

How do team sport athletes develop? A retrospective journey using deliberate practice!

Anthony S. Smith, Charleston Southern University
Emily Enloe, Oakbrook Middle School
Karen Arnold, Charleston Southern University

The purpose of this study was to analyze the retrospective practice histories of team sport athletes prior to college. Sixty-one Division I collegiate athletes from women's basketball (n=11), volleyball (n=15), baseball (n=19), and men's basketball (n=15) participated in the study. The objectives of the study included: 1) Determine the role of deliberate practice and deliberate play in the development of college team sport athletes; 2) Determine which developmental activities align with the tenants of deliberate practice; and 3) Describe the values and beliefs of team sports athletes related to practice activities. Student athletes completed a questionnaire involving their overall sport history, hours of practice in five practice venues value ratings for deliberate practice activities, and general demographics. Included in the questionnaire were the number of games played in recreational leagues, club leagues, and school leagues. Participants indicated the level of training they received during private training and level of competition during pick-up games. The results of the study revealed the age of entry into sport was 5.08 years old, with entry into the primary sport at 7.10. The primary sport has been played for 10.90 years but was not usually the first sport played. Subjects participated in 3.18 sports in the early stage of the DMSP (play), 2.02 sports in the specializing stage, and 1.48 sports in the investment stage. Overall, subjects fall short of the 10,000 suggested for expert status and other short of the 10-year rule. Findings from this study show that neither deliberate practice with specialization nor deliberate play with diversification can stand alone as the primary way to develop as a young athlete. Practice must take part in several areas, including private training, solo practice, team practice, and developmental/conditioning activities to be successful.