Children in Sport: Participation Motives and Psychological Stress

Michael W. Passer

Recent research on children’s sport participation motives is examined to provide insight about potential sources of stress in organized youth sports. It is concluded that affiliation, skill development, success and status, excitement, and fitness represent the most important general motive factors for young athletes. A four-stage model of stress is outlined, extant empirical literature on stress in youth sports is briefly reviewed within this framework, and implications of these findings with regard to the stressfulness of athletic competition for children are discussed. It is proposed that future stress research in youth sports examine coach-player and parent-player interactions, the antecedents of competitive trait anxiety, other sources of stress in addition to performance- and success-related demands, and the role of participation motivation as a moderator variable in players’ responses to various stressors. The need for research with younger children and participants in individual sports also is addressed.

During the past 40 years, considerable debate has occurred over the advantages and disadvantages of highly competitive youth sport programs. This controversy has not halted the proliferation of youth sports, but it has raised important questions about the psychological and social effects of athletic competition on children and adolescents. For example, issues pertaining to sport participation and moral development, self-esteem, achievement motivation, stress, aggression, interpersonal relationships, and gender-role socialization have been the subject of much scholarly and popular discourse. A search of the youth sport literature for empirical resolution of these issues, however, is apt to cause disappointment. Although the body of psychological research on youth sports is growing rapidly, the number of studies conducted on many topics remains small and the data have not always been consistent. Further, conceptual or methodological inadequacies have prevented some investigations from making significant contributions to our understanding of how and why athletic competition psychologically affects children. Gould (Note 1) has recently criticized the youth sport literature on the basis that many studies have failed to extend or help develop psychological theory, integrate past research, or ask questions of practi-
cal significance to youth sport personnel. Thus, although advances in knowledge have been made, most psychological issues in youth sports remain unanswered or are addressed by highly tentative findings.

A general overview of the youth sport literature is far beyond the scope of this article; the literature is too diffuse and is best surveyed in recent edited volumes (see Magill, Ash, & Smoll, 1978; Smoll & Smith, 1978). Rather, I will focus on two constructs that have generated distinct lines of research but that are interrelated in significant ways: psychological stress and participation motivation. Stress is examined because it is currently viewed by youth sport researchers and practitioners as one of the most important psychological issues confronting the field (Gould, Note 1) and, historically, has been the subject of much controversy. Before addressing this topic, it will be helpful to first analyze why children participate in organized sports.

**Participation Motivation**

Numerous psychological and sociological factors have been proposed to account for children’s involvement in sport (see Alderman, 1974; McPherson, 1978). At issue here, however, are young athletes’ perceived reasons for participation. Identifying these motives provides valuable information about the opportunities and outcomes that youngsters seek from sport. Such knowledge should be of importance not only to sport psychologists and physical educators, but to youth sport personnel who are interested in structuring the athletic environment to provide participants with a maximally rewarding experience.

Three recent youth sport studies, one conducted with male hockey players (Alderman & Wood, 1976), another with male and female swimmers (Gould, Feltz, Weiss, & Petlichkoff, Note 2), and the third with male and female athletes from 10 sports (Gill, Gross, & Hudleston, Note 3), suggest that children’s and adolescents’ participation motives can be grouped into six major categories: (a) **Affiliation**, which might be further divided into factors reflecting team atmosphere—to be on a team or experience team spirit—and friendship—to be with friends or make new friends, (b) **Skill Development**—to improve skills or learn new skills, become good at something, (c) **Excitement**—to experience action, challenge, and interesting novel activities, (d) **Success and Status**—to win, feel important, gain recognition, obtain rewards, (e) **Fitness**—to get exercise, stay in shape, and (f) **Energy Release**—to get rid of tension. It is difficult to rank these factors in terms of their perceived importance. Obviously, individual differences exist and the reasons that are most important to some young athletes are not necessarily the reasons that are paramount to others. The most general conclusion is that with the exception of energy release, all of these motives are viewed by most children as important determinants of their sport involvement. Although occasional gender differences have been found, it appears that the overall motive pattern of boys and girls is quite similar. Further, Gould et al. (Note 2) examined participation motives as a function of players’ age and years of sport experience and found few differences.

Three other points deserve mention. First, additional motive factors such as independence, power, aggression, and the influence of others (e.g., parents, parents)...
coaches) have been identified in one study or another, but they are relatively minor factors for most youth sport participants. Second, research clearly demonstrates that "having fun" (as an individual motive rather than as a general factor) is very important to almost every athlete. This raises the question, however, of what outcomes are perceived as making participation fun. Some findings (Gill et al., Note 3) indicate that fun is closely allied with excitement and action, but other results (Gould et al., Note 2) reveal no unique loading with any general factor. It seems likely that satisfying affiliation, skill development, success and status, and excitement needs will all contribute to players having fun.

Finally, there has been much debate about the emphasis in youth sports on winning, and it is interesting that these investigations have revealed success to be a significant participation motive. Data from other studies reinforce this point. For example, Scanlan and Passer (1980a, 1980b) found that 91% of male youth sport participants and 94% of female participants believed that winning was either very important or important; even higher percentages were obtained for ratings on the importance of performing well individually. In a survey of Little and Middle League Baseball players (Skubic, 1956), 87% of the respondents indicated that winning meant a great deal to them and 80% stated that they felt very bad when they played a poor game. In sum, young athletes themselves place considerable emphasis on success, although these findings do not address why (e.g., socialization, underlying social comparison or competence motives) or whether winning is overemphasized. It must be remembered, however, that children become and stay involved in organized sports for multiple reasons, and for many players, other objectives are as or even more important than success and status.

**Psychological Stress**

Stress can be viewed as a four-stage process (Passer, in press). First, the individual is confronted with a situation that involves some type of demand or opportunity. The person's appraisal of the situation represents the second stage, as the nature of the demand or opportunity, its importance, and available personal resources are evaluated. When discussing psychological stress, we are dealing with situations that are appraised as threatening in some way; that is, important values and goals are perceived as endangered (Lazarus, 1966). An unpleasant or aversive emotional response (e.g., anxiety, anger) represents the third stage of the process and has physiological and cognitive-attentional components. In other words, the perception of threat may elicit physiological arousal as well as self-preoccupational thoughts that divert the individual's attention from task-relevant cues. For example, the person may worry about the possibility of failure or become mired in thoughts of personal helplessness (Sarason, 1980). The fourth stage of the stress process focuses on the behavioral, psychological, and health-related consequences of the person's emotional response. We might ask how stress affects players' performance, their desire to continue participation, and their susceptibility to illness and injury. It should be noted that these personal consequences can modify the situation that initiated the stress process. Poor performance, for example, may cause the coach to lessen the demands placed on a player (e.g., movement to a less central position).

By definition, the fundamental demands of athletic competition are those calling for the demonstration, comparison, and evaluation of motor ability (Martens, 1975; Scanlan, 1978). We need only recall the previous discussion of players' participation motives to rec-
Table 1
Precompetition State Anxiety in 11 Organized Evaluative Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Sports</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Other Activities</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>19.52</td>
<td>Band solos</td>
<td>21.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>18.52</td>
<td>Band groups</td>
<td>17.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>17.49</td>
<td>School test</td>
<td>16.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>16.97</td>
<td>Physical education softball</td>
<td>14.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>16.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>15.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Simon and Martens, 1979.

Note. The scale range is 10 to 30, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety.

...provide only a brief overview here.

Situational Factors Related to Competitive Stress

It appears that individual sports, which maximize the social evaluation potential of competition, generally elicit higher levels of pre-event stress than team sports. Simon and Martens (1979) administered a self-report state anxiety inventory to 9- to 14-year-old boys minutes before they competed in one of seven nonschool organized sports. (Boys drawn from four other activities also were studied, and these findings will be addressed later.) Using covariance...
PARTICIPATION MOTIVES AND STRESS

Participation motives and stress 23

analysis to control for between-player differences in basal state anxiety (measured in a nonevaluative setting), Simon and Martens found that participants in wrestling and gymnastics had significantly higher precompetition state anxiety than players in football, hockey, and baseball (see Table 1). An earlier study by Griffin (1972), conducted with female athletes ranging from 12 to over 19 years of age, also suggested that individual sports elicited higher precompetition state anxiety than team sports. It would be interesting to conduct similar between-sport comparisons of athletes’ postcompetition stress, particularly among losing players.

The importance of the game and particular situation or activity within the game may affect players’ stress. Throughout an entire season of Little League Baseball, Lowe and McGrath (Note 4) recorded 10- to 12-year-old players’ pulse and respiration rates when each player was in the dugout, two turns from coming to bat. Players showed greater arousal as the criticality of the game increased (e.g., when opposing teams were closer in ranking, as fewer games remained in the season) and as the criticality of the situation within the game increased (e.g., when players were on base, when the score was close). Game criticality had a similar influence on players’ precompetition arousal. In a study by Hanson (1967), 10 Little League baseball players (9- to 12-year-olds) were each observed for a single game during which their heart rates were monitored by telemetry. Of all the activities players engaged in, their heart rates were highest while they were batting ($M = 166$ beats per minute). Thus, although Hanson did not measure situation criticality per se, batting is one of the most important and evaluation-laden activities in baseball, and these results bear some resemblance to Lowe and McGrath’s (Note 4).

The effects of success-failure on competitive stress have been examined in two recent studies (Scanlan & Passer, 1978, 1979b) conducted with 11- and 12-year-old boys and 10- to 12-year-old girls, respectively. In each study, a self-report state anxiety inventory was administered to players 30 minutes before and immediately after a youth soccer game. The findings revealed that winners were less anxious after the game than before the game, whereas losers evidenced a substantial increase in pre- to postgame anxiety (see Table 2). The closeness of the game did not influence the postgame anxiety of winners, but did affect losers’ anxiety (Scanlan & Passer, 1978); players who lost a very close game (1-goal margin) had higher postgame anxiety than those who lost either a moderately close game (2-goal margin) or a game that wasn’t close (3-goal margin). Finally, the data indicated that tying, like losing, was an aversive outcome. In most cases tying players evidenced a significant pre- to postgame increase in state anxiety, although this increase was not as large as that of losers. In some circumstances (e.g., losing the lead in the last minute of play against a bitter rival), however, a tie was found to be just as anxiety-inducing as a loss (Passer & Scanlan, 1980). Finally, it should be mentioned that several laboratory experiments have demonstrated not only that winning and losing affect children’s postcompetition state anxiety, but that ongoing success-failure outcomes (e.g., trailing or leading an opponent) affect players’ stress during competition (Gill & Martens, 1977; Martens & Gill, 1976).

Intrapersonal Factors Related to Competitive Stress

There is considerable between-child variation in stress responses to specific sport situations, and some work has been done to identify intrapersonal fac-
Table 2
Mean Pre- and Postgame State Anxiety in Two Studies of Youth Soccer Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Boys Study</th>
<th>Girls Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pregame</td>
<td>Postgame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win</td>
<td>30.35</td>
<td>26.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>28.86</td>
<td>37.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>30.52</td>
<td>35.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note. The scale range is 20 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety.

Factors that might account for these differences. One such factor is competitive trait anxiety, which represents a relatively stable disposition or tendency to perceive competitive situations as threatening and is thought to develop as a function of the person's past competitive experiences (Martens, 1977). In several field studies (Scanlan & Passer, 1978, 1979b) and laboratory experiments (Gill & Martens, 1977; Martens & Gill, 1976), children's competitive trait anxiety has been assessed by the Sport Competition Anxiety Test (Martens, 1977) a few weeks or months prior to an athletic or motor skill contest; the ability of this test to predict state anxiety responses to competition has then been examined. The findings consistently indicate that prior to competition, high competitive-trait-anxious children evidence more state anxiety than low competitive-trait-anxious children. A similar but slightly weaker relationship is obtained during competition, where it appears that competitive trait anxiety and ongoing success-failure outcomes are equally good predictors of children's state anxiety. After competition is over, state anxiety exhibits a weak relationship with competitive trait anxiety, but is strongly affected by the final success-failure outcome.

Scanlan and Passer (1978, 1979b) found that in addition to competitive trait anxiety, other intrapersonal factors were related to youth soccer players' stress. Lower preseason self-esteem and lower pregame expectancies of success were predictive of higher pregame (but not postgame) state anxiety. Postcompetition anxiety was related to players' postgame ratings of how much fun they had during the game (this was true among winners and losers, and boys and girls). Unfortunately, the direction of this relationship is not clear. Fun experienced during the game may help reduce postgame anxiety, children may report having had more fun because they are less anxious, or other factors (e.g., coaching behaviors) may be the true source of this relationship. Finally, little evidence at this time suggests that gender, age, and athletic ability are directly related to children's stress responses in specific competitive situations (see Passer, in press).
Some Perspectives on Stress in Youth Sports

Much of the debate in the youth sport literature has focused on whether organized athletic competition is too stressful for children. There are no direct or simple answers to this question, but some points merit consideration. First, in the study by Simon and Martens (1979) discussed earlier, the precompetition state anxiety of youth sport participants was compared to the pre-event state anxiety of boys participating in four other evaluative activities: an interclass physical education softball game, a school test, band group competition, and band solo competition. The results were extremely interesting (see Table 1). Overall, organized team sports were no more anxiety-inducing than physical education softball, a school test, or band group competition. Individual sports evoked more anxiety than a softball game or school test, but did not differ significantly from band group competition. All sports induced less anxiety than band solo competition. In another study, Skubic (1955) found that boys' physiological reactions to Little League Baseball games and physical education class softball matches were quite similar. It could be argued, of course, that some of the activities to which youth sports have been compared also are too stressful. For instance, there is some debate about whether band competition places too much stress on youngsters (Hunt, 1973). Nevertheless, current findings suggest that youth sports are no more stressful than several other achievement or evaluative activities in which children engage.

Another approach to discerning whether youth sports are too stressful might be to focus on the magnitude of players' stress responses to competition, but such attempts are fraught with problems. To illustrate, Simon and Martens (1979) note that the precompetition state anxiety mean for each of the seven youth sports in their study fell below the midpoint of the test scale (see Table 1); in fact, 82% of all subjects had such scores. Scanlan and Passer (1978, 1979b) found that boys' and girls' pregame state anxiety means were not only toward the low end of the scale (see Table 2), but also very similar to the means obtained from nongame, preseason assessments. To be sure, these results are positive in the sense that players' precompetition anxiety scores could have been much higher; unfortunately, there are no absolute standards by which to judge whether these scores constitute "little" or "too much" stress (Martens, 1978). Part of the issue here is that children who evidence the same operational level of stress (e.g., anxiety score, heart rate) may differ in how aversive they perceive that stress to be and may exhibit markedly different behavioral responses (e.g., performance may be impaired or facilitated). Moreover, a simple examination of sample means ignores between-player variation in test scores. For example, although Scanlan and Passer (1978, 1979b) found the preseason and pregame anxiety means for the entire sample to be similar, some children showed a preseason to pregame increase of as much as 20 points whereas others showed a corresponding decrease of up to 10 points. Finally, precompetition anxiety means may typically fall on the lower half of the scale, but what about children's postcompetition state anxiety? Data from two youth soccer studies (Scanlan & Passer, 1978, 1979b) indicate that losers' postgame anxiety means "only" fall around the midpoint of the scale, but the more important fact may be that, for most players, this represents a significant increase from their pregame anxiety (see Table 2). One wonders how high children's postcompetition scores might be after defeat in individual competition, where the social evaluation po-
tential may be greater than that in soccer or other team sports.

Limited research on young players' behavioral responses to competitive stress has been conducted and the findings provide additional fuel for the debate about stress in youth sports. Several investigations suggest that a number of children drop out of youth sports or avoid initial participation because of factors related to fear of failure, fear of negative evaluation, too much pressure, or conflict with coaches (McPherson, 1978; Orlick, 1972; Pierce, 1980). Some players report that concern about upcoming performance or poor past performance contributes to appetite or sleep loss (Skubic, 1956; State of Michigan, Note 5), and that various worries impair their performance (Pierce, 1980). Unfortunately, few findings are available on the frequency with which individual players experience these problems (see Passer, in press). Further, these studies reveal that many of the reasons why children discontinue or avoid participation in sports, and many of the causes of players' sleep loss, have little to do with competitive stress. Some findings suggest that the amount of stress-related sleep disruption in youth sports may be similar to that in nonsport recreational activities (State of Michigan, Note 5).

Where do these considerations leave us? Athletic competition does not appear to be an atypically stressful achievement activity and perhaps, as some researchers suggest, the problem of competitive stress in youth sports has been overemphasized by critics. But it is clear that competitive stress is a problem for some youth sport participants in certain situations, and a few young athletes have even sought professional psychological assistance to help cope with pressures related to their sport involvement (Ogilvie, 1979; Smith, 1980). As this review has indicated, the degree to which youth sports engender stress depends on a variety of situational and intrapersonal factors. Thus, increasing attention is being devoted by researchers to the development of intervention programs designed to structure the athletic situation to minimize stress (e.g., relationship skills training for coaches) or provide young athletes with personal skills to help cope with stress when it occurs (e.g., stress management training) (see Smith & Smoll, in press, for a review).

**Summary and Future Directions**

The research on children's competitive stress reviewed in this article suggests the following conclusions:

1. Individual sports induce more stress than team sports prior to competition.

2. Stress before and during competition is greater in games of higher criticality. During competition, stress increases as the general situation within the game or the specific activity performed becomes more critical.

3. Success-failure outcomes exert a strong influence on postcompetition stress: Winning decreases stress; losing and tying increase stress. Losing a very close game is the most stressful outcome.

4. Children with higher competitive trait anxiety, lower self-esteem, and lower expectancies of success experience greater precompetition stress. These intrapersonal factors have little influence on postcompetition stress.

5. A minority of players (it is difficult to be more specific) report that they experience adverse consequences from competitive stress including performance impairment and disruption of sleeping and eating routines. Stress-related factors contribute to some children's decision to drop out of organized sports or avoid initial participation.

6. Overall, it appears that youth sports elicit neither more nor less stress
than other evaluative activities in which children engage. The frequency of stress-induced problems in youth sports and other organized youth activities also may be similar.

Unfortunately, the body of knowledge on which these conclusions are based is limited in several important ways. First, the amount of youth sport research on stress remains relatively small, though recent trends provide hope of substantial growth in the next few years. Second, field studies examining children's stress during or after competition have focused on team sports such as baseball and soccer. If the social evaluation potential of individual sports is greater and more threatening, as between-sport comparisons of precompetition anxiety suggest, then it is essential that empirical attention be devoted to assessing children's mid- and postcompetition stress in individual sports. Although such research would likely be more difficult to conduct (e.g., greater time expenditure in obtaining large samples), the payoffs could be great. For example, because anticipated and actual success-failure outcomes are not confounded by the interaction of personal and team performance, the relationships between stress and various situational and intrapersonal factors may be more clearly evidenced. A third limitation is that most studies have been conducted with youngsters between the ages of 9 to 15, though older participants have sometimes been included. There are a number of good reasons for focusing on these children. Because participation in youth sports generally peaks around the ages of 11 to 13 (State of Michigan, Note 6), more players are available for study in this and adjacent age brackets, and the data therefore have maximum generalizability. Further, social comparison and competition are important processes to youngsters in this age range. Nevertheless, an increasing number of 4- through 8-year-olds (and even younger children) are becoming involved in organized sport programs and much of the debate regarding the psychological effects of youth sports has focused on children of elementary school age. Again, it may require more effort to conduct research with younger children (e.g., greater difficulty in administering self-report measures), but the need for such research is great. In sum, the six conclusions listed above should be viewed as propositions awaiting further examination rather than as definitive statements.

Much has been written about the central role that the behavior of coaches and parents can have in making youth sports a beneficial or detrimental experience for children. Several studies, in fact, indicate that supportive coaching behaviors may positively affect players' sport-related attitudes and general self-esteem (Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1978, 1979). Yet, to my knowledge, no research has examined the effects of coaching and parental behaviors on players' competitive stress. Anecdotal evidence suggests such a relationship, but many questions remain. To what degree is players' precompetition stress mediated by the expectation that if they should play poorly or lose, they will incur negative evaluation and punishment? How much do the comments and behavior of significant others affect children's stress during competition? To what extent can supportive or punitive behaviors attenuate or intensify players' anxiety after losing? Do coaching and parental behaviors differentially affect the stress responses of different types of children? (Some findings suggest, for example, that children with low self-esteem are the most sensitive to variations in supportive and punitive coaching behaviors; see Smith et al., 1978,
Thus, though we know that some players worry quite a bit about social evaluation (Pierce, 1980), data directly linking players' stress to the behavior of coaches and parents (and teammates) are lacking.

Another important issue concerns the etiology of competitive trait anxiety, but again, little evidence is available about why some children develop a chronic tendency to perceive athletic competition as threatening. Current work on the related construct of test anxiety, however, suggests that success-failure experiences in evaluative situations during preschool and early school years are major determinants of children's tendency to perceive academic test situations as threatening; presumably, high- as opposed to low-anxious children have a greater history of failure and concomitant negative interactions with adults (Dusek, 1980). If these factors are also developmental antecedents of competitive trait anxiety, we might expect that children with high competitive trait anxiety would exhibit considerable fear of failure and fear of negative evaluation. Available findings, unfortunately, provide little support for this supposition.

scanlan and Passer (1979a, 1981) found that youth soccer players' pregame expectancies of personal and team success were unrelated to their competitive trait anxiety. Martens (1977) correlated competitive trait anxiety with two inventories developed by Watson and Friend (1969), the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (measuring the tendency to avoid interaction with others), and the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (assessing general apprehension about and avoidance of evaluation from others, and the expectation that such evaluation will be negative); moderate correlations were obtained between competitive trait anxiety and these two scales in a sample of junior high school girls, but only weak correlations were found among males. Pierce (1980) found that youngsters' competitive trait anxiety was generally unrelated to what they worried most about in sports and to the intensity of their worries (as measured by self-reported negative behavioral consequences).

The inconclusiveness of these findings accentuates the need for further theorizing and research on the mediators of competitive trait anxiety. Such work could take at least two broad directions. First, there must be a more thorough examination of how high and low competitive-trait-anxious children perceive the athletic environment. To illustrate, even though these two groups may have similar game-specific performance expectancies, their general expectations of success in sports may differ. Additionally, because competitive trait anxiety is a sport-specific disposition, its relationship to fear and expectancy of negative evaluation in athletic situations should be assessed. A second focus for investigation would be the role that adult-child interactions play in the development of competitive trait anxiety. Several paradigms used in research on the socialization of achievement motivation (e.g., Crandall, Preston, & Rabson, 1960; Hermans, ter Laak, & Maes, 1972) could be adapted to this purpose. For instance, parent-child interactions could be observed while high and low competitive-trait-anxious children, respectively, participated in naturalistic or contrived competitive tasks. Another approach would be to determine whether changes in players' competitive trait anxiety over

---

A point of clarification is needed here. As noted earlier, higher pregame state anxiety is associated with both higher competitive trait anxiety and lower pregame success expectancies. Higher competitive-trait-anxious children, however, are not necessarily those with lower pregame expectancies.
the course of one or more sport seasons are systematically related to coaching or parental behaviors.

Further avenues for research on stress are suggested by the findings on children's participation motivation reviewed earlier in this article. Recall that needs related to affiliation, skill development, excitement, and fitness are perceived by young athletes to be just as (if not more) significant as needs pertaining to success. Recall as well that threat occurs when important goals and values are appraised as endangered (Lazarus, 1966). We might ask, then, to what extent these other (i.e., nonsuccess) needs and objectives become a source of stress among youth sport participants. For example, current evidence suggests that most children establish positive social relationships with their teammates and view their coaches as being knowledgeable and good teachers (Passer & Scanlan, Note 7; Smith et al., 1979; State of Michigan, Note 5). But even for these players, lack of attention or unclear skill instruction from the coach or intrateam conflict may generate feelings of being upset, angry, or anxious. For players who generally do not get along with teammates or who play for a poor coach, these aversive reactions may occur more frequently. How often do such instances occur? What consequences do they have? These issues may not be as salient to stress researchers (nor as problematic for players) as issues concerning success-failure and other performance-related demands, but they merit consideration. The relationship between stress and affiliative or social outcomes deserves particular attention because acceptance by others is a major source of self-esteem, and thus, rejection can be considerably ego-threatening (Coopersmith, 1967). Finally, the use of participation motivation as a moderator variable in stress research should be explored; that is, enhanced prediction of individual players' emotional responses to specific situations may be achieved by determining what goals and objectives are most important to them. Would losing a game or having low success expectancies before a game, for example, be most anxiety-inducing for those players involved in sports primarily because of success-related motives?

By necessity this discussion has excluded numerous topics relevant to the study of stress in youth sports. Issues on the conceptualization of stress and anxiety as multidimensional rather than unidimensional constructs, and methodological problems in assessing these variables, have received much attention (e.g., see Borkovec, Weerts, & Bernstein, 1977; Landers, 1980; Singer, 1980) but could not be addressed here. The use of stress-intervention programs in youth sports also could have been explicated (see Smith & Smoll, in press). Even with these omissions, however, the following points should be clear. First, youth sport research on stress has merely touched upon a small number of issues, few definitive answers can be given, and many other questions remain unexamined. Second, progress in addressing these questions will not be achieved by continued discourse on whether youth sports are generally good or bad for children. The issues involved are too complex. Rather, effort must be devoted to determining when, for whom, and why participation in organized sports can be stressful, to assessing the short- and long-term consequences of sport-related stress, and to developing theoretical models to guide such research.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. Gould, D. Sport psychology in the 1980's: Status, direction, and challenge in youth sports research. Paper presented at the annual meeting of


REFERENCES


51, 77-90.


SCANLAN, T.K., & Passer, M.W. Factors influencing the competitive performance expectancies of young female athletes. Journal of Sport Psychology, 1979, 1, 212-220. (a)

SCANLAN, T.K., & Passer, M.W. Sources of competitive stress in young female athletes. Journal of Sport Psychology, 1979, 1, 151-159. (b)


SCANLAN, T.K., & Passer, M.W. The attributional responses of young female athletes after winning, tying, and losing. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 1980, 51, 675-684. (b)

SCANLAN, T.K., & Passer, M.W. De-


