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## **Competing for Culture: Young Olympians' Narratives from the first winter Youth Olympic Games**

The purpose of this investigation was to study how the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team experienced the first winter Youth Olympics Games (YOG) by examining how they balanced the regular competitive program, the Cultural and Education program in addition to several innovative events. Nine athletes were interviewed. Their experiences and perceptions of stressors differed according to the extent of their sports competitive program during the ten days of the Games. The results are presented in three narratives: the curler (with an extensive competitive program), the biathlete (with a more balanced program), and the luger (with one competition and sufficient time to take part in the Cultural Education Program). As the curler took part both in a regular competitive event and an innovative one, YOG was all about competing and trying to get enough rest whenever possible. The biathlete with a balanced program had time to experience all that YOG had to offer, while the luger would have benefitted from additional competition, regular or innovative. In order to cope, different types of social support from coaches, team mates and parents, together with cognitive strategies, were mentioned as important. The athletes' main goal for YOG is to perform in competition. However, if the IOC wants all the athletes to embrace the cultural learning possibilities offered during the Games, future organizers should balance a cultural-competitive program for all athletes.

**Keywords:** Adolescent elite athletes, coping, competitive and organizational stress, Culture and Education Program

The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) is an innovative development of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to target the age groups between 14 and 18 – in other words, an Olympic Games for teenagers. Following approval by the IOC in Guatemala in 2007, the first YOG was held in Singapore in 2010 (summer games) and the second in Innsbruck in 2012 (winter games). The idea of establishing an international multisport event for young athletes had been gradually developed by IOC officials throughout the previous two decades (Torres, 2010). IOC President Rogge was also the driving force behind the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF), a biennial event for young European athletes launched in 1991. Despite the existence of EYOF, as a new event YOG has been labelled the “best kept secret in sports” (Judge, Petersen, & Lydum, 2009, p. 173). As such, it has received scant attention in the media as well as in research. This lack of research was pointed out at an early stage where some criticism towards this new youth competition was expressed. First of all, this youth competition should avoid mirroring the adult games (Wong, 2011). In addition, the young age of some participants has already been subject to intense debate in sports such as diving and figure skating where the events tend to be won by athletes in the YOG age-group Brennan (2007). Wong (2011) supports this observation and lists the risk of injuries to bodies that are still developing, the stress related to premature exposure to the international media, cheating, pressure to perform, and overzealous coaches as risk factors. In many respects the YOG represents a new step towards the systematic introduction of elite sport into the youth population (Parry, 2012). How the young Norwegian athletes perceived participation in YOG is the focus of this research project.

***Contextual background: The Cultural Education Program and the innovative Competitive Program***

The vision of the YOG is to inspire young people around the world to participate in

sport and adopt and live by the Olympic values in a holistic and humanistic education of youth (IOC, 2011). Furthermore, the planned competition was also intended to be a “special occasion which places as much, if not more, emphasis on the *manner* in which things are achieved, rather than the sporting achievement itself” (IOC, 2007). As a result, no records are to be kept, and the young athletes are all seen as winners if they behave like Olympians and enjoy the experience of participating.

Many of these values and experiences are to be taught and offered in the Culture and Education Program (hereafter CEP). The structure of the CEP is based around six themes: Media Lab, World Mile, Sustainability Project, Arts Project, Competence Project and Olympic Youth Festival 2012. In both Singapore and Innsbruck, local students made booths at the World Culture Village representing each of the respective 205 (Singapore) and 70 (Innsbruck) participating nations. In addition, international organisations including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) were teaching the Olympians about important topics like social responsibility.

Another modification intended to target Olympic values is the innovative Competitive Program (IOC, 2009). The YOG competitive program consists of the same sports as in the winter and summer Olympic Games. However, the YOG was to have fewer disciplines and events – but with some innovative and significant modifications. As Rita Subowo, IOC member from Indonesia has pointed out: “This should foster cooperation and interaction between athletes from various countries” (2010, p. 153). IOC challenged the different International Federations to adopt a more flexible and creative approach in their events for the games. This resulted in a program with new disciplines such as basketball three-on-three tournament in the summer version and ice

hockey skills challenge in the winter YOG<sup>1</sup>. Olympic officials consider this the most important innovation of the YOG, and in Innsbruck 14 new events were introduced.

***Theoretical background: Coping with youth competitions***

Even though the IOC has intentionally tried to reduce the importance placed on the results of competition for the young athletes, research on the Singapore 2010 YOG has revealed that the perceptions of the athletes are in contrast to the policy documents presented by the IOC (Krieger, 2012). Overall, it would be “naïve and unrealistic to assert that winning is not an important part of youth sports” (Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007, p. 322). When introducing adolescents to the same types of competitive events as mature athletes, is it important to understand ways in which younger elite athletes cope with stressors they encounter in sport (Crocker, Hoar, McDonough, Kowalski, & Niefer, 2004; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010 ).

A *stressful* situation commences with a set of circumstances in the socio-physical environment, when there is a mismatch between an individual’s resources and the perceived challenge that the athlete has to cope with. In a dynamic process, an athlete will interact with the environment during performances and evaluate any given situation according to personal goals, situation intentions and so forth, while attempting to cope with the situation (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). Hence, *coping* is viewed as a dynamic process following appraisal because of a situation (identified as threatening, challenging, etc.) where an individual perceives an imbalance between the situation and his/her resources. The transactional perspective of coping is the dominant model in contemporary research ( McKay, Niven, Lavallee, & White, 2008; Nicholls &

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<sup>1</sup> The hockey players competed in skills like skating, stick handling, puck control, skating agility, as well as shooting strength and accuracy.

Polman, 2007) and recognizes the recursive principle that a person, the environment, and psychological reactions mutually affect each other (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006; Lazarus, 1981).

Furthermore, in a competitive event, an athlete may face both competitive and organizational stressors (i.e., the environmental demands or stimuli encountered by an individual) that they have to cope with using a variety of coping strategies (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Competitive stressors are related to the competition size, venues and participants, to mention a few. Organizational stressors such as sport organization politics, selection of coaches, selection criteria for participation, housing, and transport of athletes to venues can easily disrupt athletic performance as well (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999).

When investigating how adolescent athletes cope with the perceived stress experienced during EYOF summer of 2007, Kristiansen and Roberts (2010) found that the elite competitive experience was novel to all and rather overwhelming. Consequently, the athletes used cognitive coping strategies to some extent as well as relying on different types of social support. Their findings revealed the need for social support for adolescent athletes, and underlined the importance of a good coach-athlete relationship in order to perform well and enjoy the competitive experience. Other researchers have pointed out that it takes time and experience to gain skills to cope with the pressure (e.g., Bebetos & Antoniou, 2003; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). For example, the frequency of problem-focused coping strategies and use of social support tends to increase with age (e.g., Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2009). This is important knowledge for team leaders, coaches and the IOC when encouraging young athletes to compete at the highest level.

The purpose of this investigation was to explore how members of the Norwegian Youth Olympic Team experienced participation in Innsbruck with the combination of competition and culture in the first winter YOG. Hence, two questions are posed in this investigation: (a) How did the athletes experience balancing the regular competitive program with the Culture and Education program and the innovative competitive events; and (b) What do the athletes perceive as stressors and how do they cope?

## **Methods**

Almost 1100 athletes from 70 different countries met in January 2012 at Innsbruck, Austria, and competed and shared cultural experiences for ten days.

### ***Participants***

A purposeful sampling procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was conducted among the 28 athletes included in the Norwegian national team. These competed in luge, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, biathlon, curling, ski jumping, freestyle skiing, Nordic combined and speed skating. The sampling were done according to four criteria: First, both genders were included (three men and six women aged 17 and 18 years,  $M_{age} = 17.44$  years,  $SD = 0.53$ ); second, it was important to become acquainted with the athletes' experiences in as many different venues as possible; third, to interview athletes who had participated at a different number of events during YOG; and finally, both medal winners and non-winners were interviewed.

### ***Ethical standards, recruitment and procedures***

After obtaining approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, informed consent was obtained from both participants before conducting interviews in 2012. The Norwegian National Team was recruited with the help of the Norwegian Olympic

Training Centre. Four of the athletes who finished their competitive events early were interviewed in Innsbruck; the other five were interviewed within a few weeks after their return to Norway. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that the information they provided would remain confidential, and that they could terminate the interviews at any time. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian and the replies used were later translated into English. Finally, several measures have been taken to protect the confidentiality of the young athletes, and the concern about anonymity resulted in presenting their experiences as three collective stories (see below).

### ***Interviews***

The semi-structured interviews started with (a) general questions about the athlete's previous experiences in major competition; (b) preparation for this competitive event; (c) expectations and experiences with the combination of competition, CEP, and the innovative competitions; (d) whether they experienced stress of any kind; and (e) if so, how did they cope with the different stressors. The athletes were not given any definition of terms like stress and coping, but if there were terms in the questions they did not understand these were promptly explained to them. When they talked about experiences they perceived as stressors, follow-up questions were asked about how they coped with the stressors. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

### ***Data analysis and interpretation***

The interviews were transcribed verbatim resulting in 45 pages of single spaced raw text. Segments that had similar themes and represented the same stressor were grouped together and placed into two higher order categories; a) Competitive stressors; and b) Organizational stressors. Associated sub-categories were found (housing, food, qualifications, being nervous and put pressure upon yourself), and exemplified with



quotes. The stressors meaning units were then linked with the coping strategies that were employed by participants to deal with specific stressors. The three general coping strategy categories that emerged were problem-focused, avoidance coping, and social support (the three functions according to Schaefer, Coyne, and Lazarus, 1982) and served as the main categories. In addition to the three tables, in-depth quotes were included in the presentation and interpretation of the data which is in accord with the transactional perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus (1999) advocated the use of narratives to add knowledge and understanding, and in the analysis process it was obvious that the extent of the different sports competitive program constituted an important theme for interpretation of the experiences of the athletes and also their perceptions of stress and coping. These similarities and the need to preserve anonymity resulted in a narrowing of nine stories to three by the means of three narratives.

Elliott (2005) defines *narrative* as a way of organizing a sequence of events into a whole, or according to Chase (2005), it is retrospective meaning-making as the significance of each event can then be understood through its relation to the whole. Elliot then distinguishes between *first-order* narratives, defined as the stories individuals tell about themselves and their own experiences, and *second-order* narratives defined as:

The accounts we may construct as researchers to make sense of the social world, and of other people's experiences. These narratives are therefore methods of presenting social and historical knowledge. In addition, these second-order narratives do not necessarily focus on individuals (Elliott, 2005, p. 13).

A particular type of second-order narrative is a *collective story* (Richardson, 1990). The collective story "displays an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs" ( p. 25). Hence, the nine interviews have been grouped into three collective narratives according to the

competitive schedule the youth Olympians had during the ten days in Innsbruck. These were termed: (a) *the curler*, which is the story of the youth Olympians with an extensive competitive program (and will be referred to as ‘she’); (b) *the biathlete*, which is the story of the youth Olympians with a more balanced program (and will be referred to as ‘he’), and (c) *the luger*, which is the story of the youth Olympians with only one competitive event (and will be referred to as ‘she’). The curler is based on two interviews, the biathlete on three interviews and the luger on four interviews.

## **Results**

### ***The curler***

The narrative of the curler represents an athlete with a *hectic competitive program* with both a regular tournament and a new competitive format (see Table 1).

[\*\*\*Table 1 near here\*\*\*]

The curler played two games every day (both lasting approximately 2½ hours).

Consequently, the ten days were severely structured:

We [i.e., the team of two males and two females] played curling, ate and slept for ten days... There was no time for the CEP activities, although we did walk through the areas displaying the different nations and staffed with pupils from the area [at the Congress centre] and I think the stuff we saw was okay... We could of course have squeezed in time to do some of the activities if we had really put our hearts into it. But it was more important for us to rest the little time we had off.

The curler’s program was “very professionally organized, so it worked fine”. When asked if there was too much competition, she responded that “this is the only time I can compete in YOG”, meaning that was the reason for coming in the first place.

The curler did perceive some competitive stressors due to the novelty of the situation and the team being mixed gender (two Norwegian women and men on the same team):

It is different to be in a mixed team with new people and, of course, we have to have a different tactic as we are not as strong as the men [i.e., when talking about sweeping]. But it was interesting to try it. However, we had some strategic discussions inside the team, but things functioned better and better with more experience.

Not only was she competing in the Olympics, but extra stress was also caused by the innovative competition format where all the curlers were paired up with an athlete from a different nation. Just a few of them were lucky enough to get one they could communicate with in a shared language (e.g., Germans and Austrians could communicate in German). The coaches assigned to the different teams might easily be Russian or Korean-speaking, so our curler had a hard time following the instruction. “It was a great challenge, and we had to skip ourselves, so naturally that affected our results”. To communicate with their team-player was vital in order to do well or make this a positive experience. She also added that a few found a way to communicate the curling language. However, they were “unable to communicate socially during or after the game”. The IOC intention failed in this respect and only created more stress for young athletes.

The curler used several strategies to cope with the perceived competitive stressors. The use of social support was highlighted together with problem-focused strategies such as focusing:

Everyone on the team was very nice and we become friends momentarily, and I think that had a lot to do with the results. We actually played better and better during the tournament, and I guess the fact that our coach was both very frank and

supportive resulted in great communication between the five of us that helped us in our positive competitive development. [...] We were able to keep the right focus, and I guess that is important as curling gives you time to think when a game lasts for 2 ½ hours. In addition team support become very important – especially since we didn't have time-outs [...] and we all had our parents there.

The hectic competitive program gave the curler less opportunities to experience Innsbruck, “but I can come back and see the city some other time”. More obvious was her frustration over not being able to take part in the cultural activities offered: “I walked through the Congress Centre and saw all the Booths”. As her focus evolved around the competition, discussion of coping with competitive stressors outnumbered organizational ones. However, the one organizational issue mentioned was the insecurity in the qualification period because Norway struggled to raise a team with two females in the correct age group. “The last player was scouted like a month prior to YOG”, and this organizational issue of course did something with the confidence and nervousness before the first game. Furthermore, the perception of organizational stressors seemed not to have affected performance negatively, and was hardly mentioned. When asked directly she responded:

Well, the bed was very hard as I heard the others talk about, and I really needed a good night's sleep in order to perform. The menu lacked variation, but the biggest problem for me was the different schedules for us and the two girls that we shared the room with. They were up early and early to bed, and we had the first game 1 pm and finished late at night. So we had to adapt and always be quiet so we all should get enough rest.

Due to the hectic schedule, the main organizational stressors were the ones that caused her constant limited and/or insufficient rest. To get enough rest was her main priority and totally overshadowed the intended focus on culture at YOG: “We prioritized rest

when we had some time off, so we took no part in any CEP-activities or had time for homework”. Hence, YOG was for the curler all about competing with little room for culture.

### *The biathlete*

The narrative of the biathlete represents an athlete with a *balanced competitive program*. He spent most of his time in Seefeld, approximately 20 km from Innsbruck, undertaking organized training if not competing (see Table 2).

[\*\*\*Table 2 near here\*\*\*]

The biathlete had international experience from last year’s EYOF, and was also qualified to take part in junior World Championship a few weeks later. Hence, YOG was not the main competition for the season: “It is so much more fun in the upcoming World Championship simply because it is a bigger competition”. Consequently, the biathlete did not mention as many competition stressors as the curler with less experience. He was well aware of the fact that YOG was also about culture and making friends, therefore the main pressure came from within:

Doing well was of course important, but I think we focused on that ourselves; it was not done by the team leaders or coaches. They only repeated that we were there to learn and do the best races we were capable of.

In addition, it was “hard to wait for so many days to start competing”.

To cope with the five days waiting time, the biathlete underlined support from coaches, parents *and* the waxing team as crucial. In addition, the cultural activities functioned virtually as a coping strategy due to less focus on performance 24 hours every day:

Competition was very much alike EYOF; it was the same concept with only much more going on at YOG. I found it interesting to be able to experience the other stuff as well, and not only have to focus on my performance and rest in my room while not competing. It was cool to meet all the other athletes, and I had time to take part in a few of the activities like the mountain experience.

In the interview, the biathlete mentioned a higher number of organizational stressors than competitive ones. The toughest part was the athletes left the Olympic Village early every morning, and got back late from Seefeld every night which was “really exhausting. And when we got back, we rested, there was no time for catching up with my studies”. For him this was an additional stressor – as it was “constantly on his mind that I ought to do some of it. It was energy-draining”. It actually took him a week to catch up with his studies after his return to Norway.

The late qualification (in November for biathlon) was also mentioned as a stressor and one reason that YOG was not the main goal when planning the season. The biathlete considered one month preparation as too short time to prepare for performance and it may have reduced his hope for results (as well as the pressure to perform). The qualification criteria also came up in the discussion: “the criteria have been debated among all the biathletes in the YOG-age groups, and some think that they were unfair”. To cope with the stressor caused by the qualification, coach information and support was crucial.

Both doping control and security were mentioned as stressors, but a positive aspect was the fact that during the pre-camp the leaders had “talked them through the doping routines, which helped a lot”. However, the security system was harder to prepare for and was therefore experienced as more stressful:

I found the security system very rigorous, though, but in one way that is a good thing too, even though you get really fed up by passing it every time leaving or

entering the Village. And I had to plan extra time because of the line or it maybe was closed.

The security system also made it harder to meet the parents – which in his opinion was part of his support network and helped him cope with the YOG experience. He expressed that his parents are important for his athletic career, and he felt very privileged as they are not the pushy/coachy type:

Many really push their kids around; I have seen numerous negative examples of what not to do in my sport. If my parents had been like that, I think the joy of doing my sport would have been lost. As long as they are around on my terms it is OK. But how you feel about having your parents around is individual. Many of the others have their father as a coach too, as long as they have a good relationship I have seen it work out very well.

The new competitive events were also mentioned as a stressor and something the athletes had discussed among themselves:

We did discuss these innovations, and some of us would have preferred the regular competitive program, like the ski jumpers found it weird that they did not compete in 90 m as they normally do, and the cross country skier would preferred to have something in addition to the sprint (that is offered in EYOF). I guess we would like to compete in what we are good at, but sure, the innovative events were enjoyable too.

The biathlete participated in two different relays: one was a mixed relay with the two biathlete female skiers, and the other one was two biathletes and two cross-country skiers, so he had plenty of experience in the innovative IOC elements as well. With this balanced program he seemingly had time to experience some of the cultural input YOG had to offer and enjoyed it.

### *The luger*

The narrative of the luger represents one athlete who had a *limited competitive program* and “only had one event to do”. Hence, her perceptions of stressors and coping are coloured by this (see Table 3).

[\*\*\*Table 3 near here\*\*\*]

The fact that the luger only had one event was a major stressor. She envied sports that had several options in which to compete, because then she could afford one failure and be able to fix it for the next event: “I was as nervous as if I crashed”. She had some mixed feelings about the importance of her only competition, and unfortunately there were no relays or new competitions available for her: “I wished we had a new event or relay, to compete is so much fun”. Obviously, she was there for the competition. This assumption was supported by the fact that she asked “the President of our national Sport Federation why we did not have any type of new competitions. He just replied that there was not sufficient time and it would also increase the number of participants”.

The coach was highlighted as crucial when she explained how she coped with the competitive stressors. His experience and support helped: “he explained well to us what it would be like, the total Olympic experience”. Additionally, she relied on support from her family to deal with the competitive stress and “nerves”. After the event was over, positive reframing was used - and she also mentioned cultural distraction as helpful. With a laugh, the luger pointed out that she probably had more time to reflect on the surroundings than most of her Norwegian team mates with their busy schedules:

We did a lot of the activities; some were fun and others boring. Maybe they [i.e., the organizers] should have reduced the activities offered and included some we could learn from instead? I think they almost made too much fuss about it!  
However, because of the points and reward system, we actually ran through all the



stands to collect as many points as possible. We did, of course, learn something [Laughter].

The luger also mentioned organizational stressors related to the Olympic housing facilities; the quality of the food, the lack of variation in the menu, the beds, the amount of security, and lack of information on the event prior to arrival were highlighted. In addition, late qualification was also pointed out as an organizational stressor in the preparation phase leading up to the competition. This may next have influenced the planning of the season where YOG was not the main goal, but instead the junior World Championship a few weeks later: “YOG was my second goal for the season; there are simply fewer athletes here at YOG. It is more fun when the nations come with four athletes each”, which is what was also stated by the biathlete.

To cope with the organizational stressors, the luger mentioned a few strategies. The bed was accepted as difficult to do anything about, but “we taped the pillow in order to give it a sleepable size” – a good example of using problem focused strategies. Another type of problem focused strategies was used to reframe the hazards of security: “our coach has told us that this is nothing compared to what we might expect in the Olympic Games”. The restricted menu was managed with by letting her family take her out to dinner (tangible support). The informational support from coach was also important when dealing with the insecurity issues related to qualification. The coach also felt responsible for not letting them hang around after competing:

He took us to the other athletes’ competitions and signed us up for the CEP activities. But we found spending seven hours at the Congress centre or taking part in so many activities exhausting... I should probably spend my time on studies instead. Actually spending too much time doing CEP has given me a bad conscience, I have been away from school three weeks now.

The luger would have benefitted from additional competitions, regular or innovative. Ten days may seem too much time to simply “hang around” with cultural activities and enjoying the unique international social environment.

## **Discussion**

Informed by the transactional framework (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this study extends stress research by examining how Youth Olympians perceived and coped with competitive and organizational stressors during the first winter Youth Olympics in Innsbruck 2012. Their experience were also seen in light of some of the criticism raised against YOG together with the intended benefits (e.g., Digel, 2008; Judge et al., 2009; Krieger, 2012; Parry, 2012; Wong, 2011; 2012). Furthermore, the meaning ascribed to participation has been voiced by the use of three collective narratives. These narratives have been organized and interpreted in light of the extent of the competitive program and the meaning the total load of activities accessible to them which included official training, their own competition (s), and the other team mates’ competition in addition to the extensive cultural program.

The IOC fronted Culture and Education Program was successful, and culture certainly did not have a secondary role or remained in the shadow of the competitive events as tend to happen in the Olympic Games (Garcia, 2000; Torres, 2010). Therefore, YOG has the potential to be much more than a sport competition as envisioned by the IOC: both the luger and biathlete’s experiences and stories supported this. The luger enjoyed the cultural activities, but she questioned the learning aspect which is important to the IOC (IOC, 2007). She merely approached CEP as entertainment. Krieger (2012) has previously questioned the IOC claimed popularity of CEP among the athletes; he argues that the cultural activities most of all *are entertainment* enjoyed during their compulsory stay for nearly 2 weeks in the Olympic

Village. The findings here support Krieger's research. It is therefore worth noting, if given the choice; that the luger would have preferred another competitive event instead of the cultural activities. Even though athletes were signed up for organized activities from which they could learn (both as a person and an athlete), it was the international atmosphere that made the biggest impression on them alongside the competitive events.

Intentionally, the CEP should take some of the edge off the competition, the narratives revealed that the youth Olympians mentioned typical competitive stressors such as being nervous or feeling pressure to perform at a very high level or win. The athletes stated that they put the pressure on themselves – it was not coaches or team leaders. For the luger it ended with a lack of concentration, some anxiety and lost self-confidence as has been reported earlier (Gould et al., 1999). Other athletes coped better with the situation due to more experience (e.g., Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Overall, the competition itself was not pointed out as a main stressor by the Norwegian athletes, though; it was their *main focus* in Innsbruck. One might of course speculate that the importance placed on the results will increase, and for the Norwegian youth athletes this may be exacerbated by the fact that the 2016 YOG will be located in Lillehammer, Norway. Even if the National Olympic Committees and IOCs continue to downplay the winning aspect, which the athletes perceived they did, the young athletes are capable of putting a lot of pressure on themselves (Cumming et al., 2007; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010).

The degree and/ or type of organizational stressors perceived by the curler, biathlete and luger were coloured by the competitive schedule in Innsbruck. This supports the notion that organizational stressors are environmentally diverse and temporally unstable compared to competitive stressors (Hanton et al., 2005). The luger with one competition felt like being at a very cool youth camp, but mentioned the usual

core categories of organizational stressors (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; McKay et al., 2008; Reeves et al., 2009) such as hard beds, food and menu, security. One core category of organizational stressors was in addition underlined by the biathlete: bussing. For him the travel time to the competitive venue and waiting for the busses was energy draining as he went to Seefeld every day. The curler also perceived some of the core categories of organizational stressors, though the stressor related to insufficient sleep (quality of the bed and a different schedule from their roommates). Stressors related to the new and innovative competitive format such as not being used to the competition format and language issues in the mixed doubles were also mentioned by the curler. It is interesting to note that the innovative competitions which should be fostering cooperation and interaction (Subowo, 2010), may be considered a new stressor in the expansive category of organizational ones. Finally, all of them mentioned the qualification period and criteria which differed immensely between the nations and sports. It is a feature that should be clearer and improved before the next YOG. Consequently, the results were in concordance with previous studies where youths experienced more demands associated with organizational stressors than competitive ones (Hanton et al., 2005; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010).

In terms of coping with competitive and organizational stressors, the athletes primarily mentioned different types of support services such as informational, tangible and emotional support. These strategies were used depending on the stressor (see Table 1-3), together with cognitive strategies, and the aforementioned coping strategies have previously been underlined as important for adolescents (e.g., Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Reeves et al., 2009). Support from coaches and coach communication was particularly highlighted as exceptional in the present investigation. This is a positive finding with young athletes as we know that ineffective communication may easily

become a major source of strain for elite athletes (Kristiansen, Tomten, Hanstad, & Roberts, in press). The parents' role was also highlighted by the youths; they belong to their support and security net (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010).

There is a potential limitation of this research due to presenting only three collective narratives. Some uniqueness could have been included if I had presented first-order narratives and told all the nine stories and the different meanings given to their experiences (Elliott, 2005). For example, could such an approach better account for differences based on gender, sports disciplines or coping ability? Instead the focus has been on the how the competitive program colored the "Olympians" experiences in YOG. The knowledge presented may contribute to previous scientifically-based knowledge, but we should be wary of assuming *ideals* about the benefits of youths competing in the "Olympics" as discussed by Judge and colleagues (Judge et al., 2009).

### **Implications**

YOG is seen by many as a catalyst within the movement for initiatives targeting youth (e.g., IOC, 2007), and prior to the first YOG it was argued that this development may be beneficial to the youth sport as a "trickle down benefit" (Wong, 2011). So far no Olympic host countries have been able to prove such a positive development, and it is not possible from the present data to detect traces of the Olympic legacy or predict any long-term effect on the general group of youths. Hence, as Forneris and colleagues recently argued (Forneris, Camirè, & Trudel, 2012), the further an individual is away from the organizational aspects of sport, the less likely s/he is to be aware of the mission statements. In the current research, consistent with Krieger's (2012), these athletes demonstrated that they were not very aware of the cultural mission of the games. However, the use of narrative analysis provided a rich context to better understand their experiences, such as the extra program might be both perceived as a stressor and as a

distraction from thinking about the upcoming competition. For the athletes, to be a medal winner is the best outcome for YOG participation, preferably in the regular competitive events as they seem to be more prestigious than the innovative events. So far there are no indications that the IOC has given up their YOG dream where athletes are competing for cultural experiences and not only medals. Therefore, those in charge of these young participants should note that participation in the structured CEP may be perceived as an extra organizational stressor for the athletes with an extensive and hectic competitive schedule. In conclusion, future research is needed to examine if the IOC intentions to make this a different kind of competition will succeed both at an organizational level and all the way down to the athletes perceptions.

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Table 1. The curler's perception of stressors and subsequent coping when she is having a hectic competitive program due to several tournaments. Sports with a hectic program during YOG 2010 were curling and ice hockey.

Sub-categories of stressor	Illustrative Quotes of perceived stress	Athletes subsequent way of coping with the different sources of strain
Competitive stressors	"We had never played a competition together before, I was	Coach support (informational and emotional) was crucial due to the novelty of situation and lack of

	so nervous” “None of us had played mixed before, it is different” “I was so relieved the first day when I did not blow the others chances in the game” “We did have some strategic discussion, though they were solved quickly” “We were nervous about the level of the other curlers” “It was challenging when the Chinese coached talked Chinese to me”	experience <i>Emotional support</i> from team mates and families helped Use of <i>problem-focused</i> strategies helped them to improve their game during the tournament by discussion, positive thinking and increased effort <i>Problem focused</i> coping by using strategies such as communication and let it go  <i>Emotional support</i> by friendship inside the team and with all the other YOG curlers <i>Problem focused</i> strategies as she rebuild her confidence, learnt to relax and focused on task
Organizational stressors	“There were a lot of insecurity in the qualifying period in finding the last female player”  “The curtains were too thin to keep the bedroom dark” “The quality of bed was not good enough for ten days” “Different competitive schedules from their room-mates disturbed their sleep”	<i>Informational support</i> from the federation <i>Emotional support</i> from parents Tangible support by trying to solve the problem and find a fourth player  <i>Problem-focused</i> coping by acceptance, refocusing and helping each to make it both silent and dark

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Table 2. The biathlete's perception of stressors and subsequent coping when he is having a balanced competitive program. Sports with a balanced program during YOG 2010 were biathlon, speed skating, alpine skiing and cross-country skiing.

Sub-categories of stressor	Illustrative Quotes of perceived stress	Athletes subsequent way of coping with the different sources of strain
Competitive stressors	<p>"I put a lot of pressure upon myself, I really wanted to do well"</p> <p>"We had to wait for 5 days for the first competition, that was hard"</p>	<p><i>Informational and Emotional support</i> from Coaches, leaders and parents</p> <p><i>Tangible support</i> from the waxing team</p> <p><i>Problem-focused</i> by concentrate on task</p> <p><i>Problem-focused</i> by reframing the situation, prepare and take part in the CEP activities</p>
Organizational stressors	<p>"We spent almost the entire day at the venue and bussing was straining"</p> <p>"The late qualification and the criteria was discussed inside the different federations"</p> <p>"The doping control was a new experience"</p> <p>"Security was time consuming"</p> <p>"Must catch up with schoolwork when I get back home"</p> <p>"Lack of information made the new events into a stressful experience"</p>	<p><i>Informational support</i> from coaches</p> <p><i>Tangible support</i> from parents who gave they lift back to the Village</p> <p>Used several <i>problem focused</i> strategies such as acceptance of the rules and let it go</p> <p><i>Informational support</i> from team leaders</p> <p><i>Problem-focused</i> strategies as they realised that they have to learn with this things in order to make it as an elite athlete</p> <p><i>Avoidance coping</i> by not thinking about it</p> <p><i>Informational support</i> from coaches and team leaders</p>

Table 3. The luger's perception of stressors and subsequent coping when she is having a reduced competitive program. Sports with a reduced program during YOG 2010 were luge, freestyle, figure skating, bobsleigh, skeleton and ski jumping.

Sub-categories of stressor	Illustrative Quotes of perceived stress	Athletes subsequent way of coping with the different sources of strain
Competitive stressors	"I got so nervous, tried my best but ended up crashing"	<i>Coach support:</i> The coaches were spoken highly of because of the constant support with the competitions <i>Emotional support</i> from parents <i>Problem-focused coping</i> when reframing the experience and using positive thinking
Organizational stressors	"I have not had time to do my homework, so much have been going on" "The menu has been the same for ten days and the quality of the food could have been better" "The qualification was late and did not give us much time to prepare for the event" "Lining up for security was boring"	Avoidance coping by not thinking about it  <i>Tangible support</i> from parents – took them out to eat  <i>Emotional support</i> from parents and <i>Informational support</i> from coaches  <i>Problem-focused coping</i> by using positive thinking and reframing