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# More Than a Game: Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Jean Côté, Ph.D  
Professor and Director  
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies  
Queen's University at Kingston  
Ontario, Canada  
(jc46@queensu.ca)

# Outline

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1. Positive Youth Development Approach
2. Sport and Positive Youth Development
3. Characteristics of Sport that Promote Positive Youth Development
4. Conclusion

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# **1. POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH**

# Positive Youth Development

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- Several research programs focus on youth “problems” such as drug use, violence, suicide, minor delinquency, teen pregnancy, obesity...
- Less research focuses on youth “positive development” such as how youth become invested in a domain, socially competent, compassionate, a leader...

# Research for Advancing the Health and Well Being of Youth

	1. Deficit Reduction	2. Asset Promotion
<b>Goal</b>	Reduce deficits, risks, and health compromising behavior.	Promote or enhance developmental assets.
<b>Target</b>	Vulnerable youth.	All youth.
<b>Strategies</b>	Prevention programs targeted at high-risk behaviors.	Mobilization of all citizens to act on shared vision for positive human development.
<b>Actors</b>	Professionals take the lead, citizens support.	Citizens take the lead, professionals support.

# Outcomes of Youth Development: The 5 C's:

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1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character
5. Caring (or Compassion)

(Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008; Lerner, 2004)

# Activities for Youth

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To develop complex dispositions, assets, and skills (i.e. 5 C's) youth need to be involved in activities that promote positive development.

**Larson, 2000**

# Three Elements of Activities for the Development of Positive Outcomes

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1. Engagement over time
2. Challenge (concentration)
3. Intrinsic motivation (enjoyment)

**Larson, 2000**



# How Activities Are Experienced

Activity	Enjoyment	Concentration
School work	Low	High
Television	High	Low
Talking	High	Low
Sport	High	High
Other Organized Leisure	High	High

# Activities for Youth

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1. Relaxed Leisure:
  - enjoyable
  - not demanding in terms of effort and concentration.
2. Constructive Leisure:
  - has set of constraints, rules, and challenges.
  - requires effort and concentration
  - self controlled and voluntary (most often)
  - can be enjoyable

# Positive Youth Development

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Involvement in  
constructive  
leisure  
activities



**Engagement over time**  
**Challenge**  
**Enjoyment**



Competence  
Confidence  
Connection  
Character  
Caring

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2.

# **SPORT AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

# Research on Athletes' Development: 4C's

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1. **Competence:**
  - Positive view of one's action in sport. Learning sport specific skills, competing, and performing.
2. **Confidence:**
  - An internal sense of overall positive self-worth.
3. **Connection:**
  - Positive bonds with people and institutions.
4. **Character/Caring:**
  - Respect for societal rules, integrity, empathy for others.

(Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008;  
Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008; Lerner, 2004)

# Sport and Positive Youth Development

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**Sport**



1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character/caring
5. Physical Health

# Negative Outcomes of Youth Sport

## Casting kids aside

Lately, in every newspaper or magazine one reads, there are always stories about how obese people are getting. Well, I would like to share my story.

My 12-year-old son is overweight — not by any means obese, but he could stand to lose 10 to 15 pounds. He adores soccer and plays during the summer months, and has played since he was five. Last year was his first year playing indoor winter soccer, which was great for keeping him active in winter. However, this year when he tried out for the league, he was cut from the team; the coach told him to lose some weight and come back in June.

Excuse me if I'm wrong, but I thought sports were to help kids keep active.

He just started his first year of junior high, and tried out for the basketball team; he was too short. He made the first three cuts for the football team, and then was gone; he was not tall enough for the volleyball team. And now I was paying for him to play soccer and he's still not accepted.

Where does one go from here? What is this doing to his self-esteem and self-worth?

Maybe we should look at how children are cast aside if they don't fit the mould. We tell them to try, and then we knock them over and tell them they're not good enough anyway. They can't get active and fit if no one is willing to help.

Bebi Almeida, Dartmouth

## Living in kids' hockey hell

Some say the expensive, months-long ordeal of spring tryouts is a 'scam'

BY PETER CHENEY

As a professional magician and former lawyer, David Ben may have the ideal résumé for a father trying to get his son a place in the Greater Toronto Hockey League — legerdemain and deal making, as he has learned, are the order of the day.

"It's a brutal process," Mr. Ben says. "If you're smart, you get on the phone and make calls."

For those who don't know the ropes, the pressure of trying to find a place in Canada's most competitive children's hockey league can be severe.

The process can be compared to a game of musical chairs on ice, with thousands of families jockey-

ing for a limited number of positions.

Savvy parents like Mr. Ben begin the hunt well before Christmas, putting out feelers to see if there's a team that might be interested in their child. The luckiest and most cunning parents — or those with superstar children — secure a position almost immediately, and relax until the start of the next season. The rest enter the living hell of spring tryouts, a months-long ordeal that can take families across the city, and cost hundreds of dollars.

"By the time it's over, you're beat," says Rob Vellend, an Etobicoke businessman who has two sons in the GTHL. "It's insane."

The GTHL, which has divisions for children aged 8 to 18, is renowned for both its competitive play and for the machinations that surround the team selection process.

Under league rules, teams are forbidden from holding tryouts until the third week of April, but nearly all get around that by holding "skills development sessions" and "birthday skates" — tryouts disguised as a

birthday party for a team member. These run from December on. By April, most of the top teams have nearly filled their rosters. Even so, they hold tryout sessions that cost up to \$30 per player.

"It's a fundraiser," Mr. Ben says. "Everyone knows it."

As a veteran hockey dad, he knows that most players get a position because they are spotted by scouts, or because their parents have negotiated with coaches.

"It's one of those nudge-nudge, wink-wink things," he says. "Nothing official, but your kid's on the team."

For those who fail to secure a position in advance, the pressure climaxes with the official tryouts in late April. With the clock ticking, parents are often pushed to sign a contract with a team that prevents them from looking elsewhere.

Dale Lastman, a lawyer and son of former Toronto mayor Mel Lastman, whose eight-year-old son began playing in the GTHL last season, thinks that the season should be overhauled. "It's ridiculous that we have to go through something like this with eight-year-olds," he

says. "There's a lot of stress."

Mr. Lastman thinks that the GTHL should introduce a reform similar to one that was introduced years ago for articling law students. Under the revised system, law firms are prevented from signing students until the end of the first week, allowing students to look at a number of firms before making a decision.

"I think that would help a lot," Mr. Lastman says. "The way it is now, you have to make a decision in a couple of minutes."

Dean Dart, a trainer with the GTHL's Humber Valley Sharks, one of the country's top minor hockey teams, calls the tryout process a "scam."

"Almost no one gets on a team by going to a tryout. The scouts have been out, and the phone calls have been made. That's the way it works."

After watching his two sons progress through the minor hockey ranks, Mr. Dart is philosophical about the system's failings: "It's a funny system," he says. "Is it a bad system? Maybe. But I'm not sure there's a good one."

## Today's children are in overdrive, author warns

Kids pressured to deal with too many responsibilities and activities: Elkind

# Negative Outcomes of Youth Sport

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- Physical Development
  - e.g. injuries, eating disorders
- Emotional / Psychological Development
  - e.g. low perceived abilities, low self-esteem, burnout
- Social Development
  - e.g. violence, aggression, low morality reasoning



# Positive Outcomes of Youth Sport

## For kids, good things come in triathlons

### Fitness

BARRIE SHEPLEY



**T**riathlon's early roots were based in the 1970s beach crowd of San Diego. Bored or injured from running every day, these fitness enthusiasts created the new swim-bike-run sport of triathlon. Those early triathlons had few rules, standard distances or prize money.

Triathlon migrated from the sandy beaches of Southern California to the jagged volcanic rock of Hawaii, where the Ironman Triathlon became the marquee event. ABC's annual television coverage of the Hawaii Ironman helped the sport grow as thousands of adult endurance enthusiasts were attracted to test their fitness.

As a student at McMaster University and a novice triathlon participant, I was concerned that the sport had no entry-level opportunities for children to get started. Sports that thrive long-term have huge participation numbers for younger children (hockey, soccer, swimming, gymnastics), with



The 2003 Kids of Steel competition in Midland, Ont. Most kids spend all summer riding, swimming and running and make ideal triathletes.

participation rates falling into adulthood. With the adult triathletes of the 1980s best known as Ironmen, some friends and I created a Canadian youth triathlon program called Kids of Steel.

The goal was to create a participation opportunity for kids of all ages and skill levels. Instead of worrying about winning, and goals scored, every participant would receive the same finisher's medal, T-shirt, post-race snack and a chance to draw prizes, regardless of their time.

If one thinks back to their childhood, almost every boy and girl was a natural triathlete. Children

spend their idle time in the summer riding their bicycles to the park for a swim, then returning home to run around before repeating it again the following day. Triathlon's greatest ambassador, Canadian Olympic champion Simon Whitfield, got his start in a local Kids of Steel triathlon. While spending a long weekend with family friends in Sharbot Lake, Ont., Simon participated in the local race and fell in love with the sport.

The largest Kids of Steel event takes place annually in Caledon, Ont., northwest of Toronto (this year's race is scheduled for May

30), and attracts nearly 1,000 children of all ages. Participation is largest among children three to six years of age. With water wings on their tiny bodies, the kids swim the width of the swimming pool (parents are allowed to help), before they get on their tricycles for 400 metres and then walk/jog 200 metres to the finish line. Every child receives a medal.

As the children get older, their race distances increase to accommodate their greater strength and endurance. Current research indicates that the older children are when exposed to physical activity, the less likely they are to be active as adults. Unlike most sports where boys and girls rarely compete together, Kids of Steel participants race on the exact same course within minutes of each other. While the opposite sex may not be an attraction to the sport in the younger age categories, it is a significant added bonus to participation rates in the teenage categories (four couples who met each other at a Kids of Steel event have gone on to be married).

What started as a handful of races in Ontario 15 years ago, has grown to over 75 events and 20,000-plus participants in every province last summer. There are now high schools offering credit programs, grade schools hosting events and a Canadian university

triathlon circuit (visit [www.triathloncanada.com](http://www.triathloncanada.com) for a race or club near you).

While the Kids of Steel races are dominated by swimmers and soccer players, virtually every sport is represented at the finish line. With the need of a functioning bicycle (any kind is allowed), a helmet, swimming suit and goggles, the sport is relatively inexpensive when starting out and most of the training can happen in your own back yard, at the school playground or the cottage.

Caledon's Garth and Debbie Bechtel entered their son, Sean, into the Kids of Steel race five years ago to keep him in shape when his swim club stopped during the summer. Today Sean balances full-time university studies along with training and racing for Canada's national triathlon team (he is racing at the World Championships in Madeira, Portugal, this weekend).

For fun, fairness and a lifelong passion for exercise, consider giving the kids in your family, team or neighbourhood a chance to "try their best" this summer.

*Barrie Shepley was Canada's 2000 Olympic triathlon coach and will be a CBC commentator in Athens in August.*

[barrie@personalbest.ca](mailto:barrie@personalbest.ca)

## Athletes give back to support youth

Laumann, Olson have started programs to help youngsters considered at risk

## Sports lift esteem in young athletes

*Involvement in athletics also boosts student athletes' motivation.*

Children who participate in sports earn better grades and drop out of school significantly less, research suggests.

# Active young, fit for life

# Positive Outcomes of Youth Sport

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- Physical Development
  - e.g. fitness, skills, muscular strength & endurance, flexibility, bone structure
- Psychological / Emotional Development
  - e.g. self-esteem, stress reduction, challenge, fun, enjoyment, life satisfaction
- Social Development
  - e.g. citizenship, social success, peer relationships, leadership, career achievement, community integration, discipline, commitment
- Intellectual Development
  - e.g. school grades, school attendance, cognitive development

# The Big Question

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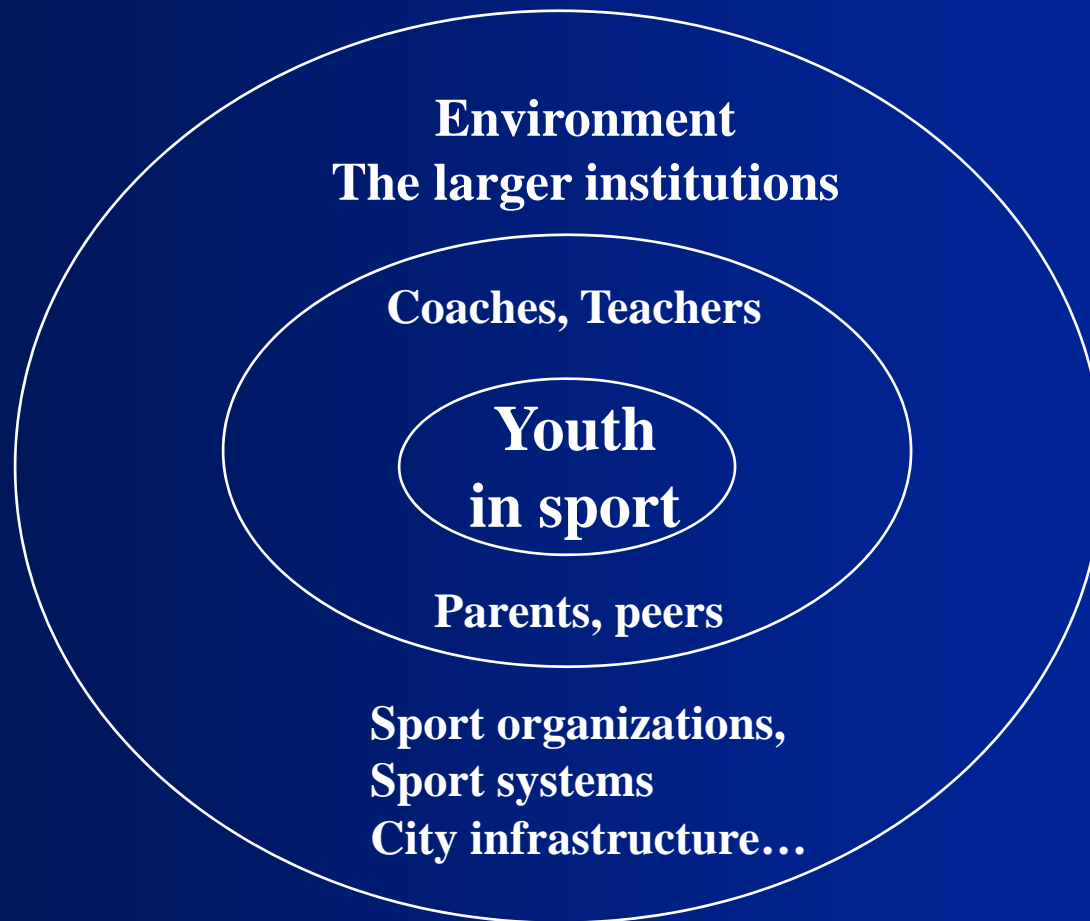
- How can participation in sport promote positive youth development and reduce the negative outcomes associated with sport participation?

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3.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF SPORT  
THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

# Environment of Youth Sport



(B) Bronfenbrenner, 1977

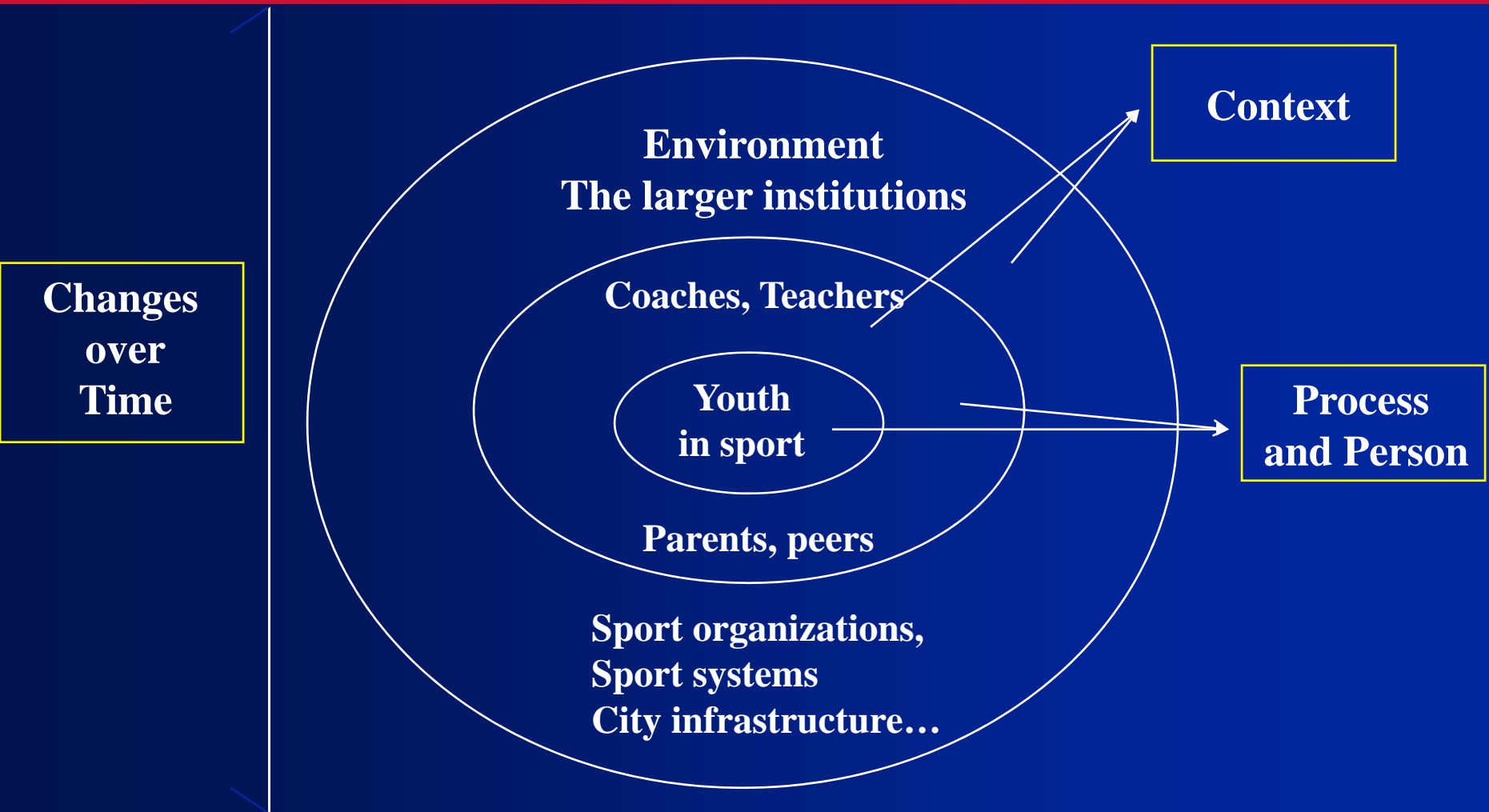
# Process-Person-Context-Time Model

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1. Process:
  - the regular “activities” of youth sport.
2. Person:
  - the “assets” or characteristics we (i.e. coaches, teachers, parents) want to transmit to the participants involved in sport.
3. Context:
  - the environment in which the activities are happening .
4. Time:
  - changes occurring over time (e.g. age and development).

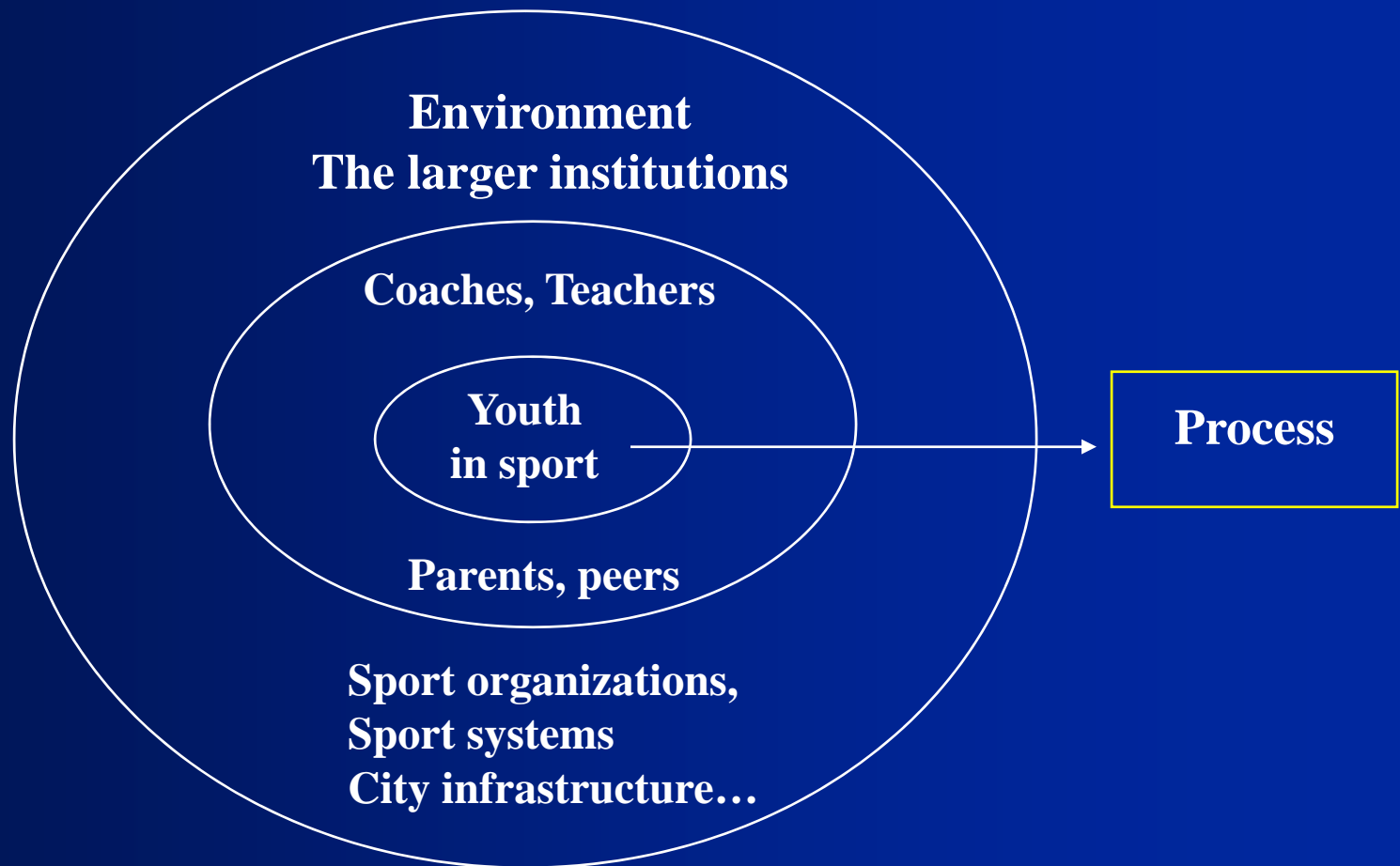
**(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)**

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)



# 1. Process (Activities)

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1. Early Specialization vs Sampling
2. Deliberate Practice vs Deliberate Play

(Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)

# 1. Process (Activities):

## Early Specialization VS Sampling

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- Early specialization is defined as limiting participation to one sport that is practised on a year-round basis.
- Sampling refers to participation in a variety of different seasonal sports.
- Early sampling in sport has the potential to promote a broader spectrum of developmental experiences and outcomes than early specialization (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Wright & Côté, 2003).

# 5 Developmental Outcomes Associated with Sampling

(Strachan, MacDonald, Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2008)

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1. Life skills (Danish, Forneris, & Wallace, 2005).
  - Intrapersonal (e.g. time management)
  - Interpersonal (e.g. communication skills, leadership)
2. Prosocial behavior (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986)
  - Exposed to prosocial norms in multiple sports
3. Healthy Identity (Coackley, 1998)
  - Exploration of a variety of roles as opposed to identity “foreclosure.”
4. Connection to diverse peer groups (Patrick et al., 1999)
5. More opportunities to build “social capital” (Smylie et al., 2006)

# 1. Process (Activities):

## Deliberate Practice VS Deliberate Play

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### Deliberate Practice:

- Is the most relevant activity for improving performance.
- Is NOT the most enjoyable activity that one could engage in.
- Requires a high level of physical and mental effort.
- Requires optimal resources.
- Promote “selection of talent” at an early age and early specialization in one sport

(Ericsson, 2003; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993)

# 1. Process (Activities): Deliberate Practice vs Deliberate Play

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## Deliberate Play:

- Regulated by flexible age-adapted rules.
- Set up and monitored by children or an involved adult.
- Little intervention for skill instruction and feedback during the activity (i.e. maximize time on task).
- Requires minimal resources.
- Designed to maximize enjoyment.
- Promote inclusion.

(Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy 2007)

# 5 Developmental Outcomes Associated with Deliberate Play

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1. Enjoyment (Wiersma, 2001)
2. Creativity (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007)
3. Regulate emotion (Stephens, 2000)
4. Communication and empathy (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004).
5. Problem solving and conflict resolution skills (Hellison, 2003)

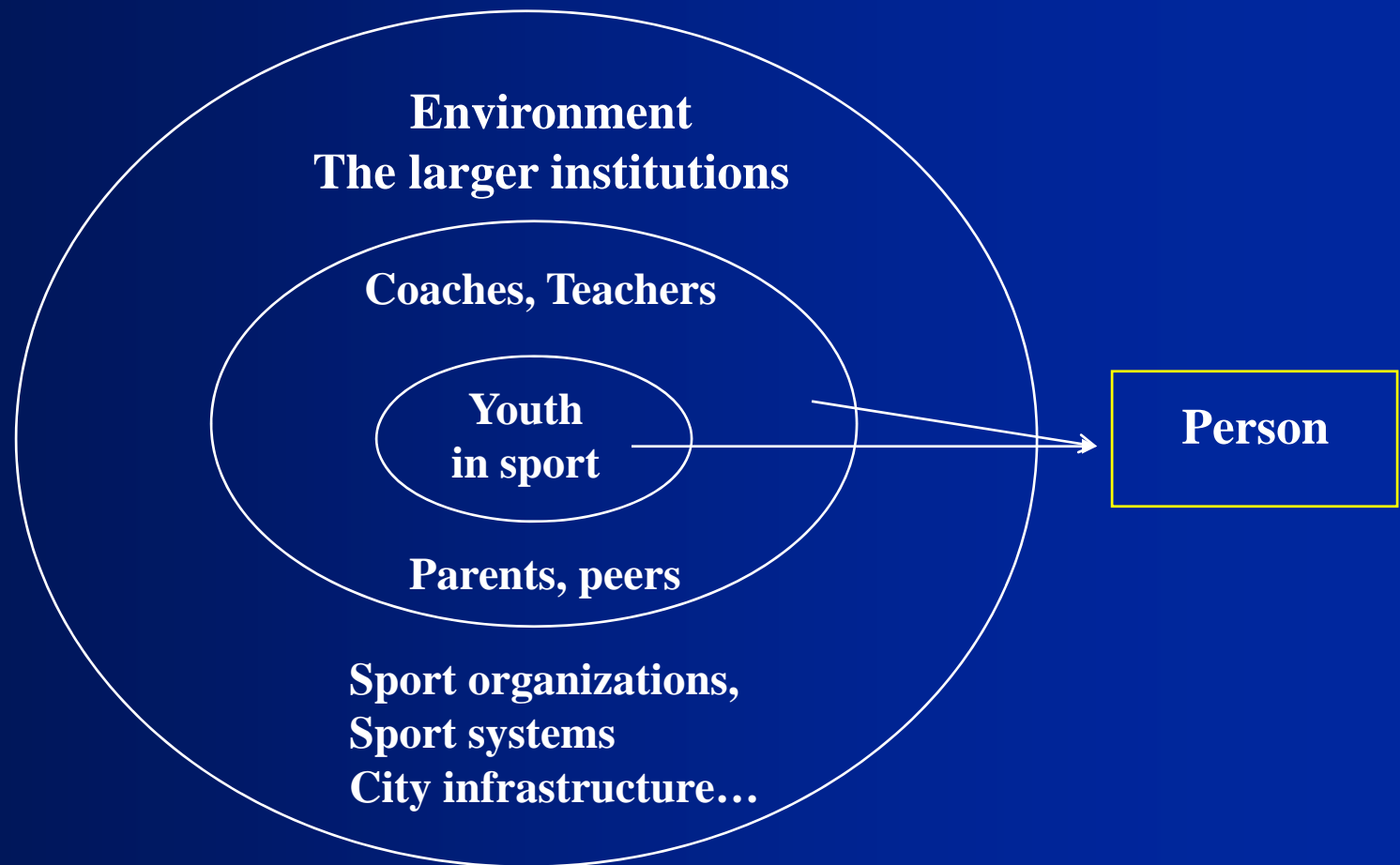
**(Strachan, MacDonald, Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2008)**

# Process: Summary

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- Through *early sampling* and *deliberate play*, children will learn emotional, cognitive, and motor skills that will be important in their later investment in sport.
- By the time athletes reach adolescence they will have learned fundamental movement skills and will have more mature cognitive and emotional skills.

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)



# Process-Person-Context-Time Model

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## 4. Time:

- changes occurring over time (e.g. age and development).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)

## 2. Person: Developmental Assets

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- The taxonomy of developmental assets focuses on a scientifically based set of environmental and psychological strengths that enhance health outcomes for children and adolescents (Search Institute, 1997; Lerner & Benson, 2003).
- External and Internal assets in sport (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005).

# The Framework of Developmental Assets

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- *External assets:* The positive experiences a young person receives from their world.
- *Internal assets:* Characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive inner growth and development of the young person. The internal assets help young people make thoughtful and good choices and prepare them for challenges to their inner strength and confidence.

# The Framework of Developmental Assets

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- 40 developmental assets (Search Institute, 1997).
  - 20 External Assets
    - Support (6)
    - Empowerment (4)
    - Boundaries and expectations (6)
    - Constructive use of time (4)
  - 20 Internal Assets
    - Commitment to learning (5)
    - Positive values (6)
    - Social competencies (5)
    - Positive identity (4)

# 20 Developmental Assets and Sport Participation

(Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005)

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Family support (1)                                     | 1. Achievement motivation (21)       |
| 2. Positive family communication (2)                      | 2. Caring (26)                       |
| 3. Other adult relationship (3)                           | 3. Honesty (29)                      |
| 4. Community values youth (7)                             | 4. Responsibility (30)               |
| 5. Safety (10)  | 5. Planning and decision making (32) |
| 6. Family boundaries (11)                                 | 6. Interpersonal competence (33)     |
| 7. Adult role models (14)                                 | 7. Peaceful conflict resolution (36) |
| 8. Positive peer influence (15)                           | 8. Personal power (37)               |
| 9. High expectation (16)                                  | 9. Self-esteem (38)                  |
| 10. Youth programs (18; i.e.<br>constructive use of time) | 10. Sense of purpose (39)            |

# Developmental Assets and Positive Youth Development

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## Protection role of assets.

- alcohol, tobacco, drugs, drinking and driving, sexuality
- depression, suicide, antisocial behavior
- violence, school problems

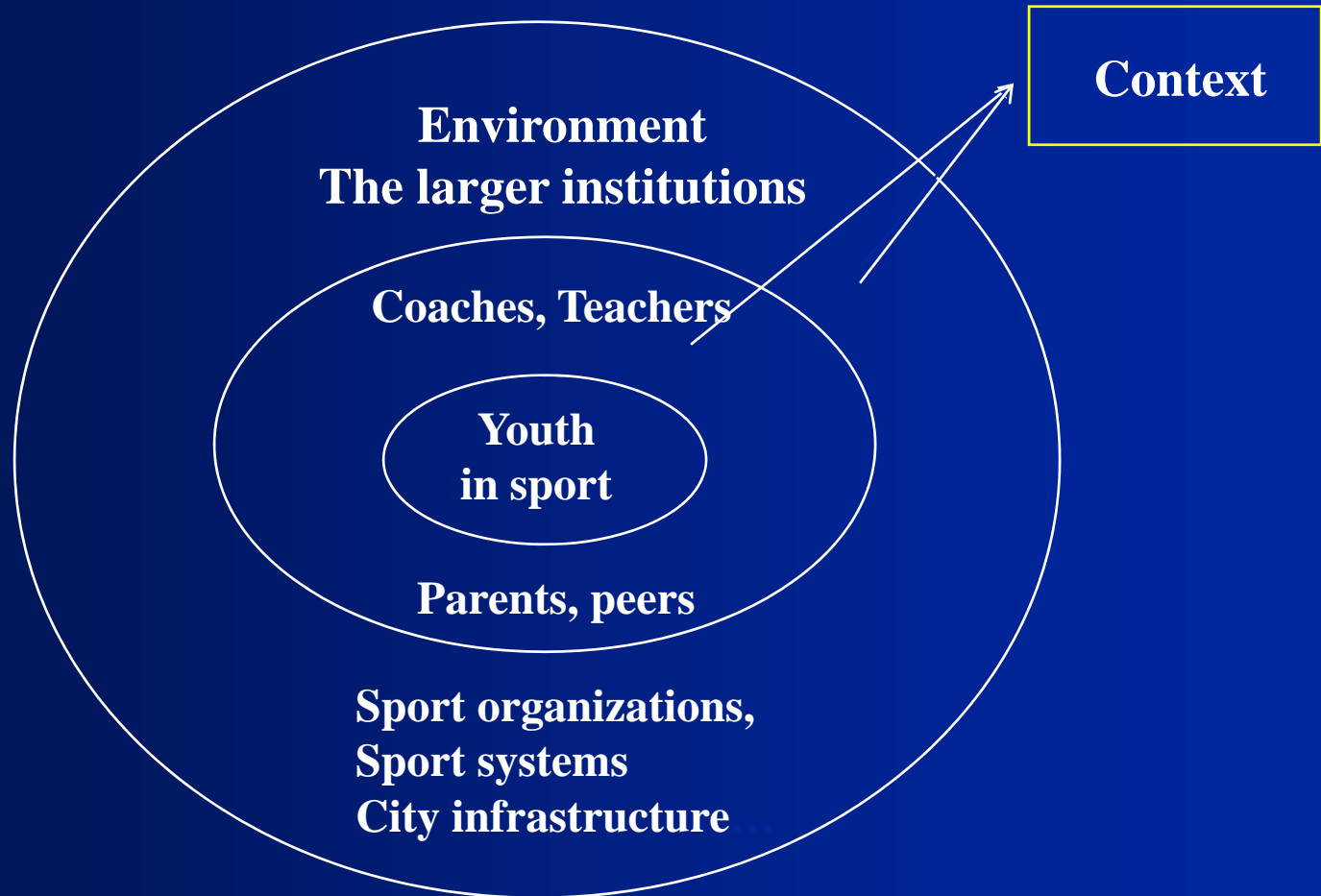
## ■ Enhancement role of assets.

- school success, leadership
- volunteering, showing care/concern for others
- resiliency in the face of obstacles
- optimism for future happiness and success

- The mean # of developmental assets for adolescents in the United States is 18.

Benson, 1997

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)

# Process-Person-Context-Time Model

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- changes occurring over time (e.g. age and development).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)



### 3. Context: Eight Setting Features

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1. Appropriate structure
2. Physical and psychological safety
3. Supportive relationships
4. Opportunities to belong
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Integration of family, school, and community efforts

**(U.S National Research Council, 2002)**

# Physical and Psychological Safety

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Safe and health promoting facilities
- Decrease confrontational interactions

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Physical and health dangers
- Verbal abuse
- Feeling of fear and insecurity

# Appropriate Structure

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Age appropriate activities
- Clear and consistent rules and expectations
- Firm-enough control
- Continuity and predictability

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Chaotic
- Disorganized
- Over controlled
- Autocratic
- Age inappropriate training

# Supportive Relationships

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Caring
- Support
- Guidance
- Good communication

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Cold
- Distant
- Over-controlling
- Focused on winning

# Opportunities to Belong

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Inclusion regardless of one's skill level.
- Engagement and integration of all.

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Exclusion
- Marginalization
- Favor certain athletes

# Positive Social Norms

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Values and morals
- Rules of behaviors
- Expectations
- Respect of others

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Norms that encourage violence or cheating
- Disrespect for others

# Support for Efficacy and Mattering

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Practices that support autonomy
- Enable responsibility
- Meaningful challenge
- Focus on improvement rather than winning

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Practices that undermine motivation and desire to learn
- Unchallenging
- Excessive focus on winning

# Opportunities for Skill Building

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Opportunities to learn physical, emotional, psychological, and social skills
- Exposure to intentional learning experiences
- Opportunities to learn life skills

## OPPOSITE POLES

- Practices that promote bad physical habits (overtraining, injuries)
- No opportunities to learn physical, emotional, psychological, and social skills.



# Integration of Family, School, and Community Effort

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## DESCRIPTORS

- Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community

## OPPOSITE POLES

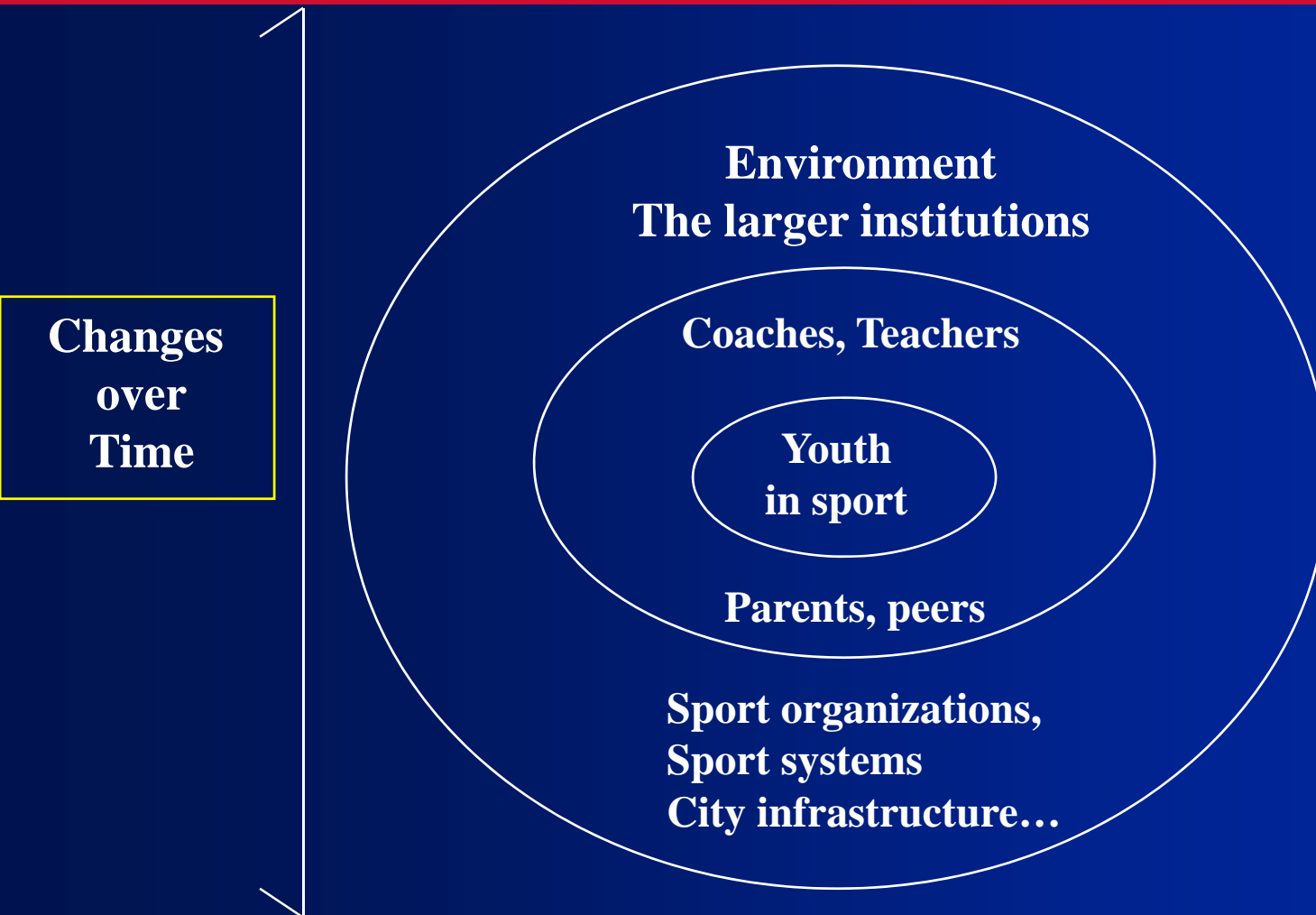
- Discordance; lack of communication; and conflict

### 3. Context: Eight Setting Features

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Sporting environments that integrate the 8 setting features increase chances to increase positive outcomes in sport.

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)

# Process-Person-Context-Time Model

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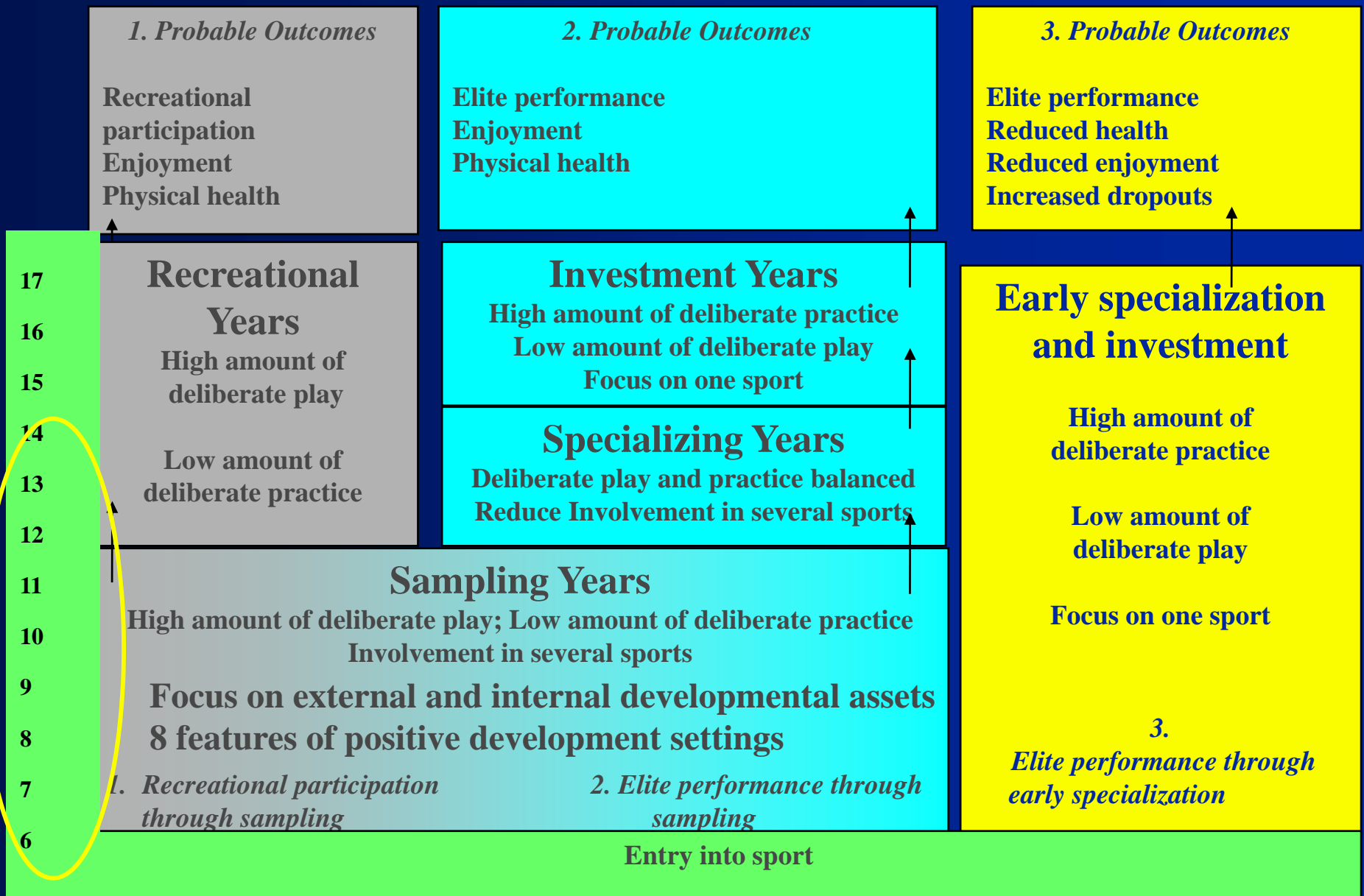
- the environment in which the activities are happening .

## 4. Time:

- changes occurring over time (e.g. age and development).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008)

# 4. TIME



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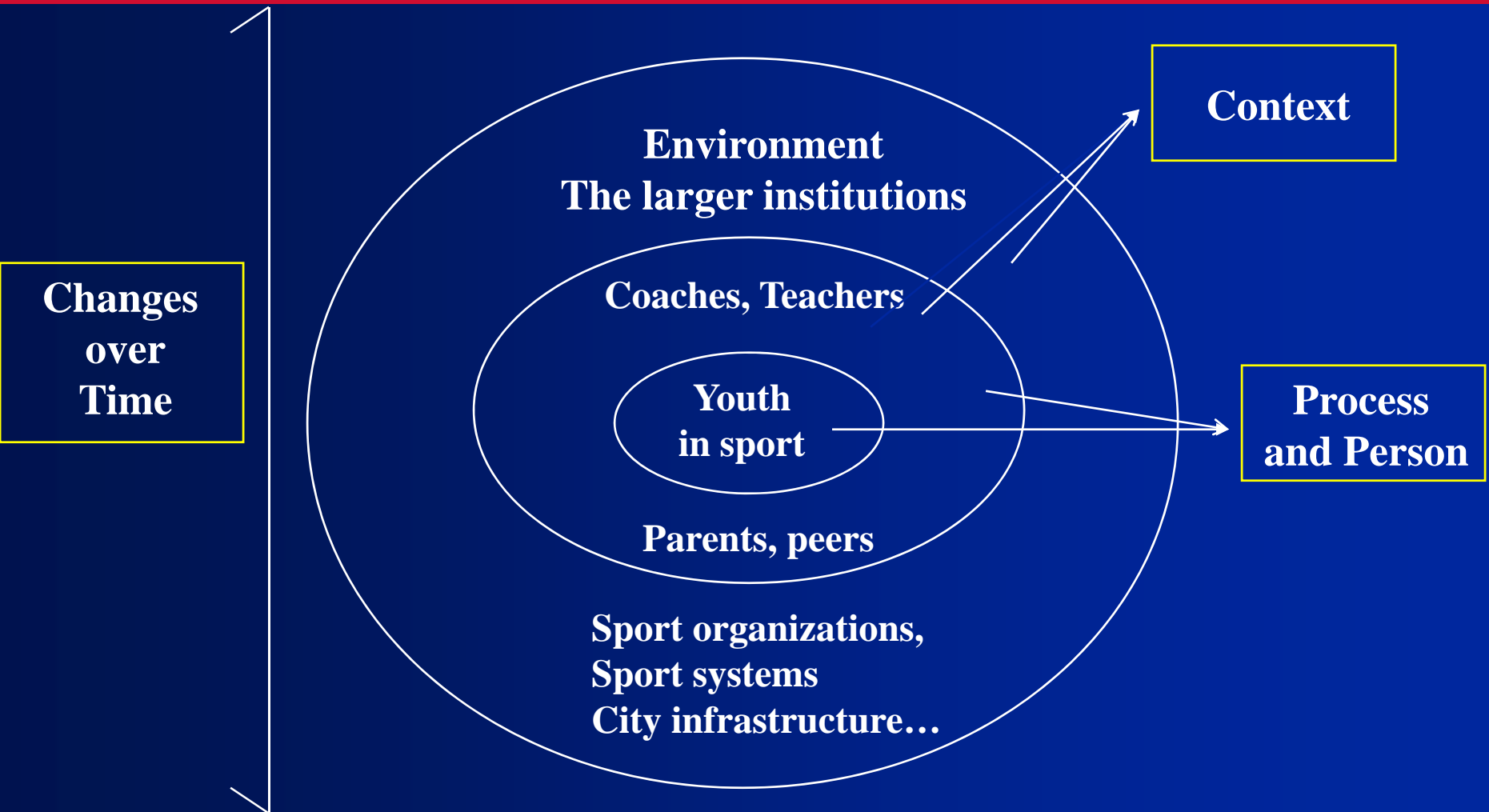
# 4. CONCLUSION

# Sport and Positive Youth Development

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- Sport contains all the elements of activities that can promote positive outcomes in youth (i.e. engagement over time, concentration, and enjoyment).
- If structured properly, sport can help youth to develop complex dispositions, assets, and skills.

# Environment of Youth Sport



(Bronfenbrenner)



# Conclusion: Proximal Processes

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“Sampling” and “playing” during childhood are posited as the *proximal processes* that form the primary mechanism for continued sport participation and personal development.

# Conclusion: Proximal Processes

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Sport programs during adolescence (i.e., age 13+) can change to include proximal processes that focus on more specific training activities (i.e. deliberate practice) and specialization in one sport.

# Conclusion: Person

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The external and internal assets of the *person* (i.e., child or adolescent) involved in a sport program should be the priority of coaches, parents, and adults involved.

# Conclusion: Context

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The eight setting features of the NRCIM should be implemented in sport programs to provide youth with a *context* that promotes continued participation in sport and the development of Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character/caring (i.e. 4 C's).

# Conclusion: Time

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Youth sport programs must be designed in consideration of a person healthy development over *time*. The Developmental Model of Sport Participation provides a framework that guide the development of sport participation over time.

Policy Makers, Sport Organizations, Coaches, Parents  
Develop and Implement Youth Sport Programs



40 Developmental Assets

Sampling



Specializing



Investment



Recreational Participation

8 Setting Features



Failed or  
Inappropriate  
Design and  
Implementation

Appropriate  
Design and  
Implementation



Diminished  
Competence  
Confidence  
Connection  
Character



Dropout

Expertise or  
Recreational  
Involvement



Enhanced  
Competence  
Confidence  
Connection  
Character

An applied  
sport-programming model  
of positive youth development



A group of six young girls are playing on a black asphalt track with white lane markings. The girls are in various positions, some facing away from the camera. One girl in the foreground wears a blue long-sleeved shirt with a large yellow number '3' on the back. Another girl further back wears a blue shirt with a yellow number '7'. The track is surrounded by a green lawn, a chain-link fence, and a white building with colorful horizontal stripes. Large trees are in the background. A blue barrel is on the left. The text 'Thank You' is overlaid in yellow.

Thank You