

Facilitating dual career badminton players' life skills development through the education of their entourage

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Introduction: Prolonged, healthful participation in sports, such as badminton, plays a key role in the physical, psychological, and social development of young individuals who often aim to maintain a dual career in which they excel both athletically and academically (Dohme et al., 2019). Dual careers can lead to early sport dropout, burnout, and increased injury risk if not managed appropriately. To limit these negative consequences, dual career athletes should be prepared for the range of demands they may face (Dohme et al., 2019). Sellars et al. (2019) suggested that dual career youth badminton players experienced a number of demands including educational requirements, injury management, internal and external expectations, and time management. One way of preparing young badminton players for these demands, is through the deliberate teaching of life skills, which can buffer the impact of the continuous strain experienced in managing a dual career, and foster welfare and positive development (Bean et al., 2018). Parents and coaches are key enablers of players' life skills development, yet can feel ill equipped to facilitate this development intentionally (Sellars et al., 2019). Consequently, the current study had two objectives. First, to understand the knowledge and use of life skills of adolescent badminton players and their entourage (parents/guardians and badminton staff) within a badminton setting. Second, to develop and evaluate an online educational program aimed at enhancing entourage members' knowledge of, and ability to promote dual career badminton players' life skills development.

Methods: Participants were purposefully sampled from a regional badminton academy, comprising eight female and male players aged 10-16 years and their entourage (11 parents and two coaches). The study spanned one badminton season and comprised of three phases.

Phase 1 – Qualitative exploration of current knowledge and use of life skills of adolescent badminton players and their entourage within a regional academy badminton setting.

Phase 2 – Creation and provision of a bespoke online educational life skills program to facilitate players' entourages' knowledge of and ability to explicitly support players' use of life skills in the future.

Phase 3 – Qualitative exploration of parents' and coaches' experience of taking part in the online life skills educational program and their perceptions of the program in enhancing knowledge and promoting the likelihood of future life skills development in adolescent players.

Results: Players highlighted that badminton was a sport in which they could learn numerous life skills that had the potential to be transferred into other environments and be used throughout life. However, players indicated that during their time in badminton settings, they were rarely explicitly taught life skills; rather life skills were learnt implicitly. Parents and coaches also expressed that their children/players were rarely, if ever, explicitly taught life skills. This apparent lack of life skills teaching was suggested to have occurred as a result of barriers such as a lack of on court time and time with players, lack of knowledge concerning life skills and their implementation, and preferences to participate in badminton technical skills development rather than that of life skills.

Subsequently, a bespoke online educational life skills program was developed with the aim of promoting the knowledge and use of life skills for parents and coaches of adolescent badminton players. The online program offered parents and coaches the opportunity to learn about life skills and their use in badminton specific settings. Participants' feedback emphasised positive experiences of the program including the development and refreshment of their life skills knowledge. Coaches described that the program led to increased awareness regarding their current use of life skills with their players, and even led to a potential

increase in the use of life skills in their practice. Additionally, the program enhanced parent and coach understanding of their own and others' roles in developing players holistically.

Discussion: Recommendations for the development of dual career badminton players' life skills:

- **Resources provision:** The provision of resources helping parents and coaches learn about adolescent badminton players' life skills development should be an integral part of the education of coaches and parents to enable them to optimally support the healthful development of their children/athletes.
- **Accessibility:** It is recommended that online educational life skills programs are broken down into bite sized modules to enable a high degree of flexibility, supporting parent and coach motivation to engage in the program at a time convenient to them.
- **Promote collaboration:** Educational resources should help coaches and parents to understand how they can facilitate life skills development in collaboration with each other.
- **Early introduction:** Results of this study suggested that coaches and parents would value from an early focus on life skills if appropriately educated.
- **Reach:** A Badminton World Federation wide roll out of a revised version of the program that can be tested nationally and internationally is recommended. The structure of the program, specifically the bite sized modules and transparency between coach and parent modules, as well as interactive the nature should be maintained.

Conclusion: It is well documented that the maintenance of a dual career can teach young badminton players valuable life skills, yet also be a strenuous undertaking, which, if not managed appropriately, can lead to unwanted consequences. To enhance the likelihood of prolonged, successful, and healthy participation within badminton, the systematic and explicit development of life skills should become an integral part of the badminton context. To do this, education is key to enhance coach and parent perceptions of being equipped to intentionally facilitate such development. Education needs to be accessible and flexible to engage already busy coaches and parents. To achieve this outcome, we recommend the provision of bite sized online modules that teach participants the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to proactively support players' life skills development individually and collaboratively. Modules should also challenge program participants to implement their understanding into their day to day practices through targeted tasks, and provide a virtual space on which such experiences can be discussed and reflected upon, with and without subject experts. Finally, the relationship and collaboration between parents and coaches is critical to the development and well-being of the badminton players. Life skills development therefore provides an ideal topic area through which enhanced collaboration between these parties can be encouraged.

References:

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