

Original Article

The Road to excellence in Orienteering: an analysis of elite athletes' life stories

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Abstract:

Excellence is the result of a long-term investment and from a successful interaction between a range of contributory factors. Therefore, this study aimed to characterize the journey of a group of world-class elite athletes from the sport of orienteering, in order to identify the important factors and conditions that may influence and determine the development and maintenance of excellence in orienteering.

This research focused on a group of 5 elite athletes whom placed in the top 10 places in the International Orienteering Federation (IOF) world ranking in 2013. The methodology used has focused on life histories, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews and then analysed using content analysis.

Results showed the interviewees recognised that excellence is a goal to achieve, in which the performance of excellence is complemented by the development of a set of skills related to the personal formation.

It was also identified that sporting diversification is the basic principle on which is based the entire development process, which is organized into three structural stages: i) initiation, characterised by a strong investment in the free and deliberate game; ii) development, expressed in a greater investment in orienteering and structured training; iii) improvement, which is distinguished as an almost exclusive commitment to this sport. Throughout the development process, this group of athletes recognise the need to possess a set of characteristics and skills such as professionalism, dedication and commitment to orienteering.

We also identified a number of decisive aspects for the development of excellence, which is the context in which this process occurs, in particular the influence of family, friends and peers as well as the socio-cultural dynamics of a country. Final key themes that emerged are the aspects of affective-emotional nature, where feelings of happiness, wellbeing and passion for this sport act as modellers and influencing elements.

Key words: Sport excellence, talent, orienteering, life history, development

Introduction

The pursuit of perfection has been a challenge that has always accompanied man. The constant evolution of scientific and technological knowledge has enabled individuals who have access to certain conditions to achieve such excellence. However, it is noted that despite this steady progress in scientific and technical knowledge there continues to be a very limited the number of individuals who can achieve and maintain levels of excellence (Gagné, 2007), which in turn gives them a uniqueness and unique status.

Indeed the systematic and exceptional performances of athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo (soccer), Simone Luder Niglli and Thierry Gueorgiou (orientation), Usain Bolt (athletics), Michael Phelps (swimming) among many others, whose characteristics, abilities and developmental pathways immediately raise admiration and curiosity to know how did they develop these capabilities? Characteristics that make them so exceptional? How do they manage maintain their high performance?

This curiosity in turn validates itself by the need for a better understanding and interpretation of this human phenomenon. Their study has consistently assumed a particular emphasis not only in the sport science scientific community but also in other fields of achievement such as musicians, teachers, scientists, among others (Bloom, 1985; Lubinski & Benbow, 2006), in seeking to better understand the reasons and possible causal factors underlying these performances.

These analyses unanimously allude to excellence as a result of certain characteristics or related to personality, motivation and/or cognitive skills, or related to the context, such as family issues, peers, or coaches,

among others. Indeed, the interaction of these factors with each other (Baker & Horton, 2004) is believed to be fundamental for the development and maintenance of excellence (Ruiz Sánchez, Durán, & Jiménez, 2006). Similarly it appears also that the development of excellence in sport has its genesis in childhood and is the result of a long-term investment (Barreiros, Côté, & Fonseca, 2013), which, in turn, highlights the need to understand excellence as a multidimensional process.

In this perspective, the contribution of the study of Bloom (1985) who analysed longitudinally the route of young talented in different areas came to emphasize that excellence is the result of an evolutionary process and that it takes place over three important and distinct phases: initial, intermediate and final years (Bloom, 1985).

These findings inspired the development of a set of development models of practitioners structured in stages (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002), which try to describe the type of investment required and the different variables underlying the development of excellence in sport (Barreiros et al. 2013).

Underlying all of these models is a common catalyst without the fulfilment of which, hardly an athlete may reach a level of excellence. Thus, it becomes important passion for the sport and a long commitment to training.

Considering the above and considering the evolutionary, dynamic and multidimensional perspective of excellence and the holistic need of understanding we believe that further study should examine a significant range of different dimensions.

Thereby we considered relevant the realization of studies that provide collecting data about the interpretations of elite athletes about their experience, their daily work, the guiding principles of their actions and meanings of their attitudes and behaviors (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003). This study aimed to characterise the development path of a group of elite orienteering athletes, in order to identify the factors and requirements that influence and determine the development and maintenance of excellence in orienteering.

Method

Participants

Five elite orienteers (25,8±2,9 years old), 4 males and 1 female participated. Three of these athletes were students at a university and two were professional athletes. Four of the athletes were individual senior world champions more than two times, and the other athletes finished as runners up in the senior world championships on more than one occasion. All the athletes were selected based on the following criteria: i) more than 10 years of experience of practice in this sport; ii) have been positioned in the top 3 positions in world cup competitions in the last 3 years; iii) are positioned in the top ten ranking of the International Orienteering Federation in 2013.

Interview Guide

This study was developed under the paradigm of qualitative methodology in the context of the methodology of life stories (Atkinson, 2005; Tierney, 2000), with which it is possible to know the route traversed by athletes by identifying people, moments and experiences that had a significant impact in their sporting career paths. Among the qualitative methods, our choice falls under the Life Stories (Atkinson, 2005; Tierney, 2000) as a powerful tool that can help the researchers to decipher the excellence in orienteering. Through this methodology, it becomes possible to examine the lives of athletes, "his childhood and youth, you can get ideas on how they spent their time, what experiences have, so we can start trying to find explanations that help us to understand why and how, over the knowledge and techniques that provided him later perform or create something that made to them protrude or different "(Pereira, 2002, p.120).

This option is also justified by the scarcity of studies developed in the context of sport excellence in this specific sport, especially this modality of excellence, even rare are those who resort to the life stories.

The interview guide was developed taking into account the objectives of the study, the available literature (Côté, Ericsson, & Law, 2005; Holt & Dunn, 2004), as well the opinions of consulted experts. More specifically, it was attained after preparation and discussion of previous drafts of the transcript, based on the following steps: i) preparation of a first draft of the transcript based on the specific aims of the study and available literature, ii) evaluation of the interview transcripts by three senior researchers in sports pedagogy, who have substantial experience with qualitative methods, iii) discussion of findings based on the presented suggestions by each, iv) a pilot study done with two elite orienteering athletes, v) minor adaptations to the transcripts resulting from the reflections of the pilot study, and vi) resubmission of the updated version of the transcripts to the aforementioned senior sport pedagogic experts. These steps ultimately resulted in the final version of the interview guide.

Data collection and analysis

All the interviews were done by the first author, between January 31th and February 28th of 2014. Each interview took between 30 minutes and 1 hour, was audio recorded and was transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis was performed using content analysis (Bardin, 2008). The software QSR NVivo 9 was used in coding the transcripts of the interviews. The construction of a categorical coding system was performed a priori and a posteriori (Ghliglione & Matalon 2001 Bardin, 2008). The resulting categories were submitted to the above mentioned panel of experts, in order to meet the standards of fidelity and validity of the entire process (Ghliglione & Matalon, 2001).

Results

In order to identify the factors and requirements that influence and determine the development and maintenance of excellence in orienteering, hereafter we present the main ideas and reflections extracted from the life stories of our interviewees. These arise aggregated to the most representative categories.

Goals to achieve

The results showed that for this group of athletes sport excellence is a goal, a purpose of life, as such there is a strong personal investment both in the development of excellence performance and to achieve performance excellence.

Based on this perception we have identified a set of lived experiences, experienced along t paths through life that contribute to the development of personal excellence (Orlick, 2008) that is characterised, first, by a constant concern with the development of performance excellence (Miller & Kerr 2002).

There are many different factors that contribute to being successful. Of course I have developed all of these components, such as physical, technical and mental component, over the past 10/20 years. To be one of the best in the world, it is necessary to develop all your different skills. (Athlete 1)

I think one of my strongest sides is does not have many weaknesses. I run faster at all distances and in any type of terrain, ... at any time. ... When I do something, I do it well, seriously. (Athlete 4)

This group of athletes highlighted the fact that sporting excellence is not only restricted to sporting performances. In parallel, these athletes also develop other activities of a personal nature that directly or indirectly complement their development as individuals and athletes. Indeed the involvement in other activities beyond sports, including academic, cultural or social, contribute to the enrichment of its project life and harmony in relation with the world and in particular with the sport (Serpa, 2007).

Of course having a profession is important especially in a sport where you can not live only from the money you earn in this sport. After the sport career you have to work, you have to have money from another job so I want to continue studying in order to have a good job. (Athlete 2)

I chose a specific area of engineering, civil engineering, and my formation in secondary school was directed towards this profession. (Sport 2)

Thus, excellence in various areas of achievement and in particular with in sport, can only be achieved and maintained through the complete development of the individual, i.e. through the harmonious development of their personal excellence (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Consequently academic success then becomes, in parallel, a priority in the lives of these individuals. Thus emerges as a complement that facilitates a fulfilment of performance excellence (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002) and consequently of personal excellence as a whole.

In turn, the experiences gained in this path provide these athletes with knowledge that allows them to develop a perception of the requirements demanded to achieve excellence. Of these, we identify a set of deontological principles like the professionalism, dedication, ambition and commitment that characterise their behaviour, ways of living and being.

I always try to be very serious, work hard every day. (Athlete 4)

I give all that it takes to be (become) a good orienteer. (Athlete 1)

My favourite hobbies are related with this sport. (Athlete 3)

I am very professional in what I do. I have goals and work a lot to achieve my goals. (Athlete 4)

Effectively the involvement in a project in order to achieving the sport excellence, given the various dimensions involved, requires a deepening set of deontological characteristics that result in what some authors (e.g., Stoeber & Becker, 2008; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) designate as the constant search for perfection or a constant commitment to the pursuit of excellence (Orlick & Partington, 1988). As can be concluded by the analysis of the interviews that we carried out, the determination, the insistent demand to achieve their goals, the dedication, the ambition and commitment, witness effectively the way of being and living of these athletes, not only in sport but also in the life. These features and aptitudes are well evidenced by several authors (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004) indicating that its modelling and influential action in this development process are considered fundamental to the development and maintenance of excellence (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al. 2002), since they act as a catalyst for the motivation and dedication in overcoming the constraints and sacrifices that arise throughout the sport career.

Stages of development

Throughout the development process, and more markedly in the early stages, it is possible to identify the importance of promoting a set of physical and sporting activities, which together promote a sporting diversification and the growth of broad motor-skill repertoire essential to excellence in orienteering. Thus, these

elite athletes highlight the relevance and need for the involvement and participation in different sports, in particular with the practice of other sports before an exclusive dedication to the sport orienteering.

You need to practice different sports, playing soccer, biking, running ... I think that's important. (Athlete 1)

This club has several modalities, you can choose anything. It is very common in Norway you can practice soccer, cross-country, skiing and, in summer, orienteering. It is very good! I practice all these different sports. (Athlete 4)

Orienteering practiced a bit of swimming, handball and scouting. (Athlete 2)

Recent evidence has highlighted the importance of performing free and spontaneous recreational activities before the involvement in a more deliberate and structured practice. This involvement appears as a pre-requisite to the development of excellence in sport (Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2003; Baker, Côté & Deakin, 2005; Berry, Albernethy & Côté, 2008; Bloom, 1985). This finding at the elite level of athletes is consistent with the results of studies conducted in other modalities where the involvement in different sports experiences favours, unequivocally, the development of physical and cognitive abilities required for the main sport (Baker, Côté & Albernethy, 2003; Baker, et al. 2005; Leite, Baker & Sampaio, 2009). It is a valid alternative to early specialization and negative consequences associated with it (Baker, 2003; Leite, et al. 2009).

Founded in this multiplicity and diversity of sporting practices it was possible to identify a set of steps and phases that these athletes run along their training path (initiation, development and improvement). These results converge with the similar structuring of several investigations in this field of research (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999) that identified three stages of sport participation or distinct development phases that characterise the pathways of sports formation for the development of excellence.

The "initiation phase" was identified in this group of athlete's discourses by the characteristics and peculiarities of the developed practice, for its playful nature as well by the significant people who afforded this practice.

The interviewees had at this stage their first sporting experiences and the first contacts with the sport of orienteering.

The first time I did orienteering was at the club when was 7 years old. (Athlete 3)

I started in this sport when I was 11 because my parents belonged to the club ... and my cousins were also there. (Athlete 1)

I amused myself with the competitions, with my parents and my friends. (Athlete 3)

Indeed, the development of excellence has its beginning at an early age (Barreiros et al. 2013; Bloom, 1985; Gould et al. 2002), encouraged by a significant person, usually parents or close family members (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). It is also at this stage that one begins to denote some distinctive qualities (Serpa, 2007).

Another peculiarity is the pleasant, encouraging and playful atmosphere, marked by fun and conviviality that this initial step provide (Ramadas, Serpa & Krebs, 2012), considered as one of the main reasons for the practice of this sport (Celestino & Pereira, 2012) and which act as the primary motivation of young people (Serpa, 2007). This feature is considered one of the main reasons for the practice of this sport (Celestino & Pereira, 2012). Characterised by spontaneity, playfulness and a fun character, in this initiation phase we recognise the presence of the free game and deliberate practice as one of the key activities in the training process for excellence.

When I was a child spent many hours every day to run through the fields. (Athlete 1)

We played a lot of things, I do not remember well, but we played hockey. (Athlete 5)

Sometimes with my friends, we played football. (Athlete 2)

For this group of athletes, a significant part in their development process is the realisation of a set of recreational physical activities. These practices, known as deliberate game (Côté, Baker & Albernethy, 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002) are characterised by their free nature, without supervision and with adapted rules, playing, in any free space, with a variable number of players of different ages and/or size (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009). Immediate pleasure and fun are dominant motivators for this group of athletes, which is further enhanced by their development in direct contact to with nature. In fact the previous literature agrees that before a more systematic practice the children have the need to experience and engage in pleasant and recreational sporting activities typical of these early ages (Ramadas et al. 2012) such as free play or deliberate play (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002). Similarly, these appear as essential components of many different developing models of elite athletes, acting as enhancers for the development of sporting excellence (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

Next we identified a period of greater development characterised by an increased involvement with sport practice, and a greater investment with formal sport were the athletes commit to the sport and obtaining results. These characteristics are similar with those included in the development stage of the models proposed by Bloom (1983) and Côté (1999).

When I was 12 this was my favorite sport and I wanted to be good at doing orienteering. (Athlete 1)

During the secondary school I started training more and more, to give more to the sport ... It was during this period that I started having good results and I began to focus more and more on this sport. (Athlete 5)

I think that when I was 14/15 years old, I was very good and was selected for the World Cup junior. Then I started to understand that it was very cool (good) to practice orienteering ... and I started to like more training. (Athlete 3)

According to Côté & Hay (2002) one of the most important transitions throughout the development of the athlete is when youngsters decide to choose and specialise in only one specific sport modality, determined by a high intrinsic motivation to learn more and improve their skills, translating into a raise in the levels of commitment and responsibility to the sport and training (Bloom, 1985; Ramadas et al. 2012), as well as in an increase in the number of hours of practice associated with a structured workout.

The club organized a training session every week always on Wednesdays afternoon. It was a training club, and during the weekend, sometimes, we travelled together for the competitions, or for the weekend training sessions. (Athlete 1) Before that I trained because I liked it, but became more specific, more recurring, I planned when and what I practiced. (Athlete 2)

...in the first years I started to went for a Swiss club and it was very good for me because it was there also the Simonne Niglli, and because were very good training camps and it helped me to develop my skills. (Athlete 3)

In this sense, the evidence shows that the athlete's performance is directly related to the amount of hours of structured, deliberate and specific accumulated practice throughout their careers (Ericsson, 1996, Ericsson et al. 1993). This, in turn, is differentiated by the quality of human resources that supervised it and by the available material resources (Ericsson et al. 1993). The results also show that excellence is strongly influenced by a set of significant others, as well as marked by a specific event.

I never really chose to go.... First Andreias ... my brother when he was studying in the secondary school had the opportunity to play sports. He was selected for the regional team and I asked if it would be possible for me to join them in the team. They said that first I had to start doing Orienteering and be good ... So this was the first starting point and I began to become a little more professional, and then I was selected for the regional selection ... (Athlete 5) When I was 14 years old when I was selected for the regional team in Switzerland. It was my first time that I participated in training camps in Orienteering. I think that this period was the key to my career orienteering. (Athlete 2) This evidence converges with previous literature which states that the option for a sporting career is strongly influenced by positive critical incidents that occur in the course of its development as a result of significant experience with high pleasure, success or through significant others (Côté et al. 2007).

The last identified stage is characterised by an exclusive dedication to the sport modality and by the permanent pursuit of excellence performance that definitively marks the life course of these athletes and that we denominated for improvement phase. When I was a younger athlete I was very strong physically, technically I had ups and downs. I was not a very stable competitor but I started to increase more and Guidance sessions over the years I was getting better ... You need to train to become better. I think that is the most important. (Athlete 1) I train every day, even when I do not feel motivated. I do it because I want to be successful and I do everything for it. (Athlete 1)

Trying to reach the limits, training hard ... I try to do a lot of my training orientation with pressure ... I try to be as close as possible to the pressure they'll feel at the World Championships and that's important. (Athlete 4)

Côté (1999) in their development model also identified and characterised this stage, and highlighted the development of strategic/competitive characteristics and specific skills as the most important components. During this stage the athletes have performed more hours of deliberate practice with the sole purpose of significant and sustained improvement of their performances looking for the most efficient and specific means (Ramadas et al. 2012).

Possible determinants of excellence in orienteering

Obtaining a career in sport is a complex process in which your success is dependent on the integration and interaction of various harmonic components (Serpa, 2007). In this sense, several authors have recently highlighted the importance of context as a determining factor for the development of sporting excellence (Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

In this perspective, these worldwide elite athletes interviewed attach particular importance to the contexts where they were developing and developed their sports training. This perception emerges as a consequence of a positive experience and involvement in a set of significant dynamic practices and opportunities offered by a number of important people.

Taking into account the degree of importance and closeness that is assigned to context a set of factors associated with the micro context (Côté, 1999; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005), (in which the influence of family and peer influence plays a preponderant action in this development process) were identified. Considered as one of the reasons for the practice of orienteering, the involvement, support and family influence (Celestino & Pereira, 2012) plays an important role in the introduction to this sport and in the teaching of the basic skills of orienteering.

My uncle taught me and trained me. They supported me a lot! (Athlete 1) My parents have always practiced orienteering. They took me to practice orienteering when I was very small. (Sport 3) Because my

brother practice guidance. My family belongs to a family of orienteeringers, we went together to the competitions when we were younger. (Sport 3)

The reference literature in this field of study is unanimous in pointing out the determining role of the family in introducing young people to sport practices (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Côté et al. 2003), but also as an important means of social, instrumental, emotional and logistical support. They (parents) supported and encouraged me to go to training camps; they paid the training camps. (Athlete 5)

Always helped me paying the fee in the club and in the competitions. (Athlete 3) Of course my family is very important when ... now live 12 km away from them, I do not see them often, but when things are bad I talk to them, I go near them and it is important to feel ... is an important support. (Athlete 4)

Also under this micro-context, friends and peers are recognised as encouragement and motivator elements both in emotional and competitive contexts. They have a leading role in the process of developing excellence. This is justified in sport orienteering for social and emotional environment that characterise this sport modality, that promote the conviviality, the sharing and exchange of experiences, and also the knowledge and cooperation among peers in pursuit of common goals (Celestino & Pereira, 2012; Koukoris, 2005).

I have many friends in orienteering. I think it was one of the reasons why I chose this sport. (Athlete 2)

Friends were an important part of what I was doing... it was motivating for me. (Athlete 3)

I had colleagues in the orienteering club; they were an important support because it was a good group of fun. (Athlete 1) Extant literature emphasises that the development of a social support structure by creating strong bonds of friendship and fellowship among peers groups is essential for the transmission of knowledge, remarkable experiences, as well as to overcome difficulties, impairment with the practice and the evolution of their performances (Baker & Horton, 2004; Bloom, 1985; Côté et al. 2003; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

On a second level of attributed influence and relevance we have identified the components that comprise the macro context of athletes, such as a set of socio-cultural dynamics belonging to a particular country or geographic region where the sport formation is developed.

In Denmark it is not a popular sport, but I think in Sweden, Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia, the orientation is taught in the schools, people know this sport, and turns out to be easier to be a good athlete... because have a good involvement. (Athlete 4)

In Switzerland all the places has regional teams and I think that's very good. (Athlete 5)

In Switzerland, from March to October every weekend there are competitions of orienteering. We have many good male athletes, not so famous as Simonne. Of course I can say that the sport orienteering is not popular in general, of course because Simonne performances this sport became more recognised in Switzerland and more people know more about orienteering. (Athlete 3)

The degree of importance that a particular country, society or culture assigns to a particular practice or modality has a preponderant influence in their development and success (Baker & Horton, 2004; Lorenzo & Sampaio, 2005). Moreover, the availability of access to infrastructure, appropriate equipment, and certified coaches are crucial aspects (Lorenzo & Sampaio, 2005) in developing programs for the development of athletes for excellence. For orienteering the Scandinavian region (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) has a higher participation rate and level of competition when compared to other regions of the globe (Svenska Orienteringsförbundet, 2014).

Another aspect that athletes understand to be very relevant for excellence has to do with the diversification of the local training. In their discourses we denote the importance attributed to the need of preferential contact with a diversity of styles of mapping and with a variety of terrains and forms of relief. This contact, in turn, configures itself preponderant to the development and maintenance of excellence in this sport. Thereby we confirmed the strong weight to what we call deliberate diversification of the training in order to experience and contact with different realities of maps and terrain.

When I was 20 years old I travelled about 8 weeks for year to participate in competitions... In the sport orienteering is important to travel to meet different types of terrain. (Athlete 1)

The most important in this sport is to practice orienteering. You can try to train ... with a map on the table but it is not same workout. The best you can do is to practice orienteering in the forest or in the city. (Athlete 2)

I go to many training camps in different countries... with my boyfriend or other friends. I talk to my coach and I try to do the maximum of technical training sessions. (Athlete 3)

Obtaining performance of excellence in this sport requires a total efficiency in the detection and processing of information from the map and the terrain. However, this process is not only dependent on the situation itself, it also requires a need for a previous repertoire of experiments and experiences (Oliveira & Duarte, 2005) which subsequently translates into a higher efficiency in the development of the cognitive processes involved in effective decision making. It is also noted the great importance attached by this group of athletes to passion for orienteering. This attribute triggers feelings of happiness and well-being, clearly visible in their manner, being in life and in sport.

I love to practice orienteering, I am very happy and very motivated. (Athlete 3)

I have to follow what makes me happy. (Athlete 5)

I'm happy with what I have done ... I feel very happy when I do a good workout, or a competition of orienteering that satisfied me very much. (Athlete 3) The way these athletes feel towards orienteering is clear

from the pleasurable sensations that this sport provides at the human, social and sporting (Celestino & Pereira, 2012) level - these appear the main rewards for their performances and dedication to this sport. The extreme dedication and commitment to orienteering has previously referenced, is based on a huge passion and love that these individuals nurse for this sport. I think you have to have passion for orienteering. (Atlete 2)

Passion is important, as I said I grew up on a farm, had no money when I was very young but I think he is not very accurate in sport orienteering. Passion is the most important. (Athlete 1)

Thus, this way of being and feeling the emotions emerge as catalysts for the perseverance in a journey toward excellence. These have been previously identified as important factors for the investment of time and energy on tasks to achieve objectives in sport (Bloom, 1985; Vallerand, et al. 2007).

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study it was possible to infer that despite the uniqueness of the life trajectories of these orienteering athletes, in relation to the development and maintenance of sporting excellence they present some similarities. Achieving excellence is a common ambition whose path is characterised by the development of personal excellence where the performances of other activities for human development are essential. It should be noted also a set of determinant contextual factors, that in the perspective of these athletes exert a modeller action in this development process assuming the diversification of local practice and training as a differentiating and distinctive factor to the development of excellence.

In sum the obtained results allow us to highlight some consistencies that take place in other sports, however some singularities should be highlighted, as is the case of the need for the diversification of the locality of training practice. However, given the particularities and specificities of orienteering, more research should be developed taking into account that the study of excellence, while an evolving and multidimensional process still has a long way to go in sport orienteering. Here we highlight the need for deepening: i) the study of social dynamics established between peers and friends outside the sport and its real contribution to excellence and ii) the implication of the sociocultural contexts in developing excellence in orienteering.

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