The case is reported of a 5 year old boy who was pressured to lose weight in order to wrestle at a lower weight class. Although a minority of athletes engage in unhealthy weight management practices, this is an unusual case because of the age of the athlete and the influential role of a parent.

DISCUSSION

Parents can clearly have strong influences on children through their expectations. In this particular case, father was placing inappropriate pressure on a child as well as instigating unsafe weight management practices. Fortunately, intervention by the coach was successful. However, the level of parental coercion among young athletes, and its role as a contributory variable in the development of unhealthy weight management practices among lean-sport participants is unknown.

Can male athletes be protected from unsafe weight management practices? Perhaps to some degree, they can. For example, coaches and trainers can encourage young men to share their concerns about body image and weight, remain alert to the use of potentially dangerous weight management practices and/or the emergence of eating disorder symptoms, and undergo more training in the area of nutrition. In addition, the National Collegiate Athletic Association has adopted new weight control rules which emphasise: competition, not weight control; reduction of incentives for rapid weight loss; and the elimination of tools used to accomplish rapid dehydration. One fundamental aspect of the approach appears to be to create a new “culture” around these issues.

Although awareness of unsafe weight management practices and eating pathology among male athletes is increasing, the potential influences of coaches and team mates have been little studied. These influences may be critically important—in either a beneficial or detrimental manner.

REFERENCES


