



Understanding Parent Stressors and Coping Experiences in Elite Sports Contexts

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The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to identify the stressors parents encounter when supporting their children performing within elite sports contexts. Second, to understand how parents cope with the stressors they encounter. A two-stage design was used. First, 1,299 parents (fathers = 529, mothers = 761, stepfathers = 8, legal guardian = 1, and parent dyads = 187) of adolescent athletes completed an open-ended survey to identify stressors associated with their child's sports involvement. Next, 16 parents of adolescent athletes participated in semi-structured interviews. Data from both stages were analyzed using hierarchical content analysis. Stage 1 results indicated that parents encountered a variety of organizational, developmental, competitive, and parental personal stressors, including time, financial, logistical, health, and education concerns. Stage 2 results highlighted that parents use numerous coping approaches to manage their experiences, including detaching from sport (e.g., sharing parental responsibilities and child's ability to cope), information seeking (e.g., information seeking in their current environment and drawing on past experiences), managing emotional reactions (e.g., emotional release strategies), avoidance (e.g., parent or child ignoring the situation), taking control (e.g., changing their own behaviors or others making changes), and parents providing support to their child (e.g., social support and being present). Overall, findings point to the importance of ensuring that interventions with parents, as well as the practices of sports organizations, need to expand account for a broader range of parental stressors and suggested coping strategies.

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Parents are highly important in an athlete's development. To help athletes achieve their potential, parents provide financial, organizational, and emotional support (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, being a parent of a youth

athlete can be challenging (Harwood & Knight, 2015), and not all parents engage in appropriate or optimal ways (Knight & Holt, 2014). Unfortunately, certain parental behaviors (e.g., pressure and directive behaviors) are associated with

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unfavorable outcomes for athletes including increased precompetitive anxiety, and reduced enjoyment and perceived competence (Amado, Sánchez-Oliva, González-Ponce, Pulido-González, & Sánchez-Miguel, 2015; Boiché, Guillet-Descas, Bois, & Sarrazin, 2011; Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009).

It has been suggested that the demonstration of inappropriate parental behaviors may increase if parents are unable to effectively cope with the stressors they encounter in elite sports contexts (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). That is, if parents find themselves in situations that increase their feelings of strain, they may be more likely to engage in negative or punitive manners (Belsky, 1984). Thus, it has been suggested that understanding parents' stress experiences in sport is important (Harwood & Knight, 2015). In line with this call to understand parents' stress experiences, the current study sought to understanding the stress experiences of parents of French elite youth athletes, based on the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1999).

Within this model, the term *stressor* refers an environmental demand encountered by individuals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). **The threatening nature of the stressor arises from a perceived imbalance between environmental demands and an individual's coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).** Coping includes the conscious attempts individuals make to manage situations that they perceive as stressful or which worries them. To evaluate the threat, an individual uses two types of appraisals: primary and secondary (Lazarus, 1999). **During the primary appraisal, the individual unearths the personal significance of a demand about his or her own beliefs and values.** For instance, one parent could appraise their child living at a training center from Monday to Friday with a fear that they are not able to support their child during moments of doubts. However, another parent may appraise the same situation as an excellent opportunity for their child to develop independence. **Secondary appraisal is related to an individual's exploration of their ability to cope with stressors (Lazarus, 1999).** For example, in the above example, one parent might think that he or she has the resources to cope with their child living away from the family, whereas the other may not.

Within the sport parenting literature, research examining stressors has recently increased but remains relatively limited (Burgess, Knight, &

Mellalieu, 2016; Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b). Taken together, the findings of these studies indicate that British parents with children involved in tennis and gymnastics experience a large range of stressors (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Such stressors include competitive stressors, which encompass demands related to their child's participation in competitions, including match preparation, issues with opponents, and their child's own performance and reaction; organizational stressors, which are demands associated with day-to-day logistics, personal investment, and the system/organization in which parents operate, including the financial impact of sport upon the family, transporting their child to training and competition, and managing injuries; and developmental stressors, which consist of demands associated with their child's future sporting, educational, and personal development.

In contrast to studies of stressors, fewer studies have focused on the coping strategies used by parents (Hayward, Knight, & Mellalieu, 2017). Coping is realized through ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage the demands appraised as threatening (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Parents of elite gymnasts and swimmers have reported using several strategies to cope with the stressors they encounter. These coping strategies have been broadly categorized into four themes: detaching from sport, normalizing experiences, a willingness to learn, and managing emotional reactions. These strategies appear to vary according to the stressor (e.g., time demands or watching their children compete), the situation (e.g., competitive stressors encountered by parents before, during, or following their children's performances), and the temporal period (e.g., at competition or training) (Burgess et al., 2016; Hayward et al., 2017).

Although literature has begun to uncover parental stressors in sport, there is a need for further research in this area for three reasons. First, research has focused exclusively on British parents, which may not be representative of the experiences of parents from other countries who have different structures, organizations, and cultural expectations of sport and parenting. Second, parental stressor research has only been conducted in four sports (and only two when considering coping literature). Of these four sports, three of them are individual sports (e.g.,

tennis, gymnastics, and swimming) which places specific demands on parents (e.g., registering and organizing children's involvement in competitions), that may not be shared in team/other sports. Consequently, further research examining sport parenting experiences in a range of sports and countries is needed (Dorsch, Vierimaa, & Plucinek, 2019).

Third, and finally, it has been suggested that sport parenting expertise includes the ability of parents to develop and deploy appropriate coping strategies to manage stressors they encounter in sports contexts (Harwood & Knight, 2015). If parents perceive a situation as non-threatening to their values or beliefs (i.e., primary appraisal) and/or feel able to manage stressors that are causing them concern, the situation is less likely to result in feelings of strain, and parents may be more likely to display positive behaviors (e.g., support, praise, and understanding; Knight, Holt, & Tamminen, 2009). Subsequently, parents effective management and evaluation of situations could be of benefit to athletes, because behaviors such as praise and understanding are positively associated with enjoyment and intrinsic motivation (Boiché et al., 2011; Sánchez-Miguel, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva, Amado, & García-Calvo, 2013). Given the potential benefits that may arise if parents' can cope with the stressors or demands they encounter, further examination of parents' experiences of stressors and coping appears warranted. To this end, the purpose of the current study was twofold. First, to identify the stressors parents encounter when supporting their children involved in intensive training centers in France. Second, to understand how parents cope with the stressors they encounter.

Method

Methodological and Philosophical Underpinning

This study adopted a qualitative description methodology (Sandelowski, 2010). This was considered the most appropriate methodology because the researcher can stay close to the data and to the surface meaning of words and events, emphasizing description over interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). Further, qualitative descriptive studies offer a comprehensive summary of an experience in the everyday terms of

those who experience it (Sandelowski, 2000), which was deemed important when seeking to understand the range of parental experiences. Qualitative description is also useful when seeking to conduct applied research, which will be used by practitioners (e.g., coaches, organizations) and the aim of this study was to produce findings that could easily understood and applied by a range of sports organizations, coaches, and clubs across France.

The study was approached from a postpositivist paradigm. In approaching this study from a postpositivist perspective, we sought to gain an insight into the parent-participants' realities, which were independent of our own thinking. However, we recognize that objectivity is fallible and that our past experiences, theories, and research will influence our interpretations. In line with a postpositivist and qualitative descriptive approach, we sought to draw on a broad range of experiences, gained through different data collection methods, to increase the chance of gaining greater insights into parents' experiences.

Participants

Stage I. Overall, 1,299 parents participated in this stage. The sample comprised 529 fathers, eight stepfathers, 761 mothers, and one legal guardian. The parents' marital status was as follows: married (73%), divorced (8%), separated (6%), civil partnership (5%), domestic partnership (5%), single (2%), and widower (1%). With regard to their occupations, parents were classified as follows: intermediate occupation (33%), middle manager and higher intellectual professions/liberal profession (30%), employee/agent (19%), craftperson/shopkeeper/head of a company (8%), worker/driver (5%), unemployed (3%), farmer (1%), and retired (1%; Institut National de la Statistique et des Études économiques, 2003). In most cases just one parent per family unit participated; however, there were 187 parent dyads (i.e., both parents) included. Participants represented 1,108 semi and competitive-elite athletes ($n_{\text{female}} = 382$, 34%; $M_{\text{age}} = 16.01$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.53$; Swann, Moran, & Piggott, 2015) who attended intensive training centers. In France, the federations select the "best" athletes to join intensive training centers. Each sport federation selects athletes based on athletic performance and potential, academic

achievement, and their overall behavior. Depending on the center, athletes either live at the center from Monday to Friday (returning home or to competitions at the weekend) or they live there full-time. The athletes trained for an average of 15.01 hr per week ($SD = 5.34$) and had been involved in competitive sports for an average of 8.33 years ($SD = 2.89$). They were from 34 different sports, both individual (46%) and team sports (54%),¹ and competed at either a national (78%) or international level (22%).

Stage II. Sixteen parents (nine mothers and seven fathers) from Stage 1 participated in this stage. Fourteen were married, one was in a civil partnership, and one was single. Eight parents were middle managers or had a higher intellectual or liberal profession, six worked in intermediate occupations, one was a worker, and one was retired (*Institut National de la Statistique et des Études économiques*, 2003). In most cases, just one parent per family unit was included; however, the mother and father of one athlete participated. Participants represented 15 semi and competitive-elite athletes (Swann et al., 2015; $n_{\text{females}} = 6$; $M_{\text{age}} = 16.70$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.13$) attending intensive training centers. The athletes trained for an average of 13.07 hr per week ($SD = 3.01$) and had been involved in competitive sports for an average of 6.73 years ($SD = 3.24$). They participated in individual ($n = 4$; badminton, cycling, and judo) and team sports ($n = 11$; basketball, handball, rugby, and volleyball), and all competed at a national level.

Procedure

Institutional research ethics board approval was obtained and then the study proceeded in two stages. For Stage 1, the researchers contacted sport federations to introduce the study and inquire into the possibility of using their center for data collection. If the federation agreed, they sent a study invitation to coaches, who then forwarded the invitation to parents of athletes at their center. The invitation included a link to an online survey. Participation was voluntary and participants provided informed consent at the start of the survey.

For Stage 2, following stratified random sampling, the lead researcher contacted participants via e-mail from the list of participants who took part in Stage 1. Interested participants (response rate = 65%) voluntarily contacted the lead re-

searcher who subsequently arranged a suitable time and location to conduct the individual interview. Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide an opportunity for participants to provide detailed information on the topic. Through semi-structured interviews, it was perceived that the participants would have an opportunity to share their interpretation of their own experience in semi- and competitive-elite sports contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Data Collection

Stage I. Given the lack of previous research on this topic in France, it was important not to restrict participants to a preselected list of stressors. Rather, it was deemed necessary to allow participants to describe stressors and their experience of these stressors in their own words. Thus, an open-ended survey was selected. Following a request for certain demographic information, the survey progressed to three questions that explored the primary appraisal of stressors encountered by parents. First, parents described stressors associated with their child's sport involvement that they found easy to manage. Next, they described stressors associated with their child's sport involvement that they found difficult to manage. Finally, parents detailed parts of their child's sport that caused them concern. After each question, there was a large space for parents to answer the questions in as much detail as possible.

Stage II. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based upon results of Stage 1 and previous research conducted in this area (Burgess et al., 2016). The guide provided the interviewer with an order of questions to ask, but the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for changes in the order of questions if required (Silverman, 2013). The two lead authors conducted all individual interviews in a private room in either the participants' home or the researchers' university. The interviews lasted between 19 and 57 min ($M = 29.44$ min, $SD = 11.55$ min). Each interview began with

¹ The 34 different sports were as follows: American football, badminton, baseball, basketball, bowling, canoeing, climbing, cycling, fencing, field hockey, football, golf, gymnastics, handball, ice hockey, judo, kayaking, modern pentathlon, orienteering, rowing, rugby, sailing, skiing, softball, squash, surfing, swimming, table tennis, target shooting, tennis, track and field, triathlon, volleyball, and wrestling.

introductory questions to establish rapport with the parents. Then, transition questions were used to lead the parents to the two main themes of the interview: (a) to detail the stressors participants had mentioned in Stage 1 (e.g., “In survey, you mentioned that [name of each sub-theme] worries you, could worry you, or are difficult to manage. Do you agree with this summary?”) and (b) to identify the strategies used to cope with each of stressor mentioned (e.g., “How do you cope with this particular stressor?”). Finally, parents answered summary questions (e.g., “Overall, what are the main strategies you adopt to cope with each of these stressors?”) and were provided with an opportunity to make any final comments.

Data Analysis

Data from Stages 1 and 2 were analyzed through content analysis (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994) using the NVivo 11 software to facilitate data organization. For Stage 1, the first question was analyzed to identify stressors perceived as being easy to manage, whereas the following two questions were analyzed to identify stressors perceived as being difficult to manage and causing concern about their child’s sport involvement. To avoid duplication, answers to question two and three were grouped together. Thus, an event mentioned in both Questions 2 and 3 was recorded only once. The process of content analysis then occurred.

First, meaning units were created by identifying and paraphrasing the stressors and the coping experiences reported by parents in their survey responses. A frequency count of each meaning unit was conducted for later comparisons (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). Each independent mention of meaning units from a participant was only counted once. Each meaning unit was then coded into a first-order thematic category that essentially represented a cluster of similar stressors or coping experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This analytical process progressed to a higher thematic level (i.e., higher order themes) culminating in a final set of general dimensions that represented the phenomena of stressors and coping experiences.

After the competition of the analysis of Stage 1 data, Stage 2 interviews were conducted. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were as-

signed to each participant to ensure confidentiality throughout the analysis process. Interviews were then analyzed following the same process as the surveys.

Overall, the analysis of both the surveys and the interviews was abductive (Mayan, 2016). Initially the data were coded deductively using predetermined categories identified in previous research. Next, data that did not fit into predetermined categories were analyzed inductively, as the data and their interpretation guided researchers toward additional themes and codes.

Methodological Rigor

In line with recent suggestions, a relativist (rather than criterion) approach to enhancing and assessing methodological rigor was adopted in this study (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Thus, steps deemed appropriate for qualitative descriptive studies were used throughout. First, the research team ensured that appropriate individuals were participating in the study based on the research aims (Cresswell, 2007). Second, pilot interviews were conducted prior to Stage 2 data collection, which allowed the two-lead researchers to check the coherency of the interview guide and ensure the questions would fully address the aims of the study. Third, depth of description and understanding of the cases was facilitated by the same two interviewers conducting all the interviews, ensuring consistency in the delivery of interview questions. Moreover, the experience of the interviewers as an athlete and coach helped in establishing rapport with study participants. Such rapport was important to increase the potential for participants to share information and ensure the credibility (Tracy, 2010). The lead researcher conducted data analysis, but data were also subjected to a prolonged and rigorous peer review whereby the lead researcher engaged in discussion with the second researcher (i.e., critical friends) to provide transparency (Tracy, 2010). Finally, to demonstrate coherence, we sought continuity between the philosophical underpinning of the study, the research question, the data collection method, data analysis procedures, and the presentation of the results (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Results

Analysis of each survey question resulted in the identification of four general dimensions of parental stressors: organizational, developmental, competitive, and parent-personal stressors. Interview data indicated that parents encountered stressors across each of these categories and reported a wide range of coping experiences to manage these. Parents indicated that they often used several coping approaches to manage one stressor and/or managed different stressors with one coping strategy. In the following sections, a brief summary of the findings from Stage 1 are provided followed by a detailed examination of the Stage 2 data because stressors are enumerated with examples in [online supplementary materials](#).

Stressors

The analysis resulted in the identification of four general dimensions of parental stressors: organizational, developmental, competitive, and parent-personal. Within each dimension, following the primary appraisal, some stressors were perceived as easy to manage, whereas others were perceived as difficult to manage. Overall, participants listed substantially more stressors that were difficult to manage compared with easy to manage (a ratio of three to one). The vast majority of parents provided answers to all three questions; however 16 parents did not answer the first question and one parent did not answer the second and third question.

Organizational stressors. Organizational stressors involved demands related to health (e.g., doping and injuries), sport systems (e.g., scheduling, quality of training and coach, and communication), logistics (e.g., domestic tasks and organization), and personal investments (e.g., time and finance). Overall, parents cited that a type of organizational stressors was easy to manage 734 times and difficult to manage 2,028 times. For more details, see [Table S1](#) in the online supplementary materials.

Developmental stressors. Developmental stressors consisted of demands arising in relation to their child's future, their holistic development, engagement in education, motivation, and their social interactions. Parents identified a type of developmental stressors as difficult to manage 906 times whereas they only reported a

type of developmental stressor as easy to manage 366 times. For more details, see [Table S2](#) in the online supplementary materials.

Competitive stressors. Competitive stressors encompassed emotional and outcome demands associated with competitions. Competitive stressors were reported 451 times by parents as being difficult to manage and a cause of concern, whereas they were only identified 88 times as being easy to manage. For more details, see [Table S3](#) in the online supplementary materials.

Parent-personal stressors. Parent-personal stressors involved demands related to parents' distance from their child (i.e., their child living away from home), their provision of support, and their interactions with other parents. This dimension was the least reported, with parents reporting that parent-personal stressors were easy to manage 147 times, and difficult to manage 341 times. For more details, see [Table S4](#) in the online supplementary materials.

Coping Experiences

Parents reported using several experiences to cope with the different stressors they encountered in elite sport contexts. These coping experiences were classified into six dimensions: (a) detaching from sport, (b) information seeking, (c) managing emotional reactions, (d) avoidance, (e) taking control, and (f) and parents providing support. Parents used strategies that they themselves had put in place or that their child or sport center implemented. The link between stressors encountered by the parents and their coping experiences appear in [Table 1](#) for detaching from sport, [Table 2](#) for information seeking, [Table 3](#) for managing emotional reactions, [Table 4](#) for avoidance, [Table 5](#) for taking control, and in [Table 6](#) for parents providing support.

Detaching from sport. Parents detached from their child's sport to cope with the stressors they encountered. Specifically, they attempted to take a step back from their child's sport experience to minimize the impact it may have on them. Parents' attempts to detach from their child's sport was facilitated by (a) sharing parental responsibilities and (b) child's own ability to cope.

Sharing parental responsibilities. One of the main strategies parents used to cope with

Table 1
General Dimension 1: Detaching From Sport

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Sharing parental responsibilities</i>			
Relying on the expertise of professionals outside sport center	Using another doctor	Organizational	Medical follow-up, General health, Quality of training and coach
	Organizing private lessons during weekend	Developmental	Engagement in education
	Trusting sport center to prevent doping	Organizational	Time, Quality of training and coach, Lack of information, Doping, Logistics, Organization of sport organizations
	Relying on the expertise of teaching staff	Developmental	Engagement in education, Holistic development
Working with other parents	Relying on the expertise of medical staff	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
	Sharing trips with other parents	Parent-personal	Appropriate support, Removal from the family
	Creating a network between parents	Organizational	Time, Organization of sport organizations
	Trusting on teammates support	Organizational	Organization of competition and training
Relying on the support of friends' child	Trusting on child's relationships with their teammates	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
	Trusting on the expertise of brother	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
Relying on the expertise of other family members		Organizational	Quality of training and coach
<i>Child ability to cope</i>			
Trust the child	Trusting on child to manage their adult life	Organizational	Holistic development, Engagement in education
Child has autonomy	Trusting on child's school autonomy	Developmental	Engagement in education
	Trusting on child's autonomy to shop	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
Repeat a grade		Organizational	Integration with life tasks, Time, Communication, Quality of training and coach, Logistics
	Child repeat their tenth grade	Developmental	Child's future, Engagement in education
Child managing own demands	Realizing that child manage the situation	Developmental	Engagement in education, Social and personal development
	Realizing that child find solution	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
	Realizing that child has accepted	Organizational	Logistics, Child tired, Removal from the family

the stressors was relying on the expertise of professionals from their child's sport center. For example, one mother relied on the expertise of the center's dietician to manage her nutrition concerns. However, if there was not

access to support or appropriate expertise available at the sport center, parents sought help from other sources. For instance, one mother explained that she worked with a psychologist from outside of the sport center

Table 2
General Dimension 2: Information Seeking

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Information seeking in their current environment</i>			
Seeking information from sport center and school	Following child's grades on school application	Developmental	Child's future, Engagement in education
	Going talk with medical staff	Organizational	Communication of sport organizations
Obtaining information from child	Asking information from their daughter	Organizational	Communication of sport organizations
Obtaining information from other parents	Sharing information with other parents	Developmental	Child's future
	Seeking advice from old parents	Organizational	Communication of sport organizations
Seeking information from literature and internet	Searching on ministry website	Organizational	Communication of sport organizations
	Deepen their knowledge	Developmental	Child's future
<i>Drawing on past experiences</i>	Deepen their knowledge	Parent-personal	Appropriate support
	Using their professional knowledge	Organizational	Quality of training and coach, Communication of sport organizations, Integration with life tasks, Medical follow-up
	Using their sport knowledge	Competitive	Opponent, Competitive outcomes
	Giving their points of view	Developmental	Holistic development
	Completing a coaching diploma	Parent-personal	Appropriate support

because, as she said, “at some point, when I knew she was not well, I had to take her to a psychologist in town.” Less frequently, parents also worked with other parents or relied on the expertise of other family members to cope with organizational and competitive demands, such as transporting their child to

training and competitions or managing poorly organized competitions. Parents also relied on the hospitality of their child’s friends, which helped them to manage stressors related to their child living away from the family home. **Child’s ability to cope.** Parents relied on their child’s own abilities to cope in different

Table 3
General Dimension 3: Managing Emotional Reactions

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Emotional release</i>			
Normalizing parent’s experience	Getting use to have little information from sport organization	Organizational	Time, Communication of sport organizations, Selection
	Accepting that their child lives away	Parent-personal	Removal from the family
Using emotional control strategies	Not showing emotion during competition	Competitive	Watching competition
	Crying the absence of their child	Parent-personal	Removal from the family

Table 4

General Dimension 4: Avoidance

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Avoidance strategies used by parents</i>			
Staying away from spouse at competition	Staying away from spouse at competition	Competitive	Emotion management
Child miss lessons	Missing lessons when child has competition	Developmental	Engagement in education
Don't go at competition	Don't go at competition with their spouse	Competitive	Emotion management
<i>Avoidance strategies used by the child</i>			
Encouraging child to stop sport center	Finding agreement to stop sport center	Organizational	Quality of training and coach
Encouraging child to disconnect from sport	Encouraging child to cut with sport a couple of days	Organizational	Quality of training and coach

settings and under different demands to facilitate their own abilities to detach from the sport. For instance, several parents recognized that their child's independence helped

them to manage or reduce their own stressors, as one mother explained in relation to managing the time stressors associated with competitions:

Table 5

General Dimension 5: Taking Control

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Adaptation from other</i>			
Requesting change from child	Telling their child what to do	Organizational	Lack of information, Doping, Child tired
	Pushing their child to keep fit	Developmental	Holistic development
Requesting change from school or sport center-related staff	Requesting school staff to change their behavior	Parental personal	Removal from the family
		Organizational	Lack of information, Quality of training and coach, Doping, Medical follow-up, Time
	Requesting private lessons at sport center	Developmental	Athletes interactions
Seeking financial assistance	Asking financial assistance for child's sports project	Developmental	Engagement in education
Requesting change from spouse	Asking her husband to be quiet	Organizational	Finances
<i>Adaptation by parents</i>			
Family and professional organization	Organizing family life differently	Competitive	Emotion management
	Taking a day off work	Organizational	Time, Organization of sport organizations, Logistics
Parents find solution	Readjusting child's schedule to have time for other activities	Organizational	Organization of competition and training
	Buying two additional kimonos	Developmental	Holistic development
		Parent-personal	Removal from the family
	Renting a flat for their child alone	Organizational	Time, Logistic, Communication of sport organizations, Logistics, Finances, Scheduling, Integration with life tasks,
	Buying a car to their child	Developmental	Engagement in education
		Parent-personal	Removal from the family

Table 6
General Dimension 6: Parents Providing Support

Overarching coping experience	Example of coping experience	Category of stressor	Stressor
<i>Social support</i> Parents providing support to their child	Being present to help their child	Organizational	Selection, Medical follow-up, Injuries, Communication of sport organizations, Quality of training and coach
	Praising their child	Developmental Developmental	Athletes interactions Child's future, Holistic development, Engagement in education
	Finding the positive Sharing child's enthusiasm for their sport	Competitive Parent-personal	Competition outcomes Removal from the family
<i>Being present</i> Stay connected	Using competitions to go on family holidays	Developmental	Engagement in education, Holistic development
	Doing trips Friday and Sunday nights	Parent-personal Organizational	Removal from the family Selection
	Realizing kilometers to see their child on the weekends	Parent-personal	Removal from the family

He knew enough people to manage his schedule and accommodation/transport to competitions. He finds it easy to develop relationships; he is doing a lot to relieve us. He is contacting the members of the association and asking if he can have a lift.

Similarly, several parents indicated that their ability to manage organizational stressors was due to their child's ability to find their own accommodation, as one father explained, "She regularly asks her teammates to accommodate her for the weekend. She can be accommodated by her teammates and school friends." Finally, parents also explained that the trusting relationship they had with their child allowed them to develop their own autonomy and thus reduce developmental stressors associated with balancing sport, school, social, and personal demands.

Information seeking. The parents searched for information to facilitate their ability to cope. Parents enhanced their knowledge by asking advice from others or by reflecting on their own experiences. Thus, the dimension of information seeking contains two higher order category: (a) information seeking in their current environment and (b) drawing on past experiences.

Information seeking in their current environment. When immediate strategies were not available within the environment (e.g., sport center, child, other parents), parents

sought to expand their knowledge by asking for advice from the sport center, their child, and other parents or by searching for information in the literature and Internet. Specifically, when they found a lack of information or feedback from the sport center or had concerns about their child's future, they sought further advice from a variety of sources. For instance, one mother explained that she called the federation because:

The most difficult, this at the federation level, to have clear information from the coaches to go to a competition abroad in [name of country] with the French team. We would like to know a little more, we did not know if . . . there was an individual tournament or a team tournament.

Drawing on past experiences. In addition to learning from others, parents also used their own experiences and knowledge to cope with certain stressors (e.g., appropriate support, competitive outcomes, and quality of training and coaching). For instance, one father explained that he used this sport knowledge to manage the behaviors of his child's opponents during competition:

There may be stressors when on a field, your child is targeted because he is the youngest, he is the worst, he is playing in front of a person who's older than he is. So, I play volleyball too and when we play against

young people, we put pressure on them because we know we have encounter, that's how, we have psychological influence . . . Thus, sometimes on the field, it can be complicated, complicated to live. To do sports, I am cool with this, it's good war. As long as it stays in the field.

Managing emotions. Parents tried to manage the negative emotions that they encountered as a result of their child's sporting involvement. In order to manage their emotional reactions, parents used emotional release strategies and attempted to normalize their experiences.

Emotional release. Parents reported using emotional release strategies to cope with the stressors they encountered due to time and competitions stressors, issues with coaches, and their distance from their child. For instance, one mother explained that the only way she would cope with the distance from her son was by "crying."

Normalizing parents' experiences. Parents explained that reappraising demands as normal in the context of their life histories allowed them to cope with their stressors. For example, one mother was able to cope with the stressors associated with watching her child compete by reappraising stress as normal, "I am always stressed when I go to see my son but stress is my nature!" Parents also normalized their experiences to those of other parents to reduce the intensity of stressors including time and distance from their child.

Avoidance. Parents sparingly used avoidance and distraction strategies. Parents avoided situations that resulted in negative emotions or they encouraged their children to avoid situations that were difficult for them to manage, such as the quality of training and coaching.

Avoidance strategies used by parents. Parents chose not to go to competitions to avoid the negative emotions that could arise when watching their child compete. For example, one mother did not go with her husband to their son's tournaments because she could not emotionally support his behavior, "We are not going together to the competition, because it is too much to manage."

Avoidance strategies used by the child. Parents encouraged their children to avoid certain situations that might result in them or their parents experiencing stress. For example, one father explained that he encouraged his son to stop attend-

ing his sport center because the quality of coach was causing him concern:

I intervened I said now leave him alone. I will quietly return to high school in [name of city] and in his club . . . We will say that by mutual agreement, we said we will stop here, we will go back to a club structure.

By using this strategy this athlete and father could avoid the situation and subsequently cope with the stressor.

Taking control. In some cases, parents tried to change the situation that caused them concern by taking control of the situation. Parents asked people in the environment to change their behaviors or parents provided themselves with a solution to manage the situation. Parents tried to take control by (a) requiring adaptation from others or (b) adapting themselves.

Adaptation from others. Parents asked for different people involved in the elite sports contexts to change their behaviors or practices to cope with several stressors (e.g., lack of information, engagement in education, and time). Most often, they requested a change from school or sport center staff. For instance, one mother requested a change in her child's training schedule to reduce her travel on Friday evenings (i.e., return home):

If we had the opportunity to stop training at the same time for everybody, we would never have problems with train. The problem is that we cannot. The coach makes sure the younger athletes leave before to keep the older athletes to work a little harder, and we have this train problem. . . . We asked for a change.

Parents also requested changes from their child. They asked them to communicate more about their current performance levels or they asked their child to complete certain behaviors. One mother reported, "Clément, we had to tell him, go to rest, go and lie on your bed, put your phone away, we have to be behind him." These strategies allowed parents to manage stressors related to health concerns, health practices, lack of communication from the sport organization, and parent-child communication.

Adaptation by parents. Many parents also tried to take the control of the situation by changing their own behaviors. Either parents organized their family and professional life differently or they found another solution to manage stressors (e.g., buying a car, renting a flat, finding a billet family, etc.). For example, one mother explained how she adapted to the dis-

tance that separated her from her child, “we organized our life differently without him, and we managed our family life with 3 instead of 4.” To facilitate attendance at competitions and manage the distance from their child, several parents also rented flats at the weekend in the town where their child’s sport center was located, as one father shared, “We got a flat, a tiny little studio in the town where he is.”

Parents providing support. The final dimension details how parents coped by helping their child to better manage difficult situations. Parents used strategies to improve their child’s morale and thus indirectly managed the stressors they themselves encountered. These strategies also allowed parents to spend more time with their child to cope with distance-related stressors. The dimension contains two higher order categories: (a) social support and (b) being present.

Social support. In response to a multitude of stressors, some parents chose to increase the support they provided to their child during difficult times. One father explained how he supported his son after a defeat to manage his stressor associated with the competition outcomes:

What I have always learned and what I try to teach him is that a defeat is only a step in the progression. It is not an end in itself. I always try to find positive in what he has done. You have done good things. I as a parent, I am his only support. I am more in a positive approach and I try to bring him, always more, never less.

Such increases in support helped children to feel more positive in various situations (e.g., defeat, injustice, or injury) and as a result, parents were less worried about their child and their stressors reduced.

Being present. Finally, parents developed strategies to help them stay in touch with their child to cope with stressors arising as a result of living away from their child, perceiving that their child was experiencing injustice, and managing to keep up and progress in education. For instance, to resolve the problem that she did not see a lot their child, one mother used competitions to have some vacation days with the family, “We organize to pack up all the family to [name of country], it is far away, we take advantage to bring all family and leave for 3–4 days of vacation.” Another mother lived far away from her daughter and regularly made the

trip to see her. She explained that she “made the choice to stay home and come and go.” Such strategies allowed parents to spend time with their children, and similarly helped them to check in on their child and ensure they were engaging with their education.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to identify the stressors parents encounter when supporting their children involved in intensive training centers in France. Second, to understand how parents cope with the stressors they encounter. Overall, findings suggest that parents encountered a variety of organizational, developmental, competitive, and parent-personal stressors. Within each general dimension, some parents perceived stressors as being easy to manage, whereas other parents perceived them as difficult to manage and causing concern. To manage stressors, parents used numerous coping experiences including detaching from sport, information seeking, managing emotional reactions, avoidance, taking control, and providing support.

Results of Stage 1 showed that parents encountered considerably more stressors that were difficult to manage than easy to manage. In addition, different stressors were appraised by parents as threatening or as nonthreatening to their beliefs and values. For example, when considering developmental stressors, the fact that athletes were very busy with their sport involvement was experienced positively by some parents because they perceived their child had purpose. However, others parents were worried that such a large investment would ultimately result in their child being limited in their engagement with other activities.

Results also show that parents encountered many common stressors such as health concerns, time and finance demands, sport organization issues, and engagement in education. However, not all parents encountered identical stressors. Further, parents did not always report the same coping experiences when faced with the same stressors. For example, to manage the balance between school and sport, one parent relied on the expertise of professionals outside of their child’s sport center (i.e., working with a private tutor), whereas another parent relied on their child’s independence to manage this demand. The inter-individual differences high-

lighted in the parents' stressor and coping experiences may result from a range of reasons, including parents' previous stress experiences, their child's response or through emotional contagion (Hayward et al., 2017). Given such differences it is clear that parents should be considered as individuals rather than groups when sport parent initiatives are developed and delivered (Knight, Dorsch, Osai, Haderlie, & Sellars, 2016). The teaching of new coping strategies, the appropriateness of actual coping strategies, and the orientation towards different coping resources should be individualized during parent education programs.

The stressors reported by parents in this study are similar to those reported by British parents (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009b; Hayward et al., 2017). The similarities between parental stressors could be a result of the commonalities within the different youth sport environments. However, there were also noticeable differences, which could have arisen due to differences in the children's competitive level, parents' experience of competitions, and the organization of each federation's sporting excellence program. For example, in France, athletes live at their training centers between Monday and Friday, but this is not the case for the British athletes who have been studied (Burgess et al., 2016; Hayward et al., 2017). Consequently, the stressors associated with their child's living arrangements were, understandably, only experienced in France.

The findings indicated that parents used several approaches to try and manage the stressors they encountered in elite sports contexts. Parents' coping approaches varied according to the stressor and the situation (Burgess et al., 2016). Further, similar to findings from elite athletes (Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & James, 2005) and aligned with transactional model (Lazarus, 1999), parents often employed multiple experiences simultaneously to cope with one stressor. The coping approaches used by parents were grouped into six dimensions, the most frequently reported being sharing parental responsibilities (Knight & Holt, 2013) and child's ability to manage. These approaches helped parents to take a step back from their child's investment in a dual project (i.e., sport and school) and manage some of stressors that caused them strain. These results extend our understanding of parents' coping, particularly how reliant par-

ents are on their children's ability to cope (cf. Burgess et al., 2016). Given such a finding, increasing athletes' abilities to cope and also teaching parents similar coping strategies to those taught to athletes (e.g., anticipating what coping strategies to use in response to various stressors and practicing strategies), could be employed to improve parental coping in sport (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Tamminen & Holt, 2010).

A novel finding was that parents also sought to take control of the situation to cope with stressors that caused them strain. Parents tried to make changes in the environment (e.g., requesting change from sport center staff, spouse, and child) or make changes themselves. For example, parents modified their family and professional schedule, found billet families, bought a car, rented a flat, managed their children's medical appointments, or removed some of their own activities to reduce the stressors they encountered. This result shows that parents are able to manage some of the sport-related stressors themselves, but they also rely upon others within their child's support network making changes as needed.

Based on these results, from an applied perspective, it seems appropriate to intervene not only with parents to help them to cope with their stressors but also with children, medical, school, and sports staff. Considering that coping is a skill that can be learned or acquired with experience (Tamminen & Holt, 2010), parents could benefit from learning to manage their emotions, trusting their child, and offering activities other than sport. Parents could also benefit from interventions carried out with the sport centers. For instance, sports centers could help parents by providing more information and by placing a greater emphasis on education over sport. The provision of information could also have a positive impact on coping resources because parents rely on the expertise of professionals at sport centers. Finally, parents rely on other parents for support (Burgess et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013) and thus, it is important to help parents learn to work together to reduce feelings of exclusion and anxiety at competitions (Knight & Holt, 2013).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study offers an expanded understanding of parents' stress and coping experiences,

several limitations should be taken into account. First, stressors are dynamic. As a result, approaches used to cope with them are also dynamic, but this study did not measure the dynamic nature due to one off interviews and survey data. Researchers would benefit from using longitudinal approaches to gain a greater understanding of these elements. As the environmental demands experienced by parents change over time, future research could also focus on their evolution over the course of a season and at different stages of development. Second, a selection bias may have been present in this study. Parents who were experiencing the most stressors and/or were not coping effectively with the stressors that cause them strain may be less likely to participate in the research. Third, content analysis used verbatim reports to understand the experiences of individual. Parents who participated may have omitted particular narratives from their experiences because they were unwilling or unable to verbalize them. Finally, due to the use of surveys and limited interviews, the sharing of parental experiences may be limited in detail. Including observations in future studies may provide useful and interesting information.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the individual, dynamic, and complex nature of sport parents' stress and coping experiences. Parents reported encountering a wide variety of organizational, developmental, competitive, and parental personal stressors in elite sport contexts. To cope with difficult to manage stressors, parents used several strategies including detaching from sport, information seeking, managing emotional reactions, avoidance, taking control, and providing support. The study highlights that educational interventions among parents, children, and sport organizations should be expanded to increase the use of effective strategies, improve the effectiveness of other strategies, and reduced the presence of stressors. The benefits of such interventions could be extensive, as it may enhance the experiences of parents, children, and sport staff within elite sport contexts.

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