

Introduction & Objective

- There is limited literature on Para sport athletes' development and sporting experiences.
- **Objective:** Extend understanding of factors impacting Para sport athletes' development by examining athletes' developmental trajectories, training histories and sporting experiences.

Method

- 213 Canadian and Australian Para sport athletes filled out the modified version of the Developmental History of Athletes' Questionnaire (DHAQ).

Results: Developmental Trajectories

- Results suggest multiple pathways to expertise exist.
- Athletes with early-onset impairments (i.e., congenital, pre-adolescent) reached developmental (e.g., started sport, various types of training) and performance (e.g., debuts at the national and international competitions) milestones at a similar age which was significantly younger than athletes with late-onset impairments (i.e., early adulthood, adulthood).
- However, athletes with late-onset injuries progressed through their career at a faster pace than the former group.

Results: Training Histories

- Athletes in each impairment group demonstrated a preference to spend more time in specific conditions (with/without coach and/or with/without other athletes) for each training type (sport-specific, physical preparation, mental preparation, and play) that was different to one another.
- Upon entry, athletes with late-acquired impairments incorporated various types of training quicker into their training regimen in comparison to athletes with early-acquired impairments.
- However, the accumulated hours of training or yearly averages did not differ between groups.

Results: Organized Sports

- The majority of athletes with late-onset impairments participated in sports prior to their injury.
- Most of their experiences were in sports similar to their current Para sport.
- In Para sport setting: a large portion of experiences were within grassroots competing alongside able-bodied (AB) athletes in AB sports (no game-modifications) in sports similar to their current ones.
- Not as many athletes participated in Para sport (55%) in comparison to AB sports (92%).

Discussion

- Results indicate athletes will experience sports differently based on the age they acquire their impairment and one-size-fits-all models do not apply to the Para sport context.
- There is a need to revisit current models, reconsider policies, and re-evaluate resource distribution across athletes' careers to optimize their developmental environment.