

## **Social Psychological Aspects of Competition for Male Youth Sport Participants: IV. Predictors of Enjoyment**

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This field study examined predictors of the sport enjoyment experienced by 76 male wrestlers, ages 9 to 14 years, who participated in the first two rounds of a competitive wrestling tournament. Enjoyment was operationalized as the amount of fun the boys had experienced during the wrestling season and the degree to which they liked to wrestle. Intrapersonal variables, including the participants' age and perceptions of their wrestling ability, were investigated as predictors of their sport enjoyment. Significant adult influences, including the boys' perceptions of typical parental and coach behaviors and responses to them in the sport setting, were also examined in relation to enjoyment. A stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated that younger boys, and those who perceived greater wrestling ability, enjoyed their sport participation more than did older boys and those with perceptions of lower ability. Boys who perceived (a) greater parental and coach satisfaction with their season's performance, (b) less maternal pressure and fewer negative maternal performance reactions, and (c) more positive adult sport involvement and interactions ( $p < .10$ ) experienced greater enjoyment when compared with their counterparts. Together, these predictors accounted for 38% of the variation in wrestlers' enjoyment.

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This research series involves an in-depth, integrative analysis of a group of competitive youth sport wrestlers. Previous articles from this multifaceted study have focused on competitive stress (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984), performance outcomes (Scanlan, Lewthwaite, & Jackson, 1984), and performance expectancies (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1985). The present article addresses a sorely neglected issue in the literature. That is, what factors contribute to participants' enjoyment of their competitive sport experience?

Enjoyment is a critical aspect of the competitive youth sport experience and a construct deserving independent research attention (Scanlan, 1984).<sup>1</sup> Repeated findings have identified the desire for enjoyment or fun as a major reason youngsters give for their participation in sport, while a lack of enjoyment has been associated with their cessation of involvement (e.g., Gill, Gross, & Huddleston, 1985; Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978; see reviews by Gould & Horn, 1984; Passer, 1982). Consistent with this evidence, data from the current study showed a positive correlation of .70 ( $p < .01$ ) between the wrestlers' enjoyment and their desire for future participation in the sport.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the importance of enjoyment has been demonstrated even at a situation or contest-specific level of analysis by the findings of several studies (Scanlan & Passer, 1978, 1979; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) which indicate that, independent of winning or losing, the amount of fun experienced by children during a contest is inversely related to their levels of postcompetition stress. This evidence has led to the contention that the experience of fun might take some of the edge off one of the most potent causes of postcompetition stress—defeat (Scanlan, 1984).

Previous research on enjoyment has evolved rather directly from the participation motivation literature (Wankel & Kreisel, 1985). A different approach was used in the present study and a new set of predictors of enjoyment was investigated. In keeping with the focus of the other aspects of this research project, two categories of predictors were examined, including intrapersonal variables and significant adult influences involving mothers, fathers, and coaches. Enjoyment was operationally defined by a scale reflecting (a) the amount of fun the boys felt they had wrestling during their season and (b) how much they liked to wrestle.

### **Intrapersonal Factors**

Age and perceived ability were the two intrapersonal predictors of enjoyment investigated. The impetus for studying age was the evidence in the litera-

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<sup>1</sup>Although enjoyment often has been used as the operational definition of intrinsic motivation, we concur with Deci and Ryan (1980, p. 52) that they are not synonymous constructs. See their discussion of the problems associated with the relationship between the two constructs, and their presentation of the case that an activity can be enjoyable without being intrinsically motivating.

<sup>2</sup>Future participation in the sport was assessed by the question, "How much do you want to wrestle next year?" Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = very much and 5 = not at all.

ture on sport dropouts which demonstrates a sharp decline in participation after 11 or 12 years of age (e.g., Seefeldt, Bliedernicht, Bruce, & Gilliam, 1978; see review by Gould & Horn, 1984). This result, and the finding that enjoyment relates to and perhaps even mediates children's decisions to participate in sport or cease their involvement, led to the supposition that enjoyment decreases with age.

Sport ability is a competence valued by most participants and, when perceived to be high, is related to positive feelings of self-worth (Coopersmith, 1967; Duda, 1981; Harter, 1982; Scanlan, 1982; Veroff, 1969). Positive affect about the self should be associated with greater enjoyment of the activity that fosters this positive self-regard. Consistent with this contention are findings which show that ability-related factors such as the learning, testing, and improvement of skills are important to children's sport participation and enjoyment (Gill, Gross, & Huddleston, 1985; Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985; see review by Gould & Horn, 1984). Accordingly, it was hypothesized that participants with higher perceptions of their wrestling ability, assessed in this study by comparative appraisal, would experience greater enjoyment in their sport than boys with lower perceived ability.

### Significant Adults

Although it is commonly observed that parents and coaches have a substantial impact on children's sport experience, very little research has been conducted regarding their role in this milieu. A central objective of the present research series has been to gain an understanding of the ways in which these adults influence important psychological processes in sport including participants' competitive stress, motivation, and, now, their enjoyment. There is a paucity of literature pertaining to parental influences on enjoyment, and only the elegant series of behavioral analysis studies conducted by Smith, Smoll, and their associates (Smith, Smoll, Hunt, Curtis, & Coppel, 1979; Smith, Zane, Smoll, & Coppel, 1983) have investigated the role of the coach in this regard. Their findings demonstrated that coaching behaviors are related strongly to postseason assessments of enjoyment, accounting for as much as 53% of the variance in this variable. A higher frequency of behaviors depicting technical instruction and positive support in terms of reinforcement and mistake-contingent encouragement was associated with greater sport enjoyment.

A wide range of adult influences was investigated in the current study to determine the predictors of children's enjoyment. Examined were children's perceptions of *characteristic* parental and coach (a) evaluative and affective reactions to their wrestling performance and (b) involvement and interactions with the children in the sport setting. Precise hypothesis testing regarding which specific influences would predict enjoyment was precluded by the lack of prior theoretical or empirical information in the general, educational, and sport psychology literatures. However, the research on coaching behaviors and common sense made the following, more general hypotheses tenable. That is, participants perceiving more positive adult (a) evaluative and affective performance reactions and (b) involvement and interactions within the sport context would experience greater enjoyment than youngsters with more negative perceptions.

## Method

### *Participants and Overview*

The participants in this field study were 76 boys, between the ages of 9 and 14 years, who completed two qualification rounds in the final tournament of their wrestling season. The competitors were members of 16 teams in the California Age Group Wrestling Association (CAGWA) which represented many different regions of the state, and the boys reflected a wide range of wrestling abilities and experience. Parental involvement in CAGWA was extensive—80% of the sample had one or both parents in attendance at the final tournament. Selection of the final tournament for testing allowed for an assessment of predictor and enjoyment variables that reflected children's experiences over the course of an entire season. Parental permission was obtained for each study participant. Further details regarding this sample are provided in the article that initiated this series (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984).

Wrestlers' ages were assessed on the Pretournament Questionnaire which was completed at team practice sessions about 2 weeks before the final tournament. All other data reported in this article were collected on the morning of the final tournament via the Postweigh-in Questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered by 30 trained testers from UCLA and the School of Physical Therapy, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, immediately following the weigh-in and approximately 2 hours before the start of the tournament competition.

### *Measures*

*Predictor Variables.* Age was assessed by having participants indicate their age in years. Perceived wrestling ability was measured in a social comparison manner with the item, "How good of a wrestler do you think you are compared to other wrestlers who are your age and who have wrestled for as long as you?" Wrestlers responded on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = very good and 5 = not good at all.

Items pertaining to wrestlers' perceptions of characteristic parental and coach behaviors and responses were subjected to an iterated principal axis factor analysis to develop reliable measures of these influences. A complete description of the rationale, procedures, and results for this analysis is provided in Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1984).<sup>3</sup> In brief, eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were derived and scales for each factor were created from the unweighted sum of items loading above .40 on the factor.

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<sup>3</sup>The figures reported in Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1984) for the variance accounted for by each factor of the two factor analyses are incorrect. The correct percents of variance accounted for by the eight factors of the Significant Adults factor analysis (see Table 2, Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) are 14.90, 11.54, 11.39, 10.73, 9.79, 8.16, 8.02, and 7.35, for Factors I through VIII, respectively. The correct percents of variance for the three factors of the Prematch Cognitions factor analysis (see Table 3, Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) are 32.55, 25.19, and 20.62, for Factors I through III, respectively.

To assure an appropriate ratio of subjects to independent variables in the subsequent regression analysis, only those adult factors that were significantly correlated ( $p < .05$ ) with enjoyment were examined with respect to this dependent variable. This procedure identified five adult factors for further analysis. These factors, their items, and their correlations with enjoyment are presented in Table 1.

*Dependent Variable.* Two questions on the Postweigh-in Questionnaire were designed to assess the dependent variable, sport enjoyment: "How much

**Table 1**  
**Significant Adult Factors and Items Correlated with Enjoyment**

Factors/Items	Factor's correlation with enjoyment
<i>Factor I: Negative adult affective reactions</i>	-.27
My mom (dad, coach) is ashamed of me when I don't wrestle well. <sup>a</sup>	
My dad (coach) gets upset with me when I don't wrestle well. <sup>a</sup>	
<i>Factor IV: Positive adult involvement and interactions</i>	.24
I wrestle because my parents and I have fun going to the tournaments together. <sup>b</sup>	
I wrestle because my dad or mom helps me with my wrestling and I like this. <sup>b</sup>	
I wrestle because I like my coach. <sup>b</sup>	
My coach tries to make me feel good when I don't wrestle well. <sup>a</sup>	
<i>Factor V: Negative adult evaluations and interactions</i>	-.23
My dad (coach) makes me uptight and nervous about my wrestling. <sup>c</sup>	
No matter how well I wrestle, my mom (dad, coach) doesn't think it is good enough. <sup>c</sup>	
<i>Factor VII: Adult satisfaction with season's performance</i>	.47
How pleased do you think your mom (dad, coach) is with the way you wrestled this season? <sup>d</sup>	
<i>Factor VIII: Negative maternal interactions</i>	-.31
My mom makes me uptight and nervous about my wrestling. <sup>c</sup>	
My mom gets upset with me when I don't wrestle well. <sup>a</sup>	

*Note:* For ease in reference, factor numbers are consistent with those in the original report of this factor analysis (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984).

<sup>a</sup>1 = usually to 3 = hardly ever.

<sup>b</sup>1 = a very important reason for why I wrestle to 5 = not an important reason at all for why I wrestle.

<sup>c</sup>1 = how I feel to 3 = not how I feel.

<sup>d</sup>1 = very pleased to 5 = not pleased at all.

fun did you have wrestling this season?" and "How much do you like to wrestle?" Five-point Likert response scales where 1 = very much fun (very much) and 5 = no fun at all (not at all) accompanied these questions. The fun and liking items correlated .70 ( $p < .001$ ). An enjoyment scale was therefore constructed from the unweighted sum of the two items (alpha coefficient = .82) and used as the dependent measure in the regression analysis.

## Results

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine predictors of participants' sport enjoyment. The independent variables in the regression model included the two intrapersonal variables, wrestler's age and perceived ability, and the five significant adult factors: Negative Adult Affective Reactions (Factor I),<sup>4</sup> Positive Adult Involvement and Interactions (IV), Negative Adult Evaluations and Interactions (V), Adult Satisfaction with Season's Performance (VII), and Negative Maternal Interactions (VIII).

As Table 2 indicates, five variables contributed to the prediction of enjoyment and together accounted for 38% of the variation in this measure. The in-

**Table 2**  
**Enjoyment Stepwise Regression Summary Table**

Predictor variable	Zero-order correlation with enjoyment	Beta	F	p
Adult satisfaction with season's performance	.47	.308	9.27	.0033
Negative maternal interactions	-.31	-.282	9.02	.0037
Age	.35	.236	5.60	.0207
Perceived ability	.26	.224	5.33	.0239
Positive adult involvement and interactions	.24	.161	2.87	.0947
Negative adult affective reactions <sup>a</sup>	-.27	—	—	—
Negative adult evaluations and interactions <sup>a</sup>	-.23	—	—	—

Model  $F(5, 70) = 9.87, p < .0001$

$R^2 = .413$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .380$

Note: Significant predictors are presented in their order of entry into the model.

<sup>a</sup>Variable did not enter the stepwise regression.

<sup>4</sup>Factor numbers correspond to the original eight factors presented in Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1984. Accordingly, Factors II, III, and VI from the original analysis were not significantly correlated with enjoyment.

trapersonal variables, age and perceived wrestling ability, and the significant adult factors, Adult Satisfaction with Season's Performance and Negative Maternal Interactions, emerged as significant predictors of enjoyment. In addition, the factor Positive Adult Involvement and Interactions was predictive at the  $p = .0947$  level. This latter finding is reported here because of its consistency with hypothesized predictors and because this investigation marks the first time these influences have been studied with respect to enjoyment. Therefore, it was felt that we should be cautious about prematurely discarding potentially important variables.

## Discussion

### Overview

The findings regarding the intrapersonal predictors of age and perceived ability demonstrated that younger children, and those who perceived themselves to be more able, experienced greater enjoyment than their counterparts. If replicated, the age result suggests that future research might pursue the reasons for the age-enjoyment relationship, thereby revealing the aspects of the youth sport experience that make it more attractive to younger participants, and less so for their more senior peers. This approach could provide insight into the issue of declining participation at the older age levels.<sup>5</sup> With respect to perceived ability, the results further reinforce the importance of competence in the sport domain. They support and extend previous findings by showing that skill-related factors, whether mastery based (e.g., Wankel & Kreisel, 1985) or social comparison oriented as reflected in this study, are central to sport enjoyment.

Previously cited research on coaching behaviors shows that coaches play a significant role in children's sport enjoyment. The current findings corroborate these results and suggest that parents also might be influential in this regard. Compared with participants who had more negative perceptions, greater enjoyment was experienced (a) by boys who felt their parents and coaches were more satisfied with their overall wrestling performance that season (Factor VII), and (b) by wrestlers who perceived less pressure and fewer negative performance interactions with their mothers (Factor VIII).<sup>6</sup> In addition, more positive perceptions of adult involvement and interactions with the child in the sport context tended to be related to greater enjoyment (Factor IV,  $p < .10$ ).

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<sup>5</sup>While Nicholls' (1978) work on perceived ability development might be used to explain the age-enjoyment relationship, the regression results of this study suggest that perceived ability is not pertinent to the present case. Moreover, age and perceived ability were not significantly correlated ( $R = -.06$  ns).

<sup>6</sup>While Factor VIII (emphasizing maternal reactions) negatively predicted enjoyment, it should be noted that Factors I and V (see Table 1) also were significant, negative correlates of enjoyment. These factors comprised similar items pertaining to parental and coach reactions and, with a larger sample size, might have entered the stepwise regression. Hence, although the potentially dominant maternal role in this regard should be noted, we feel that it would be premature to highlight it until the issue is further explored in future research.

A comment is in order regarding the perceived ability and significant adult predictors, and their causal relationships to enjoyment. It is possible that higher perceived ability and more positive adult influences result in greater enjoyment experienced by participants. The previous research on coaching behaviors suggests some support for this causal interpretation of the significant adult factors. However, other causal relationships cannot be ruled out by the data of this study. It is quite possible that (a) greater enjoyment leads to more positive perceptions of the self and others or (b) that more complex bidirectional or transactional relationships are operating. While it will need to be the task of future research to clarify the causality issue, the results of this study demonstrate that competitors' sport enjoyment is integrally related to their perceptions of ability and to their perceptions of significant adult behaviors and interactions.

### *A Preliminary Model of Sport Enjoyment*

The construct of sport enjoyment requires definition and conceptual clarity. Essential steps in this regard involve achieving some sense of the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of the construct. To do so, a working definition of sport enjoyment and our current thoughts regarding the delineation of the construct are briefly presented below. These contentions focus on (a) distinguishing enjoyment from the related construct of intrinsic motivation (also refer to Footnote 1) and (b) providing an expanded view of the enjoyment construct that encompasses enjoyment related to the totality of the competitive sport experience rather than merely the achievement and performance aspects of sport. A preliminary model of sport enjoyment is then presented which reflects this expanded perspective, and examples are given to illustrate its potential usefulness in ordering and identifying predictors of this construct.

First, with regard to definition, sport enjoyment is conceptualized here as an individual's positive affective response to his or her competitive sport experience which reflects feelings and/or perceptions such as pleasure, liking, and experienced fun.

Second, sport enjoyment shares a common base with the construct of intrinsic motivation. That shared base involves the underlying perceptions of personal competence and control (self-determination), which are necessary conditions for enjoyment and intrinsic motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 1980, for an elaboration of these perceptions and their relationships to intrinsic motivation). Consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (1975), it is contended that personal perceptions of competence and control do not need to be consciously perceived for enjoyment to occur, but they must be intact.

Third, at this point the distinction between enjoyment and intrinsic motivation occurs. That is, enjoyment is viewed as a broader, more inclusive construct that encompasses several aspects of the multifaceted competitive sport experience, including those not directly related to personal perceptions of competence and control. The competitive sport experience includes (a) achievement and nonachievement components and (b) intrinsic and extrinsic elements that may contribute to enjoyment. This larger perspective of sport enjoyment provides the opportunity to account for factors such as receiving positive social evaluation and recognition, meeting affiliation needs, and experiencing pleasurable or exhilarating sensations associated with movement.



Fourth, the components of the competitive sport experience can be incorporated into a two-dimensional model of sport enjoyment. As illustrated in Figure 1, we conceptualize the achievement-nonachievement predictors of sport enjoyment on a vertical continuum which is bisected by an intrinsic-extrinsic dimension. The four quadrants of this model can then be used to identify and order predictors of sport enjoyment. Examples of findings from this and other studies, as well as heretofore unexplored predictors of sport enjoyment, will be used to briefly explicate the model.

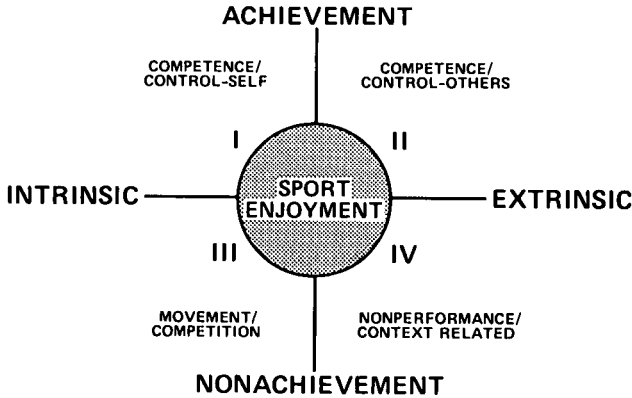


Figure 1 — A model of sport enjoyment. *Note:* Roman numerals represent the four quadrants of the model.

Factors related to sport enjoyment which fall in the model's four quadrants include the following:

- *Quadrant I (Achievement-Intrinsic):* Predictors related to personal perceptions of competence and control such as the attainment of mastery goals and perceived ability.
- *Quadrant II (Achievement-Extrinsic):* Predictors related to personal perceptions of competence and control that are derived from other people such as positive social evaluation and social recognition of sport achievement. Factor VII (Adult Satisfaction with Season's Performance) and Factor VIII (Negative Maternal Interactions) from this study would likely depict this category.
- *Quadrant III (Nonachievement-Intrinsic):* Predictors related to (a) physical activity and movement such as sensations, tension release, action, and exhilaration, and (b) competition such as excitement.
- *Quadrant IV (Nonachievement-Extrinsic):* Predictors related to non-performance aspects of sport such as affiliating with peers and having positive interactions with adults that revolve around the mutually shared sport experience. Factor IV (Positive Adult Involvement and Interactions) from this study would illustrate this category.

While this model of sport enjoyment is preliminary, it is intended to serve as a heuristic for research on this issue. As currently conceptualized, we see en-

joyment as an important motivational construct that is central to the competitive sport experience. Its potential sources are numerous and varied, and its consequences include personal choices for participation in or cessation of sport involvement. As such, it may serve as a unifying construct for sport participation and drop-out literatures.

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