

## THE ROADS TO THE NATIONAL TEAM, ON CAREER PATHWAYS IN SWEDISH ELITE SPORTS

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### **Aim**

Through the DMSP model (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007) two specialization pathways towards elite performance are indicated: one early specialising way and one later specialising way. These specific trajectories for elite athlete's participation in sport have had dominating position in the talent development discourse. Recent studies (i.e. Storm et al, 2012 and Fahlström et al, 2014) have identified more variations regarding the pathways to elite level.

This paper focuses on debut age, age of sport choice and specialization among Swedish national top-level athletes

### **Method**

The questionnaire containing quantitative and open questions, was distributed to 349 Swedish top-athletes representing 40 Sport federations. 328 athletes, 195 women and 133 men returned their questionnaires giving an answering rate of almost 94 %.

### **Results**

These results indicate that the sport specialisation patterns are unique and varied and that the sport specialization pathways are more complicated than often acknowledged. Results show five different types of trajectories, (1) Early specialisation and early investing, (2) Early specialisation and later investing, (3) Later specialisation, sampling and later investing, (4) Shorter sampling followed by specialisation and investing and (5) Later specialisation, sampling and later investing but with early sport choice.

### **Conclusions**

The findings in this study indicate that the talent programs and talent identification systems have to be more flexible to match the different individual pathways to elite level. The standardized talent programs and the traditional talent "stairways" are discussed since they run the risk of missing talents who don't seem to fit expected sport activity patterns.

### **References:**

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