

SIX INDIVIDUAL STORIES

Subject 1

Subject 1 reached menarche at an early age (11 ½ years old), and she has so far never been seriously injured. She is well trained with a lot of extra injury preventive training. In addition, her growth spurt occurred before she entered the sport school due to early menarche and also before the training volume increased. She was therefore more physically prepared for the increased training volume. She expressed a relaxed attitude towards potential negative consequences of her sport such as injuries: 'I do not think about it, well, I do think about what if a ligament ruptures, but I am not afraid that it will happen. I do a lot of exercise in order to avoid injuries.' However, she is often reminded of the possibility of getting hurt due to the high rate of injuries among others, which also affects her: 'It is boring when people are injured at the team, you cannot play with them as usual, and it is negative for the interaction in the team.'

Another stressor that came up in the interview was the high workload (from school in addition to sport) that she experienced when she started at the sport school: 'I often fall asleep after school before training—if I have time for it—I am out, the daily routines are okay, but it requires a lot of planning to stay on top of everything. It is so much easier in the spring.' She admitted that she was willing 'to sacrifice a lot in order to' reach her goal and excel in sport and getting good grades for a future education. Subject 1 also showed a social side in this strive—doing it with her team-mates was preferable.

Subject 2

Subject 2 reached menarche at age 14 and the year before she experienced extreme growth. Late puberty combined with extensive training may have contributed to her injuries. She admitted that she was not 'strong enough in my stomach and back muscles to cope with

the development' and she developed a stress fracture in her back. After her first major injury and time away from sport, she started too quickly again with the training and another long-term injury followed. When interviewed she was back in training again, but she hesitated to talk about these issues—and said with a sigh that she hated to be taken for a 'wimp:'

I'm afraid to say that I have pain, sometimes I try to be tough and probably push myself more than I should if I aim at recovering from the injuries! You need to be tough in my position. The positive factor here is that the girls on the team have stopped me when they see that I am overdoing it when the coaches are too busy to pay enough attention.

When asked about her role as a student, athlete, subject 2 reported that she found the balance between school and training hard, which is no wonder considering she reported an average of seven hour sleep per night. At home she would spend most of her time in bed (watching Netflix) compensating for the limited sleep during the night, so overall when counting the hours she reckoned it was enough sleep. Consequently, a picture of an athlete who tries to accomplish a lot when her body is also changing appears.

Subject 3

Subject 3 is pursuing two sports:

It is hard to combine football and handball, I play football for a junior team, and they are 19 years old and very good and ambitious. And then I have handball and it is hard to come to all trainings for both sports. The coaches do not talk much together, I think the football coach tries to, but I am not sure what the handball coach thinks of all this... I think I should be able to do both sports if I want, but I understand of course that with an increased focus and level it will be hard to stay at top of both team sports.

As she plays both sports competitively, she has an exhausting program and tends to disappear from preventive and strength training. She is talented, but not mature enough to make the right decisions to stay injury free and when to recover. She has had several injuries in hips, back, and knees. She prioritizes each sport in their respective seasons (football from April-September and handball from September-April), but struggles 'to decide between the two sports.' When asked if this combination in addition to school was a lot to cope with, she became silent before responding: 'If I am really struggling, I may simply lie down and cry, just because I'm tired, and I easily lose my temper. I simply need rest.' When asked if she thought that pursuing only one sport would help, she hesitated and responded 'I do not know, maybe a little, yes, maybe a little.'

Subject 4

Subject 4 reached menarche at age 13 ½ She is a talented player with an average aerobic capacity and she is not very fond of strength training. She is one of the tallest of the participants. She has not suffered from major injuries, but did suffer from a minor knee and hip injury. She admitted that she should be more committed to strength training in order to avoid any more severe injuries.

She claims to be good at recovery, but emphasizes that she could sleep more. She sleeps an average of 7½ hours per night, something she underlines is not enough. The question is of course when to sleep as her schedule is quite full. Once a month she is part of a regional group, and on those days she does not get home before midnight. She dedicated weekends for sleep and relaxing with her family, but in the season this is only possible on Sundays. Her parents are relaxed when it comes to school-work and time spent on it; 'they say I should only do what I feel I can manage. They do not accept laziness, but they know that as an athlete I will not have the same energy as others.' With older siblings in elite sport,

her parents have not expected as much of her: 'It was more a surprise to them that I wanted to pursue sport.'

Subject 5

Subject 5, as does subject 3, also combines handball and football. She too has a lot to gain from conditioning and commitment to the injury preventive training, but she is a very talented handball and football player. She has had problems with her ankle and knees, but her talent is noticed by her coach (which is noticed by the other players).

Last year, I was injured for six months (ankle sprains and instability in ligaments), it was not easy, it was not easy at all to come back, I could do some exercise, but mentally, if I was not so strong mentally, I would have never made it, I had some days where I just stayed at home and not even get out of bed, and my parents would let me stay home, they realized that I could not make it and left me alone. Eventually, I started to observe practices, but I had completely lost the handball feeling, I had to start from scratch again. This was in the winter, so I did not attend football trainings.

Also for her, sleep was often mentioned in the interview, and she emphasized that she tried to 'sleep for 13 to 14 hours on weekends, my mom comes in and to make sure that I'm alive.' She had a hard time with the combined workload of school and two sports, for example she admitted that the bathroom had become her favourite room to relax in the past year: 'I like to relax on the floor in the bathroom [laughs] because it is hot'. She has started to consider to go all in for handball, and she has a goal to continue with football until summer of 2016. She realizes she is pushing herself hard, but claims that it is fun too, however: 'I used to love my sport more... this has changed'.

Subject 6

Subject 6 is one of the shortest, has not reached menarche yet and with few injuries or problems so far in her career (just knee pains due to Osgood-Schlatters disease). She is an excellent player, and has a heavy training load and committed to several training groups besides her club. She is devoted to 7 1/2 hours sleep every night, and underlines that this is a success factor. She spent the first year at the sport school learning good routines. While the parents closely follow up on her injuries and make sure she rests or trains alternatively when needed, to stay home from school (in order to sleep) is not an option! She admits that it is not always easy to be in a competitive environment:

Mom says I've become much stronger and have more stamina now, and I feel that myself as well. I have a bad habit of comparing myself with others, I know I should not do it and that personal development is important, but if I stand next to someone who manages something, I want to do it as well or better. To improve my own technique is great, but sometimes I get a little too competitive.

The competition was not underlined so much by the others, but again, having been smaller than her peers and having experienced later physical development than her peers may have left her feeling unsure of herself at times and it may have made it common for her to compare herself with the others.