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Research article

## Why do They Engage in Such Hard Programs? The Search for Excellence in Youth Basketball

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### ABSTRACT






Excellent performance in sport has a strong positive relationship with the accumulated hours of practice. The specialization years are seen as a decisive moment to lift the skill level, athletic readiness and commitment but the selection and orientation of talent has been strongly dependent of biological and motor variables. The purpose of this study is to describe the achievement and motivation variables that can explain the belonging to an elite competitive level of young basketball players. Eighty-two basketball players under 16 years fulfilled the WFO Questionnaire (Spence and Helmreich, 1983), and an adapted version of the DPMQ (De Bruin, Rikers and Schmidt, 2007). Forty players (mean age 15.8 ± 0.96) were engaged in high performance centres and forty-two (mean age 15.6 ± 1.01) played in national level clubs. A decision tree and a random forest analysis between elite and national level players were performed. The most discriminant variable was Will to Excel, with 85,2% true positives in elite or national level. Mastery and competitiveness did not enter the final model. The will to reach excellence in performance can be considered as a condition to engage in more specialized and demanding practice. The assessment of the path to expertise only through motor variables or through the accumulated hours of deliberate practice is limited and can lead to mistaken identification or orientation of young sport talents. The use of a more comprehensive model is needed.

Key words: Youth, talent specialization, motivation, expertise.

### Key Points

- Excellent performance in sport has a strong positive relationship with the accumulated hours of practice.
- It seems reasonable that if the young athletes are better selected, have better training conditions and practice and compete more time with better teammates and opponents, the chance of becoming competent adult athletes is greater.

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