

# Parental Influence on Talent Identification for Players in Rugby Clubs in Kenya

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Corresponding Author

**Michael D. Otieno**<sup>1</sup>

**Jacob Nteere**<sup>2</sup>

**Vincent Onywera**<sup>3</sup>

**Winston Akala**<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Physical Education and Sport, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>1</sup>Email: [michaelotieno1961@gmail.com](mailto:michaelotieno1961@gmail.com) Tel: +254722770074

<sup>2</sup>Email: [profnteeere@gmail.com](mailto:profnteeere@gmail.com) Tel: +254708000550

<sup>3</sup>Department of Recreation Management and Exercise Science, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>3</sup>Email: [Fonywera@gmail.com](mailto:Fonywera@gmail.com) Tel: +254723813114

<sup>4</sup>Department of Educational Administration and Planning, University of Nairobi Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>4</sup>Email: [akala@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:akala@uonbi.ac.ke) Tel: +254723432546

## ABSTRACT

The role of parents in socialization into sports of athletes has been a topical issue among sociologists and sport scientists from the west for decades. Thus the purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of parents on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The study was guided by the hypothesis that “there is no significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the parental influence of the rugby players is classified as high or low” The factors that were investigated included the parents’ socio-economic status and the parents’ level of education. Data were collected using Questionnaires and interviews from rugby players (n= 125) and coaches (n=15) during the 2017/2018 Kenya Rugby Union league competition. Data were analysed through both descriptive and inferential statistics of Chi- square test of independent measures. Results showed that parental influence on talent identification in Kenya is not significant despite the majority (53.77%) of the coaches indicating that the socio-economic status and the level of education of the parents had an influence on talent identification. Subsequently, future studies need to be conducted to unearth the role of the entire family environment at all stages of the players’ athletic development due to the complexity of the family phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Parents, Rugby, Talent, Coaches, Family, Influence, Players, Athletic.

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### Highlights of this paper

- The purpose of the study was to investigate the parental influence on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya.
- The findings indicate that parents had no significant influence on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya.
- The study recommends further research of the family context and its impact on rugby in Kenya.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Talent identification and development have become a vital component of many sport programs (Falk, Lidor, Lander, & Lang, 2004). Schorer, Baker, Busch, Wilhelmz, and Pabst (2010) define talent identification as the process of identifying young players and accelerating their progress. The importance and purpose of talent identification aims at finding those individuals who have the highest assurance to succeed in the future so as to acquire their full potential (Williams & Reilly, 2000). This is usually achieved by assessing a number of variables through a battery of tests such as anthropometry, physiology, psychology, sociology, physical abilities, motor abilities and game specific skills.

The family environment is an important variable that will affect the identification of talent in many domains including sports (Erickson, 1996). Côté (1999) described patterns in the dynamics of families of talented athletes throughout their development in sport. Research on family socialization in the sport context is however relatively limited regardless of the critical role that parents play in youth sports as stated by Woolger and Power (1993). This observation is supported by a reassessment of research on sport socialization where, Greendorfer (1992) reasoned that parent socialization of sports participation should be one of the essential areas for future work.

Rugby is a high intensity contact based team sport that requires players to possess a diverse range of physical attributes and certain anthropometric, physical, motor and game specific variables. These variables can distinguish between talented and less talented players (Gent & Spammer, 2005). In Kenya, since the inclusion of the seven aside team in the World Rugby sevens circuit competition in 1998, pressure from the public and media for the success of team has increased. Not only is the pressure felt by the players but coaches and team managers are also prone to the 'cut throat' nature of the professional game. The success felt in the sevens' version of the game has, however, not been witnessed in the fifteens version where Kenya continues to lag behind the top rugby playing nations such as South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and England. This could be due to lack of structured youth development programs and sponsored league competitions leading to several of the country's most talented players quitting playing immediately after high school due to lack of incentives and support. Therefore, to match the increased demand for optimal performance and a competitive advantage over opposing teams, research into aspects of rugby has increased (Smart, 2011) and there is no reason why Kenya being one of the fastest developing nations in rugby should be left behind.

The possibility of identifying potential athletes by using a scientifically compiled test battery for rugby players will assist coaches and teachers in the appropriate selection of players at specific ages (Gent & Spammer, 2005). Despite research work in this field being minimal in Kenya, Oketch (2012) investigated on psychological satisfaction of male rugby players in Kenyan universities while Abisai (2014) assessed the assets and modes of identification and development of talented student athletes in selected sports disciplines in Kenyan universities. The two studies, however, did not pay attention to the criteria utilised in identifying rugby talent in Kenya. The lack of knowledge on talent identification in rugby in Kenya as well as the non-availability of comparative data between neighbouring countries could be one of the reasons that hamper individual sportsmen and women to perform at the optimal level in the fifteens' version of the game.

Since talent identification appears to depend on the interaction of genetics, environment, opportunity and encouragement and the effect of these variables on physical and psychological traits (Wolstencroft, 2002) there is a need to investigate the role played by parents. Côté (1999) further suggests that a range of environmental factors (e.g. family, schooling, date and place of birth) can influence the likelihood of a child being identified as talented. In this regard, Erickson (1996) singles out the family environment as an important variable that will affect the identification of talent in many domains including sports. Bloom (1985) demonstrated that the major influence of the family is at different stages of talent development in science, art and athletics. He reported that in the early years of their children's involvement in an activity, parents tended to be supportive allowing them freedom to decide whether or not to practice formally. This was followed by a period of dedication for both the children and the parents. Finally, the later years were characterized by the individuals' full time commitment to improving performance while the parents' role was restricted to mainly financial support. Thus Bloom's study provides a developmental perspective on the influence of family on talent identification but had no categorization like parents' socio-economic status and parents' education level.

Other numerous studies have identified parents as key players in academy player development (Kraaykamp, Oldenkamp, & Breedved, 2012; Lunn, 2010; Melnick & Wann, 2011; Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012; Mwangi, Gaudin, & Kioli, 2017; Rintaugu, Litaba, Kamande, & Toriola, 2014; Rintaugu., 2005; Scheerder, Vanreusel, & Taks, 2005; Zecevic, Tremblay, Lovsin, & Lariviere, 2010). For example, Zecevic et al. (2010) noted that parents occupy a privileged position in terms of influencing their children's physical activity as they are the custodians of their daily schedules while Mills et al. (2012) reported that there is a positive correlation between parental support and likelihood to progress to professional level. Equally, Bloom, Grant, and Watt (2005) opined that socioeconomic status of parents has a profound influence on sport and physical activity. Other researchers like Mota and Silva (1999) studied the association between socioeconomic status and parental partnering with participation in sports and physical activities by adolescents in Portugal and found no evidence regarding the influence of socio-economic status of parents on adolescents' self-reported physical activity. However, mothers and fathers seemed to have a significant influence on adolescents' physical activity. Toftegaard, Nielsen, Ibsen, and Andersen (2010) studied the parental socio and cultural factors associated with adolescent sports participation and found that age (younger) and gender (boy) were associated with adolescents' sports participation. Adolescents were more likely to participate in sports if they perceived their parents and siblings as active in exercise or sports. They concluded that demographics, socioeconomic status and socio-cultural factors were found to be the best determinants of adolescent sport participation.

Okioga (2014) has nevertheless provided a framework by examining the different family variables that influence talent identification. He indicated that socio-economic status is a combined economic and sociological measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others based on income, education and occupation. Okioga (2014) further states that when studying a family's socio-economic status, the household income, combined income, education and occupation are examined. This view is supported by Kannan (2016) assertions that socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables of occupation, education, income, wealth and place of residence and confirms that socioeconomic factors play a vital role in an individual's performance in sports.

Amongst researchers in Kenya, Rintaugu. (2005) found that a significant number of successful athletes at the secondary school sport competitions come from families where members are involved in sport. Earlier on Akpata and Gitonga (2002) had found that parental social economic status plays a key role in children socialisation into sport at the secondary school level and later on Rintaugu et al. (2014) reported that most student athletes from

Kenyan universities came from families of higher SES i.e. parents with university education and involved in good or white colour jobs. A more recent study by [Mwanga et al. \(2017\)](#) on the impact of family on Kenyan runners (n=246) performance, found that the family plays an important role in the development of athletic talent as well as influencing performance. The study indicated that family members were involved in the running as well as providing financial support to purchase running equipment, food, rent for the houses and medication.

Despite a large number of the above studies outlining the importance of parents in children's involvement in sport, none of the above studies has addressed the role of parents and their influence on participation in rugby in Kenya. Thus, there is need to examine family environment of rugby athletes especially their parental socio-economic status and level of education of the parents and how these influence the talent identification process of rugby players in Kenya. The study therefore investigated the parental influence on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The objectives of the study were to establish the influence of the parental socio-economic status and level of education of the parents on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya. Understanding the role of parents in the talent identification process is critical to the sporting careers of rugby players and will enable stakeholders to provide an enabling sporting environment. Secondly the results will have lots of implications on the athlete's entourage and rugby stakeholders such as managers of rugby clubs, Kenya Rugby Union, parents and coaches.

The study was thus guided by the following hypothesis: "that there is no significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the parental influence of the rugby players is classified as high or low".

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### *2.1. Study Design and Sample*

A descriptive survey design was used to collect data and data was collected from 95 rugby players and 15 rugby coaches from 25 rugby clubs who competed in the 2017/2018 Kenya Rugby Union league competition. The study targeted 125 players and 25 coaches but only 95 players' responded and 15 coaches were available for interviews representing response rates of 76% and 60% respectively. The demographic data of the players indicated that most of the players were aged between 20 and 29 years(78.9%) followed by those aged between 10 and 19 years (13.7%) and those aged between 30 and 39 years (7.4%).

### *2.2. Research Instruments*

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the rugby players. Section A of the questionnaire included demographic information of age, playing experience, academic qualifications and occupation. Section B focused on the parents' level of education, parents' gross monthly income and the person responsible for the players' commuting expenses to training. Section C contained questions on whether or not any family members played rugby, their highest rugby playing level and their influence on the talent identification process for their rugby club. Items in section C on the influence on talent identification were weighted on Likert type scale of very influential, influential, fairly influential and not influential.

The interview schedule was used to collect data from the rugby coaches. Interview items revolved around the perceived parental influence on the talent identification process of the players based on socio-economic status of the parents, level of education, occupation and the parents' and siblings' rugby playing experience. For the rest of the items both open-ended and close ended questions were used. The instruments were validated by a team of lecturers from the school of education at the University of Nairobi who were specialists in research methodology and sociology of sport. The draft test instruments were modified based on their common observations and the

instruments were also piloted using 15 players drawn from 3 clubs who did not participate in the study. A test-retest technique with a time difference of 2 weeks was subsequently used to test for reliability and the Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation (r) formula used to correlate the pre-test and post-test results in order to determine the coefficient of reliability. The reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.78.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to the players at their respective clubs' training grounds before commencement of training, filled and immediately collected by the research assistants while the coaches were interviewed before commencement of training at their clubs.

The responses were coded and analysed using both descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics of Chi square test of independent measures.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Parents' Level of Education

Presented in Table 1 are the players parents level of education which showed that over 50 % of the fathers had university education while 16.8 % had secondary school level and below as their highest level of education. This trend is repeated for the mothers with 48.4 % having had university education while 22.1 % had secondary school level and below. The results show that the players' parents were generally well educated.

Table-1. Distribution of the players' parents by level of education.

Father			Mother		
Level	Frequency	Percent	Level	Frequency	Percent
Ph.D.	10	10.5	Ph.D.	2	2.1
Masters	13	13.7	Masters	11	11.6
Bachelors	25	26.3	Bachelors	33	34.7
Diploma	21	22.1	Diploma	15	15.8
Certificate	6	6.3	Certificate	10	10.5
Secondary	14	14.7	Secondary	18	18.9
Primary	2	2.1	Primary	3	3.2
No Resp	4	4.2	No Resp	3	3.2
Total	95	100	Total	95	100

### 3.2. Influence of Parents' Socio-Economic Status on Talent Identification

From the coaches' perspectives majority (73.33%) coaches reported that the level of education of the parents of the rugby players influenced talent identification while only 26.67% of the coaches indicated that the level of education of parents did not influence the talent identification process. The majority of the coaches (33.3 %) indicated that parents' socio-economic status was fairly influential, 26.7 % rated it as very influential, 20 % rated it as influential and 6.7 % the coaches indicated that it was not influential.

### 3.3. Family Members Who Played Rugby

The players were also required to show if they had any family members who played rugby and it was found that majority (67.36%) of the players had no family members who played rugby while 36.63% players had at least one family member who played rugby. The players were required to indicate if the family had any influence on the talent identification process and if so, to name them. The results indicated that a majority (64.21%) of the players said that the members of their family had no influence on the talent identification process while 35.79% had family members who influenced their talent identification in rugby. From the 35.79 % the players who indicated that

members of their family had an influence on the talent identification process 42.4 % were influenced by their fathers, 33.3 % by their brothers, 18.2 % by their mothers and 6.1 % pointed out that they were influenced by other members of the wider family. The results therefore signify that the key influencers are the fathers followed by the brothers. A cross tabulation on the relevant family attributes was conducted and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table-2.** Cross tabulation of the familial attributes on influence of talent identification of players in rugby clubs in Kenya (n=95).

Attributes		Influenced the talent identification process				Total	
		Yes		No		F	Percent
		F	Percent	F	Percent		
Which means do you use to commute to your club?	Public	36	67.9	17	32.1	53	100.0
	Private	8	72.7	3	27.3	11	100.0
	Walking	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
	Missing	0	0.0	0	0.0	27	100.0
	Total	47	69.1	21	30.9	95	100.0
Did any members of your family play rugby?	Yes	15	65.2	8	34.8	23	100.0
	No	32	71.1	13	28.9	45	100.0
	Missing	0	0.0	0	0.0	50	52.6
	Total	47	69.1	21	30.9	95	100.0
Did any member of your family have any influence in your club?	Yes	17	81.0	4	19.0	21	100.0
	No	29	63.0	17	37.0	46	100.0
	Missing	1	100.0	0	0.0	27	100.0
	Total	47	69.1	21	30.9	95	100.0
If the answer to the above is yes, then indicate which member?	Father	14	93.3	1	1.1	15	100.0
	Mother	6	100.0	0	0.0	6	100.0
	Brother	11	84.6	2	2.1	13	100.0
	Others	2	2.1	0	0.0	2	100.0
	Total	47	69.1	21	30.9	95	100.0

Table 2 shows that out of the players who used public means of transport to their clubs, 67.9% indicated that this had influenced the talent identification process while 32.1% reported no influence. From the players who reported use of private means of transport, the 73% indicated that this had influenced the talent identification process while 3% of the players who walked to their clubs also indicated that this had influenced the talent identification process.

The 65.2 % of the players who reported that they have family members who play rugby also indicated that they had an influence on the talent identification process, while 34.8 % who have family members who play rugby indicated that they had no influence the talent identification process. The findings on which family member influenced the talent identification process indicated that 93.3% the players were influenced by their fathers while only 6 % players reported that their mothers had an influence on the talent identification process. A chi square test was therefore done to establish the significance of the parental influence on the talent identification process for rugby clubs in Kenya. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table-3.** Summary of Chi-square test on the influence of family on talent identification of players in rugby clubs in Kenya (n=95).

Attributes	Value	Df	P-value
Means used to commute to rugby club	0.167	2	0.920
Family members who play rugby	0.248	1	0.619
Family member who have any influence in your club	2.149	1	0.143
Indicate which family members	4.314	3	0.229

Note: P < 0.05 Reject the null hypothesis  
 P > 0.05 Accept the null hypothesis.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

From [Table 3](#), the p-value 0.920, 0.619, 0.143 and 0.229 > 0.05 gives an average p-value of 0.4778. The P value of (0.4778) is less than the significance level (0.05), which enables the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. The conclusion was to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that 'there is a significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the parental influence of the rugby players from the rugby clubs in Kenya is classified as high or low'. This finding implies that there is no evidence that parental influence plays a significant role in talent identification of rugby players in rugby clubs in Kenya.

The study aimed at investigating the influence of parents on talent identification of players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The findings revealed that the parents had no significant influence on talent identification of players in rugby clubs in Kenya. Hence the findings concur with those of [Mota and Silva \(1999\)](#) where no evidence was found regarding the influence of parents on adolescents' physical activity levels. Although the study revealed that parental influence on talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya is not significant, the findings on the influence of the socio-economic status of the parents returned favourable ratings from the coaches. The findings are therefore contrary to studies which have opined that higher the parental SES, the higher a person's chance of starting sport participation ([Kraaykamp et al., 2012](#); [Lunn, 2010](#); [Scheerder et al., 2005](#)). For example, [Scheerder et al. \(2005\)](#) was unequivocal that higher educated parents participate more often in sports than lower educated parents. Furthermore, [Nezhad, Rahmati, and Nezhad \(2012\)](#) indicated that since the socio-economic status of the parents had significant correlation with the amount of sports participation, it was conventional wisdom that as they participate they are likely to influence their children participation in sport. [Evans and Davies \(2010\)](#) asserted that middle class families invest significant amount of time, money, energy and socio-emotional development in their children and these children become more physically literate and eventual participation in sport.

An interesting finding of the study was that 67% of the players did not have family members who played rugby. This is contrary to the numerous assertions that family members are pivotal in socialization into sport of children ([Erickson, 1996](#); [Rintaugu., 2005](#)). For example, [Rintaugu. \(2005\)](#) found that a significant number of successful athletes in secondary schools came from families where members are involved in sport. The finding that parents had no influence on talent identification process was not remote leading to the implication that as much as the players have the support of the parents in playing rugby, the parents play no role the talent identification process. The indication therefore is that a socio-cultural talent identification gap exists and points to an omission of a very important role that can be played by parents in talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya.

Findings of the study also revealed that it is only the fathers and brothers who are instrumental in the talent identification process of the rugby players. The lack of mothers' influence in socialization into sport or talent identification of athletes has been reported in other studies ([Mwanga et al., 2017](#); [Rintaugu., 2005](#)). That family members provide transportation to the training and competition venues, is consistent with studies which have indicated that parents provided athletes with financial support and transportation to competition venues ([Dagkas & Stathi, 2007](#); [Rintaugu., 2005](#)).

Despite the results from the study that parental influence was not significant, findings revealed that majority of the rugby players' parents had attained university level of education. This is not far off as rugby has been preserve of the higher and middle SES classes in Kenya. Indeed, until recently, rugby as sport was only offered in a few of the former white schools or national schools ([Rintaugu., 2005](#)). However, due to concerted efforts by the Ministry of education, science and technology, in collaboration with KRU, the sport has spread to all parts of the country except for the former North Eastern province. These findings are consistent with those of [Rintaugu et al. \(2014\)](#) that Kenyan university athletes come from higher SES families where parents have university education and are

engaged in white collar jobs. To buttress the role of parental SES and sport participation in Kenya, [Mwanga et al. \(2017\)](#) found that that most of Kenya's elite and upcoming athletes in long distance running had their parents having basic primary and secondary education.

Most of the players and coaches opined that parental level of education and SES influenced the talent identification process in rugby. The findings are therefore consistent with those of [Nezhad et al. \(2012\)](#) which indicated that the socio-economic status of the parents had significant correlation with the amount of sports participation per week based on the adolescent students' level of income of father, education and level of mother's education. [Lunn \(2010\)](#) asserted that there is positive relationship between parental sports participation and individual's sports participation. This was also echoed in [Mills et al. \(2012\)](#) findings which indicated there is a positive correlation between parental support and likelihood of players to progress to professional level. The parents' level of education forms an important variable for parental influence according to the [Okioga \(2014\)](#) framework which indicated that socio-economic status is a combined economic and sociological measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others based on income, education and occupation.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study it is concluded that parents had no significant influence on talent identification of players in rugby clubs in Kenya. It is nevertheless noted that the majority of the rugby player's parents had university education while coaches observed that parental SES and levels of education influenced talent identification process in rugby. Secondly, majority of the players did not have family members who played rugby and out of the few who had, fathers and brothers were the only members of the family who had influence on the talent identification process, though mainly through the provision of finances and transportation. This conclusion, however, should be interpreted with a lot of caution as [Côté \(1999\)](#) argued that role of the family in children's sport involvement is a complex phenomenon because of the diversity of the family context. Subsequently, it is recommended from the study that the complete family environment and how it impacts on talent identification in rugby in Kenya, needs to be studied at each stage of the rugby players' development. The specific roles played by parents and siblings should also be itemized.

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