

Parental perspectives on children's soccer participation: influences, expectations, and the role of support in sports development

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Abstract:

For elementary school children to continue playing sports, appropriate support from those around them is needed. Parents are closely involved in their children's sporting activities, and depending on how they are involved, they can have a positive or negative impact on their children. To date, there have been few studies in Japan on the thoughts and attitudes of parents involved in their children's sports clubs. This situation needs to be improved by considering appropriate support from parents and management of sports clubs. In this study, we surveyed parents of children in soccer clubs, asking them to provide open-ended responses about their children's sports history; the circumstances surrounding their children's initial experience with soccer; their past, present, and future concerns about participation in soccer clubs; their hopes for what their children will learn from soccer; and the sports categories they envision their children pursuing in the future. Several fathers listed soccer as their primary sporting experience, while mothers listed tennis, basketball, or other sports besides soccer. The reasons children start playing soccer are influenced by their parents, siblings, and friends. Parents desire for their children to learn about “mental growth”, “continuation and personal growth”, and “team play and communication”. These results demonstrate the mental processes of parents, an aspect that has not been elucidated until now. We believe that it could be an important finding for the appropriate practice of sports parenting and sports club management in the future. However, it would also be necessary to conduct additional surveys in the future that include the competitive level of the team and the individual child, as well as the degree of contribution of the parents to team management.

Key Words: - sports parenting, questionnaire, football, awareness

Introduction

According to a statistical survey conducted in 2023, the number of registered soccer players in Japan was approximately 920,000, exceeding the number of registered basketball players (approximately 590,000) and volleyball players (approximately 410,000), which have traditionally been popular sports (Sasagawa Sports Foundation, 2023). Moreover, in the elementary school category, the number of players registered with the Japan Football Association (JFA) was about 310,000 as of 2013. However, in 2023, the number of player registrations saw a downward trend, at approximately 250,000 (Japan Football Association, online). Hence, identifying the cause of this trend and mitigating underlying issues might yield positive results for the Japanese soccer industry.

Competitive athletes often discontinue playing their sport owing to mental and/or physical fatigue (burnout) and a decline in motivation. To date, several studies have revealed a multitude of factors related to burnout and the continuation of competitive sports in children. Among them, a prominent factor was the excessive involvement of parents (Sánchez-Miguel, 2013; Brenner & Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, 2007; Merkel, 2013). However, the reality is that sports clubs cannot operate without the cooperation of the parents, who perform a wide range of tasks for the club, such as “paying the necessary expenses related to sports”, “doing their part (doing miscellaneous tasks such as managing equipment)”, “driving to the venue”, and “cheering” (Smoll & Smith, 2002; Coakley, 2006). This type of parental involvement with their children through sports is called “sports parenting” and is defined as a parenting style related to children's sporting activities and the way parents interact with their children in relation to their sport (Holt et al., 2009). Ideal-style sports parenting is considered an authoritative style in which parents clearly present their demands but are responsive to their child's needs, or an autonomous and supportive style that gives the child options and encourages self-determination. In contrast, inappropriate sports parenting is considered a dictatorial or controlling style that is not responsive to children's needs and sets too high demands. It has been shown that this style does not encourage the child's autonomy and is a major source of stress for the child (Holt et al., 2009; Harwood & Knight, 2016).

This kind of research shows that the way parents interact with their children affects whether their children continue to play sports in the future. What kind of future do parents expect of their children, and what

kind of anxieties do they have before, after, and in the future of their children joining a sports club? Paola et al. (2023) reported that parents considered it important for their children to develop optimal sports skills and ultimately join a university team and receive a sports scholarship. In addition, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) investigated the burden of children's sports activities on their parents. The results of this study revealed that parents, felt burdened by the cost of travel for tournaments, the cost of equipment, balancing work and club activities, and concerns about injury. However, there is a lack of research in Japan on sports parenting and the extent and nature of parents' involvement, their expectations and anxieties regarding their children playing in the elementary school category. All the aforementioned studies were conducted outside Japan, targeting Western countries. From the above, we hypothesize that individuals possess different characteristics in Japan owing to differences in values and psychological processes such as cognition and emotion, arising from different cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We believe that analyzing parents' expectations and anxieties could be an important resource for discovering appropriate ways to approach sports parenting and club management in Japan.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the characteristics of parents and their attitudes toward their children in elementary school by surveying their children's past and present soccer playing history, the circumstances surrounding their children's initiation into soccer, their concerns about their children attending soccer clubs in the past, present, and future, and the categories of sports they expect their children to play.

Material & methods

Participants

Seventy-one parents, including 25 fathers and 46 mothers, participated in this study. These participants are parents of children who had participated in a tournament for elementary school students held in Prefecture A in September 2023, and a tournament for elementary school students held in Prefecture B in February 2024. The ages of the fathers and mothers were 43.2 ± 4.2 years and 43.0 ± 4.3 years, respectively. The youngest elementary school student who participated in the tournament was 10 years old, and the oldest was 12 years old (average age: 11.0 ± 0.7 years). A written informed consent was obtained from participants after they were orally briefed on the experiment. This study was conducted after obtaining approval from the ethics review committee of the institution to which the principal investigator belonged to the Matsue National College of Technology Bioethics (Review No. 204).

Questionnaire content

Table 1 presents the questions and options in the questionnaire. The survey items in the questionnaire were set by the authors after consulting each other, as there were no studies on this topic for reference that the authors were aware of in Japan. Q1-4 consisted of questions about the parents themselves. Specifically, we surveyed the participants' ages and sports history. In addition to sports that will be included in the Olympics as of 2022, leisure sports such as mountain climbing were also included. Q5-13 consisted of questions aimed at understanding various aspects related to children playing soccer. These included the reasons why children started playing soccer, the reasons parents believed their children continued to play, the abilities parents wanted their children to develop through soccer, the concerns children had regarding playing soccer (in the past, present, and future), and the level of play parents expected their children to achieve in the future. Open-ended questions were framed for Q7-13, to avoid arbitrary results of the multiple-choice questions. For Q13, we provided options representing possible levels of soccer competition in Japan to gauge parents' expectations for their children's future level of play: amateur (a level where individuals participate voluntarily for health and relaxation), semi-professional (a level where individuals are not professional soccer players but belong to and play for their company's club team), and professional (a level where individuals can earn a living through soccer). The professional level is based on the J-League (J1, J2, and J3), while the semi-professional level is based on the JFL (Japan Football League) and regional leagues.

Analysis Methods and Statistical Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used for all analyses. For Q1 and Q3, the total count of applicable options was determined. For Q2, Q4, Q5, and Q6, the mean and standard deviations of participants' age and sports history were calculated, respectively. For Q7-13, after-coding was performed because all questions were open-ended, using triangulation to avoid arbitrary classifications. In the analysis, the first author checked the answers for spelling or grammatical errors and edited the text. At this stage, the first author created both the raw and edited data, and a co-researcher checked for any arbitrary changes made. Subsequently, the edited sentences were classified into several categories and assigned names. The co-researchers then checked for omissions or excesses in the generated categories. Names of categories were then decided after discussion. The first author then counted the sentences that corresponded to the predetermined categories separately for fathers and mothers. Some participants also described various factors. In such cases, multiple summary codes were assigned, and trials were conducted. After tallying, the authors discussed the sentences corresponding to each item until a consensus was reached. This survey was conducted in Japan, and the questionnaires were collected in Japanese. However, upon writing this study, one of the collaborative researchers who possessed the Michigan University ECPE (Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English) translated them into English.

After the data was compiled, a χ^2 test was conducted, with a significance level of 5%. In this analysis, the expected frequency for some variables was less than 5. Therefore, Fisher's exact probability test was also conducted with a significance level of 5%. In addition, when a significant difference was found, a residual analysis was conducted as a sub-test to examine which items showed a significant difference. The absolute value of the adjusted residual was considered significant at the 5% level if it was 1.96 or more. Statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS Ver. 29 (IBM).

Table 1. Questionnaire Content and Options

Questionnaire items	Options
Q1 What is your relationship to us?	Father, Mother, Others (free description)
Q2 What is your age?	Free description
Q3 What has been your major sporting experience?	No, Olympic sport (as of 2022), Leisure sports
Q4 How many years did you play the sport you selected earlier?	Free description
Q5 What is the age of your child?	Free description
Q6 How old was your child when he/she started playing soccer?	Free description
Q7 How did your child start playing soccer?	Free description
Q8 What were your concerns when your child started playing soccer?	Free description
Q9 Please tell us why your child continues to play soccer now.(This can be a reason for continuing to attend a soccer club).	Free description
Q10 What do you want your child to learn from soccer?	Free description
Q11 Do you have any concerns about your child's participation in the soccer club at this time?	Free description
Q12 Do you have any concerns about your child continuing to play soccer in the future?	Free description
Q13 What level of soccer player do you expect your child to be in the future?	Amateur (voluntary, for the purpose of health and diversion), Semi-professional (non-professional soccer players who belong to a company-run club team), Professional (able to earn a living solely by playing soccer)

Results

Parental sports experience

Figure 1 shows the sports that the parents played, broken down into their fathers and mothers. The results showed that the most common sport for fathers was soccer (n = 12), followed by baseball and software (n = 4), and track and field (n = 3). Among mothers, tennis (n = 10) was the most common, followed by basketball (n = 8) and volleyball (n = 7). Only four mothers reported having no experience playing any sports. The average and standard deviation of the period of time spent playing these sports was 10.9 ± 7.8 years for fathers and 6.0 ± 5.9 years for mothers.

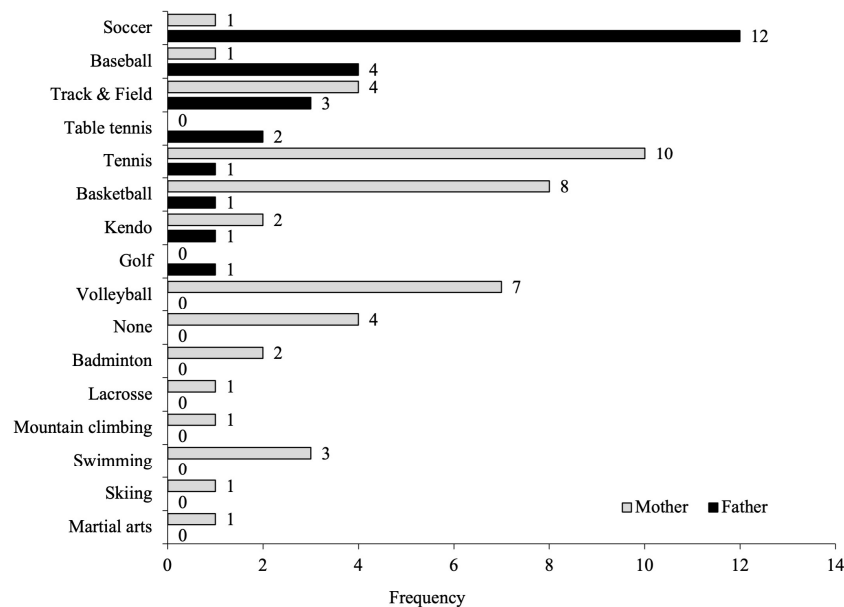


Figure 1. Major sports experience of the subjects

Reasons children started playing soccer and why they continue today

Table 2 presents the class analysis results of the reasons children started playing soccer, categorized by fathers and mothers. The results of the chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference in any of the items ($\chi^2(4) = 0.776$). The overall total suggests that the most common reason children started playing soccer was through “Invitation by a friend or acquaintance” at 29.6%, followed by “Influence of a brother or sister” (28.2%), and “Influence of parents” (19.7%). Table 3 shows the results of the class breakdown by father and mother regarding the factors that led children to continue playing soccer until the present day. The results of the chi-square test showed that there were no significant differences in any items ($\chi^2(4) = 1.958$). The overall totals suggest that the most common reason for children’s continued play was “Connection with friends” (37.4%), followed by “The joy of soccer itself” (35.4%), and “Growth, goals and challenges” (11.1%).

Table 2. How children start playing soccer

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Influence of a sibling	7	28.0%	13	28.3%	20	28.2%	Influenced by the fact that his brother played soccer first.
Invitation by a friend or acquaintance	7	28.0%	14	30.4%	21	29.6%	He started playing soccer with his friends because he was frustrated after losing.
Influence of parents	6	24.0%	8	17.4%	14	19.7%	Parents made him play.
Voluntary	2	8.0%	6	13.0%	8	11.3%	Because he wanted to play soccer.
Other	3	12.0%	5	10.9%	8	11.3%	He had experience of soccer classes (there was a soccer school at kindergarten).
Total	25	100.0%	46	100.0%	71	100.0%	

$\chi^2(4) = 0.776$, n.s.

Table 3. Reasons why children continue playing soccer

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
The joy of soccer itself	12	35.3%	23	35.4%	35	35.4%	• He loves soccer. • Although he is not a good soccer player, he seems to like soccer and does not want to quit.
Growth	3	8.8%	8	12.3%	11	11.1%	• He is interested in improving his skills. • He feels that he is improving in terms of technique.
Connection with friends	13	38.2%	24	36.9%	37	37.4%	• He thinks it is because the atmosphere of the team is very good and he enjoys playing soccer with his friends. • He enjoys playing soccer with his current teammates, and he thinks he can continue to play.
Goals and challenges	3	8.8%	8	12.3%	11	11.1%	• Because he is aiming to become a professional player. • He has a series of goals such as prefectural competitions and selections.
Support from family and coaches	3	8.8%	2	3.1%	5	5.1%	• He is able to continue playing soccer because his grandmother takes him to and from school. • He is able to continue to play soccer because of the support of my parents (his grandparents).
Total	34	100.0%	65	100.0%	99	100.0%	

$\chi^2(4) = 1.958$, n.s.

Anxiety at the time of joining, present concerns, and future worries

Table 4 presents the levels of anxiety experienced by fathers and mothers when their children joined soccer clubs. The results of the chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference in any of the items ($\chi^2(5) = 8.796$). Looking at the overall total, the most common response was “No concerns” at 80.3%, followed by “Child’s enjoyment and companionship” (9.9%), and “Children’s enjoyment and companionship” (4.2%). Table 5 presents the current concerns about having children play soccer. The results of the chi-square test showed a significant difference ($\chi^2(5) = 16.145$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, the results of the residual analysis showed that only the male respondents had significantly higher scores for school-related concerns ($p < 0.05$). For the other items, 64.4% of the respondents selected “No”, and 8.2% selected “Health and safety concerns” and “Concerns about leadership and team environment”. Table 6 shows the levels of anxiety about continuing to play soccer in the future. The results of the chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference in any of the items ($\chi^2(4) = 4.781$). The overall total results showed that the most common response was “No” at 53.5%, followed by “Health and safety related” (15.5%) and “School-related” (11.3%).

Table 4. Concerns when the child started playing soccer

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
No	19	76.0%	38	82.6%	57	80.3%	No.
Children's enjoyment and companionship	2	8.0%	1	2.2%	3	4.2%	Can the child enjoy working on it?
Child's physical ability	1	4.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	My child's physical ability is poor
Child's enjoyment and companionship	1	4.0%	6	13.0%	7	9.9%	I was worried about being able to do my duty because I have a full time job.
Child's growth and comparison to others	0	0.0%	1	2.2%	1	1.4%	I was worried about being able to keep up with the others because I started at a late age.
Injury	2	8.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.8%	Injuries to knees, feet, etc.
Total	25	100.0%	46	100.0%	71	100.0%	

$\chi^2(5) = 8.796$, n.s.

Table 5. Concerns about your child's current activities at the soccer club

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
No	13	50.0%	34	72.3%	47	64.4%	No.
School-related concerns	4▲	15.4%	0	0.0%	4	5.5%	Not studying properly.
Motivation and psychological burden concerns	2	7.7%	0	0.0%	2	2.7%	In an unfamiliar environment, he becomes extremely vulnerable.
Health and safety concerns	4	15.4%	2	4.3%	6	8.2%	I am worried about injuries, iron deficiency, and the balance of his everyday foods.
Financial or time constraints	1	3.8%	2	4.3%	3	4.1%	The cost aspect of junior youth.
Concerns about leadership and team environment	1	3.8%	5	10.6%	6	8.2%	Helplessness against coaches' voices, harassment from instructors. Favoritism.
Others	1	3.8%	4	8.5%	5	6.8%	They can't think for themselves and play in practice and games.
Total	26	100.0%	47	100.0%	73	100.0%	

$\chi^2(6) = 16.145$, $p < .05$

Table 6. Concerns about allowing your child to continue playing soccer in the future

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
No	11	44.0%	27	58.7%	38	53.5%	No.
School-related	3	12.0%	5	10.9%	8	11.3%	Worried about not having a club at the middle school, can we play soccer at the middle school?
Support related	3	12.0%	3	6.5%	6	8.5%	Time commitment, such as transportation, dealing with depression, burden on parents.
Team or peer related	1	4.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	Will I be blessed with the right people (teammates)?
Health and safety related	5	20.0%	6	13.0%	11	15.5%	Injuries
Leader/coach related	1	4.0%	2	4.3%	3	4.2%	Will I get to meet the coach, will I meet a good instructor?
Other	1	4.0%	3	6.5%	4	5.6%	Yes, there are many things.
Total	25	100.0%	46	100.0%	71	100.0%	

$\chi^2(6) = 3.781$, n.s.

Skills children should learn from soccer and their expected future level of play

Table 7 indicates the results regarding parental expectations on what their children should learn from soccer, as categorized by their fathers and mothers. The results of the chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference in any of the items ($\chi^2(4) = 4.743$). Looking at the overall total, the result was that "Mental growth" was the most common at 35.8%, followed by "Continuation and personal growth" (25.5%) and "Team play and communication" (22.6%). Table 8 shows the results regarding parental expectations on the level of competition their children could achieve in the future. The results of the chi-square test showed no significant differences in any of the items ($\chi^2(2) = 0.663$). The results were as follows: amateurs (56.3%), professionals (22.5%), and semi-professionals (21.1%).

Table 7. What you want your child to learn through soccer

	Father		Mother		Total		Sample Answers
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Fun and Fulfillment	6	15.4%	4	6.0%	10	9.4%	I want them to have fun.
Continuation and personal growth	12	30.8%	15	22.4%	27	25.5%	To keep looking forward and keep trying, no matter how hard things get in practice, games, etc.
Team play and Communication	6	15.4%	18	26.9%	24	22.6%	The importance of team play. Valuing one's fellow workers.
Mental growth	13	33.3%	25	37.3%	38	35.8%	Perseverance, fighting spirit, respect
Others	2	5.1%	5	7.5%	7	6.6%	Manners and courtesies
Total	39	100.0%	67	100.0%	106	100.0%	

$\chi^2(4) = 4.743$, n.s.

Table 8. Level of competition expected of children in the future

	Father		Mother		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Amateur	13	52.0%	27	58.7%	40	56.3%
Semiprofessional	5	20.0%	10	21.7%	15	21.1%
Professional	7	28.0%	9	19.6%	16	22.5%
Total	25	100.0%	46	100.0%	71	100.0%

$\chi^2(2) = 0.663$, n.s.

Discussion

This study explored the concerns and expectations of parents with children who are involved in soccer clubs. As a result, we were able to clarify previously unclear points from Japanese research, such as what motivated the parents of children who attended soccer clubs to get their children involved in soccer, their concerns regarding their children's involvement in soccer clubs in the past, present, and future, and the level of performance they expected their children to achieve. This aspect can be considered a novelty of this research.

According to a previous study by Baxter-Jones and Maffulli (2003), parents have the strongest influence when children start playing sports such as gymnastics, tennis, swimming, and soccer. Seabra et al. (2008) reported that more than 70% of boys and girls participated in sports when their parents (both mothers and fathers) and siblings also participated. In addition, Keegan et al. (2009) reported that peers also influence participants' motivation through competitive and cooperative behaviors, evaluative communication, and social relationships. Considering this, the fact that several children in this study cited the influence of their parents (19.7%), friends (29.6%), and siblings (28.2%) as the reasons they started playing soccer, supports the findings of previous studies. Furthermore, out of the 14 children who answered that their parents had made them start playing soccer, either their father or mother had experience playing soccer as their main sport. In relation to this, a previous study by Brummelman et al. (2013) reported that it is possible for parents to project their own desires and unfulfilled sports ambitions onto their children. Although additional research is needed to confirm whether the same trends as those in the previous study by Brummelman et al. (2013) are seen among the parents of soccer players, we suspect that parental pressure may also have an impact on children's choice to participate in sports.

Moreover, when it comes to parents' concerns about their children joining a soccer club (past, present, or future), 80.4% of respondents indicated they had no concerns when their children joined a soccer club in the past. However, this figure decreased to 64.4% in the present and 53.4% in the future, suggesting that parents become more concerned about their children's future involvement in soccer as time progresses. Considering other trends, when they first joined, some parents were concerned about "parental support" and "their child's enjoyment and friendships". However, as time progresses after the children joined the soccer club for the first time (past concerns), parents begin to prioritize "health and safety concerns", "concerns about the coach and team environment" (present concerns), and after gaining more experience playing with the same club, their concerns shift to "health and safety concerns" and "concerns related to school and schoolwork" (concerns regarding the future). To the knowledge of the authors, parents' concerns changing over time, has not been observed in previous academic research. We hypothesized that this could be due to several parents with past experience in a soccer club, faced challenges of their own, which may also contribute to their concerns about

their children's future involvement in soccer. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) investigated the issues and challenges that parents experience when their children are involved in sports activities. The results showed that parents felt burdened by two types of support: instrumental support, such as travel expenses for tournaments and equipment costs, and emotional support, such as ensuring private time, balancing work with club activities, receiving feedback on their children's play, worrying about injuries in practice and in competition. In this study, the items listed as parental burdens in a previous study by Wiersma and Fifer (2008) were listed in the results section as parental anxieties in the general sense, but the occurrence of these anxieties may differ depending on the phase in which the child joined the soccer club, the phase in which they started playing after joining, and the phase in which they decided whether or not they would continue playing in the future.

It is worth mentioning that despite being a small fraction of the results, among the concerns of parents "concerns about the coach and team environment" and "concerns about school and schoolwork" were included, despite them not being a concern when the children first joined the club. One mother stated, "I want the bench system for elementary school students to be abolished. It depends on the team you join, but the talented players are all given preferential treatment, and the other players do not get many opportunities. It is not fair for parents if their child's period of growth is cut short, or if they are given coaching that makes them want to give up while they are still in elementary school". Other parents also expressed opinions such as "The motivation for playing soccer in the club is different for each child and parent (father)" and "The soccer that the child wants to play is different from the soccer that is required by the team (mother)". These opinions are from parents who believe in their child's trainability and those who aim for a higher level of competition. We can assume that these concerns arise from the anxiety that both children and parents experience after starting to play a sport, but we can also see that the anxiety parents experience differs depending on the level of competition within the team and the individual beliefs of their child. Parents of children who currently have playing time can gain a perspective on what kind of performance their child can demonstrate during the time they are playing, and they may have concerns about the nutritional aspects of their child's regular diet and the kind of technical guidance they should receive from their coach to achieve high performance. However, parents of children who do not receive playtime are concerned about how they can get their child to play in a match, and they may have concerns about environmental and human factors (coaches) as the cause. In relation to this, Horne et al. (2020) suggests that there is a lack of communication, trust, and common goals between parents and coaches. This suggests that a few participants in this study may have also lacked the time to communicate with the coach. However, this study did not investigate the relationship between the children's level of competition, their feelings, the amount of communication between the coach and parents, and parents' anxieties. Nevertheless, to improve the relationship between parents and coaches, it would be insightful to further explore this subject.

Another relevant result was that fathers were more likely to experience anxiety regarding schoolwork" ($p < 0.05$). It is unclear why fathers were anxious about their children's schoolwork. However, in a previous study by Newland et al. (2013), it was reported that the fathers' beliefs, perceptions and involvement may affect their children's academic performance. Moreover, as many previous studies have shown, because of natural anxiety about their children's futures, many parents are involved in their children's studies and put pressure on them (Fan & Chen, 2001; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Boonk et al., 2018). In this regard, it is necessary to conduct more detailed surveys in the future, including fathers' beliefs and involvement and their children's academic or sports lives.

Moreover, the questions about what parents want their children to learn from soccer and the level of play they expect their children to achieve in the future were designed with the intention of investigating "parents' expectations for their children". Although several studies have revealed the effects of parental pressure on children's continued participation in sports and burnout (Sánchez-Miguel, 2013; Brenner & Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, 2007; Merkel, 2013 etc.), it remains unclear what specific abilities parents want their children to develop through sports (soccer), or what level of play they expect their children to achieve in the future. In the population of this study, it was found that several parents hope that their children will acquire "mental growth such as perseverance and respect for coaches and opponents", "self-growth and a continuous desire for putting forth effort", and "cooperation with teammates" through soccer. All these results reveal that parents are occupied with their children, fortifying themselves mentally or how to function socially within a group. Previous studies conducted in Europe and the United States have reported that although parents are aware that early specialization in a sport is a risk factor for injury, the benefit of optimal development of sports skills and ultimately joining a university team and receiving a sports scholarship may outweigh this risk (Paola et al., 2023). Considering these studies, we can surmise that in Western countries, parents' expectations focus on improving athletic ability. The reason for the different results between these studies and this research is the difference in educational systems and culture between Japan and other countries. In countries such as the United States and other European countries, sports scholarship systems are common, and have been introduced by several universities and colleges (American Collegiate Scholarship Association, online). However, in Japan, scholarships are only implemented by famous private universities, which makes the public's awareness of their existence low. Additionally, we can speculate that this is influenced by the large difference in market scale between Japan and Western countries (SPOLABO, online). In several studies in the field of cross-cultural

psychology, researchers have reported that Western societies have a culture of individualism in which people think of themselves as independent from others, whereas Asian societies have a culture of collectivism in which they fundamentally think of themselves as connected to others and interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002). In a previous study by Guzley et al. (1998), the cross-cultural views of commitment in Japan and the United States were investigated using the concepts of individualism and collectivism, and it was reported that four themes emerged in the Japanese sample: “connection”, “membership”, “responsibility” and “cooperation”. From the above, we can observe that several parents in this study sought spiritual growth, teamwork, and cooperation, which may have been influenced by cultural backgrounds and differences in the education system. However, when it came to the level of competition they expected their children to achieve in the future, 56.3% of the parents wanted their children to be amateurs, and the remaining half wanted their children to continue competing at a level that would enable them to earn a living as a primary or secondary source of income rather than at a recreational level. Regardless of their children's future career paths, parents in the current elementary school-age category hope for human growth, such as mental growth, teamwork, and the ability to continue growing through effort. It could be insightful to further examine whether these expectations could change over time, and how they affect the child's performance or other endeavors.

Limitations of the research and prospects

In this study, we examined the attitudes and thoughts of parents of elementary school children attending soccer clubs. As a result, we were able to visualize parents' expectations and anxieties. However, this study did not consider the level of competition of the team or individual children inside the team (whether the children were aiming at higher level of competition or were playing only at a recreational level). Moreover, the extent of the parental involvement in team management remains unknown. This is a limitation of this study, which, by considering these factors, makes it possible to discern whether there are differences in the expectations and anxieties of parents depending on the level of competition, or in the expectations and anxieties of parents for their children depending on their activities in the club.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the concerns of 71 parents whose children attended football clubs, the reasons their children started playing football, their concerns about their children attending football clubs in the past, present, and future, the categories of competition they expect their children to play and examine the characteristics of parents of elementary school children and their attitudes towards their children. As a result, (1) parents, friends and siblings influence children when they start playing sports, (2) parents' concerns may change over time (past, present and future), (3) parents want their children to learn from soccer not “improvement in competitive ability” but “mental growth”, “continuation and personal growth”, and “team play and communication”, and (4) the ratio of amateur to professional/semi-professional players that parents expect their children to play at in the future is approximately divided in half. These results generally support the results of studies conducted in countries other than Japan, but the results of (2) and (3) have not been observed in other studies and can be concluded as a trend unique to Japan. While Japan can refer to the way parents interact with their children and how sports clubs are managed in other countries, it is also necessary to consider Japan's unique systems and management. However, it is necessary to conduct additional surveys in the future that add to the level of competition between teams and individual children, and the extent of contribution of parents to team management.

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