric, one of the two gentle giants on the team, quietly slid up. During training his dad made business calls in the car or went for a run. Jason scampered in next looking a little distressed. He'd accidentally brought his older brother's identical kit bag and had no football boots. I quickly got an old pair from the car boot – crisis averted. Having gotten Jason out of school early, his mum had gone straight back home for his brother, whose training started in two hours' time.

Ryan raced up next, worried he was late. He also had a very talented older brother and a younger sister, who soon joined Robbie's siblings for shooting and handstand practice respectively. Isaac then sauntered up. He was the player most likely to get in trouble. His mum did the drop-off, his dad the pick-up. Neither of them knew he could be disruptive.

Just after 5.45pm, the team 'bus' pulled up, and the four players that lived near each other spilled out. With their penchant for not being punctual, they exposed the downside to carpooling: it only took one boy to be running late for them all to be late, with training for the whole team delayed as a result. Yani shuffled up last of all, coming straight from an orthotics class for his Osgood-Schlatter condition.

The boys filed out from the shed and crossed the pitch. A quick headcount confirmed what I suspected – Liam was absent, again. He lived the furthest away and had trouble getting to training. The family was struggling to pay the bills and put petrol in the car. They could get Liam to the games but he would spend half of them on the bench – as did all players who missed training.

The parents of young footballers might seem to be a random collection of individuals who simply come together for training and matches. Indeed, superficially, they appeared to have little in common *other* than football. However, the sporting culture of the families observed and interviewed in this study was evident in their sports involvement across generations as well as in their current investment in the children's talent. Participating in football *at an elite level* had become a way of life for them.

This chapter documents the depth of the families' involvement with football and then analyses the players' levels of engagement within the scientific debate about the existence of innate talent. Drawing on the demographic data set out in Table 1 (below), the chapter considers how biological age impacted on the team, before exploring the extent to which individual players engaged in early specialisation and deliberate practice or early diversification and deliberate play. 'Talent' is recognised as a social construction; a label of approval a society places on traits deemed to have a positive value in that society (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993: 23). A child's ability needs to be highly valued by his or her parents in particular if they are to make the substantial investment that enables that ability to reach its full potential (1993: 152). Individuals who perfect athletic traits become more than champions of their sport. They are symbolic representations of cultural values, uniting those who have a common purpose and vicariously fulfilling others in their embodying of elements collectively valued (Maguire, 2009).

Parents are instrumental in identifying, contributing to, and developing their children's talent. A lengthy and ongoing debate in the sports science literature focuses on the relative contributions of biological and environmental factors to expert performance (see Howe, Davidson & Sloboda, 1998, as well as peer comments following). Those who continue to emphasise the hereditary nature of anthropometric and physiological attributes in elite sport (e.g. Epstein, 2014; Mohamed et al., 2009) can be distinguished from those who believe that inherent ability is less important than favourable social circumstances (Côté, 1999; Bloom, 1982).

Indeed, psychologist Anders Ericsson and colleagues (1993) argued that expertise was acquired through successful management of motivational, effort and resource constraints alone; expertise was the result of extensive *deliberate practice* (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). Deliberate practice referred to practice that was performed daily in a work-like

manner, required effort and attention, did not provide immediate social or financial rewards, and was not inherently enjoyable to perform (Ericsson et al., 1993). Ericsson's deliberate practice theory came as an attractive alternative to studies focusing on the hereditary nature of attributes required by elite athletes, which were thought to distort talent identification and development programs and diminish the overall talent pool as resources were invested in children with a biological advantage that often became irrelevant over time (Helsen et al., 2000, Williams & Reilly, 2000; Downey, 1999).

However, in more recent years the sports science community has discredited the application of deliberate practice theory to sport and lamented the early specialisation (i.e. intense training in one sport and exclusion of other sports) it encourages (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013; Tucker & Collins, 2012; Moesch et al., 2011; Baker et al., 2009; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009; Maguire, 2009; Vaeyens et al., 2008; Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005). Ironically, deliberate practice theory had put even more pressure on early talent selection as stakeholders tried to accelerate the development process, leading to precocious achievers being weeded out *as well as* late biological bloomers. Experts now recommend that intense, single-sport specialisation be delayed until late adolescence to optimise success and reduce the risk of physical injury and psychological stress (see Jayanthi et al., 2012 for a critique of early specialisation).

Studies have also shown that there needs to be a strong emotional attachment to, as well as intrinsic pleasure derived from, taking part in an activity if excellence is to be achieved. Côté (1999) found that elite adult athletes usually engaged in more *deliberate play* (i.e. unstructured activities in a sport) up until the age of 12. *Early diversification* (i.e. engaging in multiple sports) was also linked to a longer professional career in sport as well as longer participation generally, since it provided children with valuable physical, cognitive and psychosocial environments that promote intrinsic motivation (Jayanthi et al., 2012; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009). Although research on elite youth footballers in England found no difference in early diversification patterns, it revealed that those who achieved professional status engaged in twice the amount of unstructured football activities between age 6 and 12 to those who dropped out (Ford et al., 2009). *Early engagement*, advocating minimal diversity but high levels of both play and practice in a primary sport, was now also being advocated.

Current research suggests that elite sporting status is a combination of nature and nurture (Gulbin et al., 2013; Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005), as well as chance (Mills et al., 2012; Vaeyens et al., 2008; Tranckle & Cushion, 2006). Each factor circumscribes the potential contribution of the other factors (Tucker & Collins, 2012; Phillips et al., 2010). Further, the dynamic, multi-dimensional nature of sport talent is best explored in a multi-disciplinary environment (Gulbin et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2010; Williams & Reilly, 2000), ideally utilising ethnographic methods of enquiry (Uehara et al., 2014; Krane & Baird, 2005).

Turning to the current ethnographic study of an Under 13 boys' representative football team, parents could be seen to have influenced their children's sporting involvement through their own role modelling of physical activity and their beliefs about their child's competence – sporting cultures were being transmitted through generations (Bois et al., 2005; Wheeler, 2011). Sport figured prominently in these families' lives, taking over most of their weeknights and a great deal of their weekends. Most of the parents had been athletes themselves and had an enormous regard for sport generally:

I've enjoyed sport hugely, so I want him to experience all that. And I want him to be as good as he can be... I hope he carries on playing... [that] it's a life-long thing. So it's a habit rather than just a couple of years or when he's young.

Football in particular was a galvanising force for these families, something that contributed positively to the family dynamics: "There's always been a lot to talk about... it brings us together as a family unit". Twelve of the 15 players in the team had parents who had played (or still played) football, four of whom had taken up football as a result of their children's involvement: "I even play indoor soccer with fathers and kids... just for us to interact". Nearly all siblings of team members also played football at some level, including the 7-year-old handstanders mentioned in the chapter's opening vignette. For many, family life had *always* revolved around football and the child's involvement was pre-ordained:

For [husband's] family, it's a common language. If Ryan didn't play soccer, he would be on the outer... I'm the only one that hasn't played soccer. I don't speak their language... because I don't, I haven't lived and breathed it, I'm a very obvious... person on the outer. And I did not want that to be something for Ryan.

Sporting excellence appeared to run in the families. Six of the 15 players had parents who had played football at representative ('rep') level. Nine players had brothers who also played rep sport, eight of whom played football while the ninth had switched from football

to rugby. Interestingly, eight of these nine were *older* brothers. Of the eight players with older brothers playing rep sport, four were the youngest players in the team (the other four were the 6th, 8th, 9th and 10th youngest). Thus having an older brother who excelled in the same sport appeared to offset a player's age disadvantage. The parents of these players were convinced that the older brothers were instrumental in the initial and ongoing development of their sibling:

I remember when Harry was like... 3 years old... Harry wanted to imitate Will to the extent that we had to hide Will's soccer strip before the game as Harry wanted to wear it... [Now] there's a level of competition between the two of them as to who's the better footballer.

The logistical support required by athletes in the specialising phase was substantial. To have more than one child competing at this stage was challenging indeed. Some parents were fortunate enough to have both boys at the same club and thus training at the same ground, albeit at different times. These parents came and went several times in the one night, or siblings sat in the car eating dinner and doing homework before or after their brother's session. For parents whose boys trained at *different* clubs on the same night, carpools with other parents or finely tuned arrangements with spouses and grandparents prevailed. Luke's parents enlisted a neighbouring university student to assist them with their transport needs. Four players had brothers training on alternate weeknights, resulting in the parents being at one football ground or another five consecutive nights of the week. For *all* parents, supporting their children's football endeavours in the specialising phase had become 'familial projects' in their own right (Hurtel & Lacassagne, 2011; Hellstedt, 2005).

Previous studies have shown that elite youth football players are often older than their less proficient peers, suggesting coaches favour players born early in the selection year who are often more physically mature (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Helsen et al., 2000; Helsen, Starkes & Van Winckel, 1998). The self-fulfilling nature of early talent identification is that those born early in the selection year are more likely to be labelled talented and subsequently exposed to better coaching, which in turn has them progress into higher ranked teams and thus increases their chances of becoming professional players. Conversely, those born late in the year can be bypassed by selectors and often drop out by 12 or 13 (Helsen, Starkes & Van Winckel, 1998).

In Australia, elite sports organisations have recently begun addressing biological advantage with a view to putting the emphasis back on player development (Barnett, 2010). In regard to football, competition results are not recorded until 12 years of age, and relative age effect policies have been introduced that give children born in the last three months of the year the option of competing in the lower age group. The trend of favouring the more biologically mature was slightly evident within the team I studied (a tier 2 team), with six players born in the first third of the year, five born in the middle third, and four born in the last third (one player was actually playing *up* an age group). However, the trend was *very* apparent in one of the strongest tier 1 teams, where 14 of 16 players were born in the first half of the year, and eight in the first quarter. In regard to the height of the players in the primary research group, measurements varied from 185 cm to 148cm. With the average height for an Australian 13-year-old male being 156 cm, and for a 14-year-old, 164 cm (Pfizer Australia, 2008), the team average of 164 cm was on the taller side (note measurements were taken at the end of the season, when many players were aged 13½).

Although the team's age and height statistics did not indicate significant bias on behalf of the *selectors*, they did suggest a bias on the part of the parents. The five oldest players in the team had all specialised in football from about seven or eight years of age. Four of the five appeared to be the players most heavily invested in (in terms of parental time or money spent on football). Three of the five continued to attend academy training on top of their team commitments, and two of the five (two of the team's tallest players) had travelled to Europe to further their football development. Thus while the team as a whole did not greatly favour the more biologically mature, the aspirations of the parents of the oldest players may have been fuelled by a physical advantage that would lessen over time.

Encouraged and supported by their sport-loving parents, many of the players in the team had at an early age started to take football seriously (i.e. play three or more times a week with club teams, private football academies or FNSW development programs). Five players were seriously involved by age seven or eight, four at age nine, four at age 10, and two at age 11. Four of the 15 players currently engaged in specialist training additional to team sessions, while six players continued to diversify (i.e. also played other organised sports). Thus all players now engaged in deliberate practice, and almost two-thirds of the team had begun to specialise early in football.

Without conducting a longitudinal study, the impact of the players' early specialisation was impossible to assess. *Not* specialising early didn't seem to have disadvantaged the players concerned, nor did continuing to play other sports. Despite the many divergences, the one key feature that stood out across the team was the amount of deliberate play engaged in. Nearly all of the players in this team had either parents or older siblings *or both* willing to kick a ball around with them. They had grown up watching, playing and perfecting their football skills with family members at home. With this in mind, the circumstances of a boy *no longer* in the team seemed pertinent.

Mark had specialised in football since he was four years of age (playing club football as well as doing two extra academy sessions each week). Neither of his parents had played football at any level, although his mum Tess had always been extremely encouraging and supportive of Mark's football involvement. As the years went by, Mark struggled to maintain his early advantage, and Tess struggled to maintain her positivity. Both were devastated when he was not retained, *or* reselected, for the team this season. Tess then drove Mark from one trial to another until they ran out of elite clubs to trial for:

When do you stop? And I think we decided to stop because we thought... he's sliding, you know, he's going downhill now. I think his little heart's been broken... Sometimes I keep wondering: why are we doing this, why don't we just go back to club and play once a week? But then it's like, once a week of soccer is just not enough. He needs to do more, I guess, for me. I like him to be doing more. If he could do that and focus on another sport, yeah. But [early specialisation] took it all away. So soccer it is, really.

Mark ended up playing this season in a regional league (a tier of football between club level and representative level) where he revelled as one of the stronger players. He soon got his confidence back, as did Tess. By the end of the season Tess had decided that a really good coach would know how to take advantage of Mark's strengths and get other players to cover his weaknesses. The memories of him being rejected over and over were replaced with the hope that he would soon be playing rep football again. Mark would again go from one trial to another, which Tess optimistically framed as 'getting to play a game of football every night'. Mark had a slightly older brother, so playing football every night should have been a common enough occurrence. Yet Mark's family didn't engage in deliberate play:

I know other families have two boys who always play soccer together, but my boys never play soccer together. They're never in the back yard kicking a ball together. Never.

Mark's situation highlighted the potential downsides to early specialisation. The intensive football training he'd engaged in since he was four facilitated his selection into rep football when he was 10. There he competed with others both familiar with and new to deliberate practice. Once exposed to professional coaching, many of the less experienced but more athletic players caught up and overtook players like Mark, who began to lose their enthusiasm to train and confidence on the pitch. Tess clearly valued physical activity and logistically was prepared to make anything happen, but focusing solely on football had closed down Mark's exposure to other sports. Early specialisation had brought Mark short-term success, but a lack of early diversification and unstructured play may have inhibited his long-term prospects across all sports.

Psychologists have stressed that parents need to get the right fit between their child's athleticism or personality and the level of competition (Findlay & Bowker, 2009). Within the current team, Harry seemed to have inherited his mother's slow twitch muscle fibres and had difficulty keeping pace with his opponents. He would struggle to keep his spot in a sport where players required speed and agility as well as technical ability. Other players had the physical ability but not the team orientation. Being creative could be impressive but could also cause problems in an organised team structure if a player didn't have the aptitude to know when and where to display individual flair. The right fit between the player's level of commitment and parental capacity was also needed. Liam's parents had over-extended themselves financially and signed him up for sporting commitments he could no longer meet. He was more likely to be deselected by social circumstances than by physical ability.

This chapter has illustrated how football was a way of life for the families involved in the study, with the transmission of sporting cultures being multi-directional. A sporting background rendered parents predisposed to value some abilities over others, investing substantial time and effort developing what they perceived as talent. While the players were a product of their familial sport environments, parents were also influenced by their children's activities, whether that be in taking up football themselves or just using the forced downtime at training to exercise.

Biological, environmental and cultural factors influence the existence, identification and development of sporting talent, often interacting in complex ways. For example, a child's biological age or maturity could trigger greater parental investment in their

football endeavours if the parents had both the means and the inclination. Conversely, the sporting culture of most of the families created an environment of sporting excellence that counteracted biological *immaturity*; having an older brother who excelled at sport appeared to offset the age disadvantage of the younger sibling.

The benefits of engaging in early specialisation, as against diversification, and deliberate practice, as against play, are harder to comment on. The sporting culture of the families in the team facilitated all forms of engagement. With all 15 players now competing at the same level, it was difficult to differentiate the impact of their engagement. The circumstances of an ex-member of the team, Mark provide support for Côté and colleagues' (2009) position that early diversification and deliberate play provide children with valuable physical, cognitive and psychosocial environments that promote the intrinsic motivation necessary for excellence to be achieved. Extensive deliberate practice also appears essential. If *early engagement* is the key, arguably the family, which serves to establish children's early emotional connection to a sport and their subsequent motivation to practice, is the lock into which the key must be fitted.

TABLE 1: Team statistics

PLAYER	BORN	HEIGHT	SCHOOL>	OTHER SPORTS	SIBLINGS' SPORTS	PARENTS' SPORTS
1.	Feb 2002	156cm	private	league, athletics	rep football U15s (PL1)	league, tennis (F); athletics (M)
2.	Nov 2001	168cm	private	--	rep U15s (PL1)	football (F); softball (M)
3.	Nov 2001	158cm	public	--	rep football U16s (PL2)	--
4.	Sep 2001	154cm	private	athletics, cricket	rep football U14s (PL2)	football (F); netball (M)
5.	Aug 2001	176cm	public	--	younger sister and brother	football (F); netball (M)
6.	July 2001	166cm	private	--	rep football U16s (PL1)	netball (M)
7.	June 2001	162cm	public	cricket, AFL	--	football (F); football (M)
8.	May 2001	154cm	private	rugby league	rep U15s (rugby union)	rugby union (F)
9.	May 2001	148cm	private		ex-rep football, now U15s	football (F); netball (M)
10.	Apr 2001	175cm	public	baseball, AFL	2 x ex-rep football	netball (M)
11.	Apr 2001	174cm	private*	--	4 younger bro, 1 older sis	league (F); basketball (M)
12.	Mar 2001	166cm	private	basketball	2 x older brothers^	football (F)
13.	Mar 2001	185cm	private*	--	older sister	athletics, football (F)
14.	Feb 2001	153cm	private	--	rep football U11s (PL2)	league, basketball (F)
15.	Jan 2001	163cm	public*	--	2 older sisters#	football (F); softball (M)

KEY

(PL1) = premier league tier 1; (PL2) = premier league tier 2; (F) = Father; (M) = Mother

> 'Private' refers generically to GPS, Independent and Catholic schools (ie non-government schools)

* Currently in Year 8 at school (the rest in Year 7).

^ Enrolment at private school precluded playing reps; brothers play A-grade football for GPS school

Older sisters turned down opportunity to play rep football as parents couldn't afford fees and/or get them to training and games in and around son's football commitments

3. The Social Production of Skill

Cody didn't start playing football until he was 10 years old. Indeed, he hadn't played any organised sports until then. An extremely focused and coordinated child, Cody didn't show any early interest in sport. Instead he directed his attention into mastering the guitar. Only after discovering YouTube did Cody become fixated with football. He quickly picked up the basic skills and moved on to practising tricks in his backyard. Soon he was asking his parents if he could take it further.

Cody's father had been a rep rugby player and rower, his mother a ballerina. They enrolled Cody in a prestigious football academy to maximise his development. After two years, Cody was selected to play for a FNSW premier league tier 1 team, bypassing club football altogether. After three years, he had competed twice at the annual NSW State Titles Tournament. Cody was one of the youngest players in his age group, yet he was also one of the most attentive, disciplined and graceful.

Cody's family lived 44 kms away from his rep football club's home ground. In order to meet his football commitments, maintain his academic grades and get sufficient sleep, Cody was taken out of the mainstream school system and home schooled by his mum. After doing four hours of schoolwork each day, Cody went outside, set up his cones and knocked off his "extras" (whatever skill he was perfecting at the time).

Cody's dad devoted approximately 26 hours each week taking Cody to football training (a five-hour round trip, four times a week), matches (up to 6 hours a week) and monthly physio appointments. During the year, the family would spend \$2,400 on club registration fees, \$1,200 on weekly sessions at a private football clinic, \$2,700 on weekly sessions at a football academy, \$1,000 on boots (a new pair each quarter), \$500 on physio sessions and \$1,000 on tournament expenses. Cody's total football expenses would be close to \$9,000 in 2014, excluding petrol and tolls.

In just three years, Cody had come a very long way in football. Indeed, his parents worried that he might soon burn out and give football away, like he did the guitar. Cody's football finesse was a testament to his physical coordination, ability to focus and strong determination, as well as the large volume of training he did (both with professional coaches and on his own). Cody's football development was also a testament to his family's sport ethic, financial backing and flexible work hours.

In addition to any favourable genetic traits they pass on, parents strongly influence the development of their children's talent through their socio-cultural contributions. Children are first recruited to the athletic setting in the cultural context of the family. How much time and effort children devote to the development of their talent depends on the ongoing material and emotional support they receive from their parents (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993:152). This chapter explores the investment parents make in their children's talent, and why.

Physical ability alone is not enough to sustain a child's involvement in elite sport. With participation being both expensive and time consuming, one socio-economic group tends to dominate, i.e. the middle class. All 15 families in the football team I studied could loosely be described as middle class, albeit they displayed a range of occupations, ethnicity and income levels. Fourteen players lived with both parents and had siblings; 10 of the 15 attended private schools. One family experienced financial difficulties throughout the season due to the parents' current employment situation.

The team demographics reflected the under-representation of children from low income and single parent families that occurs in elite sport generally, which is due to more than the significant financial investment involved (Holt et al., 2011; Rønbeck & Vikander, 2010; Côté, 1999; Van Yperen, 1998). The occupational flexibility and greater mobility of the middle class, as well as the support capacity of dual parent families, better position these parents to cope with the logistical demands of elite sport (Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Six players in the team had both parents working full-time, but at least three of these couples had one parent with flexible hours. The remaining nine players had one parent working part-time or not at all. Most of the team was well placed to meet the logistical demands of rep football.

These logistical demands often increased the higher the child aimed. As apparent from Cody's story, the amount of time and money a family could invest in football was substantial. Cody was fortunate to have the financial backing and emotional support of his parents to pursue his football dream. He clearly was an extremely determined child who worked hard to achieve the goals he set himself. Equally clearly, Cody would not have had access to the same quality and quantity of football development had it not been for his family's socio-economic circumstances and occupational flexibility. As

recognised by Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues, “When the child’s abilities are truly prodigious, parental and social investments need to be prodigious as well” (1993: 26).

Other families with boys playing in tier 1 of the FNSW premier league exhibited similar levels of commitment, but not all. For example, Alex’s parents spent up to 22 hours a week taking him to training sessions, matches and private clinics, and approximately \$8,000 on his registration fees, extra coaching, merchandise and tournament expenses. Alex kept up his core academic schoolwork by reading in the car to and from football and by having a tutor assist him on the weekends with assignments, but he flatly refused to attend school performances or award nights that clashed with football. However, the parents of Andy (also in a tier 1 team) weren’t prepared to engage in more than the core team requirements: “I wasn’t going to have my whole household turned upside down for soccer.”

With many tier 1 clubs, additional training at private clinics was compulsory; if it was not, many parents felt compelled to invest in the extra training anyway. Parents from the team studied, which competed in tier 2 of the FNSW premier league, appeared considerably more relaxed about their child’s quantity of football. Only four players in the team engaged in private coaching during the year, although several had specialised in football from a young age. When the team’s training sessions were reduced from three to two per week at the end of the pre-season, two players took up another sport to play alongside their football commitments.

The parents from this team spent significantly less time and money on football than many of their tier 1 counterparts. During the season, most of the parents averaged eight to ten hours per week taking their child to and from training and matches. Those who carpooled managed to get their hours down to six or less. Only the families who lived the furthest away devoted more than twelve hours per week to football, incurring an estimated \$70 per week on petrol and tolls in the process. The majority of the team’s parents spent between \$2,500 and \$3,500 on football per player per year. Three families exceeded the upper limit because they attended regional tournaments, had ongoing medical expenses or engaged in additional training, including an academy-organised trip to Spain.

The lower investment of both time and money was often more indicative of these parents’ priorities than it was of financial constraints. For example, one team parent

devoted only 10 hours per week to her son's *football* but his other sports took up an additional 12 to 14 hours of her time. Along with several other parents in the team, this mother felt it was important that her children continued to diversify in their sports. Other parents were keen to ensure their children maintained their academic grades and met additional private school commitments, or were determined to invest in all their children equally. While a particular socio-economic demographic (i.e. middle-class) are more likely to invest heavily in their children's sporting activities, within that demographic differing circumstances and priorities prevailed.

Measures to equalise the opportunity for all socio-economic groups to participate in sport in Europe have largely proved ineffective, suggesting that such policies are only really likely to impact on those already in possession of a sporting predisposition (Wheeler & Green, 2014). In a Canadian study on the benefits and challenges of sport participation for low-income families, Holt and colleagues (2011) suggest that this lack of success may be because the level of funding involved in some government-initiated programs is too low to *sustain* a child's participation (even if it initiates their entry), or because the programs are not well publicised and therefore utilised. Without access to low-income families who were aware of but chose not to take advantage of such programs, Holt's study recognises that other factors may also be at work.

With sport participation rates remaining socially stratified, Wheeler and Green (2014) suggest that it might be more productive to look to family cultures than disposable income. So too, in the current study, the levels of investment in a child's elite football endeavours did not always correlate with financial means. Parental investment varied from family to family, affecting not only player participation levels in organised sport generally but also their level of commitment to the one sport, which some parents did not prioritise over other sports, other family commitments or academic achievement.

Regardless of the rep football tier, the investment parents made in their children's football development went well beyond paying registration fees and getting the child to training. In addition to the travelling time and costs, all parents I interviewed appeared desensitised to the uncivilised hours, constant laundry, additional calorie intake, altered eating, sleeping and homework patterns, and additional medical expenses (e.g. physiotherapists, chiropractors and podiatrists). Some parents made high school choices according to whether the school sporting curriculum clashed with representative sport. Those who *did*

not exposed an ironic downside to being at the upper end of the socio-economic ladder – the NSW rep football system was not compatible with some private school sporting curriculums. At least two of the players would soon have to give up rep football altogether.

If school could impact on a player's football commitments, football could also impact on a player's grades, especially those who spent more hours in transit. One mother in the primary research group had invested in weekly tutoring the previous year (when her son's football commitments were greater) as his grades slid. The tutor made a big difference but was a big outlay. Most parents took their children's education seriously:

If they want to play at [rep] level they need to understand that that takes a certain level of commitment... They need to manage their time... Their school work needs to be kept up to a certain level... If they don't do their homework they won't go to soccer training, because that's what they *want* to do.

Football could both create and consume holidays. Parents thought of regional and state tournaments as a forced family holiday – 'a breath of fresh air' – but Sydney-based tournaments often just turned parents into taxi-drivers. During one set of school holidays, Deb had two sons playing in week-long indoor football tournaments at different locations. One tournament was 51km from home, the other 68km. Each morning, Deb would drop off one son at a tournament then drive 22 km to drop off the other son, alternating the sequence of drop-offs and pick-ups according to the match schedules and watching what she could of the games in between. Ironically, Deb was able to *facilitate* such activities because of her part-time employment, but in order to *fund* them she needed to work more. For Deb, the cost of the tournaments (and sport generally) in dollar terms was outweighed by their opportunity cost: in the short-term, her salary; in the long-term, her career.

Conversely, Jacqui (Kane's mum) had increased her working hours at the cost of smoothly running her household. One day she turned up to an away game at half-time. She had dropped Kane off at the ground then gone for groceries at a nearby shopping centre. With three adolescent athletes to feed Jacqui's pantry *always* needed restocking. Preparing meals as they came and went was a challenge too. The thankless tasks of elite football were as important as the transport to the game. Deb and Jacqui's situations epitomise how the family system can be organised around the sporting activities of children (Hellstedt, 2005).

Numerous studies suggest that children who engage in sport regularly reap many social, psychological and physiological benefits (Kimiecik & Horn, 2012; Findlay & Bowker, 2009). Team sports in particular enable children to overcome shyness and become more

resilient, develop personal values of respect, cooperation and teamwork, and achieve a sense of friendship, camaraderie and belonging (NSW Education & Communities, 2014; Noack et al., 2013). Children who play sport experience higher self-esteem than their non-participating counterparts (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009; Findlay & Bowker, 2009), achieve higher grades and have higher educational aspirations (Holt et al., 2011; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). Children and adolescents who engage in extra-curricular activities, and organised sport in particular, are more socially connected, encounter less cyber-bullying and are more resilient to harassment (Hume & Sullivan, 2013). Of course, negative issues are also associated with sport participation, such as adult modelling of inappropriate behaviours, the misuse of alcohol and drugs, and engagement in delinquent behaviours. Yet if delivered appropriately, sport promotes healthy development (Holt et al., 2011).

With this in mind, many Western parents invest heavily in structured activities, such as organised sport, with a view to increasing the likelihood that their child will fit in; better yet, be popular; at best, earn an athletic scholarship or professional football contract (Lancy, 2008: 342). Parents might also invest in such activities to prepare children for entry into the mature activities they will encounter later on (Rogoff, 2003: 140). In societies where adolescence is defined as a distinct social category, and a problematic one at that, yet other parents take advantage of structured activities as institutionalised forms of social control (Fine, 2004). Parents value sport especially because it keeps children off the streets, physically active, and engaged in character-building pastimes (Dyck, 2012: 56).

Investing heavily in their children's talent meant that parents, even in absentia, were able to effectively regulate where their children were, what they were doing and with whom they were associating outside of school hours. Indeed, an appealing aspect of committing to rep football was that parents could minimise what they *didn't* want their kids to be doing. The parents in the primary research group were fairly unanimous in both their love of sport and their aversion to alternative popular forms of entertainment for children. When I asked one father if his son had made any personal sacrifices to pursue his football, he simply responded: "Well, if he wasn't doing this, what else would he be doing?"

Kappos (2007) documents how the pervasive influence of electronic media has been linked to the imminent 'death of childhood', as Western children swap outdoor exercise and community interaction with sedentary, individual and sometimes age-inappropriate indoor activities. In Australia, boys aged 13 to 19 years old average 3.75 hours of electronic media

use per day (Mathers et al., 2009). Mathers and colleagues found that high electronic media use is associated with poorer behaviour, health status and health-related quality of life; Holtz and Appel (2011) show that high video game use is linked to depression, anxiety and aggression. Electronic devices and internet access are now essential to most high school students' studies. New technology is much harder to monitor, regulate and control than traditional technology. Children subject to victimisation can no longer remove themselves from the bullying environment (David-Ferdon & Feldman-Hertz, 2007).

In order to meet their football, school and other commitments, most families restricted players' use of their game consoles to the weekends; others to the school holidays. However, other types of technology were still of concern to parents. One mother warned me against my son letting others use his mobile phone after an older player had used her son's phone to access a pornography site. Another parent sought the coach's intervention when one of the players started using coarse language on a social media app to rally the boys before games. While the sporting background of the families in the research group militated against an excessive use of technology, parents remained conscious of its pervasive presence. Most parents considered rep football an attractive alternative to the electronic forms of entertainment Western children increasingly consumed.

Although, ostensibly, the parents in the research group were investing in their children's *football* development, they were also highly conscious of the perceived social and psychological benefits of engaging in organised sport. According to one mother: "[sport] teaches them a lot of things... that things are not always going to work. And sometimes even when you try your hardest it *still* doesn't work. ... I think it's really positive and gets rid of lots of sorts of stress... it'll be good when they're doing exams." Another mother revealed she'd initially chosen *team* sport in particular because she wanted her boys to "learn to adapt to different situations", "to work with other people and learn how to deal with different personalities". *They* would be the skills her boys would need in future.

A parent interviewed from outside the primary research group had two boys in different rep football tiers, one of whom (Josh) had smoothly progressed from club to representative to state level football. When asked about the positives of playing rep football, the dad worried that Josh might have actually been *too* successful too soon:

The positives of it?... Broadening their social circle, exposing them to more than just what you see at school. And, you know, sport in itself is a good educational process outside of school; being able to deal with disappointment, you know, either for not getting into a team

that you want to get into or losing a particular game that you thought you could win, or that struggle of it. A lot of parents want to shield their kids, in terms of wrap them up in cotton wool... I think that kind of closes off their mind in terms of experiencing things. I want them to go out and be able to deal with failure. You don't learn unless you do fail, I think, in a lot of ways. And I would rather that they do that earlier, learn to do that and be comfortable with doing that earlier rather than later. ... It's more the trying. I don't want them to not try. ... That's something that does concern me... Like Josh's jumped, he's continually jumped, from one level to another, that he hasn't had a setback to deal with yet.

Studies have documented how the benefits of participating in sport may transfer to other areas of children's lives (Holt et al., 2011). The players in the team studied all thought that playing rep football had made a positive contribution to their lives off the pitch. Many thought they were more popular, more mature, and more confident individuals generally than they might otherwise have been. Because of the strict training regime and the amount of time rep football took up, players also felt they were more disciplined at school and better with their time management. Some thought they were now more resilient because of the knockbacks they'd suffered; others said they were more likely to take on leadership roles at school. As a result of their involvement in rep football, players said they had more respect for their teachers, were more adaptable to changing circumstances, had better fitness and eating habits, and were more driven to succeed than previously.

A talented child often has talented siblings, which can be a logistical nightmare for the parents and financially draining. However, where the siblings are *not* so talented and do not receive as much attention, parental guilt could be overwhelming. One of the less documented aspects of parenting elite footballers (save for a brief mention by Harwood, Drew & Knight, 2010) is the efforts parents make to balance all their children's needs in and around elite sport.

All families with multiple children playing sport at any level experience conflicts in family schedules. However, club-level sport, being locally based, is more logistically manageable than rep football because of shorter distances to travel and greater access to neighbourhood or school-based support networks. Nine of the players in the research group had brothers who had played or were still playing rep sport. If siblings were several years apart, training and match times often didn't clash directly and parents could facilitate both. In one case, a constant clash led to the father attending to the older child's rugby pursuits, the mother to the younger child's football commitments. Other parents alternated between children's sports to ensure that their children received equal attention from both parents. These approaches relied heavily on the double capacity of dual parents.

One father identified his inability to attend *both* his boys' games each week as the most stressful aspect of elite football. "For me, personally, it's where there's a conflict between Danny's game and my older son's game. That's quite stressful, because I want to be at both. And choosing is very difficult." This dad felt so strongly about supporting his boys equally that it was obvious on the sideline. Apart from phoning his wife multiple times to hear how the other game was progressing, he would appear far more agitated than normal. His demeanour had as much to do with the game that he was missing as with the game that was going on right in front of him.

Several mothers expressed their relief that they had been able to invest equally in all their children over the years. According to one mother with four children: "I think we've been quite lucky that the boys have all had their opportunities. So no one has missed out." For another: "I think it's up to the parent to find that individual [talent]... I'm lucky, they're all at the same level. But if they weren't, I'd have to have found that something special in the other child." Yet another mother, with children of different gender and ability level, was highly conscious of "ensuring that you spend enough time being interested... with each of the children, around how they played, when are they playing, and ensure that they understand that both of their parents consider all three of them equally important."

For those parents who had other children *not* so talented, the guilt was palpable. Cody had a younger brother who desperately wanted to be good at sport but who didn't have Cody's physical coordination. Cody's dad made sure he spent lots of one-on-one time with his younger son but remained concerned about the potential harm his enormous investment of time into Cody's football may have on his youngest son in the future. "I find that difficult. And I always have at the back of my head, what's that going to mean when he's a teenager? Is he going to feel that I wasn't there for him, and all those types of things?"

Although older siblings were often less physically and emotionally dependent on their parents, their psychological welfare remained a concern. For a mum in the team whose oldest son wasn't athletic, the time spent with the younger ones weighed heavily: "I feel quite guilty for the oldest child because he is often left at home. Even though he's happy, I feel guilty." Another mother felt similarly anxious about whether the time she was investing in her son was to the detriment of her older daughter:

My oldest one's 18, so now she's already grown up. But then I feel that, and I think that she noticed as well, that we spend a lot more time doing that stuff with him and not with her... So you always think... did I let that part go a little bit, and... did I spend enough time with

that child? ... But as a parent I think we always do question ourselves... No matter how, you know, well we try to be organised, I think we're always going to let somebody down.

This chapter has explored the parental investment of time, money and effort that goes into sustaining a child's elite football endeavours, as well as the *hidden* costs of the project. If a family's 'sporting culture' played an important role in identifying a child's talent, the family's socio-economic status played an even more critical role in its development. Baxter-Jones and Maffulli have stressed that "for any systematic search for talent to be effective, a child's potential should be judged on their performance and not by their parental support" (2003: 255). The ethnographic data captured in this chapter shows that it is difficult to separate the two: parental investment affects performance. The substantial amount of tangible and intangible parental support that elite football requires virtually precludes the participation of children from low income or single parent families, no matter how talented they might be.

However, the data also illustrated that a more 'privileged' upbringing could, ironically, hinder a child's football career due to the incompatibility of private school and rep football commitments. Further, the level of investment a parent made into their child's football was not dependent on their disposable income. A child's ability (which may have begun as a slight biological advantage, a parent's backyard input or a YouTube clip) could be heavily invested in to achieve an end. But the end varied from family to family. For many of the parents interviewed, across all tiers, their investment in elite sport was not just about the child's football ability but also about the child's social and psychological development; football was the means to other developmental ends.

A parent's investment in their child's talent is a crucial element of the social production of skill. Yet for many parents the investment was equally geared towards the production of social skills. For most, the perceived benefits of participating in team sport compensated for the time, money and energy expended. A tension only arose when parents could not invest equally in all their offspring. For the parents involved in this study, the greatest cost of participating in elite sport was neither obvious nor quantifiable. To be factored into the mix of raising an elite athlete were the additional demands of spending enough time with each child, not favouring one child over another, and being in two places or more at once.

4. Consociate Identities: The Good, the Bad and the Integrated

Some of the personalities of the parents, some of them are less friendly or approachable, or whatever. ... Once you get to know, and it's the same with any sporting team, whether it be rep or anything... you get to know the people that you click with and the people that you don't, and you work it out.

But particularly with rep level anything, you spend a lot of time with these people. ... I guess it's like almost starting a job... You didn't even know this person, and then you see them all the time, and you've just got to learn to get on. ... You're forced to be with these other people because their kid is doing the same thing.

Contemporary childhood in Australia and many other Western societies is heavily shaped by age grading and segregation, in contrast to childhood in less-developed economies where children are integrated into the everyday activities of their communities (Rogoff, 2003: 8-9). The key point of contrast between these very different constructions of childhood is whether parents primarily help children or whether children are expected to help their parents (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). In Western cultures, children are not expected to contribute significantly to the maintenance or functioning of their families; parents, rather, tend to serve the interests of their children. One of the children's interests that involves a great deal of parental help is organised sport.

Organised sport is an increasingly prominent part of contemporary childhood; Australia's current participation level of children aged 5 to 14 is 66% (Schranz, 2014). Looking at the substantial investment of time, money and effort that Canadian parents inject into their children's athletic endeavours, anthropologist Noel Dyck (1995) adopts the notion of "consociation" to make sense of socially constructed forms of childhood in post-industrial society. Dyck sought to comprehend why parents willingly sacrificed so much of their time on their children's sporting activities. He found that parental participation in community-based athletics had become a type of informal and shared child-rearing that was facilitated and sustained by the consociate relationships that developed.

“Consociate identity” is a term first advanced by Sansom (1980) in relation to Aboriginal fringe-camps to describe a form of identity built around an individual’s history of co-involvement with others in the same settings (Dyck, 1995). Particular identities and meanings get generated in particular settings. In the organised sport setting, a parent’s level of commitment and adherence to established conventions often serves to define him or her within that particular community.

The concept of consociation has not been applied in any other studies of organised sports but is a useful way of framing the parental behaviour observed in this study as all parental interaction revolved entirely around the children’s shared ‘talent’, i.e. football. The parents, who were brought together purely to facilitate their children’s interest in football, closely identified with one another due to their shared undertaking and the specific obligations and pressures of supporting a rep football player. So too did the players. Dyck’s (1995) study explored consociate identity among parents participating in their children’s organised sport. However, the concept of consociation can be extended to the child athletes too.

Representative football can be distinguished from community-based athletics in New South Wales in several respects, but most notably in its form of administration, competition level and use of paid officials. These differences meant that more hands-on parental help was required to enable a community-based athletics meet to happen, but that the fees, distances travelled and stress to perform were probably greater in rep football. In contrast to the ‘tiresome obligations’ parents performed at the athletics meet itself (Dyck, 1995), the tiresome obligations of football were left behind when match day arrived. The transport to and from training, the excessive laundry and calorie intake, the physiotherapy and chiropractor sessions, and the constant juggling of school, sport, work and family commitments that rep football entailed, all took place Monday to Friday. Once parents delivered their children to the right ground at the right time and in the right gear on the weekend, the logistical burden lifted and an emotional intensity began to set in.

Most parents in the research group spent the hour before the match socialising. They often greeted each other enthusiastically and chatted while the boys warmed up. Parents might discuss the weather, difficulties in finding the ground and the quality of the coffee, then move on to injuries players were suffering or gear that had gone missing. Mothers went on to discuss school issues, interschool sport results or unusual adolescent behaviour, while fathers tended to launch into an analysis of the previous week’s competition results, the

opposing team's current position on the ladder or the starting line-up that day. Being involved in their children's sporting activities furnished parents with the means for "framing, performing, and reflecting upon child-rearing and recreational activities" (Dyck, 2012: 65). One dad found that these informal gatherings helped him contextualise his own son's behaviour:

In terms of discussions, communications with the parents, it's good to find out what the other kids are thinking, where they're positioned, and what they perceive soccer to be. Or what they want out of it all. Or if they're not having a good game on the day, and the reason why... Or if someone's hurt themselves in that part of the body, 'oh yeah, my son had the same problem' as to the reason why. So it's good just to get some feedback... yeah, definitely is, 100%.

After these initial greetings and small talk, parents would then break off into different groups to watch the game. A small group of Australian and English dads would usually stand alongside one another and exchange friendly insults. The mums tended to avoid this group of men, possibly because one of the dads was prone to directing some not-so-friendly criticism at the referee. Another English dad would occasionally join this group, but seemed wary of getting sucked in by such behaviour. As he explained:

I'm passionate about football. ... And I think, in the early years certainly, I was one of those touchline parents that probably said some stupid things, you know. Not that I did it knowingly but I'm sure I did. ... I was pretty gobby at parts and I'd be saying... 'C'mon mate, you got to do this, this and this. ... Whereas actually [playing at this level] you just don't say a thing. And that's great, ok. So I think I've learnt a lot.

Another small group of European and Middle-eastern parents would sit together and discuss football, food and fashion. As the only new parents to the team, they shared an outsider affinity as much as a cultural one. A few other European and Middle-eastern dads would wander up the sideline so they could communicate discreetly with their sons. The parent manager sat in the dugout with the boys on the bench; in front of them the coach and his assistant paced up and down the designated technical area.

During the game, most of the mothers sat together to cheer on their boys. Those mums who didn't often turn up, or just kept to themselves, evoked comments from other parents suggesting they weren't very sociable. However, after chatting to these mums, I soon realised that wasn't the case. One mother purposefully stood by herself so as not to get involved in disagreements with opposing team parents (as had occurred in the past, she told me). Another simply preferred a leisurely breakfast to socialising before the game. The third – whose husband admitted to being no help whatsoever at home – was always

multi-tasking in and around football in order to keep on top of the domestic chores. All three mothers worked and had other children to consider. Personal choices that were eminently sensible to the individuals making them were viewed with suspicion by those who prioritised and managed their football commitments differently. What other parents perceived as aloofness was simply the three women's failure to conform to more widely practised sideline etiquette.

Conversely, one of the dads, Ken was often avoided by other parents because of his negativity. Ken was quite adamant that his son was given less game time simply because the coach didn't like him. Ken was also quite critical of what he perceived as a lack of development taking place at training. He considered the coaching drills too complicated and the set plays too complex, which they were at times for some players but not for most. Although parents felt sympathy for Ken's son, and some agreed about the lack of development, they stopped short of commiserating because his son routinely missed training. Unlike a community-based sport such as athletics, attendance at football training was compulsory. With only 11 players in a team of 15 on the field at any one time, at least four players started on the bench. Most parents and players agreed with the coach's policy of benching those who missed training as attendance maximised both individual *and* team development. The policy also ensured that parents who *did* manage to get their children to training midweek were rewarded by their children getting more game time on the weekend.

Consociate relationships were formed and tested among the parents over the course of the season. In line with socially acceptable standards of behaviour set by long-standing members of the rep football fraternity, many parents adapted their behaviour over time and tried to avoid situations they found unpleasant, awkward or volatile. Some parents had raised the sideline etiquette standard to reflect their own level of social interaction without allowing for individual circumstances that rendered that level neither feasible or warranted. However, a minimum level of commitment – that parents ensure their children turn up to training and matches on time and in the right gear – *was* generally agreed on. Parents who failed to meet that minimum didn't attract much sympathy, even if their child did.

Throughout most of the season, team parents either gravitated towards parents of a similar cultural background or defaulted along the lines of gender. Some behaviour, although officially in breach of the Parents' Code of Conduct (such as shouting out an instruction or expressing disapproval at a contentious refereeing decision) was tolerated because parents

could relate to the passion or stress behind it. However, other forms of behaviour (including swearing, excessive instruction or constant negativity) was too offensive, embarrassing or awkward to put up with. As the season went on, parents became a bit more selective about who they stood with on the sideline. The rep football season was an exceedingly long one and no one wanted a confrontation. Every week, during the ‘forced’ interactions before and after matches and training, parents negotiated the dynamic and shifting consociate relationships carefully. Those who didn’t have the energy to do so that day diplomatically removed themselves by going elsewhere for ‘a real coffee’.

Most of the players in the team had just entered high school. On the one hand, their participation in rep football boosted their confidence levels and social standing; on the other, football was a much-needed refuge when things *weren’t* going well at school. One of the less sociable mothers thought that perhaps she needed to make more of an effort:

Because [of] the connection that the boys have together, knowing the parents is actually really important. Because, to be honest, and this is probably my first year that I haven’t connected in with the parents as much as I normally do, it’s actually noticeable to Craig. And... that whole feeling of, you know, ‘Can I have a friend over and is it one of my soccer mates’, is really important to him. It is *really* important to him.

For this parent, the issue was not about who her child was associating with at football, or the friendships she herself could be forming, but how she could facilitate the friendships *he* had formed. This mother recognised that her son’s team mates had become increasingly important to him as he struggled with the transition from primary to high school. She felt she needed to reconnect with the other team parents – to better integrate herself into her *son’s* community – to support *his* social needs. Conversely, another parent whose son had adjusted well to his new high school, despite also being one of the youngest in the team and school year, attributed his son’s social confidence and maturity to his rep football exposure. The father valued the dedicated and disciplined environment of elite sport generally, but also the camaraderie and support apparent in this particular team:

I think that friendship side of the team is something very important to him, especially the team mates that he’s with now. He really likes the team mates that he has now, so that’s important. I think that helps him socially, definitely. ... His team mates understand why he would be a certain way because they are the same. They make the same sacrifices as him, because they love what they do... They love playing at the level they play at... more so than probably them going to a party.

Consociate identities and relationships could be seen evolving among the players as well as the parents over the course of the season. Through their shared love of football, strong sense of commitment and an inclusive team environment, many of the team players had

become quite close. Most of the players were also very friendly with the coach, who organised several team bonding sessions that the players really enjoyed. However, *on* the field the coach was quite strict, and his temper easily flared. Players who didn't behave properly were loudly, and sometimes coarsely, reprimanded. At times the players fully supported the coach's strict manner; other times, they found his strident criticism excessive. The players began to weigh up the behaviour they were presented with against the behaviour they considered appropriate.

Adolescents constitute a liminal social category whose attributes are both ambiguous and dangerous (Turner, 1969). Stranded between child and adult, anthropologist David Lancy has suggested that adolescents live in limbo during their unproductive tenure between physical dependency and financial independence (2008: 303). Most contribute very little to the Western household despite the rising costs of their lengthy education. With children's work at home thought to foster social and moral responsibility, the *absence* of such work predisposes Western children to be incapable, irresponsible and anti-social (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009).

Anthropologist Gary Alan Fine's (1987) study of Little League baseball in the United States suggests there is scope for the development of social awareness, social responsiveness and independent strategising in organised sport. In a study on adolescents engaged in high school debate, Fine (2004) documents how youths draw on both adult and childhood behaviours to either further their own interests or conform to social expectations. Which behavioural repertoire adolescents select from varies from situation to situation, as will the consequences of their selection. Some adult behaviours are welcomed (e.g. displaying a mature attitude to religion or debate), while others are not (e.g. swearing or smoking).

During the season, the adolescent team players started to form their own opinions about, and responses to, the various situations in which they found themselves. When one player became visibly upset after being yelled at by the coach for asking a question during training, a team mate went over and physically comforted him. When another player was severely berated for accidentally hurting a much smaller player in a clean tackle, several boys huddled together afterwards discussing the unfairness of the coach's reaction. Team morale dropped to an all-time low when the squad was repeatedly told by the coach how badly they were performing. In an ironic display of leadership and maturity, players then

motivated each other via social media to successfully prove their critic wrong, rise above the negativity and collectively turn things around.

Players began to strategically assert their own strength of character, beliefs and morals in other ways also. A player who, two days earlier, had been cut by the team coach from indoor football trials elsewhere, greeted the coach in the same affectionate manner he always did at training. However, other disappointments were not so easily reconciled. When one boy in the team missed the first penalty in a semi-final penalty shoot-out he put his head in his hands, utterly devastated. As he struggled through tears to make his way back to his team mates, the captain of the team jogged out to him, put his arm around the boy's shoulders and drew him back into the fold. There was no blame to be levelled, only support. Players were beginning to interpret, appraise and respond to situations of conflict or adversity with a degree of maturity and compassion that was welcomed by their parents.

Clarke and Harwood (2014) have documented how being part of the elite youth football culture can shape a parent's relationship with their own child, as well as enhance their sense of parental identity. Among the primary research group, football provided parents with an open forum to perform and refine their conceptions of childhood and parenthood. Parents used the time they were brought together by games and training to support, celebrate and further their children's interests. Some parents genuinely liked each other; others were just being polite. But all had children of a similar age going through similar trials and tribulations, with many of the boy's injuries, moods or behaviour related to the physical growth, hormonal changes and social proclivities of their peer group. Parents appreciated the scope for social development that rep football provided their children and valued their burgeoning social awareness and responsiveness. However, other displays of adult-like behaviour (e.g. swearing and accessing pornography) were actively resisted.

The highly competitive, team-based nature of rep football also gave rise to circumstances that severely *tested* consociate relationships, including parental criticism of other children, the taking of holidays and the retention system. The stress to perform on the football pitch was always present and felt in multiple ways. Players (and their parents) dreaded letting the team down. According to a parent whose child excelled in both football and athletics:

Football is more [demanding] than anything else... simply because there's a lot of people involved. Whereas athletics... it only affects you. And that's, that can be equally emotional, but at least you know you haven't let anybody else down.

One dad thought players were judged more harshly in tier 1: “If say my son had a bad game... you feel funny like around people... you know that they’re dirty on you deep down but they’re not saying anything.” But parents of players underperforming in tier 2 also felt that pressure: “The emotional, yeah... it’s just crazy. I don’t know why I get... it’s just kids’ sport. But it’s not. It’s not when other parents are standing right next to you and your kid does something wrong... because they want to see results. They want to see winning.” How ‘dirty’ other parents really felt, or how much they wanted to see ‘winning’, was difficult to gauge. There was a lot of sighing and shaking of heads at times, and the occasional ‘Who was *that* to?’ but most parents outwardly remained quite circumspect.

Everyone knew that openly criticising *another* parent’s child was unacceptable. The father who had encountered this behaviour in tier 1 expressed relief it didn’t occur in this team. Yet that same dad openly criticised the team’s lack of ‘strike power’ on several occasions, effectively criticising the three strikers by position if not by name. His indiscretion began to grate with some of the more football-knowledgeable parents, not because they disagreed with the assessment, but because they were far too polite to point out *his* child’s faults. Engaging in a team sport meant taking collective responsibility for losses as well as wins, yet this ethos could be forgotten in the pressure-filled environment of elite football.

If players could be judged harshly, so could parents, only more so. Most parents took their football commitments seriously and were annoyed by those who didn’t. Extended exposure to the demands of rep football demarcated what level of commitment was acceptable and what wasn’t. During the season, three families took overseas holidays, compromising the team’s structure and player fitness. This dereliction of consociate duty was frowned upon, not only by the coach, but by other team parents who prioritised football commitments over family holidays:

I would have loved to have taken the boys skiing. We’ve never been skiing with the boys. I mean, that pisses me off... you see other families doing it... you go to these meetings and it’s soccer has to take [priority]... And we take that seriously when they say it takes priority over everything and you have to go to all the training... We’ve done that, always done that... The boys would have loved to learn how to ski... but we just haven’t.

Parental protocol in regard to the retention system, wherein the club offered valued players a spot in the team the following season on the condition they didn’t trial elsewhere, was even stricter. Yet at least two boys from the current team had accepted the retention offered from the previous season and then trialled (unsuccessfully) for a team in the higher tier. Other parents were appalled, as were the players.

On several occasions players were overheard discussing the ethics of such behaviour. At 12 and 13 years of age, these children were already part of the difficult decision-making process each year as to whether to accept retention or not. Like the parents who had put the team first and forgone family holidays, the players felt betrayed by their team mates. Players who had *openly* trialled elsewhere, and thus forfeited their retention, resented that others didn't have to win back a spot in the team through the stressful trial process like they did. Players who had *declined* invitations to trial elsewhere resented players having the opportunity to trial without bearing the risks associated with it.

Many coaches took parental negativity, overseas holidays and retention breaches into account when considering retention offers for the following season. However, less formal avenues also existed to sanction parents and players who failed to abide by the unwritten 'consociates' code'. Parents and players could express their disapproval by withdrawing access to parent and player networks: the offer of coffee would not be made, important information about trials and tournaments might not be passed on, lifts to training would not be offered, and invitations to play in summer football competitions would be withheld.

Enculturation into the elite football fraternity occurred over time, and what might have been an acceptable transgression for a rookie parent was unacceptable for a well-seasoned counterpart. Different levels of transgression and associated backlash were also apparent. Mothers who kept to themselves, prioritised other activities over football or didn't pack the right gear were mildly resented by some. Fathers who coached from the sideline might be gently shushed by a spouse, publicly rebuked by the coach or officially warned by the club. Parents who couldn't get their children to training were penalised by policy. But those who criticised another parent's child, went on an overseas family holiday or violated retention rules were privately deplored. Outwardly parents continued to be civil but inwardly some seethed, deploying informal sanctions that, if nothing else, served a cathartic purpose.

Organised sport is an increasingly prevalent part of contemporary childhood that is actively engaged in by both children and parents alike. In the process, consociate identities and relationships are formed that serve to facilitate the sporting endeavour as well as shape and define contemporary notions of childhood and parenthood. Elite football, with its extensive commitments, competitive pressure and team-based nature, is just one form of community in contemporary Western society in which parents willingly immerse themselves in order to further their children's recreational interests *and* their social development.

Having children of the same age who were passionate about the same sport immediately gave parents from different backgrounds a common interest. The time-consuming, structured and disciplined nature of rep football commitments reassured sports-minded parents that their adolescents' time was being productively occupied, and rewarded them with displays of social awareness and responsiveness as well as physical skill. However, the pressures of that common interest and differing priorities also led to breaches of the formal Parents' Code of Conduct as well as breaches of the unwritten consociates' code of conduct. The parents appeared to have less tolerance for a breach of the consociates code, possibly because this undermined the collective sense of identity and commitment.

The highly competitive and selective nature of rep football led to a turnover of players each season. Consociate identities and relationships were continually rebuilt and negotiated around children's seasonal membership of a team. The parents in this study quickly worked out who they got along with and who they didn't. Some parents remained mere acquaintances while others formed deeper alliances based on either a shared cultural background or a shared level of commitment. But no matter how well they got along, none of them socialised with one another outside of football. They had all been brought together, and identified more or less strongly with one another, through their children's participation in rep football. Facilitated by a distinct cultural phenomenon of age grading and segregation, all of these parents had dutifully integrated into their *children's* community.

5. Maintaining the Boundaries Between Parent and Coach

HEIDI (researcher): What factors do you take into account when deciding where Sean should trial or play the next season?

ROGER (parent): Number 1 would be the coach of the team for next year... it's always about development. ... Is he in the right place from a development perspective? Winning... is great, but if he's not developing, it's not going to be the right place for him. Him being happy with his teammates that are around him, I think that's important. The environment that he's in, that he's training in... if he's not happy with the team that he's in, his performance won't be as good as it could be, definitely. ... I would let him choose definitely where he wanted to trial.

HEIDI: So it's a combination of factors... Is there a primary factor?

ROGER I think him being happy. The primary reasons are definitely him playing where he wants to play and also the coach of the team, which is probably not, well I think it is important to him. It definitely is important. He would say to me, 'I'm not happy with the coach'... and if that's the case, he doesn't want to play there, he won't play there... and I will drive him another hour to go to training [elsewhere]... and that's something that we do. ... So that they're happy.

HEIDI: Which is a huge sacrifice on your behalf. But you're prepared to go that distance for your children to keep them happy?

ROGER: It is. Because they're happy... And they've played at clubs [where] they are not happy so I know that's why I don't want to see them like that... And I think that's important, that they are in a team of kids that they actually like to be around and play with... that's probably even above the coach... otherwise there's no point.

The investment parents make in their children's elite football extends beyond time and money. Participation in elite sport is costly in terms of energy and emotion also. Studies of parental involvement in youth sport have highlighted the fine line that separates encouragement and embarrassment, support and pressure, and passion and obsession (Omlil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; Hellstedt, 2005; Kanters & Casper, 2008; Babkes & Weiss, 1999). Football, in particular, inspires passionate involvement by players, coaches, fans and parents alike. An English study by Mills and colleagues (2012) found that high level

football coaches consider parents to have the greatest influence – both positive and negative – on elite youth footballers.

Sport participation is now so prevalent in Western society, and elite sport participation so demanding, that families increasingly organise themselves around the sporting commitments of one or more family members (Hurtel & Lacassagne, 2011; Hellstedt, 2005). Previous chapters have documented the logistical, financial and emotional stresses of parenting an elite footballer. Yet parents, although an indispensable source of support, may also be a source of stress for the athlete, especially as all parties navigate the transition from the early sampling to the specialising stage of sport participation, when athletes are expected to develop excellence (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Hellstedt, 2005). In elite youth football, parents and coaches contest the boundaries of their authority over the player with differing views of what constitutes his best development at training as well as his best performance on the pitch. This conflict often manifests itself in the parents' behaviour on the sideline, but sometimes is concealed from public view.

A literature review of parental involvement in youth sport by Lindstrom Bremer (2012) draws on family systems theory and sports psychology research to describe a typology of 'under-involved', 'moderately involved' and 'over-involved' parents. Adopting a model developed by Hellstedt (1987), the review posits that under-involved parents take little or no interest in their child's sport, talent or progress. Moderately involved parents finance participation and attend competitions but leave the coaching to others and balance parental direction with their children's ability to make their own decisions about participation and commitment. Over-involved parents live vicariously through their children's sporting successes; these parents are overbearing with the coach, attend training excessively and focus more on winning than skill development, health or happiness. Lindstrom Bremer's review recommended that future studies on parental involvement in youth sport use mixed research methods to give a richer picture of the complex dynamics occurring within sport families.

Drawing heavily on in-depth interviews with parents, players and coaches, as well as observations made over the course of a football season, this chapter considers the extent to which team parents could be considered 'over-involved' in accordance with Lindstrom Bremer's typology. Whether parents crossed that fine line between encouragement and

embarrassment, support and pressure, and passion and obsession was highly subjective. Thus personal observations of parents have been juxtaposed with players' perceptions of their parents' behaviour in order to give voice to an opinion often missing from social analysis – the child's.

Living vicariously through their children's sporting successes

Success on the pitch did not *guarantee* a parent's happiness, but was often closely associated with it. When I asked team parents about their fondest memories in regard to their children's achievements, one mum said: "I do recall quite distinctly his grand final win last year and how happy he looked... It was a really, really special moment". For another: "every time they even trial for something and make it... you see that smile on their face... That happiness that he's experienced, to me, makes me proud". For a third parent, his favourite memory was going to the 2013 State Titles tournament with his son: "That was a highlight for him. And I fed off that, for sure." For these parents, what made them proudest was not the actual success their child experienced, but the happiness their child experienced at the time.

Much of that happiness related to the player's perceived level of importance in the team, which in turn was determined by whether the child was in the starting line-up, what position he was asked to play and how much game time he got. A few parents commented on how nervous their kids were each week to hear the starting line-up, and players that came out of the sheds unexpectedly wearing the substitute's bib often looked disappointed. One mum would audibly swear at the sight of her son in a bib.

As the season went on players shifted positions and some spent more time on the bench. Parental reaction when players went on and off the field became more pronounced. One parent whose child was averaging only half a game stormed off one day, saying she was too angry to watch anymore. Another day she upset a fellow parent with a vitriolic spiel about the coach's choices. The team had a successful season, results-wise, however winning did not guarantee the parents' happiness. To conclude that parents lived vicariously through their children's sporting success would be an oversimplification and misleading.

Overbearing with the coach, attend training excessively

At the beginning of the season, only one parent would regularly ring the coach to discuss his child's progress. Towards the end of the season, however, when some players were getting less field time than others, were being asked to play out of position or had the potential to be nominated by the coach to attend FNSW State Squad or Institute trials (the highest level in the state to which a player could aspire), several parents began approaching the coach privately in an attempt to influence his decision-making. This behaviour would be "overbearing" according to Lindstrom Bremer's analysis.

Throughout the season, two parents of team members constantly attended training sessions. This choice was not due solely to the parents' passion for football. In one case, carpooling was impossible; in the other, the father wanted to spend more time with his child (with whom he did not live). The coach preferred parents *not* to attend training but did not communicate this preference. The fact that most parents voluntarily chose not to attend training suggested that they recognised the coach's authority over the session itself.

Focus more on winning than skill development, health or happiness

During interviews, team parents often claimed that winning was not a priority. However, observations and communications during the season suggested that some parents *were* concerned with tangible results and the team's position on the competition ladder. In many ways, their concern was understandable, given that results were inextricably linked to past and present player development. However, results could also be skewed by a team's composition (i.e. the number of biologically-advantaged players it contained) combined with its style of play (i.e. one that took advantage of the team's size, strength and speed). Results did not necessarily equate to development but might be an indication of progress. The difficulty of maintaining a focus on development in spite of the pervasive Australian cultural emphasis on winning was paralleled by the current structure of football in New South Wales, which had 24 elite youth clubs split into two premier league tiers, with teams competing in a results-based league and subject to promotion and relegation.

A parent of a child who played for the FNSW Institute – which was both in theory and practice *all* about development – was ambivalent about how the Institute teams played against teams from tier 1 in the next age group up every week (i.e. one year older). This

dad saw the sense in pitting the so-called ‘best in the state’ players against the older age group in terms of development, but wondered what constantly losing would do to the confidence and morale of 12- and 13-year-olds (an issue flagged by MacPhail & Kirk, 2006 in regard to athletics and the age bracket jumps for some events). The dad conceded that the Institute teams could not play against their own age group as that would be unfair if they won and impolitic if they lost. Nevertheless, he saw the inherent contradiction of an emphasis on development for a team situated in a results-based competition (which, as highlighted in Chapter 2, can lead to teams being stacked with biologically-advantaged athletes). Not only did his son’s team compete against the next age group up, it could be competing against players up to two years’ older.

Dedication to skill development could be at the expense of a child’s health as well as his confidence. At one point during the season, the coach of the team emphasised that players who missed a training session (either through injury or illness) “should expect no more than 25% game time that weekend”. Several times after that, players too sick to attend school nevertheless attended training as they did not want to lose their position in the starting line-up or jeopardise their game time. A sick but well-medicated player who trained twice mid-week was then too ill to go to school the rest of the week. Ironically, he ended up getting only half a game that weekend in spite of (and because of) his determination to train. Another player who arrived at a match feeling ill continued to participate in the warm up until he vomited so much he had to be taken home. Other children trained through muscular discomfort and risked injuring themselves further.

Here the boundary separating the parents’ and the coach’s jurisdictions appeared to have blurred. The coach was not demanding that the players train through illness or injury, yet that was the unfortunate effect of his edict. The parents appeared to have voluntarily relinquished authority over deciding whether their children were fit enough to play.

The ‘fine line’ of the sideline

Holt and colleagues (2008) suggest, in accordance with Fine’s (1987) analysis of Little League baseball, that parents’ experience and knowledge can influence their involvement in youth sport in an adverse manner. However, observations conducted over the course of the season gave me the impression that the parents who had played the most football

tended to be the most reserved, and perhaps even the *least* ambitious. Parents who had experienced a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from playing football seemed content for their children to follow in their own footsteps and do the same. One dad, when asked what he hoped his son would achieve out of his involvement in rep football, said:

I hope that he forges some really strong relationships, plays to the best of his ability and just does the best he can do. ... And if it means you end up playing at [this level] or a regional league, it doesn't matter. ... If you aspire to more, then great. But have fun, make some really good friends... just get a lot out of being part of a team and working together.

Another dad, who had also played a great deal, answered in a similar manner:

I hope that he continues in this elite 2, elite 1. ... If he can do that, great. I hope he develops great friendships across the teams that he plays with and the clubs he plays for. ... Beyond that, there's the fantasy... A league, and all that stuff. But the reality, that's where he is now. ... I know he'll be a great talent for a park team [like] where I play. So he'll always be a standout wherever he goes. ... And that will give him social status and friendships.

Sideline observations revealed that, while the more experienced parents often shook their heads, swore under their breath, commented amongst themselves, and even occasionally intercepted their sons to and from the change room at half-time to offer advice, they generally refrained from yelling out instructions during the game itself. These parents were seen discussing what their sons should have done with a short corner kick, how they could have held off an attacker, and when they should have made a run, but only *after* the game. *During* the game, these parents respected the authority of the coach and the autonomy of their children. When I asked one dad whether he thought a pre-existing passion for the game contributed to parents being over-involved on the sideline, he said:

If [the parents] were footballers they'd be more encouraging... If they're over the top and emotional and carrying on on the sideline then there's an immaturity, and I think they're either trying to influence someone, whether it's officials, coaches. I think it's distracting for the child, it takes their mind off [the game]... parents shouting on the sideline... that's the coach's job.

Various studies have found that parents' self-reported behaviours and attitudes are not predictive of their children's cognitive responses; what parents perceive as support, their children may perceive as pressure (Lindstrom Bremer, 2012; Omil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; Appleton, Hall & Hill, 2010; Kanters & Casper, 2008; Babkes & Weiss, 1999). Similarly, what some children view as positive encouragement, others may consider negative, debilitating or damaging (Hellstedt, 2005).

The bulk of parents in the team I studied were not overly demonstrative on the sideline. During the season, only two parents got into trouble for giving instructions to players. When the coach overheard one father, Clive (an ex-footballer) instructing his son, Jet from the *opposite* sideline, the tension in authority was clear. The club's technical director came over and calmly told Clive that he was putting his son in an awkward position: he was asking Jet to choose between the instructions of his coach and the wishes of the father he respected. Clive just quipped, "No problem there Mate. He's got no respect for me". Another father (who had *not* played competitive football) also caught instructing earned himself a more direct and very public rebuke from the coach.

Clive and Jet spent a lot of time together and shared a close bond. When it came to Jet's football, Clive thought he was strict but fair:

I try not to put pressure on Jet. I'm strict, when it comes to playing. I believe you only give 110%. You don't give 100%, you give 110%. Otherwise you may as well not be on the field.

Clive seemed oblivious to the impact his behaviour had on Jet, who, when asked how he felt about having his parents on the sideline, said: "A bit nervous sometimes... but I just block them out and I focus on what I have to do... They like screaming out, and sometimes it gets annoying... I've told him to shush." Conversely, Billy, the son of the man publicly rebuked, was the only child in the team who felt that, if his parents told him to do one thing on the pitch and the coach told him to do another, he should please his parents. When I asked Billy what he thought about his parents' sideline behaviour he said his dad could be "really embarrassing". Nevertheless, he said he felt obliged to comply with his parents' views when there was a conflict because "they always say it over and over". Billy's mum elaborated on the family's communication style when I asked her how she dealt with a disappointing result:

So all I say... after the game, is...`So how do you think you played? How do you think you performed? Do you think you could have done more?' And then just give him time to think about it and to start talking about it. If we keep pushing it he gets quite upset about it, so I try not to really say too much... He doesn't really like to hear that, cos he knows, most of the time, if he hasn't performed as well. So it's just, over time... `when you didn't pass the ball, or you didn't stop the ball, or you didn't defend as well, what could you have done?'. But, again, not pushing it too much. As long as they realise... they haven't performed as well and what they need to do to make it better next time.

Billy's parents' approach contrasted with the position taken by another non-football playing parent, who clearly respected the coach's sphere of authority:

On the whole we don't talk about the details a lot... I don't dig into it personally because I know that it's probably a sore point. They've already covered it with their coach... I think if I was to start giving them direction it's going to blur or confuse things because really it's the coach who needs to tell them what they're doing, what they could improve on and what they can do better.

Another player, Ed, was happy to receive advice from his dad but not always confident how to apply it. Ed knew the coach was in charge but clearly felt pressure to please his dad, who moved up and down the sideline so as to communicate discreetly with him:

Sometimes I can get a bit nervous... I always think when I'm playing, like, what *they're* thinking about how I'm playing at the time. And like, so I'd always, during a game, I'd glance at my dad, like, to see what, like, he'd make like a hand signal or motion to tell me what I'm doing wrong and things like that.

Where there was conflict between pleasing the coach and pleasing the parent, Ed used his own judgment to decide the best option to take at any particular point in time. Ed told me he would then attempt over the course of the game to "even it out, just to make sure that I'm doing both things at the same time". The conflict in authority meant that the child had to try to negotiate a diplomatic compromise between parent and coach.

Psychologist Jon Hellstedt (2005) has documented how young athletes between the ages of 13 and 15 perceive different levels of parental pressure, with the 13-year-olds experiencing higher perceptions of pressure. This change coincides with the transition from early to middle years of childhood, where the coach usually becomes the more dominant influence on an athlete's development (Hellstedt, 2005; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Although many of the players in the team I studied had been specialising in football – and thus exposed to professional coaching – for several years, arguably their families were also experiencing what Hellstedt (2005) termed the first major 'derailment' from the normal (Western) family life cycle. The players were all entering adolescence, which triggered a particularly sensitive time of emotional separation between parent and child, and led to changes in the power structure of the family and the coach-athlete-parent triangle. Hellstedt recommended parents assist their children through this transition by supporting their increasing sense of independence, as well as by establishing and maintaining clear boundaries between their role as parent and their (past) role as coach.

Within the primary research group, the boundaries between parent and coach were not always maintained. Some parents, such as Jet's and Billy's dads, openly crossed over from their role as parent to coach and were personally reprimanded. Others, like Ed's dad and

Billy's mum, were more covert, but their influence was obvious all the same. No matter how discreet a parent was, a player's attitude at training and their choices on the pitch soon told the coach if his jurisdiction was being encroached. One coach, when asked how he could tell if his authority was being undermined by parents, emphasised a child's attitude:

The first thing I notice is through the child. The respect that they're showing you because of things they may or may not have heard from their parents or the way their parents are reacting towards the coach, it just filters straight through to the child. So you can always tell the parent's commitment towards the coach through the child, even if the parent doesn't say anything.

Another coach said a player's technical choices also made parental influence obvious:

You can tell those times when they're being influenced by the fact that their parent is watching a session. You know, maybe they'll try and dribble past an extra defender. Maybe they won't, you know, do the simple thing. They might try and just push themselves to do something a little bit beyond what they'd normally do in that situation because they feel as though they need to impress. They're trying to impress. They're trying to prove something to mum and dad... Even if [the parents] don't necessarily realise [what they say] will shape and influence the way [the children] play, or the way they respond.

Jet, Billy and Ed were in the unenviable position of having to choose between their coach and their parent as to who had control over how they should play. Whichever way they chose, the players would be undermining an important figure of authority. Ultimately the coach would have to resolve the conflict if it was ongoing, either through mediation between the parent, coach and club, or through de-selection of the player. Just as parents are a crucial part of the player's support structure, they are also an integral part of the player's coachability, and some parent-athlete dyads were clearly more coachable than others. Parents could be as instrumental in getting their child de-selected as they were in getting him selected in the first place.

Selection, retention and de-selection

For many parents, the most stressful aspect of being involved in elite football occurred after the season itself; that is, when faced with the prospect that their children might not be retained for next season. Once they received their retention letters, players and parents began the arduous process of deciding what to do next. If players were retained, they needed to decide whether to accept the retention and play for the club the following season, or whether to decline retention, trial elsewhere and risk not ending up in any team. If players *were not* retained, they were free to trial anywhere,

but with trials for different teams often held at the same time, parents and players needed to carefully evaluate their options.

A study by Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) determined that a sport parent's primary concern was to place their child with a coach who would optimise their sporting development. The study also found that coaches who perceive parents to be overly involved, and athletes who perceive their parents as interfering, elicit negative interpersonal feelings and foster a sense of distancing in the athlete-coach dyad.

In line with Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005), when parents were asked what factors they took into account in deciding where their child would play football the next season, they usually (like Roger in the opening vignette) prioritised the coach: the child's football development was always paramount. However, as the parents verbalised their thoughts, the coach often became secondary to the child's happiness and emotional well-being, which hinged more on the team environment and who the child played with. Another family who lived a long way from the home ground was also happy to travel if the player was happy: "I believe that if he's happy in the environment that he's in, then keep him there... As long as he's having fun and enjoying what he's doing, I'll let him do it. Within reason." If logistically possible, most parents were prepared to take their children to wherever they would be happiest.

Often the parents concluded that the various factors – location, coach, development, club, tier, players and parents – were interdependent. For example, many parents I spoke to, both within and outside the primary research group, thought that tier 1 was too results-driven and not conducive to development (as FNSW has flagged by announcing it will collapse the current two-tier system into one from 2016: FNSW, 2014). Moreover, if a player was not happy with his team mates, he wouldn't develop regardless of the coaching. Many also thought that the attitude of the coach often flowed through to parents and players. Results were inextricably linked to (but not always determined by) players' past and present development, while the team environment was strongly influenced by the personality and professionalism of the coach, the players and the parents during that particular season.

While the factors *parents* took into account when considering where their child should trial or play were complex and interdependent, the factors the *coaches* assessed when deciding

which players to retain were far more straightforward. When coaches were asked their criteria for retention, one said:

I like to see players that have responded well to coaching, that have tried to take things on board, that have come to training more often than not with a positive attitude and they've made a conscious effort to learn and develop themselves. And applying the messages that we're trying to teach them as coaches to the game is extremely important... I try and take out the physical element as much as I can.

Another coach was even more unequivocal that a player's attitude was more important than his physical ability in the retention process:

I look at the amount that they've developed throughout the season. And their, not only their ability to learn more under myself as a coach, but their commitment levels to myself as a coach, if they are still valid, and if I'm the coach for the following season. Yeah, all those points which have nothing to do with their playing ability, because all players might be on a different scale. But mentally where they're at and where they want to be as a footballer.

The coaches' emphases on a player's attitude and commitment levels to develop in accordance with the technical training and guidance provided – aspects that were very much influenced by the parents' involvement in their children's football – suggest that the parent-athlete dyad was assessed as a composite unit. If a coach's authority was being undermined by the parent, then development could not (and would not) proceed.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the extent to which Lindstrom Bremer's (2012) analysis of parental involvement in sport applied to the parents of an U13s team at an elite football club and drew on interviews with coaches, parents and players in order to clarify the impact of parental behaviour. The majority of the parents fell comfortably within what Lindstrom Bremer's typography classified as moderately involved parents. A few parents attempted to influence the coach's decision-making, or made their children nervous, embarrassed or conflicted about how they should perform on the pitch. Clearly, however, the parents themselves did not realise that they had crossed that fine line between encouragement and embarrassment, support and pressure, and passion and obsession.

In the team I studied, all parents emphasised the importance of the coach when considering where their children should play next season. However, several parents failed to respect the professional boundaries that separated their role as parent from the coach's role as technical instructor and decision-maker of what occurred on the pitch. Other parents allowed the coach's policies to encroach on *their* domain by voluntarily relinquishing authority over whether a child was fit enough to attend training or take to

the field. Despite the initial prioritising of the coach (and the contradictory crossing over of boundaries), most parents independently concluded that the various factors involved in choosing a club were interdependent.

This chapter has provided examples of the difficulty in determining and maintaining an appropriate boundary between the authority of the parent over their child, and that of the coach over the player, which was complicated by the burgeoning independence of the adolescent players themselves. Parents can both overtly and covertly undermine the coach's authority, and place their children in the unfortunate position of having to make a choice between two figures of authority. In the process, parents compromise both their children's development and their prospects of retention. Coaches were able to assess a parent's level of involvement from a player's attitude and performance, and valued a player's 'coachability' more than his physical attributes. Given that a player's coachability was largely determined by the parent, an over-involved parent may well ensure that their 'talented' child is *de*-selected from the elite status they temporarily occupy.

6. Conclusion

Significant changes in child rearing patterns in Western societies have occurred over the last few decades. Children's unstructured, home-based, neighbourhood activities have increasingly been replaced with highly structured, school- and community-organised activities, supervised and regulated by adults other than the parents. Children no longer integrate into the everyday activities of their communities but rather are 'set aside', if their parents can afford it, in places where their incorporation and development are closely controlled by adults (Dyck, 2012: 51). Alternatively, children are kept 'safely' indoors, where they preoccupy themselves with their studies or with electronic media (Gill, 2007; Kappos, 2007). Children's material dependency has been extended, and their financial independence has been delayed, by an economically unproductive and socially problematic adolescence that Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) believe has inhibited the development of social and moral responsibility.

Middle-class parents, in particular, take advantage of structured activities for their children in order to cultivate certain interests, transmit differential advantages, prepare children for adulthood, or keep children productively occupied and under adult surveillance (Dyck, 2012; Lancy, 2008; Fine, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). A structured activity that many Australian children engage in is organised sport, which is often highly valued by parents for its perceived social, psychological and physiological benefits. Many of the middle-class parents in the primary research group were enthusiastic about the benefits of sport, and organised their family life around their children's sporting endeavours. However, the parents' extensive investment in their children's *elite* sporting pursuits involved more complex underlying circumstances that required further investigation and explanation.

Not all middle-class parents invest heavily in sport. As Chapter 2 endeavoured to show, sporting traditions permeate through generations, not only initiating children's early exposure to sport but also often determining in which sport they might go on to specialise. Football participation, in a sense, was hereditary. The parents that took part in this study were instrumental not only in placing their children within sporting environments and cultivating values about physical activity, but also in actively nurturing their children's abilities and ensuring they were recognised and developed as 'talents'.

Parents' sporting predispositions factored strongly in both choosing sport (and football in particular) as the structured activity in which their children engaged, and then in making the investment that facilitated their children getting selected to play at an elite level. The children were all very capable football players. However, their football talent did not simply appear and develop itself. Analysis of the players' differing levels of engagement within the debate about innate talent that dominates much of the talent identification and development literature suggested that the family unit established the players' early emotional connection to football, maintained their subsequent motivation to practise, and helped them overcome such disadvantages as being born late in the selection year.

A child's ability requires both social recognition and social investment if it is to be identified and developed into a talent. Chapter 3 highlighted the substantial investment in time, money and energy that parents were willing and, in this case, *able* to inject into their children's elite football endeavours. However, not all children playing at the same level were equally invested in, suggesting, again, that there was more to expertise than the money invested, and the hours spent, on deliberate practise. Copious quantities of material and emotional support from parents facilitated but did not guarantee sporting success. In fact the prospects of players at the upper end of the socio-economic ladder could actually be diminished because they attended prestigious private schools that inhibited elite sport participation. Even the minimum level of parental investment in time and money required to meet elite football commitments, however, ensured that single parents and parents of lower socio-economic status (or those temporarily incurring financial hardship) would find it difficult to sustain their children's involvement in rep football *if* they gained entry.

The costs of having children participate in rep football went beyond what was measurable in dollars and hours. For some parents in the study, the opportunity costs of rep football outweighed their financial investment in terms of what else they could have been doing socially or professionally. Other parents felt enormous guilt because they dedicated so much time and energy to one or more of their talented children if they perceived that it was at the expense of a child's less talented siblings. The logistical and emotional gymnastics performed by parents with multiple children involved in rep football were formidable.

Although children no longer integrate into the everyday activities of their communities in Western society (Rogoff, 2003), parents are increasingly integrated into their *children's* communities. Families are becoming more 'child-centric,' with their activity patterns and rhythms determined as much by the children's commitments as by the parents' occupations and obligations. Chapter 4 adopts the notion of consociation to explore the identities and relationships that develop among members of the elite football fraternity. The parents' ongoing interaction within a setting of pre-existing policies and customs enabled them to perform and refine their conceptions of childhood and parenthood but within the constraints of the group's shared identity. With children no longer taking part in their parents' communities, parents were now obliged, but were also quite willing, to spend increasing amounts of time in communities built around their children's activities.

Players also began forming their own consociate identities and relationships, both among themselves and with the coach. As players entered into adolescence, they began to strategically assert their own personalities, beliefs and morals and draw on adult behaviours and attitudes. The players' more mature behaviour supported Fine's (1987) assertion that scope exists for the development of social awareness, social responsiveness and independent strategising in organised sport that is otherwise absent from many areas of contemporary Western childhood. Parental reactions to the various displays of adult-like behaviour by the players echoed Fine's (2004) research on adolescents engaged in high school debate; some adult behaviours of children were welcomed while others were not.

Parents are clearly an indispensable source of financial, logistical and emotional support to their children as they pursue their elite football endeavours. However, parents can also be a source of stress and embarrassment for their children, particularly once they have entered the specialising stage where the boundaries between the roles of coach and parent are theoretically more defined. Observations of parents, players and coaches over the course of the season highlighted ways parents compromised their children's football development that went beyond the demonstrative sideline behaviour commonly encountered at football matches. Although all parents emphasised the importance of the coach, some failed to respect his authority over their sons' technical development. Other parents voluntarily relinquished their authority more readily, such as when there was a question as to whether a child was fit enough to take to the field. The parents' waiver perhaps reflects the ambiguity in the changing power relations of the coach-parent-athlete triangle.

Across all the research, the impossibility of Baxter-Jones and Maffulli's plea that "for any systematic search for talent to be effective, a child's potential should be judged on their performance and not by their parental support" (2003: 255) resonated deeply. The ethnographic data collected in this study showed that parents were crucial in almost every aspect of the talent identification and development process, be it in exposing their children to sport, valuing the sporting ability demonstrated, ensuring that the ability was developed into a talent and then facilitating that talent's development into expertise. All the while, a parent had to avoid jeopardising a child's potential for development by being *under-involved* in the consociate sphere or by being *over-involved* on the sideline and beyond. Providing support involved traversing an interactive tightrope, with different obstacles and expectations to navigate along the way.

Hellstedt (2005) argues that the rise of organised youth sport led to changes in the Western family structure and added a new dimension to the socialisation of children. Yet changes in the Western family structure and the shifting cultural constructions of childhood are also behind the rise of organised sport and the willingness of sport-minded parents to invest in their children's activities. Another way of viewing the increased participation levels in organised sport of both children and their parents, and the higher investment of parents in elite sport in particular, is to consider them a *reaction* to both the demise of the extended family and the destabilisation of the neighbourhood community. If children are no longer able to integrate smoothly into their parents' communities, and thereby develop the social awareness and responsiveness that exposure to community activities provides, then parents may seek out other ways for their children to develop certain values and life skills.

Parents do not always *choose* to raise their children in a risk-averse society, where freedom of movement is severely restricted and exposure to other forms of harm through electronic media is enhanced. But parents who have both an appreciation of sport *and* the resources can choose to carefully steer their children into a team sport, develop them to an elite standard, and transport them to a coveted club, where they will be mentored by a respected coach, disciplined by a strict training regime, challenged by team dynamics and socialised by a desirable club culture. For the parents in the primary research group, organised sport in the early years, followed by specialisation in the adolescent years, was a way of ensuring that their children were

exposed to and inculcated with the attributes, ethics and ideologies *that the parents themselves valued*. The team became a kind of extended family, but one that required continued investment, commitment, and deference to authority if membership was to be maintained.

A child's ability could be heavily invested in to achieve a variety of ends. For many of the parents I interviewed, across all tiers, investment in elite sport was not just about the child's football ability but also about the child's social and psychological development. Raising a child to be a responsible, respectful and resilient member of a post-industrial society required a strategy. Many of the parents in the primary research group were using elite football as a vehicle in which to navigate their children's journey through adolescence. Elite football was a particularly well-suited vehicle for that journey as it was an inherently enjoyable activity, highly valued by both parent and child.

The nature of my membership of the community studied deserves mention. As one of the parents of a player in the team, my access to team activities and parent networks was virtually unrestricted. However, being a member of the community also had its challenges, most notably in keeping my personal views and professional views separate and allowing the data to speak for itself. Yet my own circumstances did not predispose me to overly empathise with the other parents; my son was the only player in the team who lived close to the football club, the only player who did not have siblings, and one of the relative newcomers to the world of deliberate practice. In many ways, I did not bear the same logistical and emotional burdens of being the parent of an elite footballer nor, given my reduced investment in time and petrol, the full financial burden. The willingness of all parents, players and coaches involved in this study to share generously their personal experiences with me has given me a deeper appreciation of their football ethos and the 'elite' nature of their personal involvement, for which I am very grateful. Another limit of this study was that all families involved could be considered middle-class, and all bar one were intact (i.e. two parent families). They were *not* the demographic norm of Western society, nor even of Sydney.

This ethnographic study of parents of players in an elite youth football team highlights the crucial role parents play in developing their children's talent and explores the motives behind their extensive investment of time, money and emotion. The study exposed

concerns felt by many parents in post-industrial society generally and strategies employed to deal with such concerns. Parental participation in *organised* sport, according to Dyck (1995), is a type of informal and shared child-rearing, facilitated and sustained by consociate relationships. Parental investment in *elite* sport, however, can be viewed as a type of parenting strategy whereby contemporary Western middle-class parents proactively develop their children's talent and customise their communities to reflect their own values. The aim of the child is to make the team. The aim of the parent is to make the adult.

Appendix

Ethics Application Ref: (5201300776) - Final Approval

Dear Associate Professor Downey,

Re: ('Elite athletes, or elite parenting? Assessing the parental investment in the prodigious footballer')

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval of the above application has been granted, effective (25/11/2013). This email constitutes ethical approval only.

If you intend to conduct research out of Australia you may require extra insurance and/or local ethics approval. Please contact Maggie Feng, Tax and Insurance Officer from OFS Business Services, on x1683 to advise further.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf>.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Associate Professor Greg Downey
Ms Heidi Anne Louise Maguire

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 25th November 2014
Progress Report 2 Due: 25th November 2015
Progress Report 3 Due: 25th November 2016
Progress Report 4 Due: 25th November 2017
Final Report Due: 25th November 2018

NB: If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

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