Föräldratränare och tränarbarn. The dual roles of being a parent-coach and a coach-child in sport.

Background
As sport programs for children have become more popular and highly organized, parental involvement has increased. The parent’s role in sport has attracted serious attention from sport scientists, from various angles, especially during the last two decades. The majority of the studies of parents and parenting in youth sport have focused on fairly specific aspects of parenting behaviors, i.e. during competitions, rather than with a broader contextual focus which includes the life of the family. This means that there is a gap in previous research related to the phenomena of being a parent-coach and a coach-child in sport. Parent’s involvement and behavior in children’s sport cannot be described easily. The existing body of research shows that the sport practice is complex, and research about parent’s roles is incomplete.

Due to the large amount of coaches in Swedish child and youth sport, approximately 300,000, and the many children participating in organized sport activities (two-thirds of all school-age children in Sweden), spending their time together in sport there is an urgent need to understand the pros and cons of the dual roles of being a parent-coach and a coach-child in a sport group. This study took its departure in child rearing theories, firstly it draws on Smeyers (2010) theoretical description of the changing of the society and the role of parents in the upbringing of their children which has been redefined in several ways. Secondly, it is based on Wheelers and Greens (2014) description of parenting practices within the domain of children’s sport.

Aim
The overall aim of the present research project was to investigate questions related to the phenomenon of being a parent-coach and a coach-child in youth sport, in the light of current childrearing discourses. The following qualitative research questions were in focus; what does it mean for the child athlete to have its father or mother as a coach, and the reverse, what does it mean for the parent to coach their own child, girl or boy, in sport? What are the challenges and the advantages of this relationship in the sport practice? How does this relation impact their interactions in the sport context and what strategies are used by children and parents to deal with any problems that arise due to this family relationship in sport?

Empirical data
A semi structured approach were used in the interviews, whereby parents and children were asked a series of key questions similar to each other but adjusted to the informants’ role and age. This research project is based on 13 participants and the data was constructed through individual interviews with 7 “parent-coaches” and 6 “coach-children”. Data were constructed from interviews with six male coaches and one female coach who had been a coach for their 13-15 years old children for approximately three to eight years

Implications
Perhaps one of the most important implications for practice is that the study will provide valuable knowledge about personal experiences of this situation and the consequences evolved, for coaches and young athletes, due to this dual relationship. The knowledge may be important to prevent conflicts among children, coaches and parents as well as to empower coaches with strategies to handle the demanding roles of childrearing and coaching enacted simultaneously, but also to empower children with knowledge and strategies to handle the challenges of these dual roles. The complexity of this specific, though common, relationship in the sporting triangle are through this study made visible and the knowledge might be included in coach education programs to strengthen the quality of Swedish child and youth sport.

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