

# The roads to the national team

## *on career pathways in Swedish elite sports*

*PG Fahlström, Per Gerrevall, Mats Glemne & Susanne Linnér*

Department of Sport Science  
Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden  
pergoran.fahlstrom@lnu.se

---

**Linnaeus University**

**Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017** 

### Disposition

- Background
  - Perspectives
  - Aims
  - Methods
- Results
  - Quantitative Snap shot
  - Different pathways
- Reflections – Implications
- Questions & Answers

---

**Linnaeus University**

**Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017** 

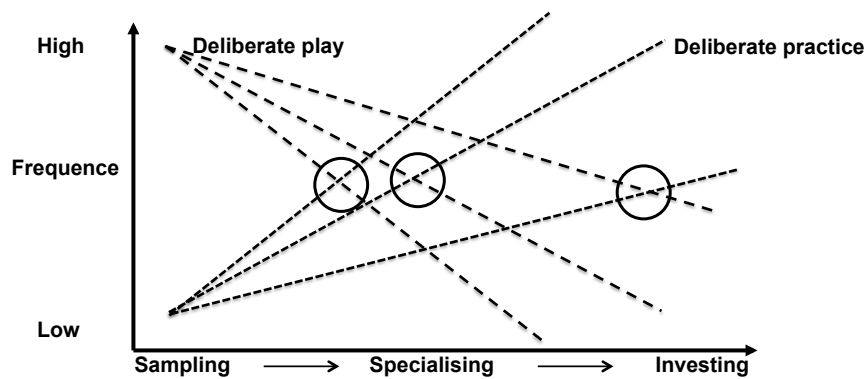
## Some concepts used

- **Specialising** – one sport/discipline
- **Sampling** – trying/scanning many sports -> specialising
- **Investing** – training for results

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## On-going discussion..



Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## Point of departure – *Inspiration*

Age	Probable outcomes	Probable outcomes	Probable outcomes	D R O P  O U T
17	Recreational participation	Elite performance	Elite performance	
16	Recreational years High amount of deliberate play	Investment years High amount of deliberate practice Low amount of deliberate play Focus on one sport	Early specialisation and investment High amount of deliberate practice	
15				
14	Low amount of deliberate practice	Specialising years Deliberate play and practice balanced Reduce involvement in several sports	Low amount of deliberate play	
13				
12	Sampling years High amount of deliberate play Low amount of deliberate practice Involvement in several sports	Focus on one sport	3. Elite performance through early specialisation	
11				
10				
9	Entry into sport			
8	1. Recreational participation through sampling			
7	3. Elite performance through sampling			
6				
5				
4				

(Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007)

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## Project aims

- ..studying different significant factors influencing the career pathways of Swedish top athletes.
- Includes areas as
  - demographic data,
  - family background,
  - work and education,
  - sport background,
  - debut age and
  - age of specialization and investing, different career steps

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## Methods – questionnaire

- Questionnaire to 349 Swedish national team athletes.
- 40 Sport federations.
- 328 athletes, 195 women and 133 men answered.
- Answering rate of 93.4 %.
- Scanned and processed through SPSS (version 22).

---

**Linnæus University**

**Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017** 

## Results

- A quantitative snap shot
- Pathways to the national team

---

**Linnæus University**

**Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017** 

## Sport involvement – development

	Other sports		Main sport					
	Start	Stop	Start	Coach	Reg train	Comp.	Spec.	Investing
<b>Total</b>	7.5	15.6	8.8	9.8	11.1	11.4	15.7	17.2
<b>Women</b>	7.6	16.0	8.3	9.4	10.7	11.0	15.6	17.1
<b>Men</b>	7.4	15.1	9.5	10.5	11.6	11.9	15.9	17.4
<b>Team sports</b>	7.3	15.8	7.3	8.3	9.1	9.6	14.2	16.0
<b>Individual sports</b>	7.6	14.7	9.6	10.8	12.4	12.5	16.5	18.0
<b>Early spec sports</b>	7.0	10.0	4.9	6.2	7.4	8.4	11.5	14.0

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

Different pathways...

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## 1) Early specialising and investing

*When I was 9 years I saw soccer for the first time and I was caught. My father was very much into soccer so I just went for soccer and from age 11 I was giving everything in training and matches. (Male: Soccer)*

*I was 10 years when I started my elite investment training at least 15 hours every week on ice + additional physical training. I just took two week off in summer and trained hard the rest of the time. (Female: Figure skating)*

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## 2) Sampling – later specialising and investing

*When you were small it was football and ice hockey and it was playful training. ...I was not very successful but then when a basketball group started I began to play when I was 14. And then I did very well. So then I dropped out of the other sports from the age of 15. (Male: Basketball)*

*When I was 5 I played football (soccer) with boys. Then I was active in many sports: football, athletics, handball, gymnastics and basketball, different activities every day, sometimes two sports a day..... I didn't make the final choice until I started upper secondary school. (Female: Basketball)*

*I started playing football and handball at the age of six, and then there has been golf, tennis, badminton, squash until I was around 16-17. Then I still played football, too, but after that there was nothing but handball. (Male: Handball)*

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

### 3) Short sampling – specialising and investing

*My dream was to become a football pro, but things didn't turn out that way. Then I started with cross-country skiing when I was 10-11 years old and then seriously with athletics when I was 11 and joined a club and started training. I had done pretty well in a few school competitions so I realized fairly early on that this was the sport where I could achieve something. (Male: Athletics)*

*I started with football when I was 6. Then I got into athletics when I was 8-9. And then things went very well and that created an interest, so I think that from the age of 10 this was my only sport. Because then there were so many hours of training per week so it was impossible to go on any longer with other sports. (Female: Athletics)*

---

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

### 4) Early specialising – but later investing

*I started canoeing when I was 12. Mostly because I had some friends who also had started. So we started with indoor training, weight training, gymnastics and skiing and so on in the winter. To begin with, canoe training may not have been so important, but we were such a large gang who had started at the same time. And there were many girls there of the same age, too. (Female: Canoeing)*

---


Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 





## Reflections – implications, tendencies

- Implications
  - Co-operation between sports -> Clubs, Federations..
  - Selections: timing, criteria etc.
  
- Tendencies
  - Academies – Earlier specialisation!?
  - Sports moving indoors...
  - Triangle -> Rectangle 

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 

## The roads to the national team

*on career pathways in Swedish elite sports*



*PG Fahlström, Per Gerrevall, Mats Glemne & Susanne Linnér*  
 Department of Sport Science  
 Linnæus University, Växjö, Sweden  
 pergoran.fahlstrom@lnu.se

Linnæus University

Sport Summit  
Aarhus 2017 