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“The Pathways Project”
Developmental Activities, Behaviours and Motivations in Girls’ Soccer
<click on link for recruitment video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaQarCyOy18>>

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Dear Coach/Technical Director/Club Manager,

My name is Nicola Hodges and I am a Professor in the School of Kinesiology, at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver. I am writing to you about an exciting research project we have launched, which has been developed in collaboration with staff from Canada National Women’s Soccer and the provincial programs. We are tracking the developmental activities, motivation and other psychological characteristics of young female soccer players; studying their practice histories across various age groups, as well as following up their progressions in a longitudinal fashion. We are particularly interested in issues of specialization and diversity in sports during youth development. A long-term study such as this will aid our understanding of the factors contributing to performance excellence, sustained participation (and dropout) in girls and women’s soccer in Canada.

For the past 25 years, I have been studying expert performance and motor learning at McMaster University, Liverpool John Moores University in the UK, and now at the University of British Columbia. I have published extensively on the topic of high-performance sport and practice behaviours in academic journals and books across the span of my career. A major component of

my research program is related to the development of soccer skills across the lifespan. I have worked with professional soccer players in the UK, I have conducted research with professional clubs in the UK and the National Women's Soccer team in Canada, and I have served as a Skill Acquisition consultant for the Canadian Women's Soccer National team. For further details on my research, please visit my lab's webpage (<http://msl.kin.educ.ubc.ca>) for a full list of studies and an introduction to the Motor Skills Laboratory at UBC.

For this research project, we are studying the career progressions of youth (ages 12 to 18 years) female soccer players and the factors that help make highly skilled, motivated, tough and committed players and ultimately successful teams. These aspects of skill development have been identified as important to continued involvement and success in sport. We are also interested in factors which lead to disinterest and drop out.

In order to get your club and players involved in this research, I would be grateful if you could promote and distribute information about this research, targeted to the current **U14, U16 and U18** year players and parents of your club. We are targeting these 3 age groups initially to provide a cross-section of players and ages. With informed consent, all participants (players and parents) will be e-mailed a link to an online survey to complete approximately once a year for the next 3-5 years. It will take players approximately 1 hour to complete the initial questionnaire. Subsequent player questionnaires (sent annually) will be much shorter and will take no more than 30 minutes to complete. A brief rationale for the proposed study is provided below. **To encourage participation, we are giving players a \$15 Amazon e-voucher for completing initial surveys, and a \$10 Amazon e-voucher for completing subsequent surveys (\$10 parents).**

Study proposal

We aim to assess how early practice activity experiences affect the development of soccer related skills and psychological skills related to motivation, commitment, deliberate practice and mental toughness. Through specifically designed, validated questionnaires, we will investigate the relationships between early soccer practice experiences, other organized sport and non-sport activities and current skill levels and motivations. These analyses will form part of a wider understanding of optimal youth sport development and the benefits and costs of early sport-specific specialization. Because we have already collected data from male players in a previous research project, we will be able to study developmental differences and compare trends in the data based on sex. Following up with the same participants in subsequent years will also improve our understanding of drop-out in soccer amongst youth players in Canada. Although not part of this current study, we hope to validate our questionnaire methods with specific skill tests (tactical and technical) and relate these to practice histories and other psychological indices. We expect that the results of our study will contribute to the existing body of literature on the development of skill in sport and factors related to continued involvement (or drop-out). In a practical sense, these data will help foster successful and positive youth sport development in soccer, with research-based evidence serving to guide the design of effective practice environments.

All proposed measurement scales have been verified and deemed appropriate by the research ethics' board at the University of British Columbia. In accordance with the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA), we will be collecting data via the UBC-

hosted version of Qualtrics, an online survey host that is fully compliant with FIPPA legislation, and ensures that the survey data is kept secure and is stored and backed up in Canada. Any information collected will be held in the strictest of confidence and no specific details allowing identification of individuals will be included in subsequent publication or presentation. General results will be made available to interested persons, but no information will be provided that will serve to identify individual coaches, parents or players.

If you /your club is willing to participate in the study, I would be grateful if you could confirm by e-mailing research personnel in the Motor Skills Lab. (kin.msl@ubc.ca) or myself (nicola.hodges@ubc.ca), or by calling my office at (604) 822-5895 and leaving a message. When contacting us, please do not forget to include your club's name. **Consenting to participate does not mean that you consent for all parties to participate. Individual consent will be sought from the players and parents as evidenced by their willingness to complete the questionnaires. Please do not provide us with names, contact information or any other detail about potential participants without first obtaining permission.** Online data collection is planned to take place as soon as we receive consent from a parent/guardian or player (for those aged 16 years or older).

If you/ your club consents to participating in this project, please share the recruitment video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaQarCyOy18> with your membership. Please also email the two documents that you may have already received or that I can send to you: “*Parent - information letter*” and “*Player - information letter*”, to all parents/players from your club's U18, U16, and U14 girls' teams, for any of the following skill levels. These documents can also be downloaded from our website; <http://msl.kin.educ.ubc.ca/pathways>:

- Youth National Team
- REX/ EXCEL program
- Provincial Program
- HPL/ Premier (BCSPL) or OPDL (for British Columbia or Ontario soccer programs respectively)
- Metro and Division 1/ Gold and Division 2 / Silver (for British Columbia soccer programs) or Youth Regional League and Youth District Competitive League (for Ontario soccer programs)

I have tried to make this as easy on all involved as possible, but please let me know via email if I can help further or provide additional details or clarification. Please do share widely to those inside and outside of your club. Thank-you!

Kind regards,

Nicola Hodges, PhD
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<https://kin.educ.ubc.ca/person/nicola-hodges/>

Addendum

It is widely recognized that practice is the most important variable in becoming an elite soccer player. Recent research has also shown that time spent in playful activities (e.g., playground soccer) during early development is an important factor in the development of male expert soccer players. This has led top European clubs including F.C. Porto, Ajax and Bayern Munich to recreate soccer 'play' activities in their sessions. Moreover, Long Term Athlete Development models advocate involvement in a variety of sports during the early years (5-12 years), with diversity seen as beneficial for player development. Key psychological variables such as motivation, toughness or grit, or readiness to engage in practice have been shown to be correlated with greater persistence and adherence in sports. We want to further study these factors and their importance in girls and women's sports.

Selected references from our Lab.

BOOKS:

- NJ Hodges and AM Williams (Eds., 2020). **Skill Acquisition in Sport: Research, Theory and Practice (3rd ed)**. London, UK: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group). <https://www.routledge.com/Skill-Acquisition-in-Sport-Research-Theory-and-Practice-3rd-Edition/Hodges-Williams/p/book/9780815392842>

JOURNAL ARTICLES:

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