



**Ethical Considerations in Sports Management:
The Involvement of Children in Competitive Sport**

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International Journal of Sport Management Recreation & Tourism, Vol.3, pp.1-17, 2009

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To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/>

DOI: 10.5199/ijsmart-1791-874X-3a

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Abstract

It was inevitable that with all the changes occurring in the modern sport, there has come a change regarding the involvement of children and young people in high-level and competitive sport. This is a very “hot” emerging issue that has drawn attention, and has sensitized people in the area of sport from all over the world, raising their concerns about the negative effects of intensive training on children and young people. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the various issues emerging from the participation of young people in high-level sport as there are mixed feelings about such involvement in highly competitive high-level sport programs. It actually outlines the basic problems in relation to this issue, suggests points and raises issues upon which discussion could focus. Such programs are widely supported on the one hand, and yet widely criticized on the other. Scientists have identified a variety of serious potential dangers that can emerge, that could definitely lead to deviations from the “Ethics in Sport” and the “Fair play” concepts. It is a very big challenge for sport management that has to be exhaustively examined for the benefit of sport and for the generations to come.

Keywords: sport management, competitive sport, ethics

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set the ground for discussion and examination regarding the issue of “Ethical considerations in sports management: The involvement of children in competitive sport”. This issue will be examined within the wider context of “sport ethics”.

Ethics in Sport: an evolutionary Concept

It is very widely promoted by the mass media and people involved in the area of sport that ethics have disappeared in sports and the sporting world. It would be very important to try to provide a definition of “Ethics in Sport”. Actually the term “ethics” has been very widely used, with different meanings and purposes. Dr. Jacques Rogge (2005), President of the International Olympic Committee in one of his presentation on ethics and Olympism, stated that “It is in style to say that ethics have disappeared in sports; ethics are an indefinable concept, and the base is respect for others. However, sport might be a universal language that is approached from very different angles by different cultures and nations. The vision of ethics is not universal therefore let us be very careful in approaching ethics”.

By examining the past, specifically examining how sport has changed throughout history, one can definitely deduce that games and sport activities have undergone a number of important changes. Such changes have always been related to the political, social and economic relationships between people in society. For example, if we go back to Ancient Greece, games and contests were grounded in mythology and religious beliefs, Roman Sport events emphasized mass entertainment and Sport activities during the middle ages clearly reflected gender and status differences. However, after the Industrial Revolution, things radically changed, and sports became gradually very pervasive and influential in the lives of people. Never before have sports been so closely linked to profit making. So we are at the point now where sports have become a combination of business, entertainment, education, moral training. Therefore, modern sports have turned into a very important social phenomenon in the 20th century. Modern sports are the creations of people coping with the conditions of life in their societies. Economic forces and the emphasis on achievement have become so pervasive in contemporary society that they have heavily influenced the way people define and

organize sports and the sport experience. The unrestrained commercialization, the rapid transformation of sport from amateurism to professionalism, the rich sponsorships and the accompanying huge money flows into sports, have led, let us admit it, to an erosion of ethical standards (Kartakoullis, 2006). People in this area are concerned that if this situation continues to persist, sports will not be as we know it today, in the near future; it will take a turn for the worse. It is within this context that someone has to examine and discuss the evolving issues, like the one under consideration in this paper.

Therefore, the question that arises is whether sport is in danger, or whether it is in crisis, bearing in mind the points emphasized in the previous paragraph. What is clear is that sport is a reflection of our society (Coakley, 1990) and as such it has serious problems and issues to face. Sport is an institution, and as such is very dynamic and never static; continuously changing. There are many people that criticize this modern form of sport and its consequences, e.g. the antisocial aspect of competition, and are therefore looking forward to a revival of ethics in sport as it used to be in the past.

Therefore having in mind the "Ethics in Sport" concept, we can identify some of the potential dangers that sport is currently facing. Dr. Rogge (1995) analyzing this issue stated that "the athlete is threatened on different levels. He may be the victim of social in adaptation, of bodily or psychic injuries, of political exploitation, of violence, corruption or doping."

More precisely, we can focus for example, on money, doping, science and the excess of training and competition as potential dangers that could open the door for deviations from ethics. For example, taking money as an issue and as a potential danger for deviation from ethics, everybody knows that it can corrupt, and it from ethics, everybody knows that it can corrupt, and it can lead to doping-the use of prohibited substances-and other means, not respecting "Fair Play" and the proposals it advocates. . However, on the other hand, can sport do without money? Science is so fast improving in the area of sport and new technologies and means are discovered for improving performance. These new innovative technologies can lead to deviation, can cause harm to athletes and can threaten their lives. This raises another issue, that of overtraining and competition; there are many examples worldwide of athletes that were physically and psychologically traumatized by their demanding attempts to improve their performance and overcome their limits. This could eventually lead to alienation, psychological problems and a deviation from a well balanced way of life.

The Code of Sports Ethics

According to the Committee of Ministers, of the Council of Europe, the Code of Sports Ethics (Recommendation No R (92)14 (1992) includes the notion of the right for children and adolescents to participate in sport and derive satisfaction from it, and the notion of the responsibility of bodies and adults seen as the promoters of fair-play and guardians of those rights. There are certain implications for people managing sport at different levels.

Sports and sports related Organizations have the following responsibilities when working with young people:

- To ensure that the structure of competition acknowledges the special requirements of the young and growing child and provides the opportunity for graded levels of involvement from the recreational to the highly competitive.
- To support the modification of rules to meet the special needs of the very young and immature, and to put the emphasis on fair play rather than competitive success.
- To ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent the exploitation of children, particularly those who demonstrate precocious ability;
- To ensure that all those within or associated with the organization who have a responsibility for children and young people are qualified at an appropriate level to manage, train, educate and coach them, and in particular that they understand the biological and psychological changes associated development of the child.

Furthermore according to this, individuals have, among other things, the following responsibilities when working with other things, the following responsibilities when working with young people:

- To put as a first priority the health, safety and welfare of the child or young athlete and to ensure that such considerations come before vicarious achievement, or the reputation of the school, club coach or parent;
- To avoid treating children as simply small adults but to be aware of the physical and psychological changes that occur during maturation and how these affect supporting performance;
- To avoid placing on a child expectations unrelated to his or her capacity to meet them;

- To make the enjoyment of the participant a priority and never place pressure which impinges on the and never place pressure which impinges on the rights of the child to choose to participate;
- To provide the child and young persons and child's family with as much information as possible to ensure awareness the potential risks and attractions of achieving e is of high performance.

Having all the above issues in mind in relation to modern sport we can now turn to the major theme of this discussion paper, Ethical considerations in sports management-The involvement of children in competitive sport. It was inevitable that with all the changes occurring in modern sport, these has come a change regarding the involvement of Young people in high level Sport. A very "hot" emerging issue that has drawn attention from the Parliamentary Assembly, and Has sensitized the Council of Europe, and people in the area of sport, raising their concerns about negative effects of intensive on children and young people.

Protection of children in high-level Sport

"Worse than the physical risks in playing high level sports today is the possibility of creating a monster, prima donna, a kid who thinks he is a superstar... Whose world revolves around him and around sports". *Dr. Phelps, Basketball Coach, University of Notre Dane (1983)*

Industrialized and developed societies emphasize achievement, success, the development of someone, potential and the successful setting of goals and large this reflects to the way adults organize the play activities of children and young people. Participation of children and young people in highly organized sport programs and high level — competitive sport has shown drastic increase. It should be emphasized though that drastic increase. It should be emphasized though that there are mixed feelings about the involvement of children and young people in highly competitive — high level sport programs. The programs are supported, yet widely criticized. On the one hand, the involvement of Young people in sport, and the benefits that can evolve from such involvement are widely known: building of character, socialization, a sense of personal involvement and achievement, reaffirmation of friendships and respect for other people, the health benefits of exercise are only some of them. However, when considering the involvement of young people in high level sport and highly organized sport programs, we can definitely identify some very serious potential dangers that can

emerge, that could definitely lead to deviations from the "Ethics in Sport" concept that was discussed in the introduction of this paper. Many specialists, like psychologists, sociologists and exercise physiologists have expressed their concerns regarding the involvement of young people in such programs. It would be important at this point to identify and analyze shortly some of the issues currently discussed in relation to the involvement of young people in high level sport.

Therefore, as outline earlier, according to the Council's of Europe recommendations every individual should have the right to engage in physical activity whatever the mode of participation, intensity or level of performance, under optimal conditions (coaching, safety etc). High- level or top sport falls within this general framework, but top sport is characterized by:

- 1) The specific requirement involved in the quest for performance both by the athletes themselves and by the members of the support teams, and
- 2) The physical and psychological risks involved.

"Problems of a moral order, when the excesses of "victory at all cost" are seen to overshadow the principle of sportsmanship, occasionally shine the spotlight on top sport. It is all the more crucial that those problems be dealt with when the athletes involved are young." *Sports Information Bulletin Nr 11, June '97*

1. High expectation/demands from parents and coaches

According to many articles, research data, and available evidence, although parents and coaches never have bad intentions for their youngsters, involved in high-level sport, many times they make mistakes that can make their children unhappy and miserable. We are thus referring to cases were parents and coaches have and set unrealistic expectations for their boys/girls in high level sport with all the consequences and implications that could follow. They can definitely lead to the establishment of highly stressful situations for both parties involved.

Referring to the issue of parent's involvement, we could provide a real life example from Cyprus, to show how they experience their children's involvement in high- level sport. There is currently a really great young female athlete, who has already managed to display her talent outside Cyprus, in international competitions. Her prospects and potential are so great and nobody can question her athletic talent. A few months ago, whilst talking to her mother, she expressed her worries and concerns because many people in the sports field, have discouraged her by saying that unless

she starts taking some "medication" under "scientific support", she will only remain a big talent, but will not be able to progress to fulfill her potential. The ethical dilemmas that emerge are obvious, and the parents that have children involved in high-level sport are greatly concerned.

2. Involvement of young people in high level Sport can affect the relationships between parents and children

Further to point one, discussed earlier, there is evidence supporting that involvement in high level sport can supporting that involvement in high level sport can definitely shape, affect the relationships between parents and children/athletes in various ways. For example, young athletes finding themselves in a double bind; if they perform well in their sport they are treated like "heroes", if not, they get negative feedback from their families. According to psychologists- and sociologists, the worse of the situations, or actually the most destructive, can result when the young/athlete, comes to the point to believe that his/her relationship with the parents depends on his/her involvement in sport, and actually on athletic performance.

3. Involvement in high-level sport can lead young people to value only winning, ignoring fair play and having fun

There is research evidence indicating that young people involved in high — level sport may develop a truly "professional attitude", with the result that they value only winning, "professional attitude", with the result that they value only winning, and they are ready to pursue all means required to achieve their goals. "The aims justify the means attitude". Such behavior and attitude can eventually lead to potential health dangers.

4. High-level sport involvement can lead to "dropouts" from healthy involvement in sport

Many criticisms prevail, suggesting that involvement of young people in high — level sport denies them the opportunity to experience the "playful" aspect of Sport, thus "dropping out" after some failure on their sport, not becoming involved in any sort of physical activity and becoming involved in any sort of physical activity and sport again. Furthermore, involvement in high — level, highly specialized sprit programs can lead to "burnout". It is therefore very important that such programs, focus on the personal

development of young athletes as well, not overemphasizing performance and ignoring personality and personal and development.

The issue of "burnout" of young athletes from high level sport has been studied considerably extensively in the U.S.A. and it is stated that this is actually a phenomenon that deserves great attention as it is very upsetting for all parties involved (young athlete, parents, coaches). It involves the loss of investment of time, money and personal effort for many years of hard work and dedication.

As an example we can refer to the tennis player Jennifer Capriati in the United States some years ago, who by the age of 14 was considered to be the biggest talented female tennis player ever, with prospects for a brilliant career. By 17 she dropped out, and after a few months she was arrested by the police whilst driving under the influence of drugs. She later admitted that she could not withstand the pressure, and that she "missed her years as a kid"

5. High risk factors — overtraining dangers

According to the National Coaching Foundation (1985), U.K., "a major issue for all concerned in sport must be the increased recognition of the possibility of performer abuse. Coaches (and parents) must recognize that physical abuse can result from overtraining or inappropriate training....."Due to the growing interest around this issue, a number of research studies worldwide have been funded for further investigation of the issue under examination. As an example, we can refer to the Training of Young Athletes (top sport) study which was commissioned by the Sports Council (1986) due to the growing concern about the negative effects of intensive training on children. The study's aim was to increase the awareness, understanding and sensitize people involved in sport of the physical and psychological pressures faced by the elite Young athlete. There are, according to the study, both positive and negative effects of intensive training for young, elite, athletes. In relation to this issue, there are known cases of coaches that produce great athletes at a very young age, managing to excel with their performance in international competitions. A couple of years later these young athletes quit or actually disappear from the sporting scene. How can these problems be faced? It is evident that there must be something wrong. Why nothing is done yet to face this issue?

After discussing some of the major threats or dangers (in relation to the deviation from "Ethics in Sports") for young people involved in high — level sport, we can now turn

to the issue of protecting Young People in high level Sport. How could this be done? What measures have to be taken? Is there anything that actually can be done about it? What mechanisms should be implemented for protecting young, elite athletes?

It would be important initially to clarify that when we talk of protection of young people in high — level sport, we can refer to many different definitions. Protection, in this case, where dealing with young promising, developing athletes, can be defined as the act of keeping these youngsters safe from physical or psychological injuries/damages that could result from abuse in involvement in high level sport. Having this protection definition in mind, we can proceed further and state that when talking of mechanisms of protection for young athletes in high — level sport, we should talk of a multifaceted approach, which would involve the athlete, the parent, the coach, and the school. These are the different levels that should be targeted in such "protection programs".

Firstly, starting with the athlete, it would be very important to educate young athletes, when starting their involvement with high-level sport, to know what their rights are, and to assist them in developing the personal skills and competencies that would allow them to take wise decisions regarding their personal lives and their careers. Therefore, young athletes should be provided with the appropriate training in developing skills (time management, coping with stress and pressure, facing crisis and failure, quitting sport and their sporting career) that would assist them in leading a well balanced life with or without sports. For this to be developed, a social care support network should be implemented that could provide all the means required for young athletes to cope with the increasing demands imposed to them by their involvement in high-level/competitive sport. Such social care support network should provide services having to do with career counseling, after career adjustment/ rehabilitation, social life skills and other related concepts.

For the student/young athlete one of the major problems is time. In addition, we should bear in mind that the commitment made to high-level sport is so great, almost to the exclusion of everything else. It is important that everybody involved in such a programs, realizes that sport is one facet of an elite athlete's life, and especially for the very young people to dedicate such an enormous proportion of their life to sport is potentially dangerous, and certainly requires very careful management.

Moving to the second level in this multifaceted approach, we should focus on the coaches that train and support young athletes. Appropriate and specialized in

servicing training should be provided, not only in respect to the training methods but also in developing the healthy relationships required between the coach and the athlete. Coaches nowadays need to know the basic concepts of psychology, sociology, and the social sciences in order to fulfill their roles as educators first and as trainers, preparing young people for high level competition. This is a vast area that definitely needs special care and attention. Dr. Leglise's study is an excellent starting point.

Parents are very important, or actually crucial in this attempt. Through the social care support network, parents should be provided with counseling services in "parenting" the young talented boy or girl. They should be definitely aware of the excessive demands imposed on such youngsters and they should be ready to work with them in developing a healthy relationship.

The school has also to play a vital role when dealing with high level young athletes, as flexible and other support services should be provided in assisting the young athlete to cope with excessive demands. With the increasing training demands for high-level sport, it is imperative that young athletes are provided with the flexible school schedule, otherwise they could very easily run into trouble trying to cope with the so time demanding training schedules and school. Young athletes should be definitely educated at school to value education and the acquisition of knowledge, and by no means they should "drop out" school for sport. A combination of the two should always be the ultimate target.

As it can be realized the protection of young athletes in highly competitive sport is not a simple concept to grasp, but involves a series of interventions at different levels. There are countries, both in Europe and worldwide, that are sensitive enough to the issue that have developed Codes of Sports Ethics and good practice of children's involvement in Sport, According to the data gathered from the two questionnaires (Clearing House and CDDS Survey), there are states that have some provisions in this respect (Belarus, the French Community of Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, German, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the U.K.). However, it would be important to note that it was not possible through this Survey to examine exhaustively all the measures taken by sports federations in different countries. Such Codes have the aim of protecting young people involved in sport from abuse, and in this respect they collaborate with sporting organizations at national, regional and local levels, and the individuals working with children and

young athletes. The aim is for the Code to be adopted by all parties involved. Along the same lines, we can refer to the National Coaching foundation for example, which in its attempt to ensure for the provision of safe sport for children and the youth, organized seminars in this respect and workshops with major themes such as the training issues for protecting the young athlete, promoting good practice in sport, protecting the vulnerable, maintaining safe boundaries in coaching and other related themes. In addition it was decided that, for the protection of young people in sport, a Code of ethics and conduct should be adopted, disciplinary procedures should be drawn, provide specialized coaching education programs, educate all people involved in the provision to sport about acceptable and unacceptable practices to protect children and other measures.

According to the European Sports Charter (1992), governments that have signed the Charter should have a commitment to give their citizens, in cooperation with the sports movement, the opportunity to practice sport under well-defined conditions, set out in 13 Articles. Article 8 specifically refers to this issue (supporting Top level sport) and states the following:

- Methods of providing appropriate direct or indirect support for sportsmen and women who reveal exceptional sporting qualities shall be devised in cooperation with sports organizations, in order to give them opportunities to develop fully their sporting and human capacities, in the full respect of their individual personality and physical and moral integrity. Such support will include aspects related to the identification of talents, to balanced education while in training institutes, and to a smooth integration into society through development of career prospects during and after sporting excellence;
- The organization and management of professionally organized sport shall be promoted through appropriate competent bodies. Practitioners engaging professionally in sport should be provided with appropriate social status and protection and with ethical safeguards against all forms of exploitation.

Furthermore, in 1996 the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe adopted a recommendation (12) Council of Europe adopted a recommendation (1292) relative to young people in high Level Sport. The recommendations can

be found an Appendix One of this paper. It would be important for us to discuss and examine critically the recommendations, in our attempt to implement them successfully.

According to the Charter, sport must be accessible to all, healthy and safe fair, tolerant and fulfilling, respectful of the environment. The Code' of Sports Ethics complements the Charter, putting fair play at the centre of the intrinsic values of sport. In view of this, it would be a wise idea if the Council of Europe or some other Body could fund a longitudinal research study that will examine the issues involved with the involvement of young people in high-level sport. Such research study could be conducted to all European Countries that have signed the Charter, and it can provide valuable information for this matter. It would be important, though, for such a study to be longitudinal as the young athletes should be followed up in various phases of their lives. Therefore the proposal for a European research study to be conducted is set for discussion. This should not be confused with the Survey already conducted by the Clearing House/CDDS examining the various provisions being made in relation to the issue under examination by different countries, as we are talking of two entirely different things. The Survey already conducted provides only one side of the coin.

Discussion and Conclusions

However, the big question that arises, concerning the protection of young athletes in high-level sport, is whether working within the rules (adopting the Code of Ethics developed, following guidelines, drawing constitutional laws and regulations imposing sanctions and penalties in cases of abuse) can really help resolve the problem. Definitely, such measures can assist in alleviating the problem to some extent, or actually assist in the protection of young athletes, but what else could be done apart from rules, laws, regulations and similar measures?

The development of a sporting ethos in the young athlete, the coach, the parent, emphasizing that all it matters is not whether you won or lost but how you played the game can be helpful. However, can it actually be helpful, bearing in mind all the issues discussed in this paper? (E.g. Money motive for winning).

There is, of course, no magic formula for solving this problem or facing this challenge. At the risk of being dubbed a romantic, I would dare say that possibly the best way out is to go back to basics. Revisit the ancient Greek philosophy about sports.

The ancient Greeks believed that only through education of the youth could we gradually develop a sporting ethos. This is why they placed sports at the centre of their education system with a view to achieve a balanced development of the individual's strength, his mind his moral and civic integrity. As we know, Ancient Greeks believed that the cultivation of man's mental and intellectual abilities could not be divorced from physical strength.

As professionals involved in sport we have to listen to these elite youngsters and to their needs, to their desires and to their concerns. It is their needs and desires that have to be met, not ours. Additionally it would be important to emphasize the cultural differences between the attitudes of people involved in the field of sport to the involvement of young people in high-level sport. There are major differences in attitudes between countries and this would be a very interesting issue to discuss. For example, we can refer to the fact that in certain countries it is almost inconceivable that Olympic level athletes would need to work to support themselves, whilst in other countries this is commonplace.

According to Dr. Rogge the ethics of sport will not be enacted by rules, it regards people and their consciences (the consciousness within oneself of the choice one ought to make between right and wrong). Ethics are evaluative concept..... And the world is changing.... Therefore, according to the Council of Europe, hit level sport or top sport, when dealing with young people requires extreme vigilance on the part of the authorities concerned with regard to all aspects related to the physical, psychological and moral integrity of the young athlete. It appears that this is an emerging issue, and there is no unified political strategy on the field. There is a range of approaches when dealing with young people in high level sport. Bearing in mind this variation in structures, it cannot be guaranteed that the rights o these young talented people will always be respected. In view of this, sport management and good governance have to play a critical and crucial role in the attempt being made to develop young athletes in a healthy environment.

Appendix 1

Recommendation '1292 (1996) on young people in high-level sport

1. The Assembly is concerned at the involvement 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 a performance that only very few can hope to achieve, and has its own further risks:
 - I. Physical and physiological risks (such as the overloading of the respiratory, cardiovascular and neuromuscular systems);
 - II. 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);
 - III. 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 Internal 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 rising 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 also believes that legislation on the basic rights of the child should be reviewed in a number of countries in order to ensure that sport is part of the normal development of children and that young athletes

- are better protected from training abuse. The Assembly stresses the responsibility of parents and families in this regard.
8. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on governments, in cooperation with sports clubs and federations, to:
 - I. make a clear policy distinction between sport for young people in general sport for all and elite or high-level sport;
 - II. encourage the drawing up of internationally agreed, gender-sensitive guideline and appropriate minimum age-limits as regards training methods, rules and restriction 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;
 - III. 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;
 - IV. 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 grown up as members of society with the possibility of developing other skills;
 - V. Pay closer attention to the training of coaches, in technical matters and in their wider moral responsibilities, their competence being ensured by national sports organizations and, the local level, municipalities and sports clubs.
 9. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers
 - I. 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;
 - II. Collect and disseminate through appropriate network information on this and on sports structures and programs for young people.

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