

Like Father, like Son: A Qualitative Study of Father-Son Dyads at the Senior National Football Team Level

Martin K. Erikstad¹, Bjørn Tore Johansen¹, Camilla J. Knight^{1, 2}, and Tommy Haugen¹

¹University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

²Swansea University, Wales, UK

Correspondence: Martin Erikstad, martin.erikstad@uia.no

Abstract

The phenomenon of father-son dyads in professional sports is commonly acknowledged through anecdotes, but there is limited understanding regarding the dynamics within multi-generational sporting families. This study aimed to investigate father-son dyads within professional football, seeking insights into the influence of former professional athlete parents on their children's sporting development. Interviews were conducted with the fathers and sons from three dyads, all of whom represented the Norwegian national football team. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The results that were generated through the analytic process highlighted several key aspects: (1) Former professional athlete-fathers perceived as role models that shaped their sons' interests, behaviors, and aspirations for success, (2) Active involvement where the fathers played football with their sons and ensured quality practice, (3) Fathers as providers of opportunities, drawing from their own experiences, recognition, and professional networks, and (4) Fathers providing tangible and emotional support while balancing demands and expectations. Across all themes, fathers maintained a relaxed perspective on elite sport, emphasizing that football's primary value lies in enjoyment and positive youth development rather than becoming an elite athlete. Notably, the results highlighted that the fathers' behaviors, actions, and approaches aligned with existing literature and recommendations pertaining to parental involvement in sport. However, it was also apparent in the findings that the sons benefited from some unique aspects arising from having a parent with elite athlete status. This included fathers serving as an inspiring figure due to their professional career, granting access to exclusive experiences, and possessing insights into the demands of professional sports thereby offering invaluable advice and guidance. In essence, this study not only reaffirms established guidelines for parental involvement in sports but also illuminates the potential added value derived from having a parent with a background in elite athletics.

Keywords

parents, sport expertise, parental support, quality practice, role model

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a fascinating trend of sons of former professional footballers also playing at the highest levels of the sport. As one example, the knockout stage of Euro 2024 featured several sons of former national team

footballers, including Thuram, Chiesa, Blind, Schmeichel, Sané, Hagi, and Conceição. Similarly, when the national football team of Norway played against Gibraltar in the qualification for the World Cup 2022, all

Norway's five goals were scored by players who were sons of former Norwegian national team players (Thorstvedt, Haaland & Sørloth; UEFA, 2024). Although attaining sport expertise and representing the national team in football is limited to a marginal proportion of participating athletes (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012; Swann et al., 2015), such anecdotal evidence indicates that the likelihood of playing sport at the highest level may be increased for children of former professional athletes. Indeed, Wilson et al. (2018) found in their study of Canadian and Australian athletes at elite, pre-elite, and non-elite level that parents of elite athletes had increased sport participation and skill level compared to parents of less skilled athletes. Nevertheless, little is known about the potential advantages elite athletes provide for their children.

Various factors have been found to be associated with positive athlete development and performance (see Rees et al., 2016 for a review). Although it is recognized that some individuals possess innate abilities that may give them an initial advantage (Bray et al., 2009), it is also understood that professional athletes have typically engaged in large amounts of deliberate play and practice throughout their development (Baker & Young, 2014; Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012). Furthermore, psychological skills and characteristics play a vital role in developing and maintaining high-level athletic performance (see e.g., Gledhill et al., 2017), such as high levels of motivation (Zuber et al., 2015), self-regulation of learning (Erikstad et al., 2018), coping strategies (Ivarsson et al., 2020), and resilience (Mills et al., 2012). In contrast, lack of commitment, motivation, coping skills, and self-regulation have been highlighted by coaches as reasons why high potential youth players do not reach their potential (Taylor & Collins, 2019).

The extent to which athletes demonstrate the psychological skills and engage in training, enabling achievement at an elite level, is influenced by the physical and social environment that surrounds them. Thus, athlete development is considered a result of personal engagement in activities, appropriate settings (e.g., access to facilities), and quality social

dynamics (Côté et al., 2014). Studies have identified several characteristics of successful athlete development environments, including training culture, access to role models, quality coaching and proximity to developmental opportunities (Henriksen et al., 2010; Rossing et al., 2018). Indeed, in understanding the multifaceted development of athletes, it is important to recognize the influential role of athletes' social environment, including coaches, teammates, and family. Among these, parents have been recognized as playing a particularly pivotal role in shaping children's development and sport experiences (see Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Within sport contexts, it is recognized that parents are increasingly involved in an attempt to foster a healthy and positive childhood (Stefansen et al., 2018). Parental support has typically been associated with positive sporting experiences and development (Knight et al., 2017). Such parental support includes providing transportation, purchasing equipment, coaching, attending practice sessions and matches, and offering social support, such as encouragement and guidance (Knight et al., 2016). Additionally, parents also play a central role in shaping their children's interest in sport, and facilitating children's access to, and abilities to benefit from, developmental opportunities (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). For instance, Côté (1999) found in his formative study of four families of elite athletes that parents had played an important role in stimulating their child's early interest in sport, and provided opportunities to sample enjoyable activities and sports when they were younger.

Moreover, Dohme and colleagues (2021) found that parents of elite youth athletes proactively supported their development, for instance by fostering learning opportunities (e.g., intentionally exposing children to role models and various competitions) and talking about valuable psychological characteristics (e.g., sharing experiences and asking reflective questions). Thus, exemplary sport parenting includes selecting appropriate sporting opportunities and providing necessary types of support, emphasizing effort and having fun, and fostering independence (Harwood & Knight,

2015; Pynn et al., 2019). Adolescents generally value parental involvement in sports but highlight the importance of maintaining clear boundaries, particularly regarding social independence and decision-making about their participation (Strandbu et al., 2019). Additionally, while many parents offer constructive support and encouragement, others display negative behaviors that can interfere with the child's performance or enjoyment of the sport (Knight et al., 2024). For instance, criticizing play and excessive expectations can lead to negative sport experiences (Amado et al., 2015).

Several theories have been used to understand parent-child interactions in sports. For instance, Bourdieu's (1978; 1986) concept of capital offers a complementary perspective by highlighting how parents' economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital can shape their children's sporting involvement and career. Economic capital may remove material barriers, and provide access to high-quality equipment, training camps, and cover club fees. Parents with high levels of cultural capital in sports (e.g., skills, knowledge, and habits) may transmit these resources to their children, while their social capital may facilitate access to networks, training opportunities, and mentorship. Symbolic capital—such as prestige or recognition parents enjoy from prior sporting success or community standing—can lend their children extra legitimacy. These forms of capital operate within Bourdieu's broader framework of field (the structured social arena with its own rules), habitus (internalized dispositions that shape how individuals perceive, think, and act) and doxa (the taken-for-granted assumptions), although capital can be considered the aspect most readily interpreted from everyday parenting practice.

Expectancy-Value Theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) complements Bourdieu by specifying the psychological process of converting the resources into sustained behavior. Notably, a child's achievement-related choices, performance, and persistence are more likely when they (a) expect success and (b) attach value to the activity. Such expectancies and values are influenced by socialization

factors such as parental beliefs and actions (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Consequently, parents may impact their children's motivation and pursuit of success in sports by valuing sports, exposing their children to activities, and setting high expectations. In drawing this together, Fredricks and Eccles (2004) summarized the influential roles of parents in sport as that of role model, interpreter, and provider.

Supporting these three roles, Schoeppe et al., (2016) and Sukys et al., (2014) found that parental sports participation and exercise habits correlated with their children's physical activity and sports involvement, with indications that paternal involvement may show stronger influence on sons' sports engagement than daughters'. They suggested that children observe and adopt their parents' values related to sports and physical activity, while also pinpointing that active parents may provide elevated levels of support, appraisal and encouragement related to their child's sport participation.

Furthermore, Knight and colleagues (2016) conducted an online survey with 70 parents from the US and the UK exploring their beliefs and attitudes towards sport, their own experiences in sport, and the ways in which they were involved in their child's sporting lives, among others. Included within this sample were several parents who had previously competed as high-performance or elite athletes. Interestingly, the approaches these parents took to their children's sporting involvement varied considerably, where some parents took a step back, recognizing their child's journey as separate from their own, while others provided coaching and tangible support based on their experiences to best help their child to develop in sport. Such views, while contrasting, demonstrate that parents who were elite or high-performance athletes are aware of the potential influence their own sporting history has on their children (Knight et al., 2016). However, in these cases their children were still within youth sport and had not and may not reach the same elite status as their parents.

In summary, anecdotal and some research evidence indicates that parents with professional

sport careers are more likely to have children that progress to elite level (Wilson et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of studies concerning the dynamics within families where elite sporting participation spans generations, and the specific advantages that may emanate from being children of elite athletes remain underexplored. As pointed out by Wilson and colleagues (2018), knowledge about this may inform sporting development for all athletes. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to investigate father-son dyads in professional football to better understand the role parents who are former professional athletes may have on their children's sporting development.

Method

Methodology and Philosophical Underpinnings

A qualitative descriptive methodology was adopted (Sandelowski, 2000; 2010). Qualitative description studies are designed to provide a detailed description or examination of events—in this instance parenting in sport. They are particularly beneficial for exploratory studies, such as the current study, and provided in-depth, insights into experiences of the participants in questions. Given the desire to understanding participants' subjective perceptions of the dynamics within their father, the study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which considers reality as socially constructed (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Particularly, within this study it was recognized that reality exists as multiple intangible mental constructions, where individuals have their own version of reality (see, e.g., Moon & Blackman, 2014). Furthermore, it is understood that the findings are shaped by the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), thus acknowledging that the researchers' values, beliefs, and experiences shape the dynamics of the interaction and the outcomes of the research process.

Participants and Sampling

Norwegian youth football is embedded in an egalitarian, volunteer-run "sport-for-all" system

with high participation rates, where roughly two-thirds of boys and over one-third of girls play organized football at age 11 (Tuastad, 2019). By rule, the Norwegian system postpones formal ranking and talent selection until after age 13, underscoring development and enjoyment over early specialization. To participate in the study, participants needed to be a father-son dyad, both of whom had competed for the Norwegian national senior football team.

Four father-son dyads that met the inclusion criteria were subsequently invited to participate in the study. In the invitation, it was specified that, given the nature of the study, there were very few individuals who met the criteria and thus there was a high likelihood that their participation would be identifiable. With this information in mind, three dyads agreed to participate. However, to minimize the risk of identification, no further demographic information regarding the participants is provided.

Procedure

After the outline of the study had been registered and approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT; reference number 797137) and the ethics committee of the first author's university, the Norwegian Football Association of Norway were contacted to invite father-son dyads that met the inclusion criteria (i.e., father and son that both had represented the Norwegian national senior team in football). Participants were invited via email from the lead researcher. Those who were interested in participating contacted the lead researcher directly, who then arranged interviews with them.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred through individual interviews with the six participants. For the sons (i.e., the current active players), two participated in interviews in person during activities with the National team and one participated via an interview on Zoom. For their fathers, two participants conducted in-person interviews, and one was interviewed via Zoom. Care was taken

to ensure that no information from the interviews was disclosed during subsequent interviews (i.e., from sons in fathers' interviews and vice versa). However, given the high chance that fathers/sons would recognize the comments from the other if they were to read the paper, all information shared within this manuscript has been shared with participants and they have confirmed their agreement for it to be included. None of the participants requested any corrections or revisions.

The interviews commenced with initial inquiries regarding the participants' careers, including questions such as "Please describe yourself as a player", and "What are the main factors that you would say have contributed to your success?" Following this introduction, a pre-prepared timeline was used to guide and facilitate a chronological and in-depth discussion of their careers. This timeline, created from publicly available information about the participants' careers (e.g., milestones, transfers, and individual awards), helped facilitate recall, as recommended by Adriansen (2012). The timeline for the fathers also included their sons' career milestones.

The interview guide drew upon different theoretical perspectives to understand the factors contributing to sporting expertise. These perspectives include the participant's engagement in activities, access to facilities, and social dynamics (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2010; Côté et al., 2014). Moreover, particular emphasis was placed on understanding the fathers' roles in relation to these factors, such as the role they might have played for their sons' engagement in activities, access to facilities, or broader social interactions, as well as exploring the dynamics of their relationships—such as values and habits—that may have shaped the sons' development (Bourdieu, 1978, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

The interviews with the fathers included an in-depth discussion about their own career to gain insights into how their experiences may have shaped their roles as parents, as well as an in-depth discussion on their son's career and their involvement as fathers. The fathers' careers were not discussed in-depth in the interviews with their sons. However, the sons

were asked about their perceptions about their fathers' careers, and whether it has influenced them in the sport setting. For the players, the interviews lasted on average 78 minutes, and the interviews of their fathers lasted on average 119 minutes.

Data analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the subsequent data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis stands out as a theoretically versatile interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis, facilitating the identification and examination of patterns or themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The reflexive approach acknowledges the researcher's active role in the process, where Braun and Clarke (2019) highlight that themes do not passively emerge from the data or coding but are co-constructed at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves. Consequently, while the analytic approach was primarily inductive, it aligns with the abductive method proposed by Tavory and Timmermans (2014), emphasizing theoretical knowledge in interpreting the data.

Analysis started with the first author, who conducted the interviews, listened to the audio recordings, transcribed the audio orthographically, and engaged in multiple readings of the transcribed material while taking reflexive notes. This process yielded preliminary analytical insights, including noting interesting quotes and potential thematic concepts. Subsequently, codes (e.g., "Playing football together") were identified through a primarily inductive approach, before codes with shared meanings were combined into themes in the next phase.

Themes (e.g., "Active involvement and quality practice") were then reviewed for coherence and resonance with the data and the research question before being refined, defined, and named to succinctly convey their central concepts (i.e., "Active involvement where the fathers played football with their sons and ensured quality practice"). Finally, the themes were presented in the present manuscript in the

final phase of the analysis. Through the analytic process, codes and themes were discussed in the research group to reflect on whether the ideas made sense and if other interpretations of the data should be considered, as recommended (see Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016).

An exploratory approach was deemed valuable for this study as it allowed for an open-ended examination of the complex dynamics between fathers and sons, enabling the development of themes may not align with predefined theoretical frameworks (e.g., Bourdieu, 1978, 1986; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). While themes were developed primarily inductively, we acknowledge that our theoretical knowledge contributed to their interpretation and refinement. As the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, all quotes featured in this work have been carefully translated to ensure accuracy to the best extent possible. Quotes attributed to the sons are identified as S1, S2, and S3, while those from their respective fathers are similarly identified as F1, F2, and F3.

Methodological Rigor

The interpretive stance of this paper recognizes the inherent subjectivity in the investigation of reality, emphasizing that our understanding of the world is shaped by our interpretations rather than an absolute truth (Moon & Blackman, 2018). However, adhering to recommendations for qualitative descriptive studies (Milne & Oberle, 2005), this research has been fortified with a series of measures to ensure methodological rigor. In pursuit of authenticity, credibility, and integrity, participants were highly purposefully included in the study.

Moreover, care was taken to ensure that the analysis remained rooted in the authentic voices of the study's participants, thereby reducing preconceived notions or speculative biases that might have coloured the research process. Notably, the interviewer had a background of being a former academy player in a Norwegian Premier League club, with parents uninvolved in competitive or recreational sports.

Additionally, the interviewer had been involved in conducting several previous studies related to athlete development and the social

environment in sport. Recognizing the potential effect of such background on the research process, the co-authors of this paper played a crucial role as critical friends as recommended by Smith and McGannon (2018), engaging in regular debriefings and discussions. These interactions provided a platform for rigorous scrutiny of assumptions, as well as the codes and themes that emerged during the analysis. The active discussions among the co-authors fostered a heightened level of reflexivity, ensuring that the interpretations derived from the data were deeply considered, thoroughly debated, and consistently aligned with the study's data and objectives. By implementing these rigorous practices, this study maintains a firm methodological foundation, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the intricate interplay between the researcher and the data, and enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

Results

The themes generated from the analysis are presented under four main topics:

- (1) Former professional athlete-fathers perceived as role models, shaping their sons' interests, behaviors, and aspirations for success
- (2) Active involvement where the fathers played football with their sons and ensured quality practice
- (3) Fathers as providers of opportunities, drawing from their own experiences, recognition, and professional networks
- (4) Fathers offering tangible and emotional support while balancing demands and expectations.

See Table 1, next page, for topics, themes, and examples.

Table 1. Topics, themes and examples

Topic	Theme	Example
Former professional athlete-fathers perceived as role models, shaping their sons' interests, behaviors, and aspirations for success	The fathers' love for football shaped their sons' interests	<i>"We are a sports family ... It runs in the family." (S3)</i>
	Fathers' success inspired the dream of "going pro"	<i>"I knew that my dad had made a living playing football, so I knew it was possible. So, I had the goal of becoming a football player." (S2)</i>
	Fathers provided an early introduction to the elite athlete lifestyle	<i>"There is something about growing up with a father who is involved in elite sports. It has to do with diet, it has to do with habits, it has to do with focus." (F2)</i>
Active involvement where the fathers played football with their sons and ensured quality practice	Professional fathers as accessible and competent companions in play and practice	<i>"He was always available to join in on the (football) field." (S2)</i>
	Ensuring the quality of their children's participation in organized practices as coaches	<i>"So, I was a football player, and everyone else there knew it. They [the players] were classmates, and we knew each other; the parents who were there. So, it was very natural to be a part of it then." (F1)</i>
Fathers as providers of opportunities, drawing from their own experiences, recognition, and professional networks	Fathers enabled access to facilities and developmental opportunities	<i>"We spent a lot of time driving around [the particular location], trying to find a small piece of artificial turf that was available during the winter. Our vacations in warmer destinations turned into trips spent searching for some football field we could use." (F2)</i>
	Fathers as "door opener" to unique developmental experiences and current elite athletes	<i>"I remember being around [team name, best team in Norway at the time] and getting to meet a lot of first-team player ... It didn't feel so distant to become a [team name] player back then. Because I was so close to it during my upbringing." (S3)</i>
Fathers providing tangible and emotional support while balancing demands and expectations	Fathers provided tangible support that made sport participation easy	<i>"We couldn't have had it more organized at home, in terms of training schedules, transportation, getting there, pick-up, and all that. It was flawless all the way." (S3)</i>
	Providing expert advice about the requirements of professional football	<i>"He [the father] has gone through many surgeries, and he knows what it's like to be injured, to face adversity ... I think I have that from him, and from the stories he has told. That ... when you're down, it's a good opportunity to work even harder." (S2)</i>
	Balancing demands and expectations	<i>"If everything goes smoothly, if we just remove all obstacles along the way, there won't be any toughening. There won't be any resilience." (F2)</i>
	Emotional support prioritized with no unfulfilled sport dreams	<i>"I got the impression that there were many others, especially fathers on the team I played for, who were ... had such a strong desire for their sons to become really good. But I think a lot, and because [player's father] was very good himself, he had a career, so I think he was very relaxed. He knew how things worked and didn't have any dreams that he never fulfilled." (S1)</i>

Former professional athlete-fathers perceived as role models, shaping their sons' interests, behaviors, and aspirations for success

Three themes were generated under the broader topic related to perceptions of the former professional athlete-fathers as role models. Common for these themes is that the father's interests, behaviors and success were emulated by their sons.

Fathers' love for football shaped their sons' interests.

Through the interviews, all three fathers displayed a great passion for football, not only as a profession but a genuine love of the game. F1 described how his life revolved around football, *"It's the only life I know. It's as simple as that."* The fathers also had various roles within football after retirement (e.g., TV pundits and coaches), and the three sons had been socialized within the realm of football throughout their life. Indeed, the current professional players said they noticed early on the value their fathers placed on football, for instance through watching their fathers playing and observing their interest in watching and talking about football. All three players described a passion for sports that extended beyond their fathers to the family, as illustrated by S3:

"We are a sports family. Both sets of my grandparents—my mom's parents and my dad's parents—were involved in sports. And both my mom and dad have been involved in sports as well. So, it runs in the family."

Participants also indicated that football was the primary recreational activity fathers engaged in with their children, *"We played a lot of football inside"* (F2). Similar, F3 said *"There was a lot of play. We had a lot of fun."* Thus, the sons' early exposure to football was quite extensive, with football being a central element in their home environments. However, it is important to note that the primary motivation for these father-child football interactions was the father's enjoyment and passion for the sport, rather than a specific aspiration to nurture professional players. Indeed, it was understood that the fathers considered participation in sports

to be valuable in itself, which was exemplified by F3: *"The socialization that comes with it, and the positives of sports in terms of being active, staying in good physical shape, good mental shape. You must not underestimate that."*

Fathers' success inspired the dream of "going pro."

The fathers' professional football careers inspired their sons to pursue the same dream: *"I knew that my dad had made a living playing football, so I knew it was possible. So, I had the goal of becoming a football player"* (S2). One son watched his father play live at the stadium, while the other two watched online video clips of their fathers' highlights. The sons were immensely proud of their fathers' achievements and felt that they too could achieve their dreams of becoming professional football players: *"Undoubtedly, it has made it [playing professional football] feel less distant"* (S3).

S2 elaborated on his experiences:

He [F2] was one of the greatest on the national team at that time. And... when we walked around the city, people wanted to take pictures. And I thought that was cool. And I thought to myself: "I'd like to have that kind of experience one day too."

S1 reflected upon similar experiences, also adding the importance of the uniqueness of the father-son relationship:

You often see that with other fathers and sons, no matter what profession is being discussed. It's often the case that you want to become the same as your father. Because you look up to your father as a role model. At least, most people do. For my part, the desire to become a football player came very naturally.

Collectively, these reflections show how the fathers' achievements inspired the sons' ambitions and gave them an early vision of life as elite athletes.

Fathers provided an early introduction to the elite athlete lifestyle.

Through the interviews it was evident that the fathers had a profound influence on their sons' perception of the athlete lifestyle. One of the fathers, who is himself the son of a former

football player at national team level, said, *“There is something about growing up with a father who is involved in elite sports. It has to do with diet, it has to do with habits, it has to do with focus”* (F1). His son (S1) further elaborated upon how his upbringing normalized living like a professional athlete, only realizing later that the professional lifestyle is not typical:

My upbringing has been important in shaping me into a professional football player. Because I believe, somewhat unconsciously, you get introduced to that elite athlete lifestyle.... So, when you reach the teenage years, it doesn't feel like a choice to do the right thing in relation to football. Because you've seen and done it your whole life.

Furthermore, through daily interactions and observations, children witnessed the dedication and work ethic that was integral to the athlete lifestyle, fostering a sense of normalcy regarding such behaviors. S2 reflected upon how his father's dedication had shaped him as an athlete: *“There's no point in not giving 100%. And that mindset, that mentality, I believe it is the most important thing I've gained from him, and it's the reason I have achieved as much as I have ...”* Thus, setting high expectations and goals for themselves, working hard, and not blaming others were examples of characteristics the current professional athletes saw in their fathers and that formed their attitudes towards sports and challenges.

Active involvement where the fathers played football with their sons ensured quality practice.

Active involvement represents themes related to the fathers' sport-specific involvement which was perceived to influence their sons' development.

Professional fathers as accessible and competent companions in play and practice

All three dyads described playing a lot of football together, starting from a very young age, *“We started with ball when he was 2 years old, you know. Maybe even before that”* (F2). The players' football involvement throughout the early years (i.e., until approximately age 8)

was often done with their fathers; e.g., *“I played mostly with my dad”* (S3). The activities were highlighted as something they did for fun, yet, describing the activities as purposeful (e.g., mastering new skills or competing, such as practicing volley-kicks, counting passes, hand-stand). For instance, S1 said, *“When I was just over 1 year old, I had just learned to walk. So [F1] used to throw a ball up our staircase, and it would bounce back down. Then I would volley it.”*

The dyads described that they continued playing football together throughout the adolescence of their sons, typically after school, during weekends or holidays and while traveling. Through the interviews, it was understood that fathers' involvement in professional football (both when active and after retirement) enabled them to have more free time compared to traditional jobs; for example, *“He was always available to join in on the [football] field”* (S2). This ensured there was more time for active involvement.

The football activities were described as being centered around challenges and/or mastery of skills (e.g., two-touch, “keepy-uppy”, shooting). For instance, both S3 and F3 described the football activity they completed together:

I especially remember we had an exercise we did, where he stood maybe 10 to 15 meters away from me and kicked. We were supposed to pass. But he kicked as hard as he could. And I had to cushion the ball. And it had to lie still. And we could stand like that for hours. (S3)

His father (F3) also described the same activity: *When we played, I could take a ball and kick it hard. Because I saw he was getting better and better at receiving it. And then I gave him challenges, like I never rolled the ball along the grass. I threw it up in the air or bounced it in front of him. It was deliberate. And it's fun to see how he handles it. Right? Learns from it.*

Although these activities had a purpose (e.g., mastering new skills), the sons perceived them as enjoyable, *“I rarely remember it being like, ‘now we're going to do it because...’ It was fun exercises and fun things to do”* (S3). Similarly,

S1 said, *“But when it comes to serious training to develop skills, I never feel like [F1] and I have done that. We have never engaged in that.”*

Accordingly, due to their early and comprehensive involvement in football, facilitated by their fathers, all participants noted that the presently active players demonstrated a notably higher skill level than their peers.

Ensuring the quality of their children’s participation in organized practices as coaches

F1 and F2 explained that they were the formal coach for their respective child’s team. F2 said that he took the initiative to start an organized team for his sons’ cohort and became the formal coach of the team. He had this role until S2 was about 12 to 13 years of age. After that, the club provided paid coaches. Meanwhile, F1 volunteered and was the formal coach of his son’s team until the son was approximately 14. He felt this was natural, given his occupation as a professional football player, which also meant he had time, *“So, I was a football player, and everyone else there knew it. They [the players] were classmates, and we knew each other, the parents who were there. So, it was very natural to be a part of it then.”* F3 was not the formal coach of his son’s team, saying it was *“because he had good enough coaches and good enough teammates. I saw that early on.”* However, he said that he helped when needed, such as during single practice sessions.

The fathers perceived that their background as professional football players provided them with competent knowledge that was useful for coaching, thus ensuring proper quality for their children’s organized football. Yet, participants also highlighted that coaching children was very different to their role as professional athletes, as F1 reflected:

I wish I knew as much back then when I became a coach for a group of 6 to 7-year-olds ... as I do now after working with football since I retired as a player ... You don’t need to train headers with 6-year-olds, like I thought we had to do.

Collectively, serving as volunteer coaches not only ensured high-quality early training but also highlighted the fathers’ broader role in

actively constructing an environment beneficial to their sons’ football development.

Fathers as providers of opportunities, drawing from their own experiences, recognition, and professional networks

Based on their own careers, previous experiences, fame, and social and professional networks, the fathers were able to provide their children opportunities, some of which would not be easily available to others.

Fathers enabled access to facilities and developmental opportunities

Through interviews with the fathers, it was understood that it was important to them that their children had access to areas to be active and play football. Thus, they made a deliberate choice to live close to football facilities. F3 talked about the importance of the proximity to a local football field, *“We also had our own football field in the neighborhood. So, was a paradise for getting good at engaging in activities.”* He further talked about how his son benefited from this field, especially on Saturdays and Sundays:

[S3] got up around 10 o’clock, almost before us, and was on his way to [name of the place]. They met up with a whole group there. The reason they got up early was that they had to secure a goal because so many people were there. They had to secure a goal so they could play. Otherwise, it was occupied.

F2 also talked about how he actively helped S2 to find places to play and practice football:

We spent a lot of time driving around [location], trying to find a small piece of artificial turf that was available during the winter. Our vacations in warmer destinations turned into trips spent searching for some football field we could use.

F2 further summarized it as *“a constant hunt, trying to find places where we could play . . .”* he also said that the family moved to another city in Norway, partially because S2 was accepted into a high school designed to optimize football development. They deliberately bought

a house close to S2's school and training facilities so it was convenient for him to attend both school and practice. Moreover, the fathers, particularly F2, provided additional support for their sons, such as F2 hiring a specialist sprint trainer for S2, and enrolled him to a specialized football training camps abroad.

Both F2 and F3 also explained that they provided their sons access to local football domes (i.e., indoor pitches) that are normally restricted to clubs that pay to use the facility. F2 got access because he was the coach and thus had a key to the dome. S3 explained that he and his friends were initially kicked out of the dome when they played there, but F3 talked with the manager to ensure they were allowed to play:

There was a handball arena, and during the winter, we used to go there to play football between our sessions. For some reason, the person in charge of the hall strongly opposed this. They didn't want us to use the arena. There was no one else there, but it was about wear and tear. The hall would quickly deteriorate, and they would have to replace the surface and other things. I remember coming home early and telling my dad what had happened. He went straight to the hall and talked to the guy in charge, and he got it sorted out.

Although it is unclear whether person would typically receive approval for their child to utilize the dome, F3 suggested it may have been due to his professional status, "You probably have easier access to many things when your name is (last name)."

Interestingly, all sons were enrolled into the academy of the club their fathers had played professionally. However, F1 emphasized that he did not believe his son received any special treatment due to his name when he was promoted to the first team. He reflected on the situation:

Well, there have been some hints that, for (S1), it wasn't a problem to be included in (team name) A-squad when he was 16-17 years old, because of, you know, his name and all that. But that's not how it works in elite sports. You must perform and be good enough. If not, it doesn't matter what your name is or where you come from.

Together, these efforts underscore the fathers' involvement in securing access to facilities and developmental opportunities, perceived as important for their sons' development.

Fathers as "door opener" to unique developmental experiences and current elite athletes

Building on the above, through the interviews, it was understood that the fathers' involvement in elite football provided their sons with some experiences and opportunities that were not normally available to others. For instance, F2 explained that his son was allowed to train with the academy of two different English Premier League clubs during his childhood and early youth. Access to both these clubs were due to his connections within professional football. Moreover, F2's network from professional football was crucial for his son's first professional contract. In fact, both F2 and S2 claimed that S2 had initially decided he was going to leave football and study abroad, as he had not received a professional contract offer from his club upon the conclusion of his junior tenure. However, F2 contacted the head coach of a different Norwegian professional club, someone he had a personal connection with through his involvement in professional football. He inquired about the possibility of arranging a trial for his son. F2 elaborated on the details of this process:

He was going to (name of university). He had made up his mind about it. And everything was arranged. Scholarships and everything. But then I thought, "should I try this one last opportunity and see if there are any others interested? (...)" So, then I called (name of coach of a Norwegian professional team), who was the head coach. And I asked, "can he come and train with you guys for a week?" He didn't know anything (about S2). Who is this guy? I told him the same as I told you. Scores a lot of goals and gets a lot of yellow cards. And then, well, he was there for a while, and it went well... It was just like... A really close call, just a coincidence, really. If I hadn't made that

one phone call to [name of manager], he (S2) would have been out, gone.

While underpinning that S2 deserved a professional contract, F2 also acknowledged that his status and connections was important in facilitating S2's trial, *"If some random guy had called and said he has a kid here, it probably would have been worse."* He further explained:

I'm sure there are many players in the lower divisions who, with just the right conditions, could have become national team players... We like to believe that everything that comes our way and the things we achieve are because we are so good. But I think there's a lot of luck and small coincidences involved.

The fathers' intimate links to professional football also allowed their children to connect with current elite athletes, which the sons perceived shaped their ambitions. S1, whose father was an active player when he was a child, said *"I spent a lot of time in the [name of team] locker room and watched a lot of training sessions. So, it became clear early on that I wanted to be a part of something like that."* S3's father was involved in the club after his retirement, and S3 reflected extensively upon the impact of being around the team:

The impact it had... I remember being around (team name, best team in Norway at the time) and getting to meet a lot of first-team players. I often received... When I was around 10-11 years old, so I could inherit the shoes of (name of former Norwegian national team player), for example, after he was done with them. It didn't feel so distant to become a (team name) player back then. Because I was so close to it during my upbringing.

He also reflected upon how proximity to elite athletes also influenced him in big matches:

I just played against Ronaldo and several big names that I used to watch on TV when I was little, but I don't get that "wow feeling." I feel like I belong here. It's not that special. And undoubtedly, that is because I grew up so close to football, or

(club name), and professional football players.

Together, these illustrates how the fathers' connections and experiences in elite football opened doors to unique opportunities and environments that nurtured their sons' ambitions and sense of belonging in professional football.

Fathers providing tangible and emotional support while balancing demands and expectations

This topic relates to various forms for social support provided by the fathers that enabled ease of access and engagement in football.

Fathers provided tangible support that made sport participation easy

Through the interviews it became evident that football and sport participation were highly valued by the fathers, and therefore it was important to provide practical support that facilitated children's sport participation. Similar, the sons explained that their family time was structured around their football involvement. For instance, S3 said, *"We couldn't have had it more organized at home, in terms of training schedules, transportation, getting there, pick-up, and all that. It was flawless all the way."*

Indeed, organizing meals so it was convenient for the children's school and practice, as well as driving to sport activities so it was easy to attend was prominent in all families. For example, F2 flew to Spain and back just to accompany S2 for an international football camp. S3 said the tangible support he received from his family was normal for him as a child, but he had since reflected that he was fortunate, and that not all children have access to the same tangible or emotional support from their families,

Providing expert advice about the requirements of professional football

It was evident that the fathers had professional experiences that enabled them to give insightful advice for their sons' development as football players, *"He has given me a lot of good advice"* (S3). Indeed, all three sons talked about the importance of the fathers' background as

football players in guiding their own career and sport development:

He has, of course, shared a lot from when he was a player himself and is indeed a good sparring partner when I need help. Regardless of what it's about, whether it's football-related or outside of it, he knows what it's all about. He has been in the game himself (S2).

Specifically, sons shared insights in their discussion with their fathers concerning five main topics: 1) football tactics both generally and before matches, 2) how to improve certain aspects of their play, 3) the psychological aspect of developing expertise (i.e., “what it takes”), 4) how to cope with injuries, setbacks, and tough environments, and 5) career moves. Indeed, it was understood that the fathers recognized that success is a long-term endeavor, thus supporting their children to prioritize improvement over immediate results. F3 said, “*I've had seasons where I could have easily scored around 50 goals, you know. But then suddenly, it hits the post, and I just can't get it in.*” He talked about how such experiences from his own career helped him advise his son:

Instead of just specifically talking about him needing to score the goal, he already knows that. It's not like if he misses a goal, I tell him he needs to score it ... There's no need to emphasize it. You should rather think that you were in the right place at the right time. Then there are some small adjustments.

Similarly, S2 talked about how his father sharing his own experiences with injuries and setbacks from professional football was useful for his own career:

He has gone through many surgeries, and he knows what it's like to be injured, to face adversity. So... He told me that... Has said that. As I mentioned earlier. When you're in such a situation, there's no point in feeling sorry for yourself. It just brings negativity, and I think I have that from him, and from the stories he has told. That... When you're down, it's a good opportunity to work even harder.

Overall, the sons were unanimous in explaining that it was an independent choice to pursue the

dream of becoming a professional football player. However, their fathers' background as professional athletes helped them to understand what was required.

Balancing demands and expectations

Formed by their life as professional athletes, the sons said their fathers could be strict if they blamed others or made excuses for poor performances. F3 said that his son's decision to pursue a professional career encouraged him to have high expectations:

I've been focused on being thorough. He says he wants to commit. Okay, then I know where the bar is set. If he hadn't said that, I wouldn't have done the same. In terms of development. But I'm fortunate that I know something about it [development], you know, through experience. And then I showed no mercy.

S2's father elaborated on the importance of having certain expectations or challenging his son to do things better or differently, “*If everything goes smoothly. If we just remove all obstacles along the way, there won't be any toughening. There won't be any resilience*” (F2). Aligned with this, S2 recalled a situation where F2 had challenged him:

We had won. I felt like I had played a good game. I had scored and had an assist or something like that. He was at the game, watching, and we were going to drive home after the match. Then there was a situation we disagreed about, which I thought was completely wrong, and he stood his ground. Being the brat I was, I refused to put on my seatbelt, so the car started beeping. We drove home, and it wasn't a long drive, only 5 minutes to our house. But halfway there, he stopped at a supermarket, in the parking lot. He turned off the car, got out because I refused to put on my seatbelt, and we couldn't come to an agreement. He walked away and went home, while I sat in the car and had to wait for my mom to come with her bike and drive me home again. We haven't always seen eye to eye on things, but I think it's a good thing. That he hasn't

always praised me but has found ways ... found areas where I can improve.

S1 and S2 both said they were challenged by their fathers but stressed that they never perceived any form of pressure from their father. However, to challenge S3, both F3 and S3 said that things could “get heated”. It was also understood that S3 perceived that, at times, F3 was too tough, “*He was very tough. And it has undoubtedly shaped me to have... I have a bit of an issue with authority*” (S3). S3 reflected that his father’s involvement in top football at a time where the psychological aspects of football were less emphasized, likely informed how he provided feedback to him:

It happens that I’m joking (with F3), “You guys didn’t understand anything back then, about what was going on in the players head. You were just living it up, arguing with each other, without realizing what it was doing to people.” And things like that. It’s probably also because (famous Norwegian coach) was my dad’s coach, and he didn’t have a clue about what was going on in players head.

Emotional support prioritized with no unfulfilled sport dreams

The fathers were familiar with the challenges and pressures of elite sports; thus they were in a position where they could offer unique perspectives and emotional support when their sons were facing setbacks or challenges. Furthermore, it was evident, due to the fathers’ high value for sport, that they wanted their children to play because they enjoyed it rather than solely for external rewards, fostering a more sustainable and relaxed approach to elite sport. It was emphasized by the current players that freedom and playing football for fun was important in early years, and that the interest and joy of playing football would have been thwarted if their fathers had pushed them into making football and training more serious and deliberate. S2 said:

“There shouldn’t be any pushing from any side; I believe it has been extremely important for my development. Because there are many who have fathers who push

their sons to train more”(...). He (F2) never pushed me. It was always me who had to say, ‘Shall we go for a round on the field’”

Although fathers talked about the pride of their careers and in representing the national team, they had a relaxed attitude towards their sons’ football careers. F1 emphasized that the sporting life is not necessarily better than other ways of living, as “*there are many things in life that are equally okay as training every day and chasing a ball two days a week in competition with others.*” The relaxed attitude towards their child’s career was also exemplified by S1:

I got the impression that there were many others, especially fathers, on the team I played for, who were very... had such a strong desire for their sons to become really good. But I think a lot, and because (father) was very good himself, he had a career, so I think he was very relaxed. He knew how things worked and didn’t have any dreams that he never fulfilled.

His father reflected, “*This is their life. And how they want to live it, they ultimately must figure out for themselves. We’re here to support and help them*” (F1).

Nevertheless, S1 and S3 perceived that their fathers’ professional career formed the broader environmental expectations for their athletic performances. For instance, S3 admitted that being the son of a famous player could be stressful at times, “*You feel like you have to be good because your dad was a football player before. And you’re known before you’ve even done anything.*” Similarly, F1 said, “*You have the pressure of expectations on you when your name is [S1]. Or [S1] had it. All the time. And that’s just how it is.*” While S1 said he now feels there were early expectations about his football career, he said that he did not notice it much when he was younger. He felt his father did a good job in protecting him from pressure from outside, for instance by denying interviews with media that wanted to focus on the son’s early following the footsteps of their father:

I never noticed it much, because I think both (F1) and (grandfather) have been very good at that, shielding me as best they can. They have said afterward that they have received

a lot of requests for interviews and TV appearances, but they have consistently said no so that nothing extra is built up that is unnecessary.

Similarly, S2 shared, “*I never felt any pressure from people around, like, ‘Wow, you’re [F2]’s son – you must become good.*”

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate father-son dyads in professional football to better understand the role parents who are former professional athletes may have in their child’s sporting development. Overall, the findings suggest that the fathers influenced their child’s development through being an inspiring figure due to their having a professional career, providing access to unique experiences, and possessing insights into the demands of professional sports which allowed them to offer valuable advice and guidance. Particularly, it was clear that the fathers fulfilled, in unique ways, the role model, provider, and interpreter roles detailed by Fredricks and Eccles (2004). Also, the fathers’ behaviors generally aligned with current recommendations on parental expertise that can be performed by parents without elite sport experience (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Pynn et al., 2020).

The fathers were understood to be role models who introduced their sons to football early, inspired their sons’ football ambitions through their own achievements, and normalized the elite athlete lifestyle and effort. Such findings align with appropriate role model practices as outlined by Harwood and Knight (2015), highlighting that parents may encourage their child’s sport participation by, for instance, engaging in sport themselves, having an active lifestyle and displaying interest in sports (e.g., watching and reading), as well as informing sport behaviors and effort. The findings resonate with frameworks used to understand the socialization processes in sport (Bourdieu; 1978; 1986; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004), contributing to the development of early interest and ambitions. By treating elite football as an ordinary part of family life, the fathers’ cultural capital was perceived as boosting their sons’

belief that success was both achievable and worth pursuing—capturing the “expectancy” and “value” pathways of Expectancy-Value Theory. In line with this, Expectancy-Value Theory has been used to explain how parents may influence their children’s sport enjoyment and desire for success, for instance through exposing their children to sport and value sport themselves (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Indeed, within the current study, it was understood that the father’s achievements and valuation of effort and competition shaped their sons’ aspirations and enjoyment of football.

This dynamic can also be understood through Bourdieu’s notion of capital (1978; 1986), as fathers transmitted cultural capital in the form of values and habits related to sport. Emphasis on these values appeared to facilitate their children’s internalization of an elite athlete identity, making the pursuit of professional-level success appear both natural and attainable. The findings underscore the potential role of former professional athletes in normalizing the elite athlete lifestyle, with exposure to dedicated habits and healthy living naturally fostered strong work ethic and discipline in their sons.

Research on elite and super-elite athletes from the UK yielded similar findings, with a commonality among said athletes that they were socialized (brought up) in a “culture of striving” (Hardy et al., 2017 pp. 12). Bourdieu (1978) emphasizes how the transmission of cultural capital within the familial context shapes individuals’ perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes towards sport, as supported by empirical findings (Stuij, 2015). However, whether this “culture of striving” nurtures healthy motivation or produces excessive pressure may depend on the quality of the father-child relationship: when high expectations are delivered with warmth, autonomy support, and open communication the culture may be experienced as inspiring, whereas in more controlling or distant relationships they can culminate in excessive pressure, burnout, and lost enjoyment (Amado et al., 2015).

The sons’ involvement in football play and practice activities was highlighted as a central factor in their success, in line with previous

research that elite athlete careers typically necessitate large amounts of play and practice (see, e.g., Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012). Participants emphasized the fathers' role in facilitating this involvement, indicating the fathers' cultural and economic capital through their interest in football and ability to be consistently available for these activities. The fathers' football knowledge and experience (i.e., cultural capital) enabled them to provide appropriate challenges to their child's interests and developmental needs. These challenges evolved over time, incorporating increasing structure, as well as technical and tactical advice, to support their sons' progression. Such changes aligned with the distinct phases that have been identified within research, with children engaging in play-type activities followed by more deliberate practice (see e.g., Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) and the recommendations of sport parenting expertise regarding appropriate sporting opportunities (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the activities fathers and sons completed together early included elements that can be associated with more deliberate forms of practice (e.g., working together on improving skills), yet aligning with their sons' interests and conducted with the purpose of having fun. Particularly, it appeared that through the types of activities engaged in, these playful yet purposeful interactions were a way of turning fathers' cultural capital into embodied capital in their sons (Bourdieu, 1978; 1986). Moreover, two fathers were the formal coach of their children, while the third father was not as the son's team had good coaches. Thus, former professional athletes may ensure the quality of their sons' sport involvement. Such provision may be particularly relevant in the Norwegian context, given that clubs depend on children's parents voluntarily coaching their children's team throughout ages of 6-12 years (Tuastad, 2019).

The findings also emphasize the fathers' active facilitation of access to diverse football facilities and developmental opportunities for their sons, reiterating the importance of their involvement. The deliberate choice to live near

developmental facilities, enrollment in training camps, and training specialists may underpin the fathers' cultural and economic capital, as well as promoting their sons' valuation of football and expectations for success. Indeed, previous studies have highlighted that proximity to developmental opportunities is associated with the likelihood of becoming elite youth athlete (Rossing et al., 2018), and that parents may proactively support their children through ensuring access to developmental opportunities and seeking appropriate opportunities for their children (Dohme et al., 2021; Harwood & Knight, 2015). While the families' relocation decisions and investment in specialist coaching reflect the proactive, opportunity-seeking parental support in accordance with Dohme et al. (2021), this more professionalized youth-football pathway suggests that Norway's volunteer-based, sport-for-all system could be complemented by additional initiatives to nurture elite ambitions. Based on the present findings, professional athlete parents may have experience and competence that make them particularly good at identifying and facilitating appropriate sport opportunities for their children, highlighting the benefits of cultural capital.

Social capital became evident as certain key opportunities were available to the sons through networks established by their fathers (i.e., trial with a professional club through father's connections with the head coach), providing pathways not accessible to everyone. While such capital clearly raised the boys' success expectancies, it also highlights that resources—not just personal drive—facilitated access to elite pathways. Furthermore, the prestige associated with the father's name recognition in sports provided symbolic capital to facilitate easier access to opportunities. This was evident in instances where one son and his friends were allowed to train in facilities typically not available for peer-led activities. Symbolic capital may also influence coaches' assessments of a child's talent, which is particularly relevant since coaches act as gatekeepers, determining which opportunities are available to athletes (Skrubbetang et al., 2021). The sons in this study reached the national team, which may

explain and justify the opportunities they were given. However, the findings also show that such opportunities are not available to all ambitious athletes, highlighting the potential benefits of being the son of a professional athlete.

Fathers provided various types of support for their sons, including practical and support, emotional, as well as expert advice. Similar findings were reported in Knight and colleagues' (2016) study that also included parents with former sport expertise. Notably, fathers, drawing from their backgrounds, provided advice that aided the players in navigating towards professional careers—an aspect congruent with the importance of accessible, high-quality counselling (Ericsson et al, 1993). The current study also unveiled a potential role of fathers in challenging their sons, thereby emphasizing their contribution in nurturing psychological attributes associated with resilience and mental toughness, qualities deemed crucial for success in football (Mills et al., 2012; Taylor & Collins, 2019). In Pynn and colleagues (2019) study on exemplary sport parenting, coaches and parents pinpointed the importance of parents fostering independence through challenging their children and allowing the children to make mistakes and experience failure. At the same time, the study emphasized the necessity for parents to remain involved and caring. Providing such challenges can be understood through the lens of Eccles' expectancy-value theory, which posits that parental beliefs and actions significantly influence children's motivation and self-perception of ability (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). By setting challenges, parents may show high expectations, which can enhance a child's belief in their competence and motivation to achieve. Viewed through Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, the drills and expectations drew on fathers' football knowledge, illustrating how resources may facilitate motivation during everyday training. Nevertheless, the present findings underscore the complexities surrounding the provision of challenges, as such actions might inadvertently be displayed or perceived as pressuring, highlighting the need to

balance challenges with support and encouragement.

Finally, the fathers adopted a relaxed stance toward elite sports, emphasizing that the primary value of sports participation was not solely tied to achieving a professional athletic career. Indeed, parental involvement extends beyond fostering opportunities for children to excel in sports; it also plays a crucial role in nurturing their positive psychosocial experiences and promoting favorable developmental outcomes (Harwood et al., 2019).

Implications

The present study highlights the potential benefits of educating parents on effective sport parenting practices and also shows that fathers were aware of the sizeable role luck plays in talent progression (e.g., timing and injuries) and helped their sons to navigate these uncertainties. While former professional athletes possess some unique insights and resources, many of their behaviors can be adopted by any parent, such as playing sports, modeling enjoyment, and maintaining a balanced perspective that values sport for its inherent satisfaction. Policymakers and sports organizations should prioritize accessible parent education programs to allow all children in sport to benefit from such parental practices. Additionally, the study may highlight the necessity for equitable access to developmental opportunities in youth sports, such as providing access to high-quality coaching and facilities for all athletes. Furthermore, although not being a problem for the sons in the present study, practitioners such as coaches and sports psychologists should be conscious of the pressure that may come for children of elite athletes. Fostering open communication and collaboration between parents and coaches can help ensure that the developmental environment supports both performance and well-being.

Limitations

Although this qualitative study delved into the experiences and perceptions between father-son dyads in professional football, certain limitations warrant consideration. First, the

study included only three father-son dyads. Although a larger sample was difficult given the highly restrictive inclusion criteria where both father and son must have represented the senior national team, having few participants in the study restricted the breadth and diversity of perspectives. Second, the retrospective nature of the interviews raises concerns regarding the influence of success on participants' recollections. The attained success within their football careers may inadvertently color or bias their accounts, possibly altering the accuracy of their recollections. Finally, the study primarily focused on the dynamics of the father-son relationship and did not include all factors relevant to the phenomenon of father-son dyads on professional football. For instance, genetics could play a substantial role in athletic development and performance (see e.g., Bray et al., 2009), encompassing traits like physical attributes, muscle composition, and psychological characteristics relevant to sporting expertise.

Conclusions

In summary, the study addressed the need for insight into families where elite sporting participation spans generations (see Wilson et al., 2018). The findings indicate that former professional athlete fathers generally aligned well with recommendations of parental expertise in sport (see Knight et al., 2015; Pynn et al., 2019), including behaviors and influence that do not necessitate a former professional career (e.g., playing sport with their child, providing various forms of support, and sharing a love for sport). Notably, the fathers also adopted a relaxed stance toward elite sports, stressing that the true value of participation lay in enjoyment and positive youth development rather than becoming an elite athlete. However, the findings also indicate potential unique influences former professional athletes may have on their children. Such unique factors include the potential inspiration of watching or knowing your father played at a professional level, their provision of access to professional environments, and an understanding of the requirements of professional sport that enabled them to provide appropriate advice and

guidance. The present findings may contribute to understanding underlying factors that may explain the prevalence of father-son dyads at the highest sport level.

Authors' Declarations

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ORCID iDs

Martin Kjeøen Erikstad
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8954-5060>

Bjørn Tore Johansen
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3621-7933>

Camilla J. Knight
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5806-6887>

Tommy Haugen
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7909-473X>

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