

Analysis of the social and emotional context of elite young basketball players

Análisis del contexto social y emocional de jóvenes jugadores de baloncesto de élite

Análise do contexto social e emocional de jovens jogadores de basquetebol de elite

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to gather the testimony of elite young basketball players regarding their own level of satisfaction and expectations, as well as their social and emotional context, including their coaches and parents. The instrument used to obtain this data was the semi-structured interview. The sample has been composed of 48 players under-14 and under-16 Male and Female in the season of 2021/22 played in teams that competed in the Spanish Nacional Championship. This study indicates the importance that players give to their coaches in the achievement of their goals, and on the role of parents in emotional and social support. All players easily highlighted the aspects they value the most in coaches, like the confidence that coaches give to them followed by the improvement as a player and the learning they felt.

Only a few didn't feel a negative influence by any coach, being in this regard the lack of confidence, motivation and the low demanding training posture the most common. In most cases parents have a positive.

Keywords: players interview; adolescents; coaches; parents; social context.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio fue recoger el testimonio de jóvenes jugadores de baloncesto de élite sobre su propio nivel de satisfacción y expectativas, así como sobre su contexto social y emocional, incluidos sus entrenadores y padres. El instrumento utilizado para la obtención de estos datos fue la entrevista semiestructurada. La muestra ha estado compuesta por 48 jugadores sub-14 y sub-16 Masculino y Femenino que en la temporada 2021/22 jugaron en equipos que disputaron el Campeonato de España. Este estudio indica la importancia que los jugadores dan a sus entrenadores en la consecución de sus objetivos, y sobre el papel de los padres en el apoyo emocional y social. Todos los jugadores destacaron fácilmente los aspectos que más valoran de los entrenadores, como la confianza que les dan los entrenadores seguida de la mejora como jugador y el aprendizaje logrado. Sólo unos pocos no sintieron influencia negativa por parte de ningún entrenador, siendo en este sentido la falta de confianza, motivación y la postura de entrenamiento poco exigente los más comunes. En la mayoría de los casos los padres tienen una actitud positiva.

Palabras clave: entrevista a deportistas; adolescentes; entrenadores; padres; contexto social.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi recolher o testemunho de jovens jogadores de basquetebol de elite relativamente ao seu próprio nível de satisfação e expectativas, bem como ao seu contexto social e emocional, incluindo os seus treinadores e pais. O instrumento utilizado para a obtenção destes dados foi a entrevista semiestructurada. A amostra foi constituída por 48 jogadores sub-14 e sub-16 Masculinos e Femininos que na época 2021/22 disputaram o Campeonato Nacional Espanhol. Este estudo indica a importância que os jogadores dão aos seus treinadores na concretização dos seus objetivos, e sobre o papel dos pais no apoio emocional e social. Todos os jogadores

destacaram facilmente os aspetos que mais valorizam nos treinadores, como a confiança que os treinadores lhes dão seguida da melhoria como jogadores e aprendizagem sentida. Apenas alguns não sentiram influência negativa de nenhum treinador, sendo neste aspeto a falta de confiança, motivação e a postura de treino pouco exigente as mais comuns. Na maioria dos casos, os pais têm uma atitude positiva.

Palavras-chave: entrevista a jogadores; adolescentes; treinadores; pais; contexto social.

Introducción

The development of a talent player is a complex process, dependent on genetic heritage, sports training, nutrition, emotional factors, and the socio-emotional context where young athletes develop (Guth & Roth, 2013; Quijada, 2016). Only a minority will reach a professional level (Merkel, 2013), and even the most predestined can derail due to lack of motivation, commitment, psychological resources, and appropriate challenge during their sports training (Taylor & Collins, 2019).

The practice of organized sports by youth, can exceed the psychological and physical health benefits related to physical activity alone (Varghese & LaBella, 2021). However, the shift from a recreational activity to a competitive and demanding level, can lead to an early specialization in a single sport (Eime et al., 2013), that according to Myer et al. (2015) may be a risk factor for overuse injury and burnout. Also, the risk of overemphasizing winning at an early age, combined with an inadequate development of skills can lead to anxiety, stress and in many cases sports abandonment (Merkel, 2013).

The environment created by coaches, parents and peers may contribute to which the activity is experienced (Chan et al., 2012). The outcome of sport participation, special in a more demanding context, may not be by itself positive (Neely et al., 2011). It appears that parents, especially mothers, play an important role during childhood, peers have a bigger influence in adolescents and coaches affect more the effort and enjoyment in children and the competence in adolescent (Chan et al., 2012).

It is reasonable to assume that the context and the different agents that surround athletes affect their development, being highlighted by Davis & Baker (2007) the role of coaches in optimizing the training time, and parents in providing the initial opportunity to play sports and in providing financial and emotional support.

According to Balaguer et al. (2008) coaches that are empathic and supporting, make their athletes feel more valued, enhancing their social relationships. Also, allowing athletes to act with autonomy, matching their actions with their values, will favour their motivation and psychological well-being. The communication style and motivational climate generated by coaches are determinant on the enjoyment and the commitment in young athletes (Torregrosa, et al., 2008). Luiz de Andrade et al. (2021) pointed out that the coach motivational climate was the main factor to intrinsic motivation, which leads to a better performance. Apart from the coach's influence, parental support enhances achievement motivation and performance in elite athletes (Imtihansyah et al., 2024). Morales-Sánchez et al. (2024) highlight that task-oriented climates, which value personal improvement and effort, can enhance self-esteem and reduce performance anxiety in young athletes. Similarly, Coutinho et al. (2021) point out that when parents foster an environment emphasizing personal development, learning, and effort over competition, athletes are less likely to experience fear of failure in sports.

It is necessary to improve the social and affective contexts, developing good relationships, and having positive communication. According to Reynoso-Sánchez et al. (2024), a competent coach possesses extensive knowledge of their sport, strong leadership abilities, motivational skills, and effective decision-making capabilities. They also prioritize building positive relationships with athletes, addressing their psychological needs to enhance both performance and well-being.

Training programs should aim to foster an optimal development, promoting a healthy and satisfying live as young and later as adults, in form to engage in a meaningful way in their communities during and after their athlete careers (Holt & Neely, 2011).

With sports initiation occurring in earlier ages, its fundamental to know what is happening at that moment. Drawing new lines of research with a future that provide data on how to create initiation and training models that allows sport to give

opportunity for physical, emotional, and social learning. Finding evidence about the positive or negative impact of sport at an early age would allow many coaches, clubs or organizations to establish new guidelines and scenarios.

The aim of this paper was to analyse the social and emotional context of young elite basketball players regarding their most close environment like coaches and parents.

Method and Instruments

Our study used a qualitative and quantitative methodology, having as instrument a semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002). The process used to elaborate the interview was the following (Jiménez et al., 2009): a) first, the team of investigators designed the interview protocol, which was revised and discussed, by a group of four experts, two doctors in Sports Psychology with over than ten years of experience, and two basketball coaches, with over than ten years of experience with elite youth teams; b) then the final protocol was approved; c) interviews were done by the same team and finally, the transcription and codification of interviews. To meet the study objectives, the research group established five categories before collecting data: 1) Satisfaction degree regarding their own level of performance and related with their coach; 2) Expectations and beliefs about short and long-term goals; 3) Influence of Coaches; 4) Influence of Parents; 5) Players feelings about competition.

Participants

The sample has been composed of 48 players, distributed according to gender and competition age group, in the follow way: Female (under-14: n=13, 13,90 ± 0,49 years; under-16 n=12, 15,66 ± 0,53 years) and Male (under-14: n=12, 13,94 ± 0,25 years; under-16 n=11, 15,83 ± 0,51 years). All participants were players that in season of 2021/22 played in the autonomic selection of Madrid and competed in the Spanish Nacional Championship. All players practice four or more days per week and have played basketball for more than 5 years.

Procedure

All parents, guardians and players were informed of the voluntary nature of this study, the rights of withdrawal, and the confidentiality of data, being provided their informed consent to participate. The interviews were conducted before a training session by one of the researchers, face to face, with a minimum of fifteen minutes for each player.

Data analysis

Regarding to the open questions the analysis was realized considering the grammatical criteria according to Rodriguez et al. (1996). The selected unit of meaning was the sentence.

Once the codification was finished for each interview, the main investigator clustered all the units of meaning of the same category, in this sense the categorization means in its own one a task of synthesis (Navarro et al., 2017).

Regarding to the quantitative variables: the level of satisfaction was gathered through various aspects of their own level of performance and related with their coach. For each aspect players could choose according to a Linkert scale, between the number 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) (Eraña, I., 2016). The same logic was applied in relation to the expectations and beliefs of the players goals where they could choose between the number 1 (unlikely), to 5 (very likely) The T-Test Student was used to compare the means between the groups of age and gender.

Results

The content analysis was carried out according to each category mentioned above, comparing the results between the respective age and gender groups.

1) Level of satisfaction

As shown in table 1 and table 2, players, seem more satisfied about their individual technique, and less satisfied regarding their psychological performance. The only significative difference between groups was in the level of instruction of their coaches, U16 are less satisfied (3,87) than the U14 (4,40) (p 0,034). Overall, the level of satisfaction regarding their coach was high, being also high their perception on their technical and tactical performance.

Table 1. Level of satisfaction regarding various aspects of sports practice regarding age group.

Level of Satisfaction	Age group	N	Avg.	σ	T	p
Technical performance	U-14	25	4.00	0.71	-0.437	0.664
	U-16	23	4.09	0.67		
Tactical performance	U-14	25	3.84	0.75	-1.011	0.317
	U-16	23	4.04	0.64		
Physical performance	U-14	25	3.88	0.78	0.044	0.965
	U-16	23	3.87	0.87		
Psychological performance	U-14	25	3.64	0.99	-0.624	0.536
	U-16	23	3.83	1.07		
Coach	U-14	25	4.48	0.59	1.680	0.100
	U-16	23	4.04	1.15		
Coach Instruction	U-14	25	4.40	0.71	2.181	0.034
	U-16	23	3.87	0.97		
Concern of Coach towards me	U-14	25	4.28	0.89	-0.239	0.812
	U-16	23	4.35	1.07		

Significance ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2. Level of satisfaction regarding various aspects of sports practice regarding gender

Level of Satisfaction	Gender	N	Avg.	σ	T	p
Technical performance	FEM	25	4.08	0.70	0.402	0.690
	MAS	23	4.00	0.67		
Tactical performance	FEM	25	3.96	0.79	0.231	0.818
	MAS	23	3.91	0.60		
Physical performance	FEM	25	3.80	0.76	-0.660	0.512
	MAS	23	3.96	0.88		
Psychological performance	FEM	25	3.56	1.04	-1.196	0.238
	MAS	23	3.91	0.99		
Coach	FEM	25	4.28	1.02	0.072	0.943
	MAS	23	4.26	0.81		
Coach Instruction	FEM	25	4.12	1.01	-0.211	0.834
	MAS	23	4.17	0.72		
Concern of Coach towards me	FEM	25	4.36	1.08	0.350	0.728
	MAS	23	4.26	0.86		

Significance ($p < 0.05$)

2) Expectations

Players were asked what their short-term and long-term goals were, the beliefs and concern in achieving them, as well as people that they consider help or an impediment.

Short Term Goals

As can be seen in table 3, the more common short-term goal was improving as a player, that could be general our specific, regarding physical, technical, tactical or psychologic aspect: "Improve tactical level and improve dribbling and shooting." (MC2).

Winning a specific competition or reaching a certain position was also prevalent in the female groups: "Improve psychological performance. Win the Spanish Championship." (FC3).

On the other hand, de male groups seemed more focus in securing their place on a team or exchanging for a more competitive environment: “I want to perform well and continue in my club. Be satisfied with myself and enjoy playing basketball.” (MI12).

Table 3. Short term goals regarding age group and gender

Gender	Age	N	Improve as a player		Wining specific competition		Secure their place on a team		Playing in National Team	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	6	46	6	46	6	46	4	31
Female	U-16	12	10	83	5	42	4	33	0	0
Male	U-14	12	6	50	2	17	7	58	0	0
Male	U-16	11	6	55	2	18	8	73	1	9

Long Term Goals

As shown in table 4, the most common long-term goal is to reach a professional level, being slight significant in boys: “Live from Basketball, it does not matter if I don’t go abroad.” (MC1). It’s also more significant in the male group the specificity about the club or league where they want to play in the future: “Play professionally in the NBA or la ACB.” (MI12). The female groups are more focus to improve their own game, playing in the higher level possible and achieving a scholarship overseas: “Being able to play all positions. Play at a high level.” (FC5). Only a very small percentage show no expectation regard to their future or keeping on paying just for the fun of it.

Table 4. Long term goals regarding age group and gender

Gender	Age	N	Play at the highest level possible		Becoming Pro.		Going to USA (Scholarship)		Playing in National team		Playing NBA/WNBA		Improve as player		Wining specific competition		Secure their place on a team	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	3	23	4	31	3	23	3	23	2	15	2	15	0	0	2	15
Female	U-16	12	2	17	3	25	6	50	0	0	1	8	5	42	1	8	4	33
Male	U-14	12	1	8	5	42	1	8	0	0	4	33	1	8	0	0	5	42
Male	U-16	11	3	27	6	55	0	0	0	0	2	18	2	18	0	0	7	64

Beliefs and concerns about achieving goals

It was asked the probability athletes felt in the achievement of their goals, and the concerns they had in not being able to reach them, In both variables there isn’t significant differences between groups. Overall athletes are not to concern in achieving their goals (3,58 average) and slightly more confident in achieving them (3,73 average).

People that can help you to reach your goals

Most athletes point out more than one person that could help to reach their goals (Table 5). However, it’s very clear that the coach has an overwhelming relevance, follow by parents and family. The importance of the coach decreases along the age, being less relevant in the U16: “My coaches, because they are the ones who know the most and can teach me. Parents, they encourage me to continue playing. Friends, always as support.” (FC5). “Me, because if I don’t train, I don’t improve. My colleagues because they make me do better. My coaches because they help me improve.” (MI8). Older male players do not attribute any importance to teammates in this context, in contrast to female and younger male players.

Table 5. People that can help players to reach their goals, regarding age group and gender

Gender	Age	N°	Family		Parents		Brothers		Coaches		Team-Mates		My-self		Friends	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	2	15	9	69	4	31	12	92	5	38	2	15	1	8
Female	U-16	12	3	25	8	67	2	17	8	67	3	25	1	8	2	17
Male	U-14	12	4	33	4	33	1	8	11	92	4	33	1	8	1	8
Male	U-16	11	5	45	5	45	2	18	8	73	0	0	0	0	2	18

People that can prevent you from achieving your goals

A large part of the athletes considered that no one can prevent them to achieve their goals, except themselves, that can be their own obstacle: "Myself. Because of my lack of security on some occasions and because a large percentage depends on me. Whoever I give importance to influence me and affect me." (FC4).

A smaller percentage also considered other persons like friends from school, other team-mates, or having a bad coach: "Some friend, because they drink, and smoke and their activities are not what I need." (MC6).

Family members were not referred as a negative influence by any athlete.

3) Influence and behaviour of coaches

In this section we wanted to know what players valued the most in coaches that had a positive impact, and what athletes didn't like in coaches who had a negative impact. Also, what is the behaviour of their actual coach after winning and after losing a game.

Coaches who had positive influence

The most common aspects that players regard (table 6) has a positive influence is the confidence felt, followed by the improvement and learning with their coach methodology: "Learn new things, have trust in Me. Tranquillity that he transmitted, happiness." (FC1).

Also considered important by most players was the psychologic support: "My actual coach. Raised my self-esteem. Brought out the positive things in me. He is my best coach." (FI10).

Being slightly higher in the female groups girls it's also pointed out the good relation and the empathy with the coach: "He doesn't convey his concern to the players, he bonds with the players, I learned a lot" (MI5).

The major difference between gender is in the fact that girls seem to give more value to concerned and demanding coaches: "He taught me to defend and be aggressive, to steal balls and be strong. Had a very good treatment, trust. He put in a lot of effort and encouraged you to continue." (FI13). Especially in the female group, there is a tendency to prefer more demanding coaches as age advances.

Table 6. More common attributes of coaches who had positive influence

Gender	Age	N°	Confidence		Learning		Psychologic Sup.		Empathic		Demanding		Positive	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	5	38	5	38	4	31	4	31	4	31	5	38
Female	U-16	12	5	42	5	42	6	50	5	42	6	50	0	0
Male	U-14	12	7	58	7	58	4	33	3	25	1	8	1	8
Male	U-16	11	6	55	6	55	3	27	3	27	3	27	1	9

Coaches who had negative influence

When asked about the coaches that have influenced worst, male players pointed as main characteristic the lack of confidence and motivation: "He was very controlling; he didn't have confidence in me. In important moments they were not with me." (MI3).

Female athletes highlight more the feeling of not learning and the low demanding training posture: “Give us too much autonomy, let us direct ourselves. Had no concern, carefree. Felt like I didn’t get better with him.” (F12).

Regarding the group ages the u-14 seem to be more sensitive about Coaches with low patience that tend to be angry and have a negative approach: “He screamed too much. He punished us a lot when we failed. Bad character sometimes.” (M12).

Other characteristics that seemed to be transverse to all athletes were the bad character, incompetence, lack of knowledge, indifference, and the bad relation or no connection: “Didn’t work technically or psychologically. He didn’t care about us, didn’t connect with us.” (M19).

Only few athletes refer that never had a coach that have negatively influence.

Table 7. More common attributes of coaches who had negative influence

Gender	Age	N°	Distrust		Not learning		Bad Relation		Soft		Indifference Didn't Help		Negative		Incompetence		Bad character	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	2	15	4	31	3	23	4	31	3	23	4	31	1	8	0	0
Female	U-16	12	2	17	4	33	5	42	5	42	0	0	0	0	4	33	2	17
Male	U-14	12	9	75	3	25	3	25	1	8	3	25	4	33	2	17	3	25
Male	U-16	11	5	45	1	9	1	9	2	18	4	36	1	9	1	9	3	27

Coach behaviour in competition

In this part athletes answer about their coach behaviour in competition, after winning a game and after losing a game.

After losing game

The most common reaction is to support, cheer follow by the feedback and correction about the game that can be general do the team or individual to each player: “Try to find solutions to win the games. Morally support to move forward.” (M19).

Specially in the younger group its more common to the coach to get upset or angry. However, this behaviour tends to be momentaneous and followed by more positive aspects: “Normally he gets angry because we have played a bad game, but he also corrects us and encourages us.” (M11).

Same players also pointed out that the reaction sometimes depends more on the performance that about the result itself: “It depends on the defeat, because if it was a difficult game, he encourages us. But if we have played badly, he scolds us.” (M13).

After winning a game

Athletes report that in most cases the coach congratulates after winning, reinforces the good and bad behaviours to improve, and demands focus to the future (next match). “He congratulates us. Seek our improvement indifferently.” (F13).

Some coaches show feelings of happiness, satisfaction and proud and a small percentage reveal no reaction or give few importance of the winning: “Very happy, congratulations to everyone. best vibe.” (FC1). “He doesn't say or do anything. It's our work and that we must prepare for the next game.” (FC4).

4) Parents behaviour in competition

In this section athletes reported their parent’s behaviour in competition, after winning a game and after losing a game.

After losing game

The most common behaviour is to encourage and animate after losing a game, giving emotional support: “They encourage me, they try to make me happy and forget the lost.” (FC1). “They motivate a lot and try to keep me from breaking down and keep going” (M19).

Some parents also give feedback and try to improve some behaviours: “They tell me my mistakes and we watch a video they record of the game to see how to improve those mistakes.” (MC7).

Very few parents get angry or sad with them or have no reaction: “My mother gets angry and remains negative.” (FC3). “Nothing, they don’t tell me anything.” (MI3).

Depending on the performance and attitude in the game parents can have different behaviours: “If I have done wrong, they get angry. If I have done well and there has been a fight, they support me.” (FI3).

After winning a game

Most of the parents congratulate after winning a game, being this more relevant in male athletes: “Congratulate. Comment on things that were done correctly and incorrectly, individually and as a team.” (MC5).

Instead, female athletes feel more that, their parents stay happy and proud of their achievement: “They are proud, they are happy. Highlight any errors so we can improve them.” (FI3).

Parents also tend to make corrections and give feedback, being this more common in female athletes: “See the good things about the game and the details that could be improved.” (FI11). “My father was a player. We watch the videos to see what to improve and I really like that.” (MI4).

5) Players feelings about competition

To know the feelings regarding competition, we asked the athletes what they like more about competing and what they like less.

What do players like most about competing

As seen in table 8, athletes report that what they like more is the feelings and intensity: “The tension in important moments.” (FC8). “Feeling of adrenaline. Happiness of doing what I like. Try to do your best to win.” (MC5).

Having to overcome and play in the highest level was also mentioned special by male athletes: “That you can overcome each day.” (FI10). “To make an effort, playing in the highest level.” (MI9).

The female groups highlighted the opportunity to make new friends and have new experiences: “To have experiences, knowing people, coaches, learning new things.” (FC6).

In the younger players was also relevant the happiness that competing brings to them: “Being able to play the sport that I love. To win, learning with you own mistakes.” (MI12).

Winning was predominant in the male and in older female players: “The desire that I have to win.” (MC11).

The enjoyment of competition appears to be of low relevance and decreases with age, especially in the U16 male group, where it is nearly non-existent.

Table 8. What do athletes like most about competing, regarding age group and gender

Gender	Age	N°	Enjoy		Friends & Experiences		Feelings & Intensity		To overcome		Be part of a team		Learning Improving		Winning	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	4	31	5	38	4	31	1	8	1	8	1	8	0	0
Female	U-16	12	1	8	2	17	4	33	2	17	2	17	2	17	3	25
Male	U-14	12	2	17	1	8	1	8	3	25	1	8	1	8	5	42
Male	U-16	11	0	0	0	0	7	64	3	27	2	18	0	0	3	27

What do players like less about competing

The frustration that competition brings is the most reported negative aspect: “When you have to come back from a game that you are losing and see that things don’t work out.” (FI11).

Losing, failing, stress and pression felt was also relevant across all athletes: "Lose. Injure myself". (FC4). "I stress a lot. To hate something, you love to do." (FC2). "Playing badly hurts!" (MC8). "Pressure to win." (MC9).

Table 9. What do athletes like less about competing, regarding age group and gender

Gender	Age	N°	Pressure Stress		Get angry with friends		Disconnection with team		Fale Play bad		Sacrifices Injuries		Losing		Frustration		Nothing	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	U-14	13	3	23	1	8	1	8	5	38	1	8	0	0	4	31	1	8
Female	U-16	12	2	17	1	8	0	0	0	0	1	8	3	25	4	33	0	0
Male	U-14	12	1	8	2	17	1	8	0	0	0	0	4	33	3	25	1	8
Male	U-16	11	2	18	1	9	2	18	2	18	0	0	2	18	2	18	0	0

Discussion

This study collected the testimony from elite young basketball players regarding their satisfaction, expectations, and social-emotional context, including the relationships with coaches and parents. The results will be analysed according to each category: 1) Satisfaction degree regarding their own level of performance and related with their coach; 2) Expectations and beliefs about short and long-term goals; 3) Influence of Coaches; 4) Influence of Parents; 5) Players feelings about competition.

Satisfaction

High satisfaction with the coach is associated with a higher satisfaction regarding to their technical and tactical performance perception (García-Herrero, 2022), in general they are more satisfied with their coach that with themselves.

Coaches tend to give more instruction to younger athletes, as a need to give more information, that could be beneficial for a player development (Partington, 2014), in the opposite, coaches in the older age groups tend to be more focus on the feedback and post-instruction. This fact could explain why U16 athletes show less satisfaction than U14 athletes regarding the level of instruction of their coaches.

Expectations and beliefs

The short-term goals were similar between groups. According to Williamson (2022) process goals appear to be the most effective for enhancing performance and improving certain psychological out-comes, as well as performance, and mastery goals. For this fact it's positive that the most common goal was the improvement (general and specific) as athletes.

On the other hand, goals based on normative comparisons do not improve performance and result in some maladaptive psychological out-comes (Williamson, 2022). And in this case, it was also relevant the goal of winning a specific competition, mainly in the female group.

About long-term goals, Wang et al. (2016) study showed that female athletes have more mastering-avoidance goals, and male athletes have higher performance-approach goals. Supporting our results, where female athletes are more focus in improving as a player and in getting a scholarship overseas, and male athletes want to become professional and perform in their teams. Although these goals, athletes don't have high confidence in reaching them, being even lower their concern in achieving them.

To help to reach their goals, the coach was the most important figure, follow by parents and family (Chan et al., 2012). A large part of the athletes considered that no one can prevent them to achieve their goals, except themselves.

The U16 male players did not attribute any importance to their teammates, in contrast to female and younger male players. This outcome may stem from a shift toward a performance-oriented climate, where players prioritize outperforming teammates and consistently strive to be the best rather than focusing on effort and personal improvement (Smith & Mellano, 2022).

There is a slight decrease in the importance attributed to the coach as age progresses, while the significance given to parents and family remains high. This finding partially aligns with Prieto Andreu and Ramírez Muñoz (2020), who observed that older athletes have a more negative perception of both parents and coaches.

Influence and behaviour of coaches and parents

According to Gearity (2012) successful outcomes may be achieved despite the coach being perceived as a poor coach, being residual in this study the importance given by athletes to winning. Overall, our athletes value more the confidence that coaches give them, follow by the learning and psychological support. Becker (2009) also mentioned the importance of enjoyment, positivity, and demanding learning environment. Despite athletes in this study didn't give too much importance to fun, the general highlighted the feeling of learning and improving. Female players tend to prefer a more participatory leadership style from their coaches, receive more feedback, and seek more technical instruction than male players (Wałach-Biśta, 2019), which can lead to a preference for a coach who is both empathetic and demanding.

Male athletes pointed more the lack of confidence and motivation and female athletes the undemanding and bad posture as negative influence of their coaches (Neely et al., 2011).

Their actual coach and parents after losing a game tend to support, cheer and give feedback (Chan et al., 2012). After winning a game the coach and parents congratulates depending on more of the performance that in the result itself.

Players feelings about competition

The feelings of intensity of the game and having to overcome and play in the highest level was mentioned as positive aspects of competition. As well as the opportunity to make new friends and have new experiences (Eime et al., 2013). In elite teams, motivation is directed to overcome competitive games rather than tackling challenging tasks (Gonçalves et al., 2015). This may explain why, among older male U16 athletes, the sense of fun is nearly absent, as the intense drive to succeed in competition often outweighs the intrinsic enjoyment of playing.

The frustration that competition brings is the most reported negative aspect, losing, failing, stress and pressure felt was also relevant across all athletes (Carter-Thuillier et al., 2016; Myer et al., 2015).

Conclusion

This study indicates the importance that athletes give to their coaches in the achievement of their goals, and on the role of parents in emotional and social support.

All athletes easily highlighted the aspects they value the most in coaches, and only a few didn't feel a negative influence by any coach. Regarding this matter, coaches must foster relationships built on empathy and trust by actively listening and offering emotional support, while also being mindful of how players perceive their own performance improvements. During training sessions and competition, coaches should set high expectations, while demonstrating care, expertise, and competence. At the same time, they should remain patient and maintain positive communication. Above all, it is important that players feel valued, and their performance is recognized and play a meaningful role on the team.

In most cases parents have a positive attitude whatever the result of competition, encouraging and trying to help. Players, particularly the older ones, recognize the importance that parents have in their athletic success. Beyond logistical support, the emotional support during challenging times, such as defeats or underperformance, is vital. The mental health and wellbeing of elite young athletes had become increasingly relevant in the recent years. Talent must be nurtured with a healthy environment, both physical and psychological, which favours good integral development and acts as a prevention of future problems. It is crucial to train according to each player needs and adjust the different levels of demand to the different ages.

Ethical Statement: This study was approved by the Bioethics Committee of Universidad Europea (Madrid, Valencia, and Canarias campuses), which ensures scientific quality and compliance with ethical standards in research involving human participants (approval number: CIP1213006.21). All participants, or their legal guardians in the case of minors, provided written informed consent prior to participation. Personal data were treated in accordance with Spanish data protection laws (LO 3/2018) and anonymized using coded identifiers. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and applicable national regulations on biomedical research and clinical trials (Law 14/2007 and Royal Decree 223/2004).

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Appendix

ENTREVISTA PARA DEPORTISTAS

DATOS PERSONALES

Fecha de nacimiento:
Club actual:

Sexo:
Fecha:

NIVEL DE SATISFACCIÓN

Valora el grado de satisfacción (del 1 nada satisfactorio al 5 muy satisfactorio)

	Nada Satisfactorio		3	Muy Satisfactorio	
	1	2		4	5
Nivel de satisfacción con mi rendimiento técnico					
Nivel de satisfacción con mi rendimiento táctico					
Nivel de satisfacción con mi rendimiento físico					
Nivel de satisfacción con mi rend. psicológico					
Nivel de satisfacción con mi entrenador					
Nivel de satisfacción con el grado de instrucción					
Nivel de satisfacción con el grado de preocupación que el entrenador muestra hacia mi					

EXPECTATIVAS Y CREENCIAS

1) Cuáles son tus expectativas de rendimiento para el próximo año:

2) Cuáles son tus expectativas de rendimiento para el futuro:

	Poco probable		3	Muy Probable	
	1	2		4	5
¿En qué medida crees que puedes conseguirlos?					

	Poco		3	Mucho	
	1	2		4	5
¿Hasta qué punto te preocupa no conseguirlos?					

CONTEXTO SOCIO-EMOCIONAL

1) Indica qué personas crees que pueden ayudarte a lograr tus objetivos y por qué:

2) Indica qué personas crees que pueden impedir que consigas tus objetivos y por qué

3) Piensa en alguno de los entrenadores/as que más te ha influido y escribe tres cosas que te gustaban de él/ella.

4) Piensa en alguno de los entrenadores/as que menos o peor te han influido y escribe tres cosas que no te gustaban de él/ella

5) Describe qué es lo que hace tu entrenador actual cuando pierdes

6) Describe qué es lo que hace tu entrenador actual cuando ganas

7) Describe qué es lo que hacen tus padres cuando pierdes

8) Describe qué es lo que hacen tus padres cuando ganas

9) Qué es lo que más te gusta de competir y lo que menos?