During the last decade [1976-1986] there has been a substantial increase in the number of children participating in sport in the U.K. The most recent figures (Martin and Mason 1981) suggest that 6.3 million or 79.1% of all children between the ages of 5 and 15 years will participate in organised youth sport in 1985 (Campbell 1984). Although these figures represent a mainly recreational or casual involvement there is a growing number of young children who devote many hours to intensive training in the hope of achieving future performance success. Evidence for this increased participation is based upon the growing number of sports clubs with greater availability of higher standards of coaching, training and competition for the young. This growth in the availability, status and also choice of sport has meant the introduction of a "catch 'em young" philosophy. There are now junior versions of rugby union, "mini-rugby"; rugby league, "mini-foots"; and tennis "short tennis", available for the under 10's, with the result that children are specialising in just one sport at an early age. It is not surprising, therefore, that in sports such as gymnastics, swimming or tennis, youngsters of 12 or 13 years may have already trained and competed for four or five years.

However, despite the increased opportunity to participate, the child's involvement in sport is still determined by a number of social and environmental factors. These not only shape the child's expectations and participation, but ultimately determine the severity and effects of both training and competition. Factors cited include the sex of the child, social class, background, race, and the geographical location of the home (McPherson 1982). These variables explain to some degree why children who may be physically and psychologically similar do or do not become involved in sport.
Editor's comments - [ For several years prior to 1986 there was growing unease amongst coaches, parents and members of the medical and paramedical professions about the effects which intensive training may have on the physical and psychological development of young athletes.

In the light of this ever-widening concern the Sports Council became convinced that a thorough investigation of the problem was required. What was needed, it seemed to the Council, was to establish scientifically whether young athletes undergoing intensive training were at greater risk of adverse physical, or psychological reactions than their non-training contemporaries; and equally important, what benefits they stood to gain from training.

This review of literature informed what became to be known as the TOYA study (1992 - 1996).
The effects of intensive training on young athletes: A review of the literature

Written by Rowley, S.
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