Recommendation 1292 (1996)[1]

Young people in high-level sport

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly is concerned at theinvolvement of young people in high-level sport at too early an age.

2. Sport has a primary role in the mental as well as physical development of children and young people and therefore should be an integral part of the general educational process for democratic society.

3. Elite sport however is aimed exclusively at top level performances, that only very few can hope to achieve, and has its own further risks:

   3.1. hysical and physiological risks (such as the overloading of the respiratory, cardiovascular and neuromuscular systems);

   3.2. psychological risks (such as the strain caused by the "win at all costs" mentality and "dropping-out" as a result of early commitment to intense training);

   3.3. reduced possibilities for children involved in intense training to attend normal school, especially during competition periods.

4. Some internationally agreed texts, either on young people or on sport, have referred to the need for protection of young people, but without formulating precise recommendations. For example the recent European Manifesto on Young People and Sport, adopted by the European Ministers responsible for Sport in May 1995, states that "the level and intensity of training and competition should be appropriate to the age and physical and mental development of the child".

5. Certain sports federations have shown concern at the early age at which some young people enter competition and have taken steps to raise it (for example, the International Gymnastics Federation and the Women's Tennis Association). The Assembly welcomes such moves and calls on sports federations and on the International Olympic Committee to review national and international competition systems involving young people with a view to raising minimum age-limits or, where already appropriate, enforcing them.

6. The Assembly sees several advantages in drawing a clearer distinction between juvenile and adult competition classes. This could be achieved by raising the age-limits for participation in certain competitions to 16 or 18 years, depending on the sport, particularly in international competitions and championships.

7. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on governments, in co-operation with sports clubs and federations, to:

   7.1. make a clear policy distinction between sport for young people in general (sport for all) and elite or high-level sport;

   7.2. encourage the drawing up of internationally agreed, gender-sensitive guidelines and appropriate minimum age-limits as regards training methods, rules and restrictions for young people in individual sports, with special attention to those sports where competition level can be reached at a very early age, for instance gymnastics, swimming and ski jumping, or to those sports known to be dangerous, such as boxing;

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1. See Doc. 7459, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mr Elo. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 20 March 1996.

7.3. introduce, in particular, fixed minimum age-limits for participation in international competitions and championships, between 16 and 18 years, depending on the type of sports involved;

7.4. ensure that the most talented young athletes receive a sufficient basic education, follow reasonable training and competition schedules and have the opportunity to be children and grow up as members of society with the possibility of developing other skills;

7.5. pay closer attention to the training of coaches, in technical matters and in their wider moral responsibilities, their competence being ensured by national sports organisations and, at the local level, municipalities and sports clubs.

8. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

8.1. encourage continuing research on the subject of young people in high-level sport in order to be able to assess the evolution in sport for young people, especially in some sports;

8.2. collect and disseminate through appropriate networks information on this and on sports structures and programmes for young people.