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Youth in the Focus of German Triathlon Sports

Bachelor Thesis

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Prague, April 2009

Abstract

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Thesis objectives: The aim of this work is to analyse the development of youth in Germany to correspondence to performance sport, triathlon. Among others performance sportsmen speaks about their different experience.

Methods: In this thesis we used especially the method of comparison and method of data analysis. The Method of comparison in comparing the interviewed and different kind of social environment.

Results: We found out relating to the interviewed persons, that each one of them could not manage the high double stress level during this youth age, which had different reasons. The accompanying persons have an important duty to manage that the child pursue the right way.

Keywords: performance, stress-managing, personal development, relationship

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1.Introduction

Competitive sports are often discussed in society. In particular competitive sports of kids and teenagers are discussed very controversial and have a lot of critics as well as supporters in public and in the media. Mainly discussions are about whether this type of sport is harmful or beneficial to kids and teenagers. Triathlon is a very challenging sport. The combination of three sports, swimming, cycling and running, demand more from athletes than other sports.

I choose this work to show an impression to others how the children and youth are managing their daily routine. It has to internalize especially to non-child-age person how kids see their life relating to school and training. This work has to convey an impression into an area where most of us in modern times not often think about. It is quite natural that kids have to go to school for getting good chances of work in future. Also, that they are doing sports to be fit. The adults only want the best for their youth. A doctor on one side and also high performance sports man, as it is in triathlon. That is the vision of their future. But the reality is looking different. Only a few percent of them can cope with that.

A great quantity of ambition, will power is required for such a great performance day by day.

However, triathlon attracts more and more the attention of athletes of all age groups and the number of athletes is growing year by year.

2. Kids and teenagers as triathletes

In the last decade triathlon was one of the booming sports for adults as well as kids. The Olympic Games 2000 in Sydney, Australia, where the first Olympic triathlon competition was held, can be named as the trigger event for this boom. Since the Olympics 2000, where the German Stephan Vuckovic won the silver medal, the media focuses more and more on triathlon too. Newspapers and local media publish a growing number of reports on national and international triathlon competitions. However, publicity focuses on top athletes whilst reports about young athletes e.g. the U23 (under the age of 23), who were really successful at the world championships, can hardly be found.

2.1 Supporting young talent

German Triathlon Union (DTU) has a great interest in supporting young talents and intensified the support over the last years resulting in successful participation of young athletes at European and World championships, establishment of school championships and a triathlon series for kids. Support of young athletes underwent significant changes: a centre that focuses only on scouting and acquisition of young talent has been established; schools have become an important partner regarding supporting young athletes; a special training concept for young athletes was developed and the journal "Triathlon" reports not only about adults anymore but also about young athletes.

3. The concept of German Triathlon Union

The concept is based on a structured training that focuses mainly on fun and health. An attractive training is structured in a way that ensures that kids and youth will not lose interest, fun and motivation to keep up a hard training schedule. This is the only way to attract young athletes and secure a solid basis for future development. The training for kids and teenagers should consist of a natural mix of fun and focus on success. Another factor is the creative and individual design of the training which plays an important role in all age groups. The physical stress of the training for the three different sports is taken into consideration as well. School, apprenticeship and professional work are taken into account on an individual basis too, but they are not given prerogative. Planning and organisation are decisive to abide the necessary scope of training for the different age groups. Another important factor for planning and practicing are the newest scientific facts about which the coach has to be informed regularly.

The next three chapters deal with the three different parts of the training concept of DTU:

Part 1: Analysis of the three disciplines „swimming“, „cycling“ and „running

Firstly, the content of the training for the three disciplines is being analysed in general but not yet with regard to the different age groups. Among other topics one focus will be on the training structure of each individual discipline. In addition, the relation to the other disciplines will be discussed, to show how the performance of athletes can be systematically and effectively increased. Moreover, this chapter will contain information about training equipment and useful training schedules and repetition, which will lead to a successful competition. One of the most important performance determining criteria of all three individual disciplines and of the entire triathlon is endurance of muscle power.

General work out and athletic training can be regarded as another discipline of triathlon to which great attention should be paid. The focus will be in particular on the specific issues that have to be taken into consideration whilst working with young athletes and the respective risks. Endurance of muscle power is essential for young athletes too. Therefore, their training has to include endurance related exercises. However, due to physical constitution of kids, one has to pay attention to not begin with endurance training with weights and at work out stations at a too early age. As to the physical development of females and males, females should start to train with weights at the age of 14 while males should start at the age of 15. Of course, the age reference is a recommendation based on the average development process of kids. Whether or not an athlete should start to work out with weights is, in addition, subject to the individual development and physical constitution of the athlete. Prior to the work out with weights the training regarding endurance of muscle power of young athletes is based on a general athletic training which focuses on the whole body. This is important to prepare the body of young athletes for the up coming specific strains and to avoid disabilities and malpositions. In particular during the growing phase preparation of these trainings and the cool down phase are of major importance Training with weights or at work out stations requires one year basic training to ensure good technique and coordination. As well as for the other disciplines, the coach should always take fun and a range of exercises into consideration when designing a training schedule regarding endurance of muscle power.

Part 2: Long-term performance increase

The necessary physical, psychological and technical-coordinative bases for high-end performance in sports are to be laid at an early age and should be slowly but steadily developed and increased. Time is the crucial criterion. Training of young athletes should contain sufficient time for build-up, to achieve effective performance increase. It is of high importance that young athletes stick constantly to their training schedule whereas achieving the best possible results in the corresponding age group is a minor aspect.

DTU divides long-term performance increase in for modules:

- 1. Module: Basic Training, till 14 years of age
- 2. Module: Build Training, 15 – 16 years of age
- 3. Module: Connect Training, from 17 years of age on
- 4. Module: High performance training, from 21 years of age on

Furthermore, there is a pre-module for scouting, attracting interest and motivating the youth towards triathlon and broad basic introduction training. This pre-module is designed for kids between 6 and 8 years, It does not focus on a specific training. The goal is to develop a variety of coordinative skills and enjoy practice. One of the main focuses of this pre-module from an organisational point is to scout young talent and to attract these talents to triathlon. This is an important and as well difficult job for the coach. As everybody grows at their own speed the scouting period does not end with the pre-module phase. Young talents need and get time to develop and grow up till they turn 15. By that time the talent scouting period should be completed to turn the focus on fostering the scouted talents. Thereby it is ensured, that the team rooster consists of promising young talents.

The concept of DTU names besides conditional, coordinative and organic factors emotional, individual and psychological skills as criteria of performance diagnosis a triathlon talent should have (Ntk, 2004, S. 59). Another aspect in the triathlon training concept is mental training with focus on visualisation, belief and concentration. On every performance level mental strength is almost as essential as physical strength. Belief in oneself is of great importance during training as during competition (Ntk, 2004, S.60).

Moreover, the athlete has to gain knowledge about his abilities, resources and health from the beginning, to develop the ability to design their own training and not rely too much on a sport organisation. Independency from organized training session can be learned by forecast training and relax exercises. Thereby, athletes learn to concentrate on themselves, physical as well as mental, and learn to notice and recognize their body feedback, to analyze it and to react to it. This ensures good development of their performance (Nkt, 2004 S. 63).

An important factor regarding motivation that should be taken into consideration by the coach is the success and development check, With regard to training with weights, the training should be interrupted immediately. Kids shall not be treated as adults who can compel their body to resist to higher stress levels. When kids are in pain, training should be stopped immediately. Preventive training methods are trunk and stabilisation training, which is the basis of all triathlon training, circular training and spine gymnastics. These training methods can also be practised in younger age groups. The crucial point is the right intensity regarding the individual disciplines, which are going to be increased continuously over the training period. A bad training schedule regarding quality as well as quantity of training can lead to withdrawal from sport.

From a pedagogical point of view lapse of individuality, health or lifestyle as not enough sleep can lead to this decision. Impact of mother-nature as extreme temperature can also have a negative influence. Therefore, it is important to try to eliminate these factors to increase the stress resistance of an athlete (Nkt, 2004, 40-41). Thus, it is of importance to design an individual training schedule in accordance with the daily routine of the athlete that leaves enough room for recovery. Moreover, adjusting training periods to external factors as for instance holidays leads slowly but steadily to a higher stress resistance of the athlete (Nkt, 2004, S. 50, 55)

Part 3: Different age groups

This part of the training concept contains training examples, training periods and methodical training design for each discipline and for each age group. The first age group is the one of teenagers of 12-13 years of age (pupil A). This is the age at which teenagers take their “first real steps in triathlon land”. Training in this age group consists in particular of a broad variety of different training exercises. The main goal is to build the basis for endurance, technique and speed, while competition is a minor aspect. Athletes are recommended to participate only in a few competitions with very short distances in each discipline. The official distance in these age group are swimming: 400meters, cycling: 10 kilometres, running: 2,5 kilometres. Besides the triathlon, there are other competitions that combine two of the three disciplines as for instance “swim and run”. The training of this age group does not contain periodical training or training with weights.

The next age group is the one of teenagers of 14-15 years (youth B). Training of this age group contains periodical training. Competition distances are longer: swimming up to 800 metres, cycling up to 40 kilometres and running up to 3 kilometres. Athletes do not compete in individual disciplines that often anymore. They focus more and more on the triathlon competition learn about tactics and get guidance to successfully design their own trainings schedule.

The last part of the concept for these age groups contains a negative-list with all risks. Youth A is the age groups of 16-17 year old athletes. At this age athletes have the possibility to participate in international sprint championships (swimming 700 metres, cycling 20 kilometres, running 5 kilometres). To avoid too much stress at an early age it is recommended that starts at these competitions are limited. In addition, athletes should still compete in single disciplines against others. The training is getting more and more specific and the training rhythm is more and more intensified.

- MACKONNIN, K.: *Kinderleicht zum Triathlon*.

-*Nachwuchstrainingskonzept der DTU*. Deutsche Triathlon Union (2004)

At the age of 18-19 years (Youth) athletes are usually almost fully develop regarding physical growth. Their training is getting even more specific and the volume increases. In addition, athletes of this age usually have to cope with stress at school (A-Levels) or are already working. Thus, “recovery” plays an important role too. Short distance competitions in this age group consist of 1500 metres swimming, 40 kilometres cycling and 10 kilometres running. As preparation for the next step, the first year in the adult class, athletes should focus on gather experience in those competitions. However, during the first year in youth the focus should be on cycling competition and sprint distances. Short distance competitions should be in the focus during the second year. An important subject of training in this age group is the physical fitness, resistance, tactics and optimizing of starts, to optimize the complexity of competition.

At the end, the national coach responsible for young athletes talks about the actual situation in Germany and in comparison to other nations. Germany’s young talents are top notch athletes. The task is to even the path from being a young promising talent to becoming a professional first class athlete. In particular in the group of male young talents is a lot of room for improvement. Lots of talent is lost due to the rooster structure. The time frame in which performance improvement has to be proofed are to narrow. Therefore a lot of talents do not get the necessary time for development and are suspended from the team. In particular researches from Güllich show that world class athletes needed more time to be successful than national top athletes and a part of them started there career later than the national stars. In addition, there are a lot of athletes from other sports who decided to switch to triathlon late in their career. This show as well, that the support should also be provided for older athletes and should not stop after an athletes older than 19. Due to the immense time pressure regarding improvement of performance the actual rooster structure is called a provocation of speed”.

- GÜLLICH,A., EMRICH,E., Büch, M.-P.: *Beiträge zum Nachwuchsleistungssport*
-*Nachwuchstrainingskonzept der DTU*. Deutsche Triathlon Union (2004)

The national coach concludes that a later start with competitive sport and longer support of athletes leads to greater success. This can also foster the chances of athletes from other sport to become world class athlete in triathlon. It is important to be demanding but also to give athletes enough time to achieve high end results. Trying to force athletes to maximum results in the shortest time possible – acceleration of performance improvement – is not the right approach. Therefore, it is necessary to judge improvement of performance on a broad basis and not to focus on the results achieved at one pre-defined point of time only. This way, talents who develop slowly but steady will get their chances as well. Besides his critic against the system, the coach criticizes the discipline of athletes as well.

In particular in a sport like triathlon self-discipline of young talent is of great importance. But due to the fact that the discipline young talents are expected to show is such a great burden to them, a lot of young talents do not get the chance to develop the necessary self-discipline.

Moreover, there is the demand of focussing on the individuality of the athletes and an adjustment of the training regarding this aspect. The stress is very high, in particular for young talents and has to be adjusted accordingly. A limit of participation in competition has to be established and controlled. However, if the performance reached a certain level young athletes of 19-20 years should participate in international competitions to gain experience.

Regarding coaching it is said that the existing literature and education opportunities are only sometimes used. In addition, the knowledge exchange regarding training and technical experience is very low. This has to be changed to steadily improve training of young talent and adjust it continuously to the newest knowledge.

3. 1. Triathlon at school

Brochures about the concept are also handed to school teachers to encourage and convince them to integrate triathlon into sports education. In addition, the concept contains useful information and instructions for coaches who work with kids.

The brochure describes the advantages of triathlon and promotes triathlon as the new endurance improving sport at school. On one hand, triathlon is a very exiting sport which leads to highly motivated kids and this is important and helpful for every teacher. On the other hand, the combination of the three disciplines as swimming, cycling and running, which is challenging as well. Moreover, these three disciplines are well known and not difficult to learn. These are central reasons for athletes to take up triathlon. In addition, all essential goals of sports education at school such as training of physical coordination, gaining physical strength and fostering kids interest in sport on a regular basis are achieved. Another factor is the combination of mental strength and enjoying the classes.

Due to the variety of disciplines which offer a broad variety of training possibilities this sport can easily be incorporated in sport education at school independent of the fitness level of the pupils. The recommended age to start sport education that is inspired by triathlon is 8 years. Different fitness levels can be compensated very well by varying the courses length. Moreover, sports education at school fosters social live as well in form relays and other team sports which is an important factor too. Didactic methods and the legal situation regarding triathlon as a part of schools sport education are explained as well.

- RUNER, K.: Triathlon in der Schule (2009-03-24)

< <http://www.asm-ksl.it/teams/sport/Triathlon%20-%20Schule%20.doc> >

- RICHARTZ, A., BRETTSCHEIDER, W.-D.: *Weltmeister werden und die Schule schaffen.*

Pedagogical- reflection of sport education at school is of great importance. Play, game action and agility should get back in the focus of sport education and should be of higher importance than improving performance. Therefore, sports education that takes different perspectives into consideration is necessary to achieve the highest goal of physical education: Enjoying agility. Triathlon also addresses to and fosters health. Endurance and the ability to listen to ones body are improved. Both have preventive importance towards general heath condition. In addition, in the game alike triathlon training with its many possible variations athletes experience plenty of agility exercises which foster possible practices, self-employed and confidence. And as these exercises are in general partner or group exercises, social-cooperative acting is fostered as well. Moreover, all three disciplines are not bound to school facilities they can be practised after school during spare time. Legal requirements to establish triathlon as school sport may differ from province to province. The provinces are responsible for the teaching plan and their content. Thus, it is in their responsibility whether they integrate triathlon in these teaching plans. Besides legal aspects, local condition at the actual condition of the schools and the qualification of teachers need to be taken in to consideration too.

The extensive practical part is designed for kids from grade 5 to 7. It does not only focus on teaching of physical coordination but also on development of personality and social competence of students. This part contains many exercises for each individual discipline including the variation disciplines with many pictures supporting the descriptions for better understanding. Exercises that combine different disciplines with one another are included too. The last part of the brochure is a guide on how to organise a school triathlon. It describes the organisational steps and contains important information necessary to organise such a school event.

3. 2. My own experiences

Tight rooster structures are not a new trend in triathlon. They were established decades ago. Athletes who did not meet the time requirements for their age group did not receive any attention. Hidden talents did not get the necessary time for development and improvement. That was about 12 years ago, when triathlon was not a boom sport yet. At that time, Triathlon was more likely something new and unknown to the youth and in particular to girls. Whilst only 2 -3 girls were part of the triathlon team; the fraction of boys was significantly higher. The popularity of the sport was not very high and athletes had to explain it very often to their families and friends.

Over the years the local team initiated noteworthy changes to open triathlon for young athletes. A few adult athletes practised at local facilities for quite some time but they had no experience in and knowledge of training kids and teenagers. After the first few competitions of young athletes the changes began to show results and triathlon began to attract athletes from other sports. Athletes of the swimming team and other talented young athletes became interested in triathlon. A new 5-day training schedule for the “new” triathletes was designed. It included 2-3 times swimming of 1 ½ hours, 2 times running of up to 1 hour and cycling of up to 3 hours once during the 5 days. However, the team did neither have a professional triathlon coach nor training designed for each athlete individually.

Today, the situation has changed. A triathlon division has been established offering training for kids from 8 years of age on. The division has coaches for every individual discipline and age group. Some coaches are athletes too and do still successfully participate in triathlon competition. Sometimes whole families are engaged in triathlon. While at the beginning athlete's siblings were addressed to. Now, due to increasing public relations a broad regional scouting and promotion structure has been established. Papers report regularly about triathlon competitions and the results of the young athletes. Public interest and interest of sponsors has been awakened. Even though, structures for youth triathlon training have been established, the fostering of young talented athletes still depends in a significant way on performance and the pressure to achieve good results is very high. Some talented athletes got selected to join the province team and participate in additional training there. The number of female athletes has increased, but female athletes are still outnumbered by males. These young athletes do not look happy when they arrive to practice. It seems that training is more like an obligation to them lacking fun, joy, play and game character.

4. Emperic part

4. 1. Research method

The research is based on the „Guideline-Expert-Interview“. Information about research studies about this subject can not be found. Therefore, interviews are a good way to gather first and important data. One coach and three athletes were interview about there experiences with and opinions on competitive triathlon for kids and teenagers.

4. 2. Selection of interview partners and implementation of interviews

One criterion for the selection of interview partners was that they should be in different age groups and therefore in different phases of training and carrier. In addition they should have different and partly contradictional experiences with and opinions on this matter. Therefore, I have chosen a coach responsible for youth training in the province team, who works as a teacher at a trade school The athletes are a 22 year old male (I 1), who has successful international records, a 16 year old male (I 2) who is a top notch national athlete and a 18 year old female (I 3)

4. 3. Data analysis

Transcription of interviews was an important requirement for the following analysis of data. This was made in three steps in accordance with Wolfgang Fichten (see Fichten, 2002):

- Step 1: Ask questions

With regard to the interest of research, knowledge about the subject, premise and hypothesis and the goal of research, clear questions for the data were formulated. This is important to extract the concrete answers to the questions from the received data. Questions for the data are considered sub-topics to the main question this research is aiming for to answer.

- Step 2: data examination and description of data

During examination of data, data is studied intensively. This contains not only reading the data but also to internalize the data to get to its information as a whole. After the data had been read, data was described. The description does not contain any judgement but plain and clear answers only. These plain and clear answers are a necessary and important requirement for the interpretation of data.

- Step 3: Interpretation of data

In this step the meaning of the answers is extracted from the data and conclusions are being drawn.

4. 4. Examination of interviews

4. 4. 1. Take-up triathlon and age

All interview partners think that the best age to take up competitive triathlon is 13 -14. However, the decision to take up sports happens years before that age. The interview partners took up sport at the age of 4-6 years. Two athletes started with swimming and switched to triathlon. One athlete started with track and field before switching sports. All athletes took up sports on their parents initiative. Two parents used to compete in triathlon as well. The parents of the third athlete were participating in a variety of sports without competing.

I 1 got attracted to triathlon at school at the age of 12. His teacher offered a workshop for interested kids in grade 6. Firstly, the focus was on enjoying agility and the workshop was very popular among kids. Training focused on games and play and contained at the beginning of 1 unit lasting about 1 ½ hours. After about 6 months the workshop participated in their first small competition. The time period of this competition was approximately 20 minutes. The number of competitions was increased steadily. Some of them were on weekends and some of them were during school holidays, but participation was always voluntary. I 1 discovered quickly that he got potential and started with extra training during his spare time. His teacher supported him with training instructions. He discovered that he did not improve in track and field and so he quit and focussed on triathlon only. I 1 joined the school triathlon team for 2 years. At a school triathlon he had a long conversation with a triathlon coach who convinced him to join the triathlon division of the local sports club. At that time the triathlon division had just been established recently. Therefore, not too many athletes participated in training and he was the only young athlete in the team. Moreover, I 1 was living in a different city at that time. Thus, he participated only in swimming practice once a week. There he met another coach, who noticed his potential and accompanied him to the top.

I 2 started her career in sports at the age of 6, when she joined a swimming team. From the start, training was performance oriented and she had to take part in first competitions only a few months after she took up the sport. At 12 years of age she received nomination for the province team and at 13 she had her greatest successes. As her local sports club had had a triathlon division and had organised annual triathlon competitions for years she got in touch with this sport very early. She had always recognized triathlon as exciting and at the age of 14 she competed in her first triathlon. The distances were 300 metres swimming, 15 kilometres cycling and 2.5 kilometres running. Her first impressions were more likely negative because of the enormous physical stress of the competition. She underestimated the stress of performing all three disciplines without a rest in between them. However, after a triathlon coach asked her if she wanted to continue triathlon, she agreed to train with the triathlon team. At that time the triathlon youth team was just founded recently. "The complete switch from swimming to triathlon was due to the fact that I did not qualify to train under instruction of national coaches at the national swimming centre," said I 2. After two further triathlon competitions in which she did great, she was nominated to join the province team.

The sport career of I 3 was similar to the one of I 2. She started swimming at the age of 4. The only memory she has of that time is that she enjoyed swimming very much at the beginning. However, due to one very ambitious parent that changed. Performance and success became more and more important. Even though she would have loved to take up another sport she stuck to swimming at first. This was mainly because she received respect of one parent and friends only because of her success. At the age of 14 I 3 switched to triathlon. A few of her team mates did so as well and it was something new.

The coach confirms that an early start in particular in swimming is one of the requirements for national and international success and high end performance in triathlon. In general kids should take up swimming at the age of 6-7; an age where they get reasonable training. The switch to triathlon should happen at the age of 13. 13 years is as well the age at which athletes should start to participate in competition. Starting to compete at the age of 15 or 16 is considered to be difficult with regard to performance requirements for top athletes. “If you did not start with swimming at an early age, it is very hard to meet the requirements”, so the coach. This underlines, that triathlon is not a sport to start with from scratch. The interview partners started with different sports, but these sports were connected with triathlon or one of the individual disciplines. The basis for taking up triathlon was laid at an early age and they added other disciplines later on. For a successful career in triathlon it is necessary to take up sports as a kid to get physical education as early as possible. Moreover, all interview partners trained in a success oriented system. Another interesting fact is that in all cases the parents laid the cornerstone for the triathlon career of their kids. They started in a different sport though and switched to triathlon more or less on a voluntary basis or on their own initiative. That leads to the conclusion that triathlon is not a competitive sport for kids. Performance and success oriented training should be taken up at the age of 13. All interview partners agree, that if one wants to practice triathlon at kids age, than only under the aspects of fun and enjoying agility.

4. 4. 2. Training Schedule

All interview partners said that triathlon is a sport that requires a lot of training. They also underlined the individual character of this training. During his track and field time I 1 went to practice twice a week. The triathlon work shop at school practiced once or twice a week for 1 hour. He increased this to 3 – 4 times a week on his own initiative. After joining the triathlon team he practiced 5 times a week at the beginning (2 x swimming, 2 x running and 1x cycling). After he got his personal coach at the age of 15 this increased quickly to 1 unit a day such as 1 to 2 hours of swimming or running or 2-3 hours of cycling adding up to about 10 hours a week. Swimming was practiced with together with the team. Running and cycling were practiced alone but not without instructions and training schedules from his coach. At the age of 16 he sometimes practiced twice a day. Two day a week he went swimming before school and running after school.

I 2 practiced the starting sport already 5 times a week for 1 ½ hours at the age of 12. Twice a week she did a 30 minute warm up run before she went swimming. The other days she did a general warm up programme of 30 minutes before she practiced swimming. After she switched to triathlon at the age of 14 she went swimming 4 times a week for 90 minutes at the beginning. In addition she did running practice twice a week up to one hour and cycling practice once a week up to 2 hours. At the age of 14 I 2 had already one training unit a day. Sometimes she did 2 units a day to ensure she had one day off to recover. After she switched completely to triathlon, she cut back on swimming to 2-3 times a week for 1 hour and increased on running and cycling as well as on general athletic practice. Most practices were together with the triathlon team. But coaches provided every athlete with additional and individual training instructions and training schedules they had to carry out on their own. She kept the daily training units and increased the volume of training for the individual disciplines slowly but steadily. In addition she had to take part in 4 week end training camps a year and a winter training camp of 1 week as well as a spring training camp of 2 weeks.

I 3 practiced swimming 3 times a week for 1 ½ hours till she turned 14. Since she turned 10 she did a 30 minute warm up run before the swimming practice twice a week. Once a year she went for a training camp of one week. After switching to triathlon she increased running to 2-3 times a week and added one hour of cycling once a week. During preparation for competition cycling increased to 2 times a week and swimming to 4 times a week. I 3 practiced in particular running and swimming on her own. Her trainer did not provide her with individual training schedules and instructions.

The coach generally distinguishes between winter and summer practice. But the training is also designed differently regarding the different age groups. “During winter we practice mainly running and swimming. Cycling is usually practiced once a week during the winter for one or two hours. About 45% of the time is spent on swimming, 45% on running and 10% on general athletic practice. Youth B and A practice usually 7 – 10 hours a week during the winter. This is increased up to 15 – 18 hours per week for younger U 23 athletes. Older U 23 athletes practice 20 hours and more. U 23 athletes focus more on working out with weights and on cycling. From spring on cycling training get more in the focus. The cycling units increase from once a week to 3-4 times a week. From this time on all three disciplines are practiced practically parallel to one another. Cycling is practiced with a higher intensity than the other disciplines. This way the time spent on each discipline is about 30 % of the overall training time plus 10 % for general athletic training which are an integral part of the training of all age groups. Till the U 23 level, all athletes practice with their body weight only. From U 23 level on practice with weights is added to the schedule. The coach says that “10% are a lot for an endurance sport even though it does not sound very much at first.” This underlines the individual aspect of triathlon training. A lot of young athletes are forced to practice many units on their own because regular competitive triathlon training can not be offered in every region due to a lack of trainers.

The coach describes the problem of training on their own as follows: “Athletes of this age are usually not reflective regarding their performance, technique and physical coordination that they can improve themselves. Therefore, they need somebody who corrects them and gives them instructions.” The quality of training on their own is often questionable. An interesting point is, that all interview partner name the high time intensity of training as one specific aspect of triathlon training. But at the same time they back paddle from this statement. Only I 3 says: “triathlon is a time consuming sport. Swimming, cycling and running on a high end level require daily training, sometimes twice a day.” I 1 says his daily units are “not extraordinary long” and I 2 says that “one unit is not longer than 1-2 hours”. The coach says that the “weekly training volume of 8-10 hours is not that high that it could not be integrated in a daily routine. Comparing the average training of 13-16 year olds with the average training of 17 years olds and older, we can see an increase of approximately 50%. However, 10 hours a week can be a high volume too. But maybe athletes call the volume of 10 hours “not that much” because they are not used to a way higher training intensity and now they apply different standards. I 1 and I 2 consider a high training intensity as normal. They are part of their lives and their success compensates for the time they have to spend practicing.

The following statement of the coach shows why standards regarding the time aspect in triathlon training can not be compared with other sports: “If you practice a sport like football three to four times a week, then this is a lot. If you practice swimming three times a week for triathlon, you have only practiced one discipline yet; one third so to say.” Athletes know about this particular aspect of triathlon, which due to 3 disciplines in one sport demands very time consuming training and two of the three interviewed athletes accept this. Despite the successful start of her triathlon career I 3 did not want to give up everything else to triathlon and its daily training. She did not regard the high time effort as normal and reasonable and did not regard triathlon as satisfying as I 1 and I 2. I 3 did not cope with the high training intensity from an early age on besides school and so she dropped triathlon. Thus, the following chapter deals with the role of school in competitive training.

4. 4. 3. The role of school

According to athletes, parents and trainers, school is always more important than triathlon. Therefore, training should be reduced in any case if an athlete has problems at school. But most of young athletes do not have problems at school; most of them are good students. All interview partners go to “Gymnasium”, a trend the coach confirms as well. I 1 says he has never had problems at school. When he took up triathlon his marks did not go down. He has always been an average to good student. “It has always been the case that school was the most important thing. The teachers also paid attention to that.“ His parents had the same opinion and regard school as more important as triathlon. Moreover, he adds: ”When there were busy times at school training had to be cancelled.” But his next comment almost reveals this statement: ”However, we always tried to get everything in line without neglecting any of the two.” Nonetheless, some of his statements in this interview showed that school was not always the most important thing. I 1 did his homework sometimes late at night or in the morning right before school. His goal was to pass his exams. “I always thought you are going to “Gymnasium” and you have to pass ... I wanted to get my “Abitur” ... no matter how, just get it.” This shows that I 1 opinion on school and triathlon changed over the years. Since he turned 17 and began professional triathlon training “school was not regarded as important anymore and in particular during the “Oberstufe”. But that was ok with him and his parents as he achieved his goal and passed his “Abitur”. “If they (the parents) had noticed that I got really bad at school, they would have intervened but my marks never got that bad.”

I 2 assesses herself as an average to good student. Doing well in school has never been a problem for her. She has always gotten good marks with reasonable effort and is not concerned about graduating from school. “I study a bit a day or two before the exams and always got good results.” Her coach coordinates the training schedule with her school exams. He asks her how much time she needs for studying and designs the training schedule around school. I 2 parents consider school more important as triathlon too. “If my mark were not as good as they are, my parents would definitely tell me to cut back on triathlon and focus more on school. Of course school is more important than triathlon.” This interview as well shows the high importance of a career in sports to her parents. “They are observing my school and sport activities with high interest. They want me to be as good in triathlon as I am in school.”

I 3 is going to „Gymnasium“ as well. She is an average student. She considered sport more important than school during her time as an “active” competitive athlete and paid the price, so she said. She failed one grade and had to redo the school year. At that time she did not blame it on her training effort, but looking back she thinks that her time intensive sport was the reason for her failure. Her parents had different opinions regarding the importance of school and sport. Whilst one parent considered sport and school on the same level, the other parent clearly rated school over sport.

The coach states that school and professional career of young athletes are always more important than sport. He says in the life of a competitive young athlete there should be enough room for school, sport and one hobby; in that order. School is definitely the most important aspect. “That is due to the fact, that chances of becoming a professional triathlete who can live of his sport and does not have to work again are very small compared to other sports”, so the coach. From grade nine or ten on coaches ask athletes more often about their marks. If an athlete has problems in school, coaches cut back on training hours to give athletes more time to study. In addition the Olympic Centre offers tutoring but to the experience of the coach athletes do not take hold of this opportunity. Problems at school are not common among competitive triathlon athletes and therefore are rarely discussed, states the coach. Interesting to see is, that all interview partners firstly considered school more important than sport. However, after they reached a certain competitive level school and sport were regarded as equally important or sport was rated over school. This applies to athletes as well as to their parents. Nonetheless, all athletes go or went to “Gymnasium”, which means that education is or was considered important and is or was not neglected despite of a career in sports. The coach made a crucial comment about the future of a professional triathlon athlete. He thinks that the chances of financing ones life only with triathlon are very low. “In Germany we have maybe 10 athletes who can live of triathlon.”

Therefore, coaches are instructed to pay attention to athletes situation in school or there professional career and discuss that with them. At the beginning, parents share this opinion but the more successful their children become, the more parents seem to focus on success and a career in sports. They think their kids are capable of doing very well in school and stand the hard and time intensive training necessary for success in triathlon as well. Students understand that their parents give school priority over sport. But they notice as well that sport and success are important to their parents too. However, none of the interview partners clearly says this. They make comments such as their parents understood that they had to skip school to go and compete, that bad marks were owned to high training effort and that parents sometime had to convince their kids to go practice.

Nonetheless, students understand that in case of really big problems in school parents would have given priority over sport. Whilst students ranked school and sport equal after a while, parents never did. When push comes to shove school always had priority.

As I 3 experienced two different opinions at home she sometimes ranked sport over school and now regrets this. The coach names school clearly as more important than school. This is also the position of the triathlon association. We understand the importance of education for athletes, take that into consideration when we design training schedules and try to make that clear to athletes as well.

This sounds reasonable in theory but reality is mostly different. On one hand most young triathlon athletes are good in school so that coaches do not have to pay attention to school problems. On the other hand are a lot of athletes afraid to disclose weak marks to the coach. This may be a reason why coaches do not have much experience in this field. My coaches did not really pay attention to my situation at school let alone they were willing to cut back on training hours. One had to solve the problem by oneself. Apparently, this has improved over the last years as well.

-BRETTSCHEIDER, W.: *Ein schwieriger Spagat: Jugendliche zwischen Höchstleistungstraining und Schulkarriere*
-PROHL, R.: *Grundriss der Sportpädagogik.*

4. 4. 4. School and Sport: a double stress level

The foregoing described the two workplaces of teenagers: school and training. The following paragraph illustrates the experiences and feelings of teenagers regarding the double stress level. For all interview partner sport and training was part of their lives since they went to elementary school. At first, it was a hobby and they practiced once or twice a week during the afternoon or early evening for one or two hours. The requirements at both workplaces grew slowly but steadily. In particular the time consuming triathlon training is named by athletes and coaches to be responsible for an increasing stress level. I 1 and I 2 accepted this aspect and concluded that they can handle it. Another aspect is the time athletes have to spend to get to their training location. When I 1 took up triathlon he joined the team for swimming twice a week and went running and cycling alone because it took him too much time to get the training base. "I did not want to go there four times a week; I was interested in other things as well." In addition, competitions were not around the corner, not even only 20 – 30 km away as in other sports. If you want to compete you have to drive sometimes very far. Today he still has the opinion that they had to put a lot of effort and time into training. Time that was actually needed for other things.

I 1 said he spent less time in particular with his friends. Since he started triathlon he did not have much spare time. But this impression changed quickly and he began to regard sport as his spare time and the feeling that he was missing out on something else faded away. "At the beginning it was hard but I got used to it." It made the most sense to him to reorganise his spare time and "cut back on spending time with his friends to have more time for training." "It was okay to do nothing else besides school but practice", so he said. Going to school and training for triathlon at the same time was hard but he regarded "school as a good way to equalize the hard training." At the age of 17 the stress and necessary effort increased drastically. On one hand he now went to "Oberstufe" and had to study for his "Abitur". On the other hand he was nominated and elected to the national team which meant another increase of training. From that time on, I 1 clearly focused on sport. Due to the high necessary effort school was sometimes neglected. But he was so successful in triathlon that he accepted the double stress level and the related effort because it paid off well.

I 2 think as well that triathlon training takes up a lot of time. But she did not consider it that bad as I 1. "All overall I had enough time", she said. She did not have any problems in school despite the double burden of training and studying. As she did not face any problems at school and spent an "average" time studying she always had enough time for other spare time activities. Driving to trainings locations in another city was the bigger burden to her. "Due to the long distances life was sometimes a bit stressful. I got home, ate, pack my stuff and rushed off." Sometimes she had to miss out on parties when she competed on the next day. She also had to forbear from going out with friends but that was not a big issue for her. At least two good girlfriends practiced swimming as well and they meet regularly after practice. Sometimes she wished that she could go out and party with friends but she accepted the situation because she enjoyed the sport so much and did not want to cut back on it either. This shows that I 2 sometime was in a cleavage between sports and friends but friends were not enough a reason to cut back on sport. She knows that due to the double burden she had to compromise on friends.

I 3 is sceptic when looking back on the double burden of training and school. Her marks and friendships suffered under the enormous expenditure of time the training demanded. In particular weekend competitions were a burden for her. "Even though these were only one-day competitions we had to get up early in the morning or we arrive there the evening before. The whole weekend was determined by the competition. I could not go out the evening before and I usually got home too late to do anything with my friends the next day. There was basically no room for studying or friends in my life unless they had an extraordinary understanding for or are competitive athletes too. It was hard for I 3 to cope with the double burden and she often reached her physical or psychological limits. But success and the respect from the coach, the team and one parent resulting thereof she made her bear that burden.

These were the different experiences with the double burden of training and studying. All interview partners name the enormous expenditure of time as the biggest burden, followed by long distances to trainings location. I 1 and I 2 handled this stress factors well and had no problems at school. I 1 needed a few weeks to get use to this new life style but never had a real problem with it. I 3 reached the point, where she could not take the double burden anymore. Her marks in school went down, her social contacts suffered and she got to the point where she was not willing to accept this way of life anymore. She dropped triathlon.

The coach considers the double burden of studying and training as very stressful for young athletes too. One reason he gives for his opinion is that athletes sometimes drop triathlon suddenly and unexpectedly. He also distinguishes good athletes and top athletes. Top athletes are organized from the beginning and can handle the double burden. Other athletes quit after sometime, not because they are not successful, but because they cannot organize sport and school/work. Then the stress level gets to high and they quit triathlon. The coach also has the opinion that the stress is most likely mental stress create in the head of kids. They know in the morning what they will practice in the afternoon whilst their classmates can enjoy their spare time. Therefore, it requires good discipline and ambition to stick to such a time consuming sport.

Nonetheless he states, that the burden for 16 years old is not that high. “Their obligations towards school are not that high, that we cannot integrate a relatively low training effort of 8 – 10 hours in their daily schedule. He distinguishes between younger and older athletes. Their training schedules differ a lot from one another in particular regarding the volume of training hours. The different age groups have to be taken into consideration as well. Whilst 10 hours could be too much for a 13 year old athlete, 15-20 hours could just be the right trainings workload for an 18 year old. For good athletes the double burden does not seem to be an obstacle that they cannot overcome. According to the coach and athletes as well, good results in sport are always accompanied by good results in school. Of course athletes do not like the fact that they cannot spend that much time with their friends but they do not consider this as an extra burden.

I 3 would have had the chance to become a top athlete on national level if she had trained more and if she had been able to keep her good marks without putting too much effort into it. But she had to put too much effort into studying and thus she could not utilize the important social contacts of her team. She thinks that this was mainly because her results were as good as those of her team mates. Therefore, her team mates and the coach as well did not take her serious. Personally, I think that the double burden for kids and teenagers is very high in competitive sports and in particular in triathlon. Every athlete experiences this and copes with it in his own way. The following chapter is about families and friends of athletes and the question if and how they can help to handle the burden and what role they play in the training phase and the entire career of a young athlete.

4. 4. 5. Role of the parents

Some aspects regarding the role of parents in their kids' sports career have already been mentioned before. Apparently, parents are an important driving force that ignites the flame in kids to take up sports. The coach and the three young athletes confirm that parents have a significant impact on the competitive sports career. Their support is very important for their kids. Parents of my interview partners are very interested in triathlon. Some have already been interested in triathlon before their kids took up the sport. Others became interested because their kids started with triathlon. I 1 says his parents are like help in every situation in life, sport, school, friends, whenever a problem occurred he could ask them for help. "I can talk with them about everything and I think that is very important." He really appreciates the support of his parents in particular with regard to his career in sports. "I have to thank my parents for a lot of things, especial in sports there gave outstanding support." His parents have become interested in triathlon when I 1 started it and followed his career with excitement from the beginning. They drove him to training locations, to competitions provided him with good equipment, which is very important in competitive sports. They get along very well with his coach and talk very often with him about triathlon and everything that has to do with it. His parents recognised soon the promising development and his good result. With his success their own ambitions grew stronger too. "Sometimes when I did not feel like practicing they put a little pressure on me, that I could not skip training, so I went there." Even though these situations were very rare it happened that his parents pushed him to practice.

The sports career of their son more and more dominated the thoughts of his parents. They suggested training camps from nowhere and thought about his training schedule more than he did. They developed their own ideas, after competitions they came up with suggestions and critics and so on. I 1 said he liked these situations at first but they quickly became a strain. I 2's parents also discovered their interest in triathlon through their daughter. When she took up triathlon they were interested in her career from the start and accompanied her to competitions out of town.

I 2 is grateful for this support. “I could not enjoy it that much, if my parents were against the sport.” The support of her parents is very important to her. “I think it is so much easier to handle all this when your parents are truly supporting you.” However, she speaks about a certain pressure from her parents as well. “When they notice that I do not practice regularly, they say something about it ... like giving me a little tap.” The next comment almost apologizes for the last sentence. “They just want me to do well and see me happy but they do not put me under pressure ... no way.” However, when she describes and reflects her competitions I 2 also mentions negative critics of her parents. “They say: Come on kid, you could have done better than this.” Nonetheless, she adds, that the opinion of her parents usually reflects her own opinion.

The situation of I 3’s parents is different. One parent supported her depending on her success in sports. The other parent supported her no matter what in any case and independent of her performance. This parent did not focus on sport but on their daughter only. I 3 say that both parents mean a lot to her and that is why she did sports for so many years. But as she did not get necessary support from her parents she holds them partly responsible for the ending of her career. “Without full support and attention of parents this is not possible.”

This is also the opinion of the coach. He thinks that in particular athletes up to the age of 18 need full support of their parents especially with regard to the double burden of school and training. On the one hand he mentioned the long distances to training locations and to competitions. On the other hand he states the psychological support is essential for young athletes. But in triathlon there are hardly parents to be found who are not interested in their kids sport, says the coach. A lot of parents are former triathlon athletes or practice at least one of the three disciplines. Therefore, he says, “life of the parents usually circles around the sport of their kids.” Due to the time consuming training that triathlon requires a high understanding and interest of the parents are essential.

The coach explains that because of the structure of a triathlon season there is sometimes only one week left to go on a family holiday together. Training camps and competitions make it sometimes impossible to go on a family holiday during school holidays. But almost all parents are willing to take on these restraints of family life, says the coach. The only problem with parents the coach named was: parents who are too ambitious. "The problem is that sometimes parents want to self-actualize through their kids." These parents extend the training of their kids without knowledge, permission, instruction or feedback of the coach. However, these cases are rare and if a coach notices them this is discussed with the parents. "In case we notice that the athlete practices that much that he will suffer harm, we talk seriously with the parents about this issue."

For all interview partners parents are an important pillar in their career in competitive sports. I 1 and I 2 experience full support from their parents. But both spoke about a certain pressure that was put upon them by their parents. Even though they both do not make a clear statement in this issue, I 1 use the word pressure. Both have the opinion that their parents have the right to push them a little to practice and to criticize them after competitions with average results. Both are very successful at the moment, due to their hard and constant training and looking back they may regard the pressure and critics of their parents as helpful. I 3 clearly says that her parents put her under pressure. She does neither justify, excuse or explain this aspect. In her case the pressure may be different than the pressure I 1 and I 2 were put under.

The aspect of self-actualizing of parents through kids, which is also mentioned by the coach, had for sure an important impact on I 3. The parent initiating the pressure was a former triathlon athlete who took up triathlon when he was an adult. Maybe I 1 and I 2 judge their parents differently once they withdraw from triathlon. Personally, I think that a competitive career in triathlon is only possible with the full support of the parents. They need to be interested in the sport to give the necessary support and in particular the necessary emotional support. Moreover, the parent-child relation has to be of high quality to understand the needs of the athlete and to give support regardless the circumstances to handle the double stress level of triathlon and school.

-GÜLLICH, A., EMRICH, E., BÜCH, M.-P.: *Beiträge zum Nachwuchsleistungssport*.
-BRETTSCHEIDER, W.: GERLACH, E.: *Sportengagement und Entwicklung im Kindesalter*.

4.4.6. Role of the trainer

For the youth the trainer plays an important role. Even he sees his position as important for a successful training. All interviewed persons denote a good contact and certain sympathy as main aspect for a good collaboration. I 1 trusted in the trainer from the beginning. He saw him like a “guardian” against the much older club comrades. “I was afraid to go for the training, because I have been the smallest and youngest. It was good that he (the trainer) had been there and took care about me.” Also the individual support from the trainer was for I 1 very important, which gave him a feeling to be in good hands. Even the approach with the parents from the beginning of the triathlon training was for I 1 very important. “He (the trainer) looked immediately for the contact to my parents, to see how they back the sport. Both had to know how it works.” Now I 1 cooperate with his trainer approximately for ten years and say, that the contact became closer and more private in this time. A friendship has been developed. He explained his altered perception to the trainer with the age difference. When he was fourteen the age difference against today has been too big. For I 2 and I 3 the trainer was from the beginning the person who was respected, based on the age difference. Their age-differences had been between 15 and 20 years.

The respect uttered in blind trust and strict follow of the instructions from the trainer, without thinking about it, said the youth. With increase age the training was scrutinize from both of them. I 2 spoke about “a good contact all the time...but it was not too close”. She got her training plan from the trainer, but because of the distance she had to do a lot of it by herself and that is the reason why the personal contact with the trainer was limited. For I 2 it was not a deficit. The regularly telephone call has been suffice for I 2 and it was enough for her to feel good supported by the trainer. I 3 wished a little bit more friendly motivation in training, even in failed competition. In these situations she felt left alone and reproaches the trainer that he saw only the performance and forgot the kids inside.

At all youth is clear that the trainer plays a pedagogical role. He meets with respect, but also expected something back from him. For I 1 and I 3 is this support very important, for feeling good in training and to improve their performance. For I 2 is the trainer in the role of an educator who leads the right way. Here is not crucially to have the close contact to the trainer to manage the hard training.

The Trainer has the opinion, that his tasks are first of all sporting, but he also sees his responsibility in pedagogical view. “We bring our athletes up to reasonable humans, not only as sportsmen...” Even if there is a problem inside the encounter group or with single athletes “is it clearly pedagogic”. The good contact between the active participant and the trainer is absolute necessary. It is the key for good experiences of youth during training and how long they will have fun and motivation.

-PROHL, R.: *Grundriss der Sportpädagogik*

-Emrich, E., & Güllich, A.: Zur Evaluation des deutschen Fördersystems im Nachwuchsleistungssport.

5. Consideration

It was my personally demand for this performance sport generally and especially in triathlon, which I practice about eight years. It also developed the wish to study “Physical Education and Sports” at the Charles University in Prague and to inspire again the youth and children for that sport. I also think, that the experiences and results help me to improve sensibility for the performance sport , triathlon.

It was hard to find suitable materials and literatures for this topic. The studies which deal especially to that topic “performance sport”, in that kind of age, are reasonable.

The completed interviews didn't show a main difference to investigations which almost exist. But the consideration in my research was focused only on that sport. Triathlon is considering as an extreme-sport, because of the high quantitative training and high quality of load in three sports, swimming, cycling and running.

But some aspects appear through the different situations, in which the affected youth stay in his high performance sports career. Following similarity findings are shown in sport-pedagogy.

Investigations, which distinguished as a main problem is time, double load of school and performance sport in children and youth age. A supported function to manage this kind of load had the parents. But it also shows, that this function can weak by too much ambition and stress to the sport performance from the side of the parents. They can influence positively or negatively the performance in the sport career. Another dangerous part is the dependency to the performance sport, which has been written in the literatures and also is heard in the interviews.

Two persons (I 1 and I 2) in my investigation also named this kind of aspect, but they didn't look forward to the danger which can happen. Nevertheless, I 3 realized it afterwards.

To the trainer this danger is shown very clearly and he also point out to it. The effects had mostly be seen after the withdrawal in performance sports.

The relationship between sportsman and trainer has been seen in different ways. The literatures give this relationship an important role as against the interviews. There we had different meanings. One person didn't see the personal relationship as important. But for the other one is the personal relationship a key point of successful training process.

The investigation about the connection of school and sport is good organized only by children with good school abilities. The schools don't considerate of somebody only when it is a special sport school. In instants to that point, the Triathlon Union (DTU) says, that school is at first place and the training has to be reduces if necessary needed. The reality sometimes is a little different and not always inconvertible. The development of sport, as well as school achievement is partially too quick, so that it takes time before the trainer notice the problem and can react on it. Summarized you can say, that Children and youth who aim a performance sport career have to fulfill four requirements

- Parents help as a function of support
- discipline and self-organization
- strong mind, which include a healthy self-confidence
- good school achievement, without a great focus on studying

These points are adapted in the literature and supported by the interviews. However, here distinguishes some aspects which could not be found in the existing investigations. One main factor which also requires a performance sports career is the financing of the sport, which also be named by the interviewed participants. This aspect got a higher importance such as in swimming or soccer. Every sport, which is practice on a high performance level required financial means, to hold the equipment in highest standard. Triathlon is one of the expensive sports. Only the Triathlon-bike for kids cost about 500€. For youth it starts from 1000€. In addition too, high start fees, hotels and travel cost a lot of money.

One more aspect which was found out during the interviews is the personally approach which you cannot find out only by observation (vgl.

Fichten/Wagener/Gebken/Beer/Junghans/Meyer, 2004). The interpretation of the statement by “reading between the lines” was for the analysis very important. That is how aspects came to the surface which would not be declared by the interviewed persons before, especially the stress from parents. I think the difficulties are to find out the mediocrity. Voluntariness of children against sport has to become the main priority of the parents and not to force the wish of a sport career which they want to reach through their children. My investigations show sometimes the opposite. Most of children start a performance sport career because of the parents will. Teenagers sometimes need only a nice persuade from the parents to get them to the training. For the parents it is like a support-assistance. Other children are getting overstress in that situation. This feeling depends on the self-confidence of the child.

The interviews also show us that youth which almost is located in the performance oriented system only have a designated view for their whole situation. They mostly see only the sport and the success as the main factors in their life and do not see the negatives, like the danger of their sport commitment and the whole system. The person, who drop out shows very plainly the negative aspects of a sport performance career in Triathlon. In addition to the perceptions also the limit of the investigations become clearly. The presented interviews show only a small qualitative section of the reality.

Even the opinion of friends from the affected people would bring interested aspects and perceptions relating to the public awareness of triathlon.

Nobody of the interviewed people even speak about the weather problem, which consist in this kind of sport. In Triathlon, during training and competition too, the weather plays an important role. During summer, when the weather is dry and warm, running and cycling get more comfortable outside, than during wet and cold weather. Especially competitions which occur under difficult conditions like wind and rain make the load still more intensive as it already is. The trainer point out of this problem with different terms in training, but it does not become a main aspect.

If children and youth generally can, or have to do such kind of performance training could not be clarified with this work. At what age can we appreciate the scope of decision? Evaluate the

protect them against danger and not to support them with wrong ambition, possible even to push them into the performance sport. Children have to stay children.

In performance sport especially in triathlon it is hard not to give the sport the main priority in the life. Training has for children who practice the sport on performance level, top priority.

To reveal the mistakes of the whole performance systems in children and youth range and to minimize the danger, more researches have to conduct to this area. Results are missing from ethic discussion, which does not exist in this area.

Moreover the “drop-out “problem has to be examine closer. Here the persons who drop out have to move in the focus of consideration, because even there we can determine the default of the systems, specially the long-term-effect, and not only on the results of the active performance sportsmen.

-BRETTSCHEIDER, W.: GERLACH, E.: *Sportengagement und Entwicklung im Kindesalter*.

-DIGEL, H.: *Spitzensport: Chancen und Probleme*.

In my opinion, generally sport and the activity in a club are for kids very important. Fun and the “work together” will facilitate. Also the generally social competence and critical faculties will be trained. Even sport which is practice on performance level can have positive influence to some kids and youth. The main aspect, self-confidence may be clear for them. Even the children learn to accept that there are next to the parents other persons to be respected, like the trainer in this case.

But triathlon is not a team-sport. It is a sport where most of time everybody is alone responsible for the results. Also in youth we can find the sport like “drug addiction”. A lot of persons who “drop-out” and members of the performance sportsmen see in practicing the sport, the use of a “compensatory drug”. It is a feeling which appears, when you push the body to the edge of capacity. This adrenaline push you will get rarely. These named reasons show in my opinion, that triathlon is not a sport for children. I support to train the three disciplines alternately and child-oriented, but connect them together like in triathlon competitions may be forborne, because of the extremely high effort.

From my point of view the work of the triathlon unions, especially the cooperation with schools seems to be positive. The amount of sport-unions and clubs who look for the cooperation with schools, is quite low. Aspects of movement and playing are on focus of the union. Certainly these cooperation acts also for talent selection.

Where is the edge of the fun factor a when begins the performance thought?

All interviewed persons mentioned that practicing triathlon brings a lot of admiration, but nobody who does not practice it can track, what it means to this sport.

The negatives are mostly unknown and would not be demand by fans. I think, we meet a great respect for the youth who practice triathlon. Not only of the double load of school and training, but especially of the permanent load.

Literature

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Supplements

Supplement 1: Questions for the interview

Questions for the interviews

- 1) At What kind of age do you start with sport?
- 2) During what kind of age the performance training begin?
- 3) How did you get into the triathlon-sport?
- 4) How do your trainings-schedule looks like ?
- 5) What kind of sports did you choose, before your triathlon career starts?
- 6) What kind of role do your parents play in your “exhausting” daily plan?
- 7) What does the word “leisure-time” means for you?
- 8) How do you see the school in your life?
- 9) How do you handle the double-stress, school and sport?
- 10) What position do the trainer acquire in your living style?

