

## Sources of Enjoyment for Youth Sport Athletes

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The positive emotion of enjoyment has been shown to be an important ingredient to motivation in youth and elite sport. This article first summarizes the progress made to date in developing and measuring the enjoyment construct, and in understanding its sources and motivational consequences. Then a field study is presented that focuses on sources of enjoyment in a large youth sample ( $N=1,342$ ) that is diverse in age, ethnicity, and gender. Factor analytic and multiple regression techniques were used to determine categories and predictors of sport enjoyment. The significant sources of enjoyment for these participants were greater effort and mastery, positive team interactions and support, and positive coach support and satisfaction with the players' seasonal performance. These findings accounted for 47% of the variance in sport enjoyment and shed light on the predictors of this important affect for a diverse group of athletes.

The positive emotion of enjoyment has been presented as a cornerstone of motivation in sport (15). Because of its importance, one of our ongoing research objectives is to better understand the motivational role of enjoyment. To do so, (a) the construct requires constitutive and operational definition, and (b) the motivational consequences as well as the sources of sport enjoyment need to be thoroughly examined. First, progress on these issues is summarized below. Then this article focuses on our present research project examining sources of sport enjoyment in a large, ethnically diverse sample of female and male youth athletes.

### Summary of Progress in Sport Enjoyment Research

#### *The Sport Enjoyment Construct and Its Measurement*

There typically has been little attention in the literature to constitutively defining enjoyment. We define the enjoyment construct as a "positive affective response to the sport experience that reflects generalized feelings such as pleasure, liking,

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and fun'' (15, pp. 202-203). As currently conceptualized, it is a more differentiated construct than global positive affect, but more general than a specific emotion such as pride (13, 15). Consistent with much of the prior literature on youth participants, the terms enjoyment and fun are considered to be synonyms. Finally, while some researchers use the constructs of enjoyment and intrinsic motivation somewhat interchangeably (e.g., 7), Scanlan and Lewthwaite (14) contended that these two constructs need to be clearly distinguished. They viewed enjoyment as the broader, more inclusive construct with many diverse sources possible.

As the literature on enjoyment now shows (see 15 for review), the sources of this positive affect can be intrinsic (e.g., sensory/movement experiences, feeling fit), extrinsic (e.g., receiving tangible rewards or social recognition), achievement related (e.g., demonstrating autonomous or social achievement), or non-achievement related (e.g., affiliation, travel opportunities) in nature. In contrast, intrinsic motivation typically is thought to be derived from a limited set of achievement related factors. Principally, these are perceptions of competence and self-determination.

Enjoyment has been operationally defined in the literature in a variety of ways, and is characteristically measured by one or two items focused on enjoyment (1, 6, 18, 19), liking (1, 14), fun (10, 14, 20), or mood (4). Accordingly, the reliability of the measures can be problematic (11) and there is limited evidence to suggest that these various terms used to denote enjoyment are equivalent. We recently developed a 4-item scale to enhance the psychometric properties of our enjoyment measure (13, 16). This measure adds "happy" and "enjoy" items to an earlier, 2-item scale consisting of "liking" and "fun" (14). Factor analysis results presented later in this article, and elsewhere (16), demonstrate that these items form a single, reliable scale. Moreover, this finding indirectly strengthens past research by suggesting that the enjoyment, liking, and fun items used throughout the literature are likely similar terms. Hence their validity as measures of enjoyment is enhanced.

### ***Motivational Consequences of Enjoyment***

There continues to be mounting evidence demonstrating the important motivational consequences of sport enjoyment to both youth and elite athletes. The importance of enjoyment to sport motivation first surfaced over a decade ago in the literature on participation motivation and cessation. This descriptive research showed that "to have fun" was an important reason given by youth athletes for participating in sport (2, 21). Lack of enjoyment was a major attribution reported for dropping out of sport (2, 9, 22).

Recent findings are beginning to demonstrate the relationships between sport enjoyment and other important motivational variables. First, interview data with highly talented athletes indicate that sport enjoyment is positively related to perceptions of personal effort expenditure (17). When they were enjoying their sport, elite skaters reported an increased desire to exert effort and a feeling that they actually had expended greater effort. Second, initial evidence with the elite skaters (17) and youth athletes (14) shows sport enjoyment to be positively related to an increased desire for future participation in sport. This research has developed into a more formal line of work that integrates our study of enjoyment with the development of a model of sport commitment. We have defined sport

commitment as a “psychological construct representing the desire and resolve to continue sport participation” (13, p. 6). Our recent findings with youth athletes (3, 13) have shown enjoyment to be one of the most important predictors of this commitment.

### **Sources of Sport Enjoyment**

If enjoyment is as important to sport motivation as research increasingly suggests, then the logical question is, What makes sport enjoyable? This issue leads directly into investigating the sources of enjoyment. Although this research is still in the early stages of development, more work has focused on this question than most other topics related to enjoyment.

In examining sources of sport enjoyment, various researchers have focused on seasonal enjoyment (1, 14), enjoyment related to specific circumstances such as before or after a game (4, 12, 20), enjoyment experienced during the most competitive phase of one's sport career (17), and enjoyment of sport in general (6, 10, 18, 19). Despite these variations, there is increasing commonality in the sources of enjoyment derived from both quantitative and qualitative studies, and even between elite and youth performers. Moreover, there now is considerable support for the notion that the sources of enjoyment are many and diverse, reflecting the achievement/nonachievement and intrinsic/extrinsic aspects of sport (14, 18, 19). The results summarized below merely exemplify the points just made. The interested reader is referred to Scanlan and Simons (15) for a detailed literature review and to Scanlan et al. (17) for an extensive set of enjoyment sources.

Results across studies demonstrate that various achievement related factors such as perceived competence, effort, and skill mastery (6, 10, 14, 17, 20) are related positively to sport enjoyment. Other identified sources of enjoyment include elements of the activity itself such as movement sensations (6, 10, 17); social recognition/interactions/opportunities involving, for example, being known as a good athlete, making new friends, and being with friends (6, 17, 18, 19); and extrinsic rewards such as receiving trophies and awards (17, 18, 19).

An important avenue of research that has received limited attention to date pertains to the role played by parents and coaches as contributors to athletes' enjoyment. Scanlan and Lewthwaite (14) found that young male wrestlers experienced greater enjoyment when they perceived that (a) their parents and coach were satisfied with their season's performance, (b) their parents and coach were positively involved in their sport and had positive interactions with them, and (c) there were fewer negative interactions with their mothers. Brustad (1) found that lower perceived pressure from parents predicted greater enjoyment in young basketball players. Finally, elite skaters reported that a source of their enjoyment was bringing pleasure or pride to their family and coach through their performance and talent (17).

### **Study Focus**

Working to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sources of sport enjoyment, we have studied youth sport and elite performers. Moreover, we have used a multimethod approach employing both quantitative field studies and qualitative in-depth interviews. The field studies allow large samples to be surveyed, which

enhances the generalizability of the findings, while the interviews provide the rich, detailed information required for a greater depth of understanding. In the present study, we returned to the natural field setting of youth sport to survey the sources of enjoyment in a sample of the size and heterogeneity seldom found in the literature. Drawing on the extant survey and interview literature, we generated an extensive list of items to explore a broad range of enjoyment sources. Importantly, the participants in the present investigation were identical to those in one of the samples studied with respect to sport commitment (3). Therefore, this study examined the sources of enjoyment in a group of athletes whom we already knew had indicated that this positive affect was an important factor in their desire and resolve to continue their participation.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 1,342 young athletes (875 males and 467 females) involved in a non-school sponsored boys' tackle football league ( $n=553$ ), boys' and girls' high school soccer ( $n=616$ ), and a non-school sponsored girls' volleyball program ( $n=173$ ). The football players were 10 to 15 years of age ( $M=12.3$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ), the soccer players were 13 to 19 years old ( $M=15.7$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ), and the volleyball players were 10 to 15 years old ( $M=13.0$ ,  $SD=0.9$ ). All the athletes had considerable experience playing organized sport ( $M=6.5$ ,  $SD=2.5$ ). The amount of time athletes could have spent playing in their particular programs was partly dependent upon their age and ranged from 0 to 4 years. For the football players the time spent playing in their program was nearly 2 years ( $M=2.4$ ), for the high school soccer players it was about 1-1/2 years ( $M=1.4$ ), and for the volleyball players it was less than a year ( $M=0.5$ ). The sample was ethnically diverse, with 56% Caucasian and 44% ethnic minorities including African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and athletes with multiethnic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

### Survey

We had two main objectives in developing a set of items to measure the sources of sport enjoyment. First, the items had to be applicable across diverse youth-sport samples. Specifically, the items needed to be understood easily by athletes as young as 9 or 10 years of age, from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, and representing a wide range of competitive levels across a variety of sports. Second, as the sources of sport enjoyment items were one part of a larger survey, the item set needed to be small enough to facilitate survey administration while still reliably capturing the diversity of potential sources of sport enjoyment.

The first step in developing items to measure the sources of sport enjoyment was an extensive review of the sport enjoyment literature. From this review of the extant qualitative and quantitative research (1, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20), over 60 potential survey items related to sources of sport enjoyment were derived. These items focused on, for example, perceived ability, mastery, effort, social affiliation, social recognition, significant others, and flow. The 60 items were then evaluated

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<sup>1</sup>For greater detail of the breakdown for each sport, see Scanlan et al. (16).

by four judges (three sport psychologists and one social psychologist) in terms of their face validity and applicability to athletes of different ages, sports, and competitive levels. In addition, the four judges and four elementary and two junior high school teachers evaluated the ethnic appropriateness and the clarity of sentence structure, word usage, item format, and response foils.

Based on feedback from the teachers, the wording of some items was changed, and questions evaluated as ambiguous or difficult were dropped. Also adhered to were the teachers' recommendations of posing questions and using response formats in a manner similar to the standardized and regular tests students take in school. For example, responses to the questions were constructed using 5-point Likert scales with a word defining each number on the scale (e.g., 1 = none, 2 = a little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = pretty much, 5 = a lot).

To further establish the generalizability and appropriateness of the measures, the items were pilot tested with several groups of young athletes who were diverse in age, gender, competitive level, ethnicity, and sport type. Based on the results from pilot testing, several items were dropped. The criteria for dropping items included data from descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Cronbach alpha reliabilities (5), and conceptual considerations. The outcome of the evaluation process described above was that 33 of the original 60 items were retained. In addition, 4 items were developed that measured the dependent variable, seasonal sport enjoyment.

### **Procedures**

For the three sports surveyed, initial permission to contact particular teams was obtained from each organization's governing body. Individual coaches were then telephoned for permission to approach their athletes. Surveys were administered at least midway into a program's season to ensure that the study participants had some experience playing in their current program. One week prior to data collection, the players' parents were sent a letter detailing the nature of the project and their parental rights to decide whether their child should participate.

The athletes completed the questionnaire during regular practice sessions under the supervision of trained proctors. During this time, coaches and parents agreed to remain at a distance. Before starting, the athletes were informed of their rights and were asked to sign an assent form if they chose to participate in the study. Virtually all of the athletes agreed to participate. Instructions were given on completing the survey, and players were encouraged to ask the proctors for clarification if there was something they did not understand.

### **Results**

The three groups of athletes were combined to maximize sample size for data analyses. Several reasons, some of which have been documented in detail elsewhere (3), suggested that this approach was appropriate. First, the three sports were all team sports. Second, regardless of sport, all the teams participated at comparable levels of competition and had similar organizational structures. For example, the sports were similar in terms of their administrative rules and regulations, the number of games played, playoff schedules and structure, and level of athlete involvement. Third, separate exploratory factor analyses for the three

sports, gender, and age of the athletes (examined in two yearly increments) revealed similar factor structures for each subgroup.

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness) were used to examine individual item characteristics. These results indicated that all the items were within limits for normality (skewness  $\leq \pm 2$ ). However, there was some lack of response variability (standard deviations  $< 1.0$ ) for several items. For example, the items assessing the dependent variable (enjoy, happy, fun, liking) all had standard deviations of less than 1.0 and the means for these items were all greater than 4.4. The athletes' positive evaluations of their sport enjoyment is similar to past enjoyment research (14). This probably reflects the self-selective nature of youth sport and the positive way in which young athletes typically view their current involvement. As such, it is not unreasonable to see constrained variance and skewness of the enjoyment data.

### ***Factor Analysis of the Enjoyment Items***

Although items were developed to reflect sources of enjoyment previously identified in the literature (e.g., effort, ability), several of the proposed sources were new constructs. Exploratory factor analysis was viewed as the most appropriate method for determining the underlying structure of all the sources. Based on prior research, we expected that the sources of enjoyment would be correlated. Accordingly, principal factor analysis with oblique rotation was conducted.

The factor analysis results are presented in Table 1 and factor intercorrelations are reported in Table 2. Two criteria were employed in evaluating the resultant factor structure. First, the number of factors retained was based on interpretability and conceptual clarity. Second, only items loading above .30 were retained on a factor. Of the original 37 items, 6 failed to load (loadings  $< .30$ ) in the factor analysis and are not depicted in Table 1.

Six interpretable factors were extracted and labeled, respectively, Perceived Ability (e.g., Are you a good player? How good are your skills?), Sport Enjoyment (e.g., Do you have fun playing? Do you like playing?), Positive Team Interactions and Support (e.g., Have you made new friends? Do your teammates help you with your playing?), Positive Parental Involvement, Interactions, and Performance Satisfaction (e.g., Do your parents watch games? Do your parents help you with your playing?), Effort and Mastery (e.g., Have you tried hard? Have you learned new skills?), and Positive Coach Support and Satisfaction with Players' Seasonal Performance (e.g., Is your coach pleased/proud of the way you have played? Does your coach do or say things to make you feel good?). Cronbach's alpha coefficients (see Table 1) for all six factors were deemed acceptable for internal consistency of scales ( $\alpha \geq .60$ ). The six factors accounted for 44.8% of the variance in the enjoyment items.

### ***Multiple Regression Analysis***

A non-stepwise multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the significant predictors of sport enjoyment. Factor scores were calculated for each item and used in the multiple regression analysis. The regression model tested had the Sport Enjoyment factor as the dependent variable with the remaining

Table 1

**Reference Vector Structure for Factor Analysis Using an  
Oblique Rotation of Enjoyment Items**

Item	Factors and factor loadings					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Are you a good player?	.67	-.03	-.00	.02	.02	-.01
How good are your skills?	.64	-.06	.00	.08	.07	-.05
How good are you compared to other players?	.50	-.04	-.01	.01	-.03	.01
Are your teammates pleased with your playing?	.40	.07	.24	.11	-.04	.11
Do you feel fast or strong when you play?	.39	.01	.07	-.04	.22	-.00
Do you get into doing the skills?	.34	.08	.05	-.07	.18	-.00
Do you like playing?	-.04	.69	-.00	.02	.06	-.02
Do you enjoy playing?	-.03	.67	.03	-.00	.02	-.02
Do you have fun playing?	-.02	.67	.01	-.00	.01	.00
Are you happy playing?	-.07	.66	.02	-.03	.04	.03
How many of your teammates are your friends?	.11	.05	.48	-.09	-.01	-.06
Do your teammates help you with your playing?	-.02	.02	.47	.02	.01	.00
Have you spent time just having fun w/other players?	.11	.02	.47	-.02	-.06	-.03
Do teammates do/say things to make you feel good?	.12	.03	.47	.05	-.06	.05
Have you made new friends by playing?	-.07	-.04	.37	.03	.16	-.01
Have you gone places/done special things with team?	.01	.03	.34	.04	.01	.06
Do parents do/say things to make you feel good?	.02	.05	.01	.61	-.04	-.04
Do your parents come to watch you play?	.07	-.02	-.07	.55	.03	-.04
Do your parents help you with your playing?	-.05	-.11	.10	.51	.14	-.06
Are your parents proud of the way you have played?	.14	.10	-.05	.49	-.09	.09
Do you get to do things w/parents b/c of playing?	-.09	-.04	.09	.44	.12	.01
Are your parents pleased w/way you have played?	.14	.10	-.08	.40	-.04	.12
Do you work hard in practices?	.09	.05	-.09	.00	.51	-.04
Have you tried your hardest?	.16	.02	-.10	-.02	.48	.07
How much have you learned?	-.26	.00	.15	.09	.45	.07
Do you get into the action of the match?	.21	.01	.07	.01	.39	-.05
Do you play hard in your matches?	.26	.08	-.11	-.02	.37	.02
Have you improved your playing skills?	-.07	.00	.13	.03	.37	.11
Is your head coach pleased w/way you have played?	.13	.00	-.02	-.01	.01	.59
Is your head coach proud of way you have played?	.11	.00	-.03	-.02	.02	.58
Does coach do/say things to make you feel good?	-.11	.04	.13	.00	.07	.44
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	.81	.93	.68	.83	.65	.84
Eigenvalue	9.89	2.17	1.53	1.24	1.01	0.78
% Variance	26.7	5.9	4.1	3.3	2.7	2.1

*Notes.* All items measured on 5-point Likert scales with 1 = low, 5 = high ratings except for "How good are you compared to other players your age who have played for as long as you have?" which used a 7-point Likert scale.

Nonloading items omitted for clarity (see text for more detail).

**Table 2**  
**Factor Intercorrelations Derived From Principal Factor Analysis**

Factor	Coach	Parents	Effort / Mastery	Ability	Friends
Enjoyment	.515	.359	.449	.359	.463
Coach	—	.482	.338	.458	.521
Parents		—	.403	.458	.361
Effort / mastery			—	.273	.315
Ability				—	.358

five factors as the predictor variables. The regression model was significant  $F(5, 1336 = 236.55, p < .0001$  and accounted for 47% of the sport enjoyment variance. The significant predictors of sport enjoyment were Positive Team Interactions and Support ( $\beta = .22, p < .0001$ ), Positive Coach Support and Satisfaction with Players' Seasonal Performance ( $\beta = .30, p < .0001$ ), and Effort and Mastery ( $\beta = .32, p < .0001$ ). The more positive the team and coach environment, and the greater the perceived effort and mastery, the greater the seasonal enjoyment. The Positive Parental Involvement, Interactions, and Performance Satisfaction ( $\beta = -.03$ ) and Perceived Ability ( $\beta = .04$ ) factors were not significant predictors of sport enjoyment for the current sample.

## Discussion

Consistent with prior youth and elite sport findings (see 15 for a review), the results of this study showed that the perceived Effort and Mastery factor was a positive and significant predictor of sport enjoyment. This, and the related findings from the literature, make an important statement. What they address is a common misperception among some researchers, coaches, and parents that can reduce the motivational role of enjoyment by what we term "The Pizza Parlor Phenomenon" (15). This is the notion that enjoyment is what occurs at the pizza parlor *after* the hard work and skill learning are over for the day, week, or season. Repeatedly, this is *not* what youth and elite performers tell us! What they do keep reporting is that affiliation and special events certainly are fun, but so are the processes and accomplishments associated with achievement such as effort, learning, and mastery.

While this point may seem obvious, often it is not put to operational use. For researchers, operationalizing this information involves giving more focus to enjoyment in understanding the motivation to achieve. For coaches and parents, internalizing and using this information calls for greater attention to enjoyment as a motivating force throughout the sport experience, including its achievement aspects. For example, appropriately challenging practice sessions can indeed fuel the emotional fire of enjoyment.

We have learned a considerable amount in this study about the role of significant others in the experience of enjoyment. Of enormous benefit was our



being able to draw on prior interview data (17) to generate survey items so that a broader range and more detailed set of athlete perceptions could be measured. This clearly added to the richness of the item set reflected in the various factors, most particularly with respect to the Positive Team Interactions and Support factor. This 6-item factor captures team related enjoyment sources more completely and in greater detail than we have achieved in past youth sport research. Demonstrating their generalizability, the items loading on the factor are quite consistent with sources of enjoyment expressed by elite skaters.

As previously discussed, there is little information in the literature regarding the role of coaches and parents as contributors to sport enjoyment. Here we found the coach to have a significant role in the athletes' enjoyment, while this was not shown for the parents. Supporting and extending past research with youth (14) and elite athletes (17), positive coach support and satisfaction with the players' performance were predictive of greater enjoyment.

With respect to the nonsignificant parent finding, the answer might simply be that parental influence is more sample dependent. Whereas coaches and peers are an integral part of any organized sport setting, parental influences can be more peripheral. For instance, they can depend upon the type of involvement encouraged, required, or even permitted by the sport organization; or they can be dictated by conditions outside the realm of sport such as work or family structure. For example, in our work with young wrestlers and elite skaters, where parental factors were predictive of enjoyment, parental involvement was extensive to the point of being almost mandatory. Parents of wrestlers drove their sons all over the state to participate in almost weekly tournaments. Not surprisingly, 80% of the parents were present at the tournament where we collected data, and many were actively involved in running various aspects of the event. The overall parental role in the current project did not seem to be as intense, and this might have lessened their impact. In any event, this avenue of research has many intriguing issues to be pursued.

From a more global perspective, three things were accomplished in this study. First, we are another step closer to more fully understanding the sources of sport enjoyment. Here we learned more about enjoyment in a very large and heterogeneous sample of athletes, and particularly about perceptions of effort and mastery, as well as the role of significant others as contributors to the participants' enjoyment. Second, we made progress in developing multi-item measures of the enjoyment construct and several of its predictors. While the intention was not to create a sources-of-enjoyment scale, we have provided a large data base upon which to build in the future. Third, the data presented here integrate our ongoing research on the sources of enjoyment with our more recent work on sport commitment. Recall that the group of athletes studied here were the same participants who indicated that enjoyment was an important factor in their commitment. In this respect, the combined findings reflect a very large nomothetic case study. The outcome is a more complete picture of the motivational role of enjoyment gained by a tight linkage between the study of its sources and consequences.

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