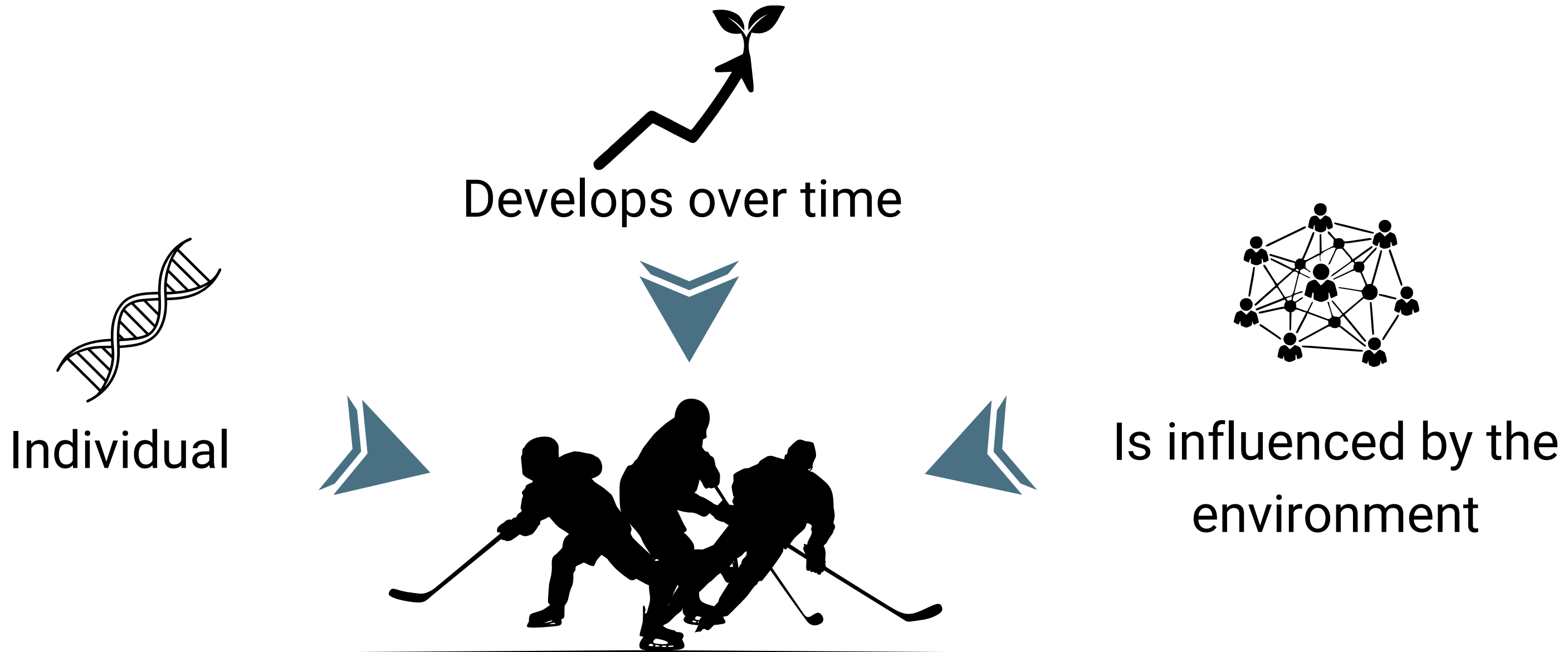


Athlete Perspectives on Talent Development Environments in Finnish Youth Team Sports: Relevance to Development and Environmental Diversity

A Multi-Sport,
Multi-Year
Analysis

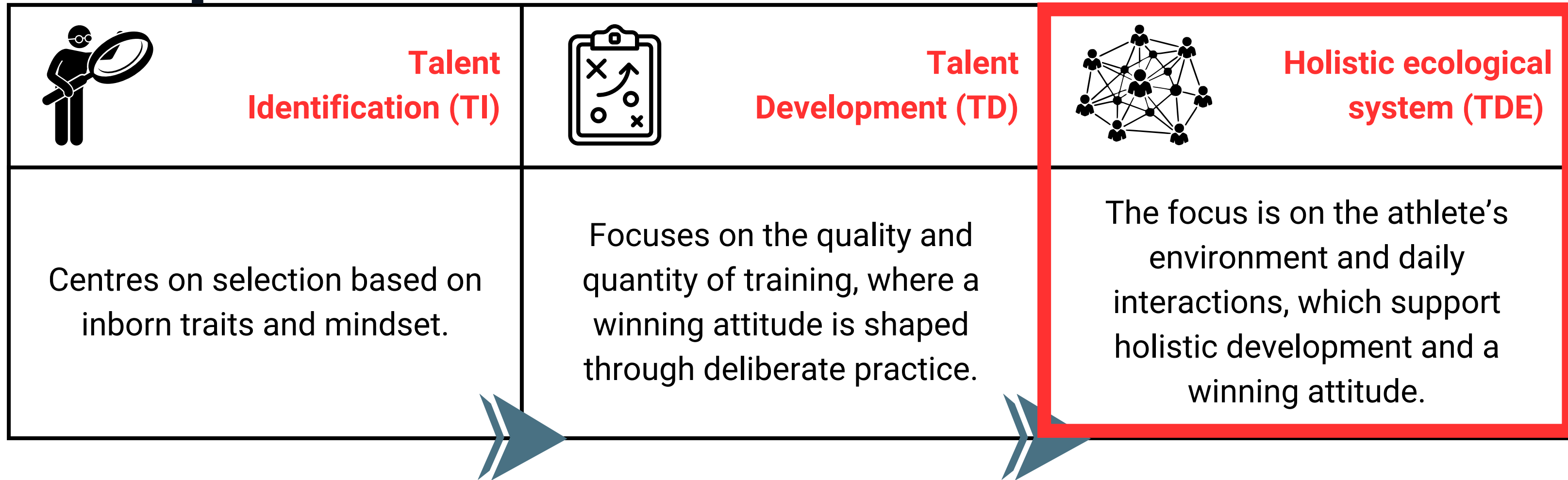
Lovro Bajc
PhD Student
Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences
Biology of Physical Activity | Sports Coaching Science | 2025

The cornerstones of athlete development



Every young person deserves the opportunity to develop their talent to its full potential.

Perspectives on athletic talent



The TDE perspective emphasizes that talent development is context-dependent and supported by the environment, rather than based solely on individual traits.

What Do We Mean by “Athlete Development Environment”?

- Every club and organization operates within an environment made up of **people, processes, and culture** that shape how talent and performance grow.
- It is more than facilities or structures. It is about how **communication, trust, and daily practices connect**. When we understand how environments function, we can turn culture into performance.
- Understanding the environment helps leaders, coaches, and practitioners make focused improvements that drive long-term success.

Talent never grows in isolation. It grows in environments.

Literature Review



1 Human development emerges from continuous interaction between the individual and their environment.

Bronfenbrenner, U. 1977. *Towards an Experimental Ecology of Human Development*. *American Psychologist* 32, pp. 513-531



2 Natural abilities develop into talent through interaction with personal and environmental factors.

Gagné, F. 2013. 'Yes, Giftedness (Aka "innate" talent) does exist!', in Kaufman, S. B. *The Complexity of Greatness: Beyond Talent or Practice*.



3. The quality of the talent development environment matters. Structure, culture, support networks all shape it

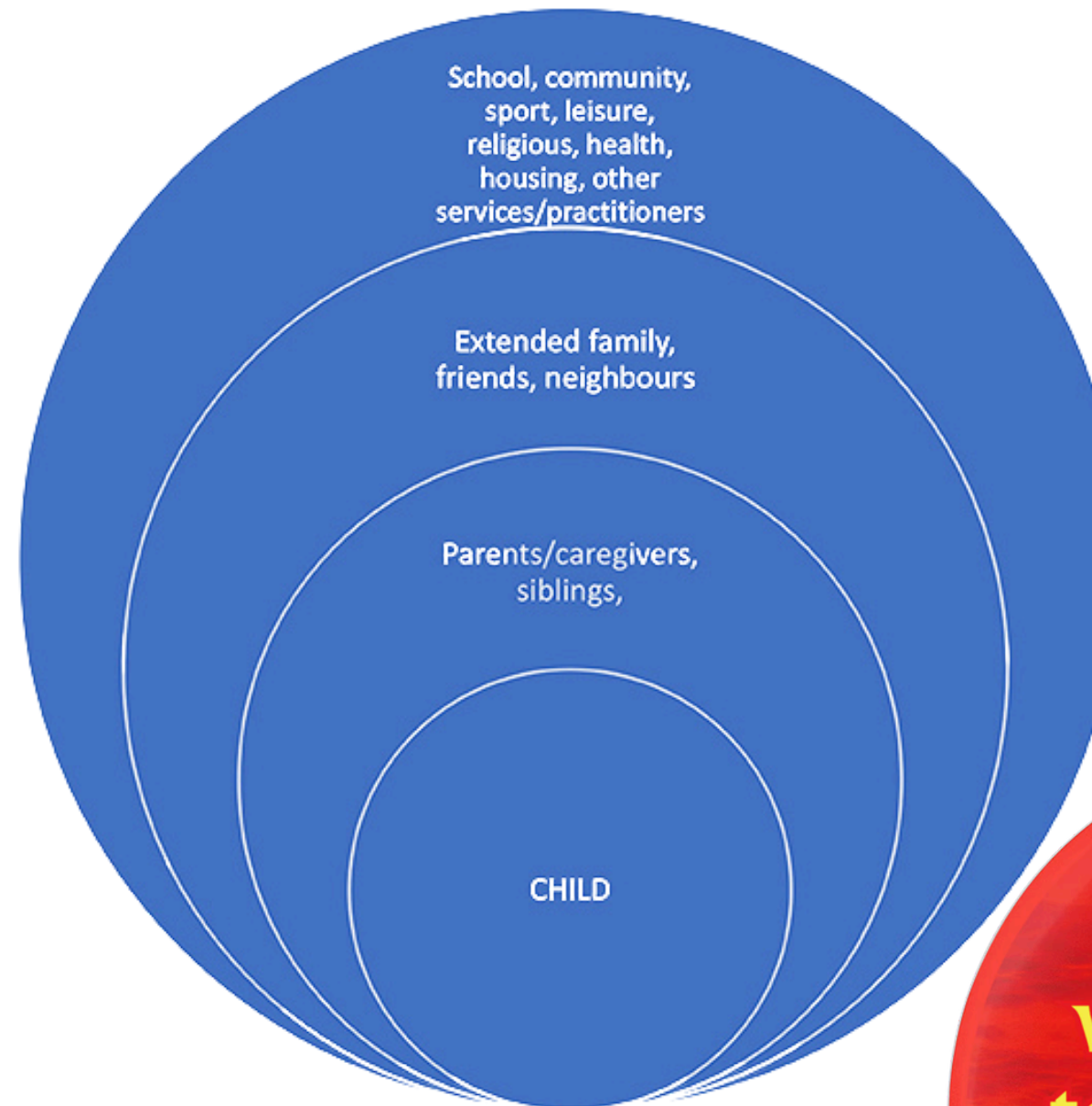
Hauser, et al. 2022. *Talent development environments within sports: a scoping review examinig functional and dysfunctional environ-mental features*. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*.

Henriksen, K. 2010. *The Ecology of Talent Development in Sport: A Multiple Case Study of Successful Athletic Talent Development Environments in Scandinavia*.



4 Current Finnish research on TDEs is scarce, limited to dual careers; multi-sport and longitudinal evidence is missing.

Nikander, J., et al. 2020. *From athletic talent development to dual career development? A case study in a Finnish high-performance sports environment*.



Origins of TDE

- **Long-term and not short term on mind**
 - clear vision, purpose and identity
- **Coherent support messages**
 - coaches, parents, schools and other stakeholders should communicate consistent messages.
- **Development before early success**
 - winning at developmental stages should not define long-term potential.
- **Individualised & ongoing approaches**
 - consider differences in maturation, performance and progression. Biobanding?
- **Holistic & Systematic approach**
 - All systems connected

KEY FEATURES

Long Term Aims & Methods

Wide Ranging Coherent Messages & Support

Emphasise Appropriate Development NOT Early Success

Individualised & Ongoing Development

KEY METHODS

- Develop a **Long-Term Vision, Purpose & Identity**

- Provide **Coherent Philosophies, Aims & Methods at a Variety of Levels** (e.g. Parents, Coach Content, Practice & Reward Systems, Selection, Funding, Competition Structure, NGBs)
- **Educate Parents, Schools, Peers, Coaches & Important Others** (and encourage positive contributions!)
- Utilise **Role Models** at a Variety of Levels
- Set Up a **Variety of Support Networks** Over the Long Term (e.g. Peer, Coach, Sport Staff, Family)
- Provide Forums for **Open & Honest Communication Patterns at a Variety of Levels**

- Re-conceptualize 'Winning' as Success at Developmental Stages
- Provide Clear Expectations, Roles, & Meaning Within the 'Big Picture' at Every Level
- Provide 'Stage Specific' Integrated Experiences & Teaching
 - Fundamental Physical & Perceptual Skills
 - Fundamental Mental Skills (Learning & Development; Life; Performance Related)
 - Sport Specific Skills (Technical, Tactical, Mental, Physical, Perceptual)
 - Balance
- Encourage Increasing Responsibility & Autonomy in Learning/Development
- Develop Intrinsic Motivation & Personal Commitment to Process
- Promote Personal Relevance, Athlete Understanding & Knowledge

- Provide Opportunities & Fundamentals to as Many Youngsters as Possible
- Provide Flexible Systems to Allow for Performance & Physical Development Variation
- Identify, Prepare for, and Support Individuals Through Key Transitions
- Provide Regular Individual Goal Setting & Review Processes
- Provide Systematic Reinforcement Contingencies

NATURE OF MODEL

Integrated, Holistic & Systematic

Fig. 1. The model of effective talent identification and development procedures emerging from the literature

Martindale, R. J. J., Collins, D., & Daubney, J. (2005). Talent development: a guide for practice and research within sport. *Quest*, 57, 353-375.

Danish model

- Athlete at the centre of a wider system
- Development is shaped by both micro- and macro-environments
- Athletic and non-athletic domains interact: coaches, teammates, family, school, clubs and governing bodies
- The environment develops over time: past experiences, present conditions and future opportunities all matter

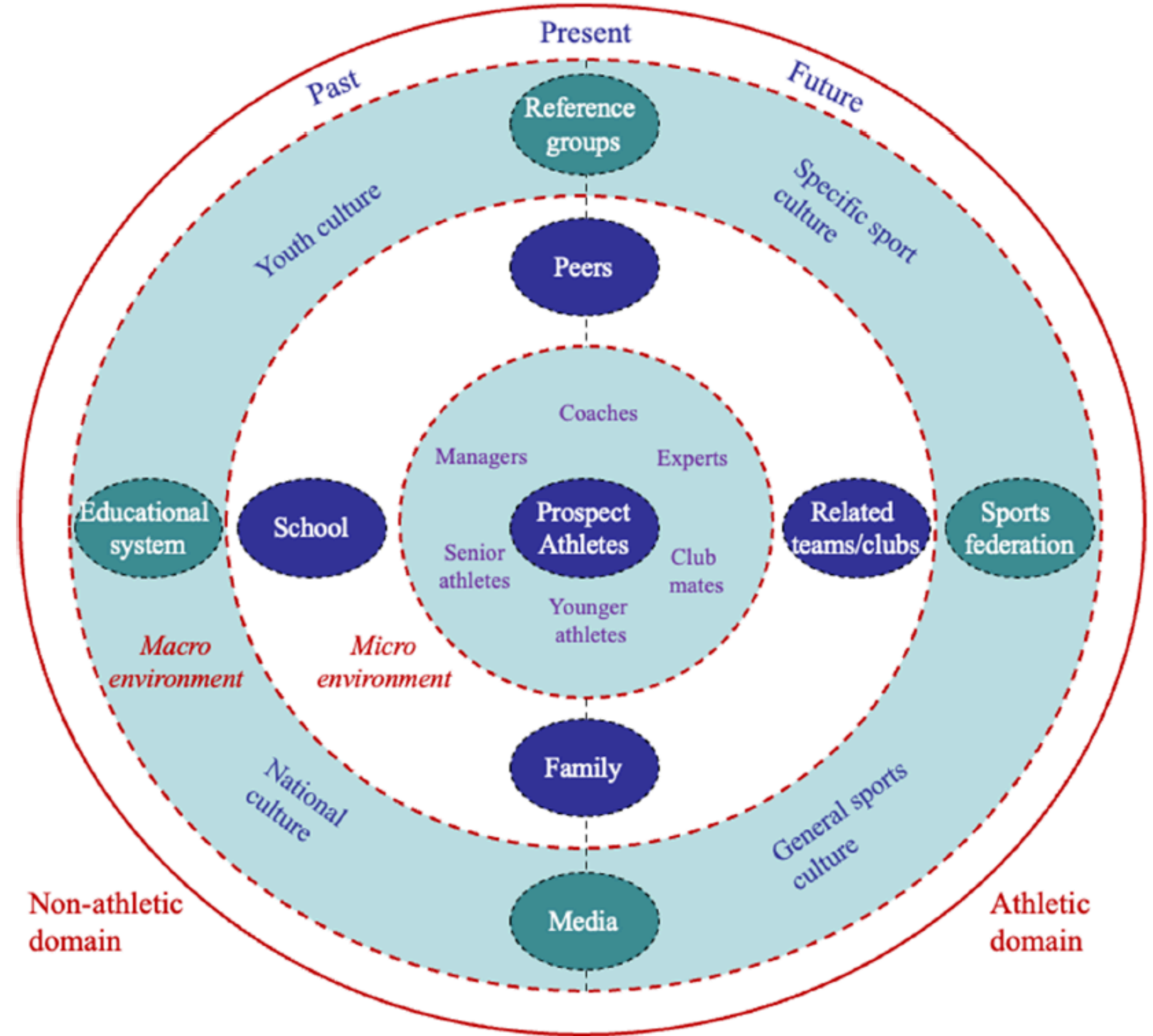


FIGURE 1
The athletic talent development environment (ATDE) working model. Reprinted with permission.

Danish model cont'

- **Resources are only the starting point**
 - people, finances and facilities must be translated into effective daily practice.
- **Culture shapes development**
 - cultural artefacts (e.g., stories, customs and physical manifestations such as clothing and organisation charts)
 - espoused values (i.e., principles, goals and standards that the organisation shows to the world)
 - basic assumptions (i.e., taken for granted and serving as underlying reasons for actions).
- **Success is multidimensional**
 - effective environments support individual development, team achievement and sustained athlete development over time.

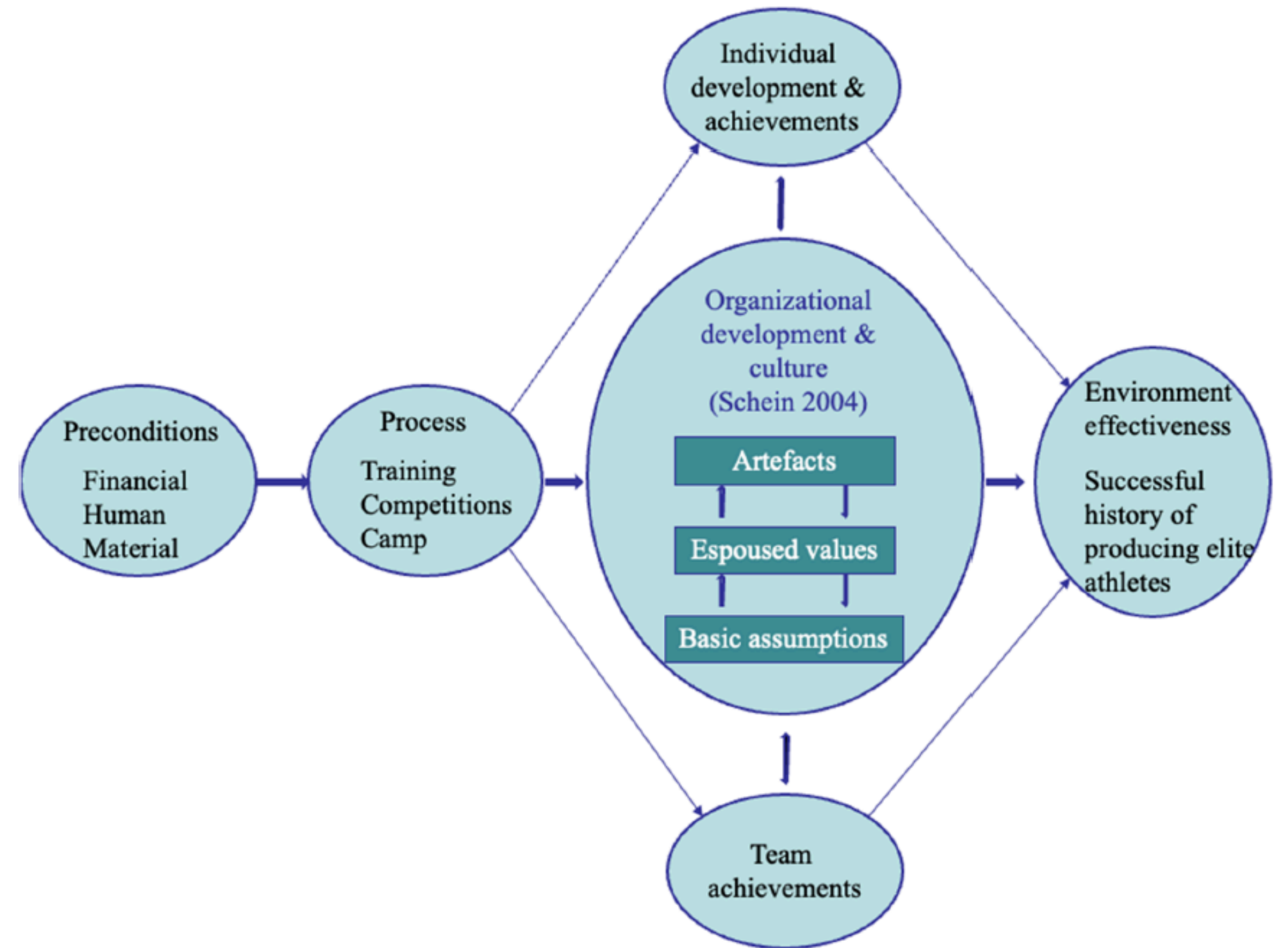


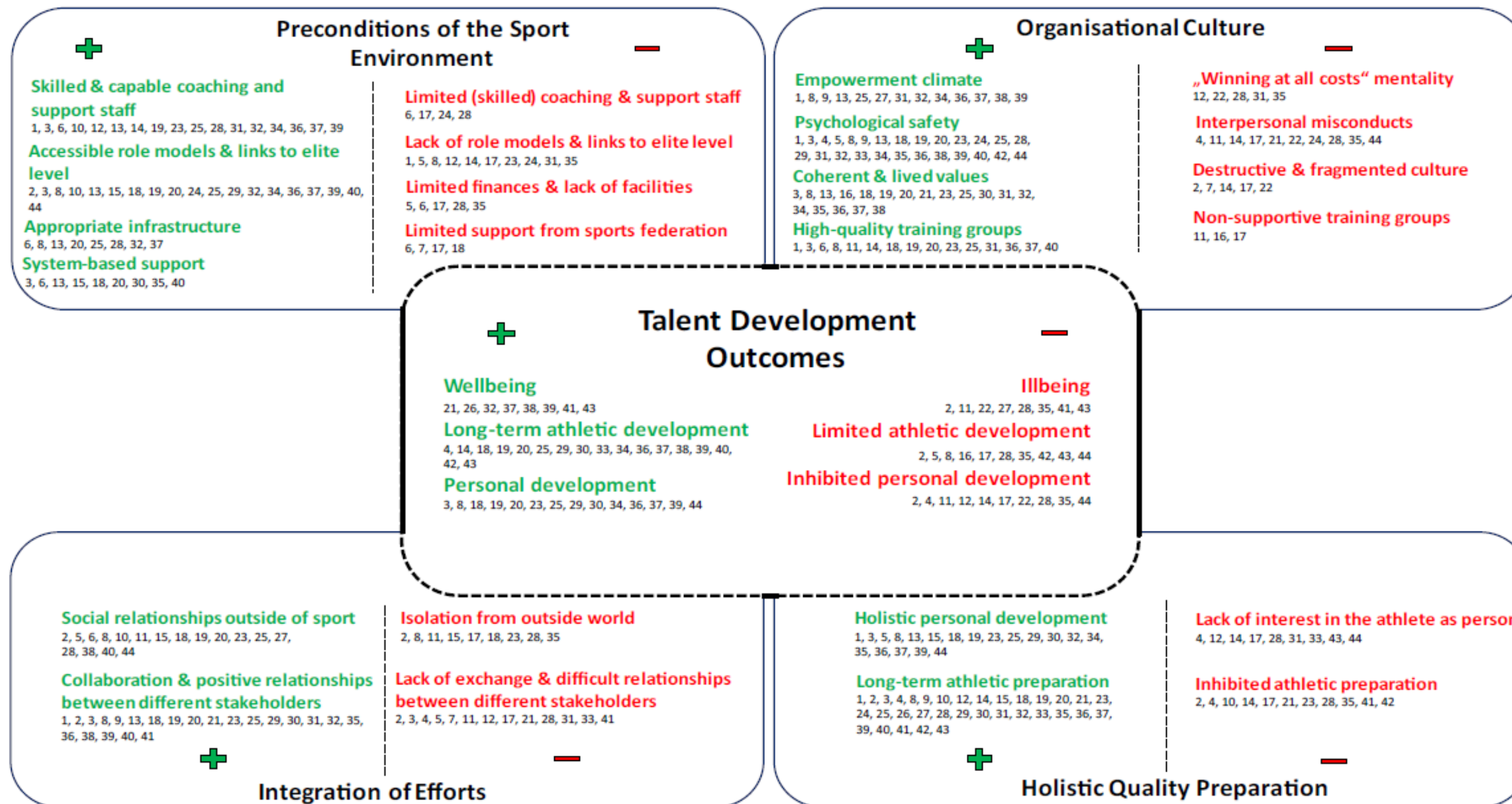
FIGURE 2

The environment success factors (ESF) working model. Reprinted with permission.

Danish model cont'

Features of successful ATDEs	Descriptors	Opposite Poles
Structure		
Integration of efforts	Coordination and communication between sport, school, family and other components; athletes experience synergy	Lack of communication; conflicting interests; athletes experience contradicting demands
Training groups with supportive relationships	Opportunities for inclusion in a training community with supportive relationships and friendships	Individualized training programs at an early stage; training alone; rivalry and low cohesion
Proximal role models	Opportunities to train with the elite athletes who are willing to pass on their knowledge	Boundaries between athletes at different levels. Elite level athletes keep their secrets
Support of sporting goals by the wider environment	School, family and friends acknowledge the athletes' dedication to sport	Non-sport environment shows lack of understanding of elite sport
Organizational culture		
Coherent organizational culture	Coherence between espoused values and actions provides stability	Fragmented culture; espoused values do not correspond to actions; uncertainty
Support for the development of psychosocial skills	Opportunities to develop competences that are of benefit outside sport; considering athletes as "whole human beings"	Focus solely on sport; excessive control from coaches; focus on relative performance before personal improvement
Training that allows for diversification	Opportunities to sample different sports during early phases; focus on versatile basic sport skills in training	Promoting early specialization and sport specific skills only; considering other sports as rivals
A room for free initiative	Opportunities to organize training at own initiative across age- and training groups.	Inaccessible facilities and high training loads demotivate athletes to train outside formal training.
Knowledge sharing	Coaches share knowledge inside the ATDE and with coaches in other ATDEs	Coaches protect their "secrets" and consider other coaches only as rivals.
Focus on long-term development	Focus on long-term development of the athletes; age-appropriate training	Focus on early success; kids train like miniature elite athletes.

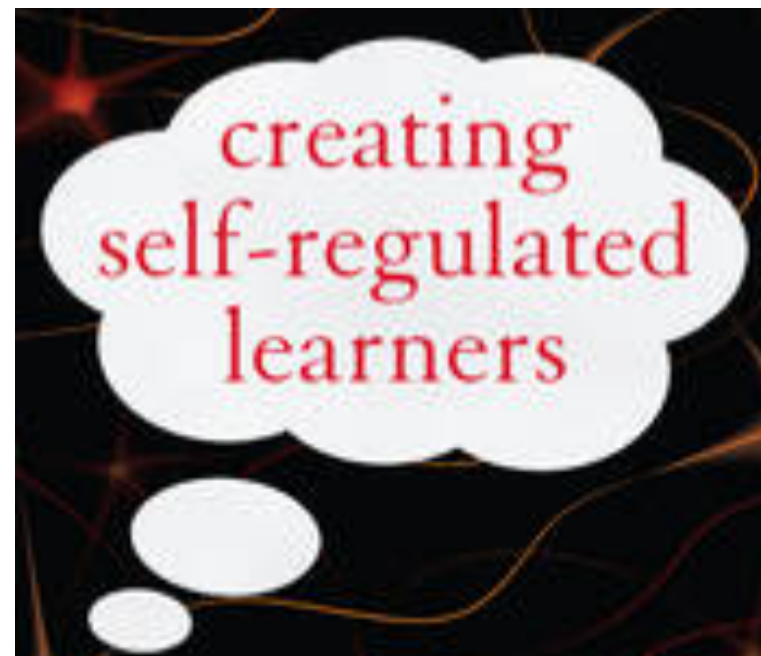
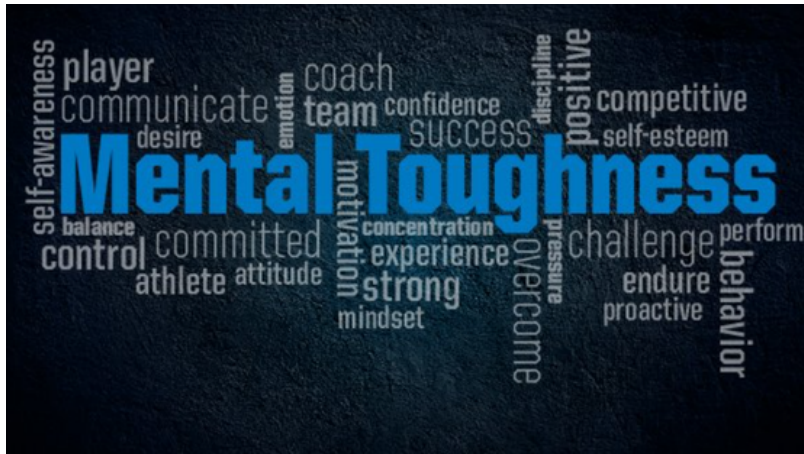
Functional vs Dysfunctional TDEs



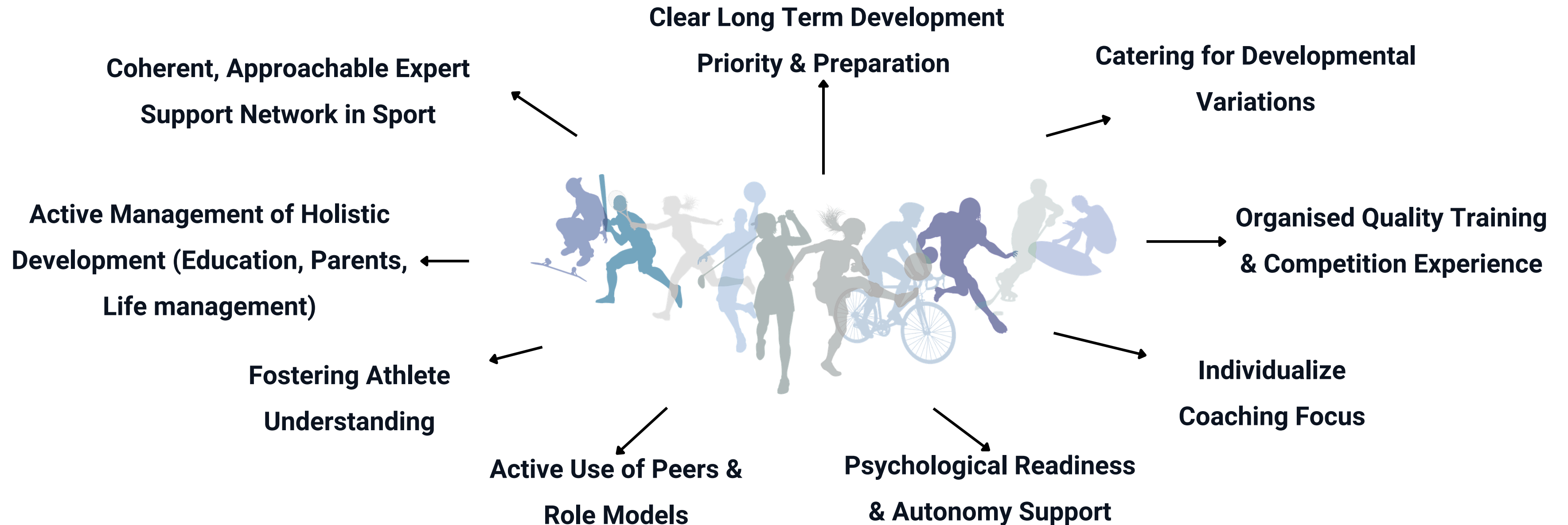
A preliminary conceptual framework of functional and dysfunctional TDE features and its effects on the holistic development of athletes

Hauser et al. 2022. Talent development environments within sports: a scoping review examining functional and dysfunctional environmental features.

Why should we care?



Key Factors of Quality TDEs





Etelä-Karjalan
URHEILUAKATEMIA

Urheilijakehitysympäristön oivallusraportti 2025



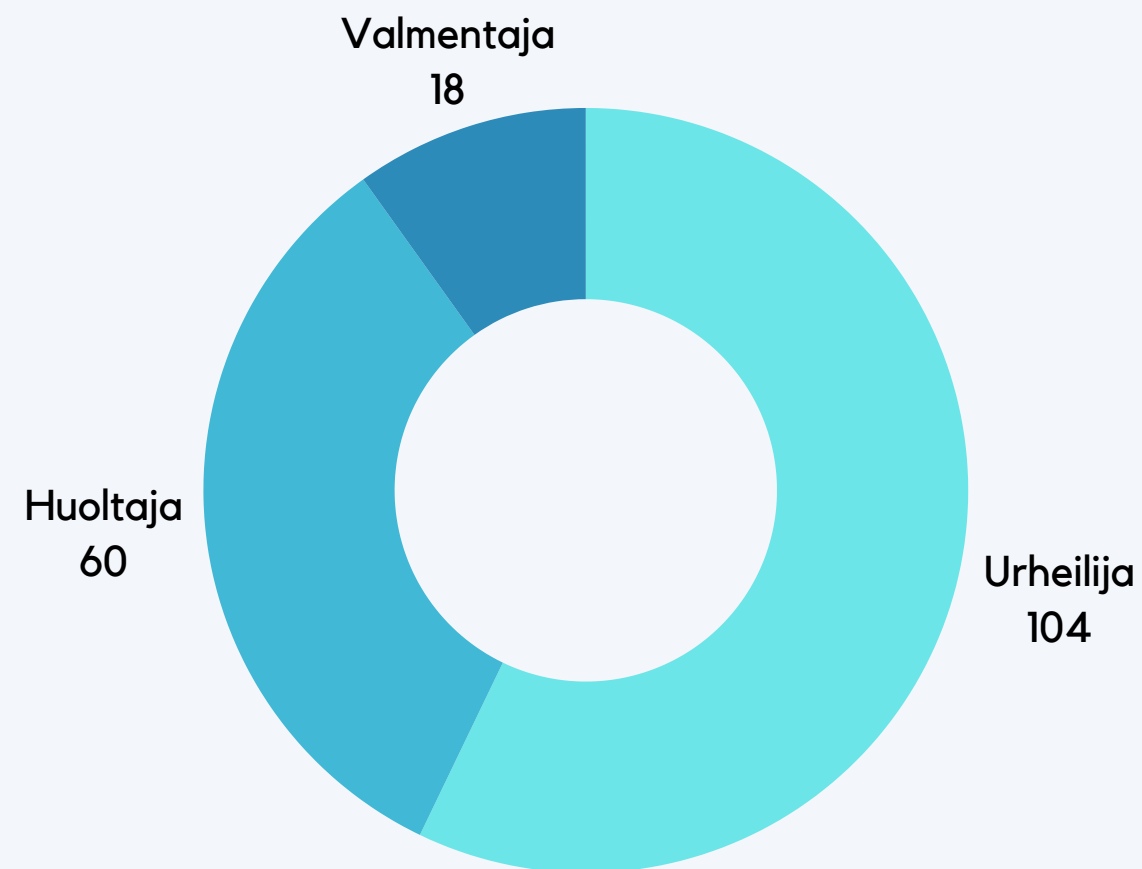
Vaastajat

Määrä: 183

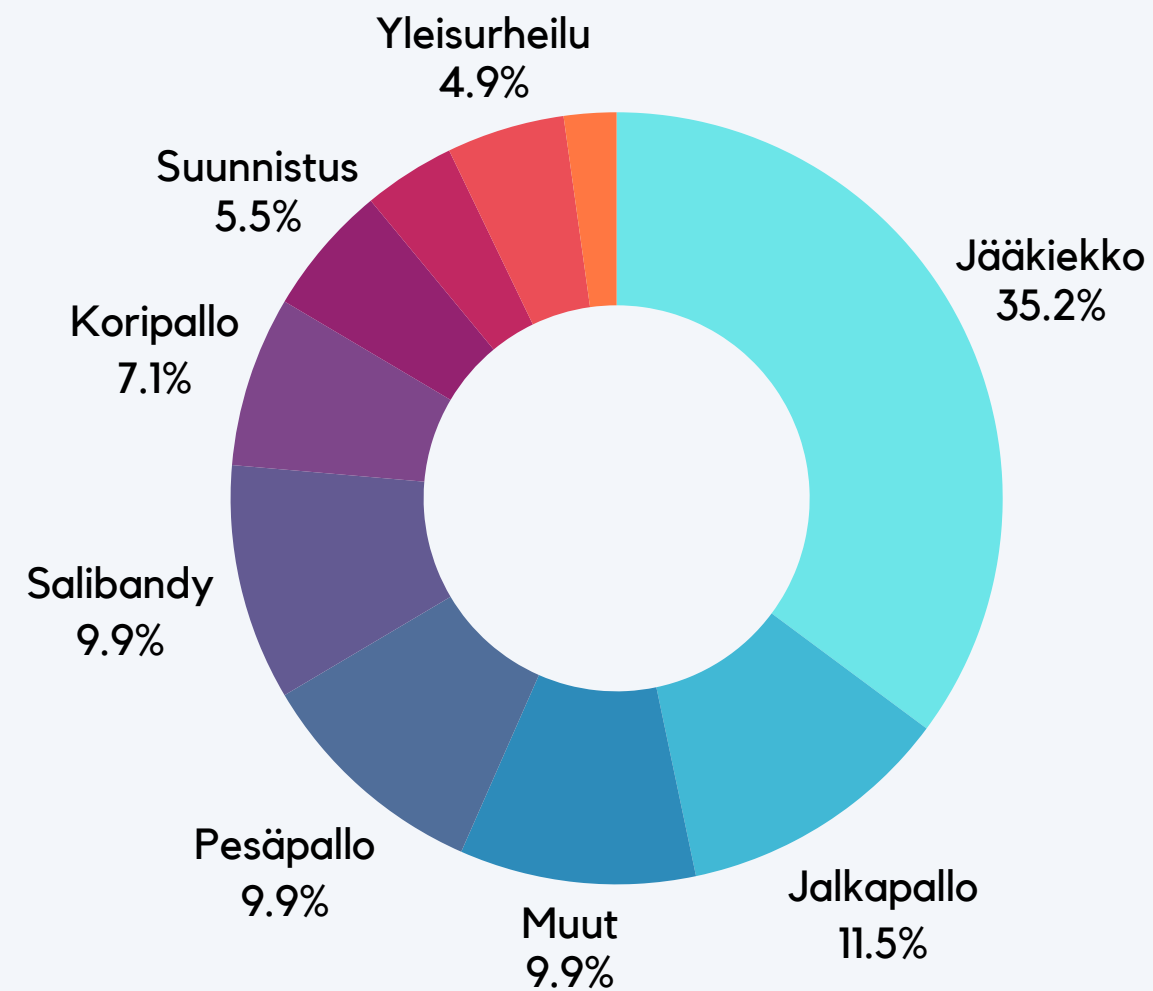
Laji: 20

Seurat: 31

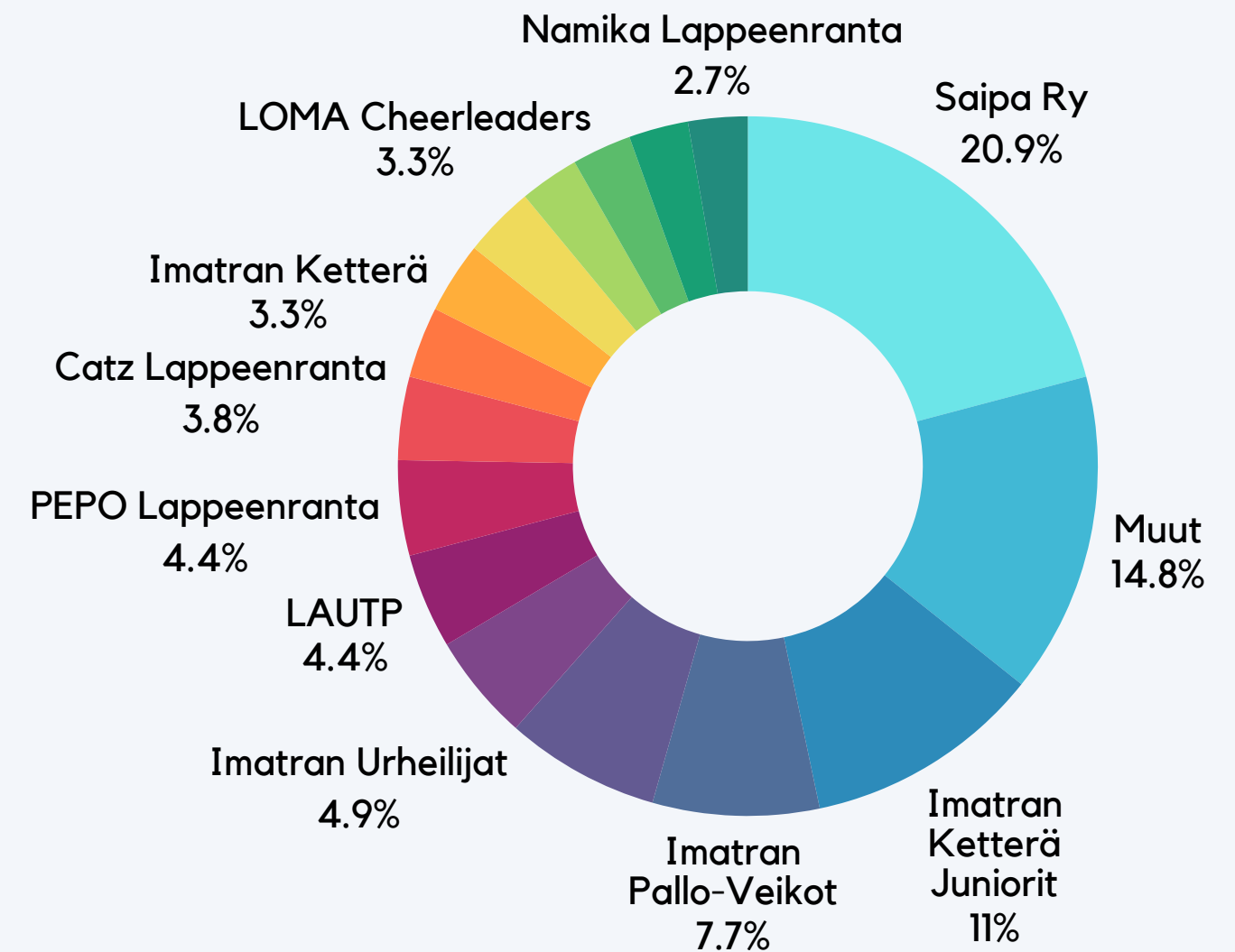
Rooli



Laji



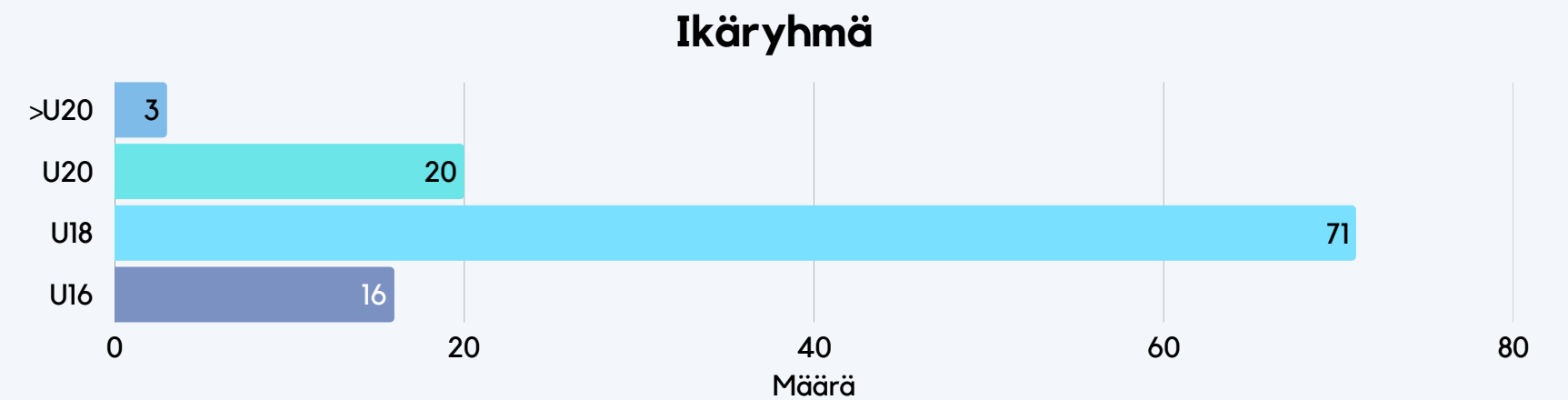
Seura



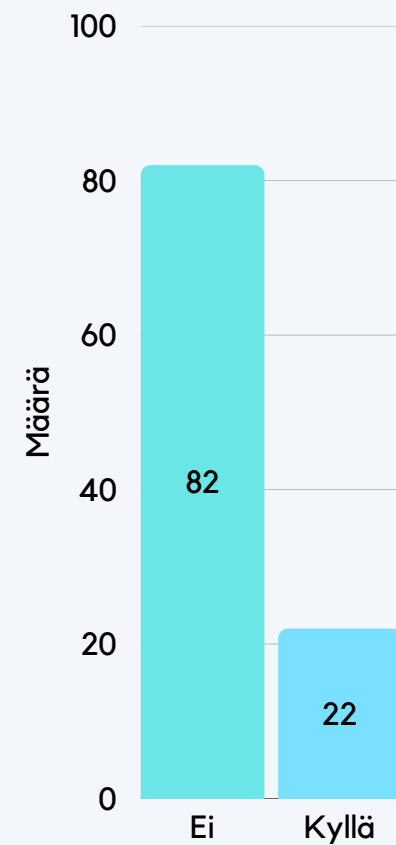


Urheilijat: Demografia ja Taustatekijät

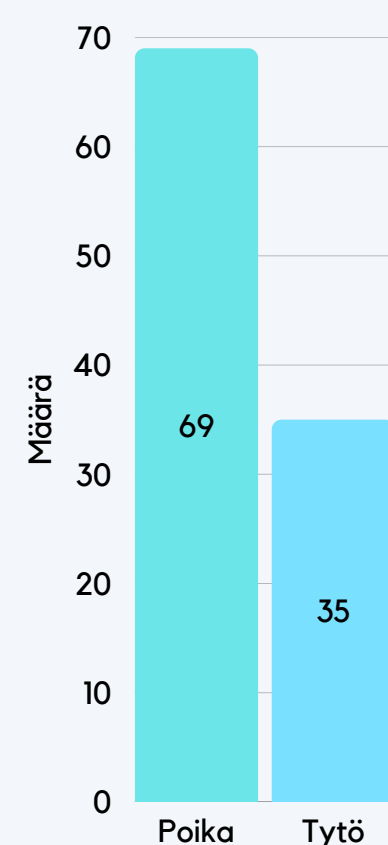
Muuttuja	Keskiarvo	Keskihajonta	Max	Min
Ikä	16.67	1.39	14.00	25.00
Vuodet Päälaajissa	9.53	3.13	17.00	2.00
Harjoitustunnit per viikko	9.44	5.04	26.00	3.00
Vuodet seurassa	7.68	3.65	15.00	1.00
Vuodet valmentajan kanssa	2.48	2.02	12.00	0.10



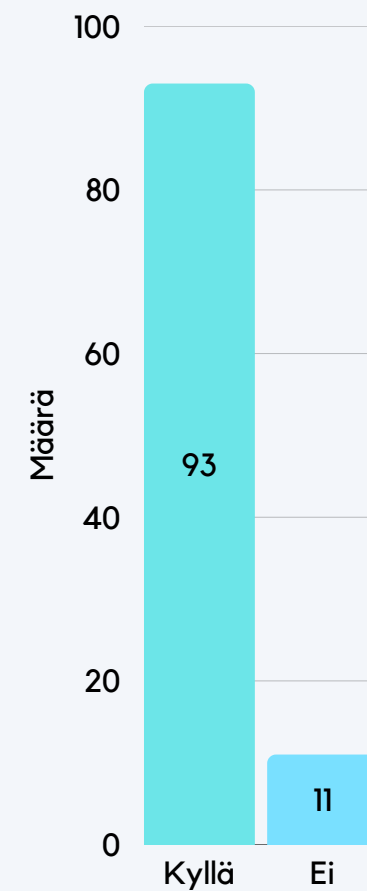
Maajoukkue toiminnassa



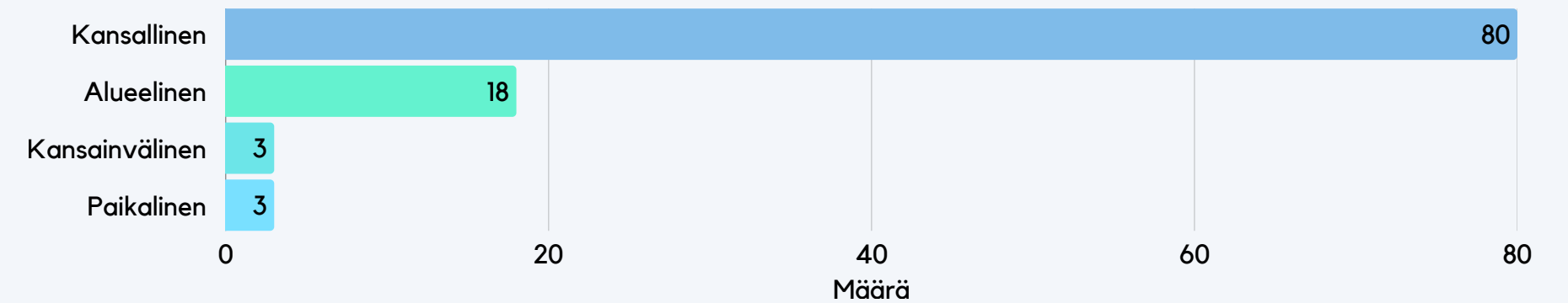
Sukupuolen jako



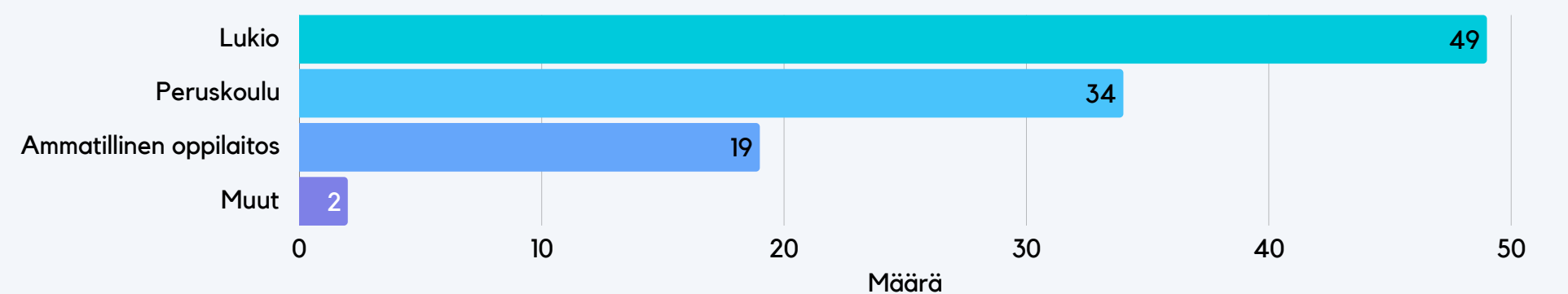
UAK:ssa



Kilpailutaso



Koulumuoto





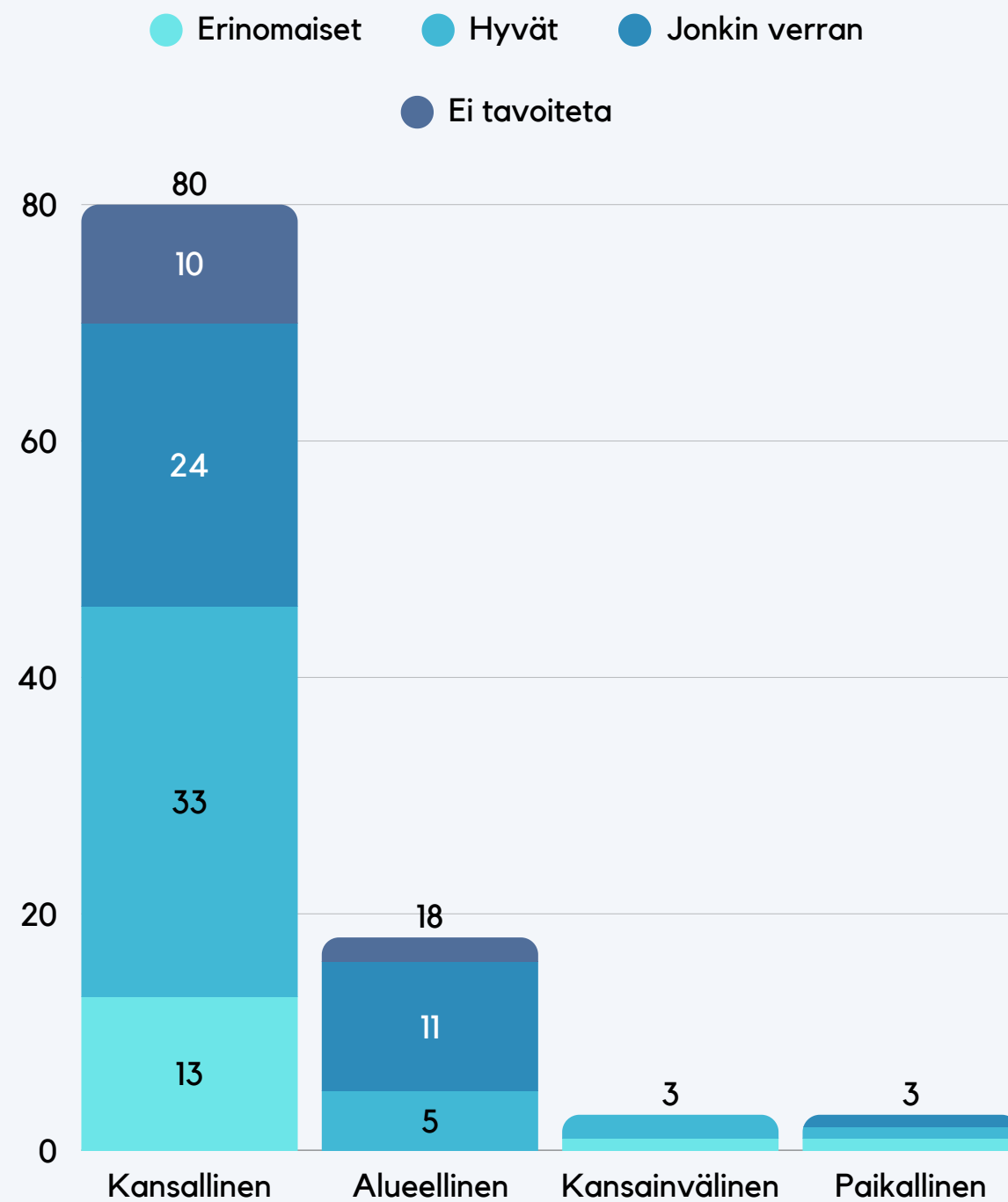
Ammattilaisuuden mahdollisuus



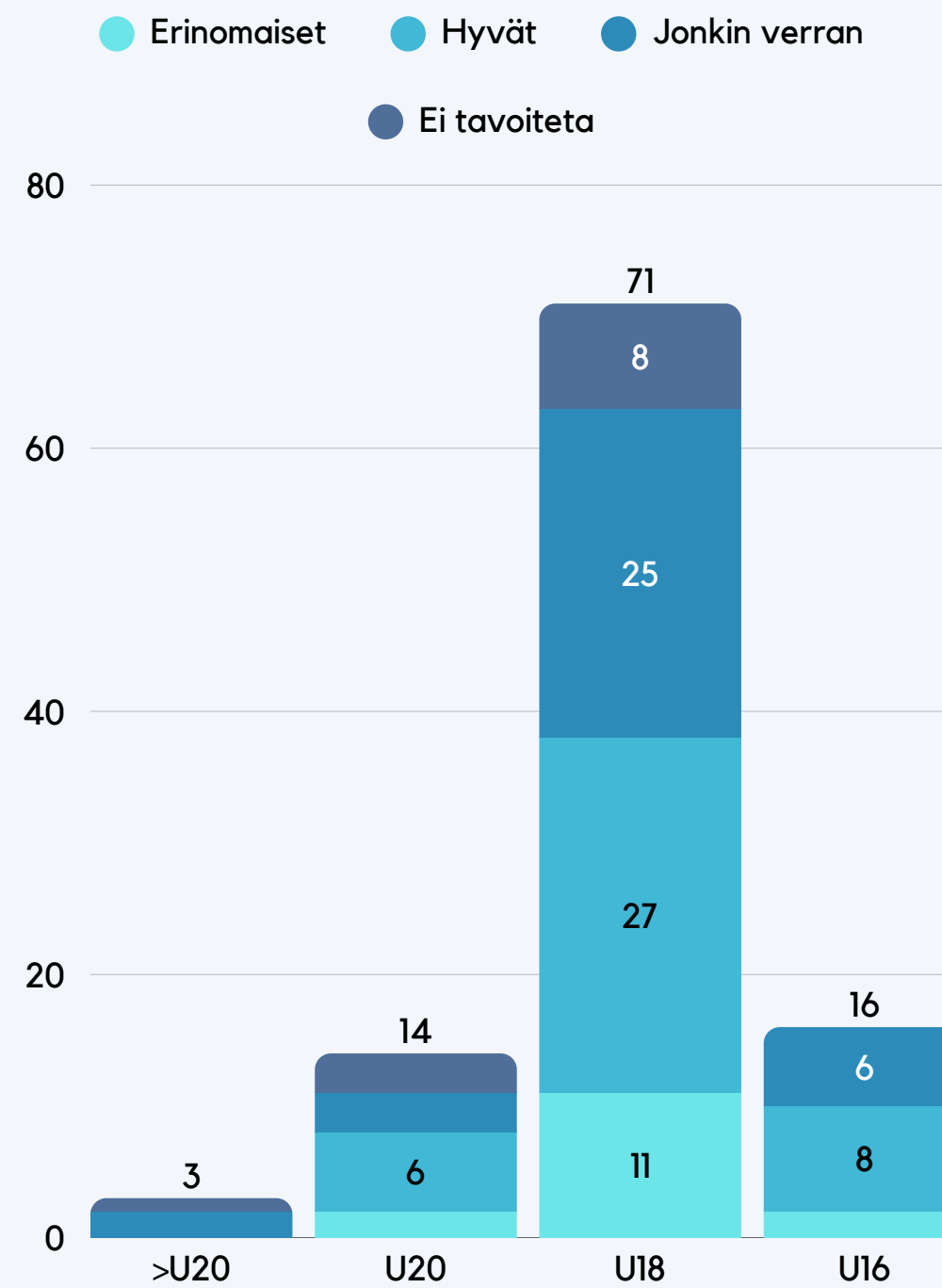
Koettu ammattilaisuus ryhmittäin

Urheilijan määrä: 104

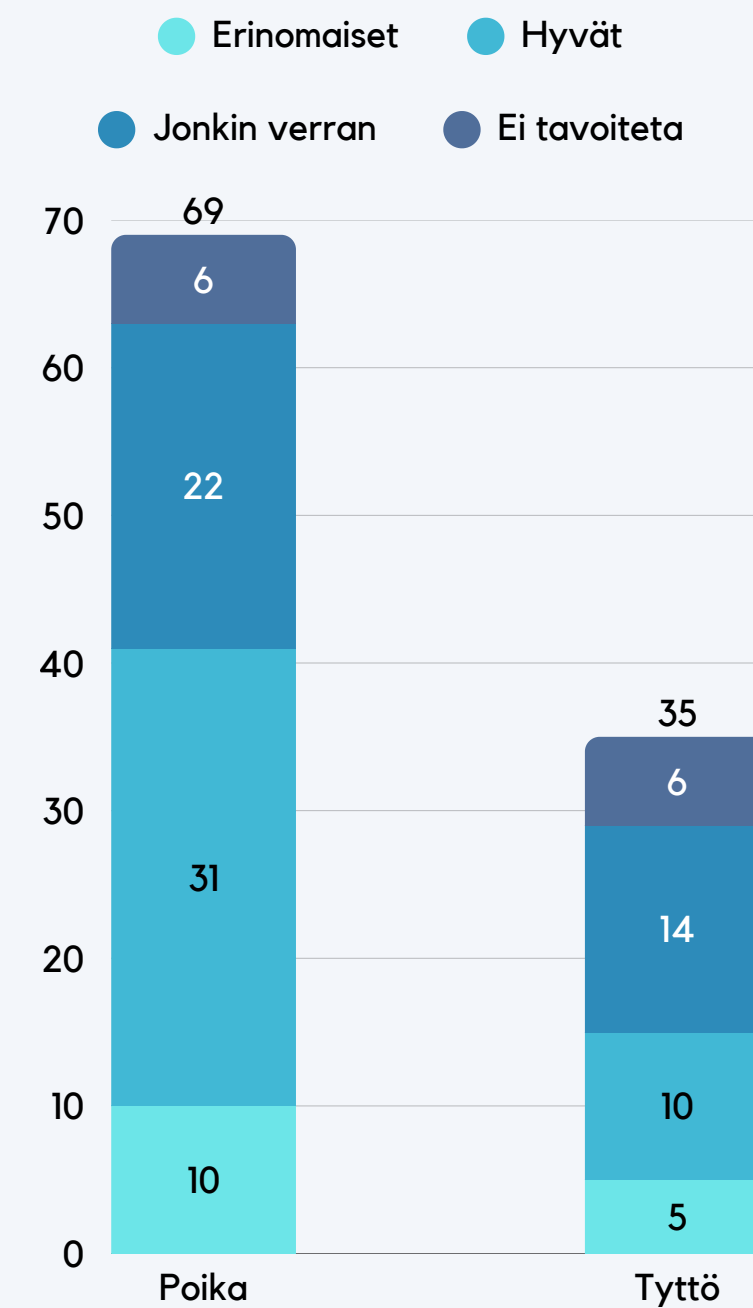
Ammattilaisuus & kilpailutaso



Ammattilaisuus & Ikäryhmä



Ammattilaisuus & Sukupuoli

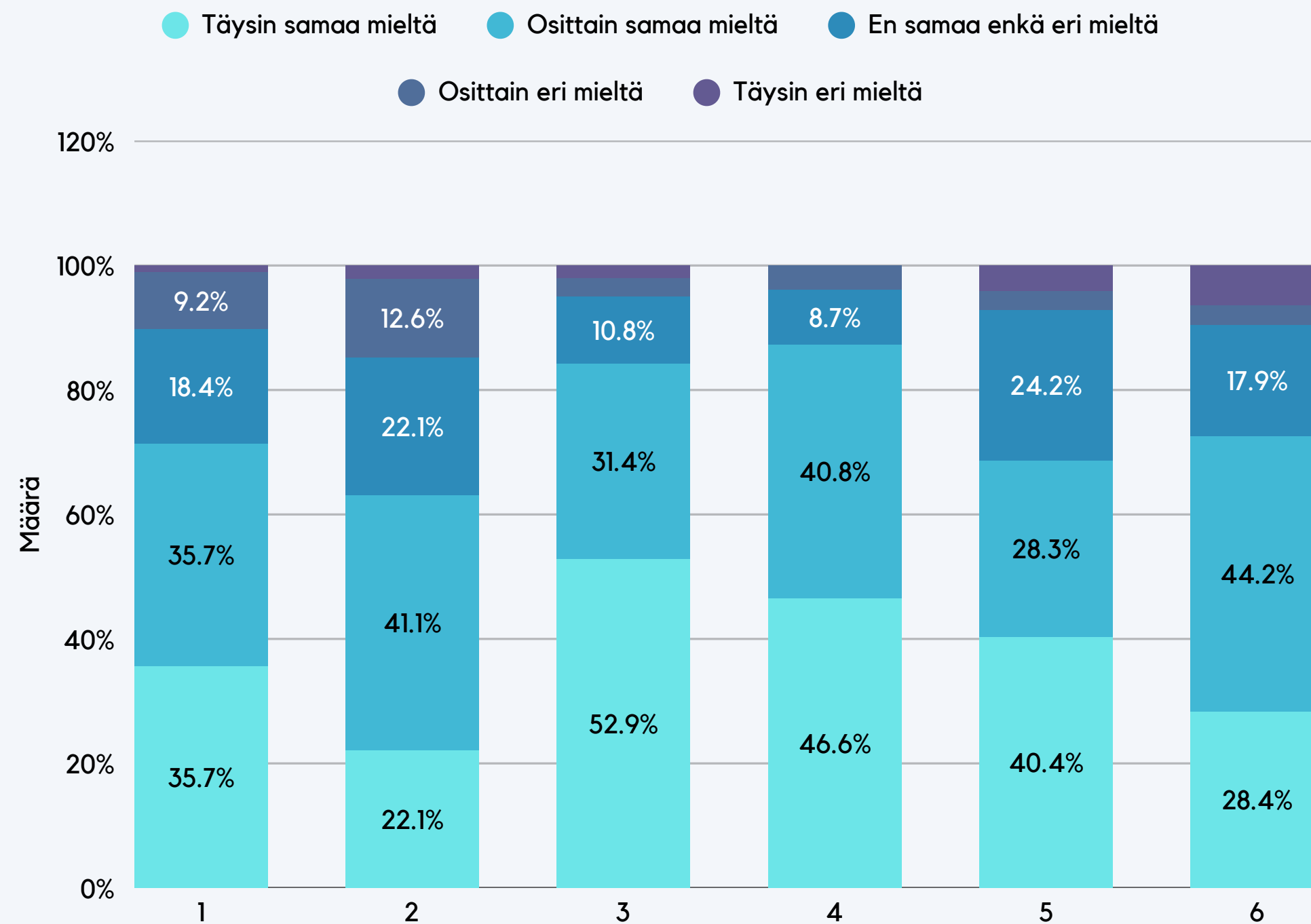




Arki, opiskelu ja urheilu

Urheilijoiden kokemukset

Urheilijan määrä: 104



Arvioidut osa-alueet:

1. Koulun tuki kaksoisuralle
2. Tavoite siviiliuralle
3. Tavoite urheilu-uralle
4. Elämän tasapaino
5. Valmentajan tuki kaksoisuralle
6. Vuosisuunnitelma kaksoisuralle

Osa- Alue	"en osaa sanoa" - määrä
1	6
2	9
3	2
4	1
5	5
6	9

Talent development environment



To maintain

Harjoitukseni ovat normaalisti kehittäviä ja haastavia	76.92%
Selkeä ja hyvin suunniteltu toiminta on tärkeää niille, jotka vastaavat valmennuksestani	75.27%
Valmentajani suunnittelee harjoitukset siten, että ne sisältävät useita erilaisia hyödyllisiä taitoja ja ominaisuuksia kuten lajitaitoja, fysiikkaa, taktisia taitoja, henkisiä taitoja ja pää...	73.63%
Valmentajani antaa minun oppia tekemällä omia virheitäni	61.54%
Valmentajani selittää minulle, kuinka harjoittelu- ja kilpailuohjelmat yhdessä auttavat minua kehittymään	60.44%
Valmentajani osaa auttaa minua ymmärtämään mitä minun pitää tehdä ja miksi	74.18%
Valmentajani osaa auttaa minua ymmärtämään vahvuuteni ja heikkouteni omassa urheilulajissani	70.33%
Valmentajani ja muut minua urheilussa tukevat henkilöt ovat helposti lähestyttäviä (esim. fysioterapeutti, urheilupsykologi, fysiikkavalmentaja, ravitsemusterapeutti, elämäntapa valmentaja jne.)	69.23%
Valmentajallani on positiivinen ja kannustava vaikutus minuun	68.68%
Jos loukkaannun, uskon saavani edelleen hyvää tukea	64.84%

Rakenteellinen harjoitteluympäristö

Vahva viestintä ja ymmärrys

Kannustava valmennustyyli

Välittävä tukiverkosto

Luottamus vastoinkäymisissä

To re-evaluate

Asetan säännöllisesti valmentajani kanssa tavoitteita, jotka liittyvät henkilökohtaiseen kehitykseeni	42.86%
Kouluni ei oikeastaan tue minua urheilussani, silloin kun tarvitsen sitä	40.11%
Keskustelen valmentajani kanssa siitä, mitä entiset ja/tai nykyiset maailman huiput ovat tehneet menestyäkseen	39.01%
Pyrimme valmentajani kanssa usein ennakoimaan, mikä on seuraava suuri haasteeni.	39.01%
Minulla on usein mahdollisuus keskustella minua kokeneempien urheilijoiden kanssa siitä, kuinka he ovat käsitelleet samoja haasteita, joita kohtaan	35.71%
En saa juurikaan apua henkisen vahvuuteni tehokkaaseen kehittämiseen	35.16%
Tällä hetkellä minulla on mahdollisuus tavata useita ammattilaisia jotka, auttavat minua kehittämisessäni urheilijana (esim. fysioterapeutti, urheilupsykologi, fysiikkavalmentaja, ravintoval...)	32.42%
Valmentajani järjestävät aikaa keskusteluun vanhempieni kanssa minusta ja mitä aoin saavuttaa	31.32%
Valmentajani puhuvat säännöllisesti muille minua lajissani tukeville ihmisille siitä, mitä yritän saavuttaa (esim. fysioterapeutti, urheilupsykologi, ravitsemusterapeutti, fysiikkavalmentaja, eläm...)	30.77%
Minulle kerrotaan toistuvasti, että nykyiset tulokseni eivät vaikuta tulevaan menestymiseeni	26.37%

Tavoiteasettelu ja ennakointi

Asiantuntijaverkoston koordinaatio

Psykologinen ja autonomiaa tukeva valmennus

Pitkän aikavälin kehitys

Vertaisoppiminen ja roolimallit

Kokonaisvaltainen tuki

Lovro Bajc
PhD Student
Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences
Biology of Physical Activity
Sports Coaching Science | 2026

LinkedIn:



Lovro Bajc

Doctoral Researcher in Sports Coaching Science
(Jyväskylä) | Head Coach at SaiPa U18 | Talent Dev...



Thank You For Your Attention

