

# The development of shared leadership in youth football



WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO THE PUBLIC DEFENCE IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
**DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES**

**GERCO VAN DALFSEN**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 8th 2020, at 13.00**

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## ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

Shared leadership development in sport is at the beginning of its theoretical (and practical) development. This thesis therefore has been positioned at the exploratory end of the spectrum and focusses on how to develop shared leadership in youth team sports. Although leadership studies are relatively new as an academic discipline, leadership as a topic has been studied for thousands of years (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling & Taylor, 2011). Several theories were developed and various approaches to leadership can be identified with sometimes a focus on the leader or follower, the interactive process between them, and/or the influence of the context. Recent leadership theory shifted the focus from the leader to leadership, emphasising the shared social process to which many people contribute (Pearce & Conger, 2003). While thousands of studies have been conducted on leadership delivered by adults, leadership by youth has gained less attention as theoretical or research subject and therefore remains an underexplored topic in the broader leadership literature. This also applies to the development of leadership in the context of sport and physical activity in general and the development of shared leadership in particular. Therefore the purpose of this thesis is to explore how shared leadership can be developed in youth team sport, and within competitive youth football in particular.

The first study focussed on the development of shared leadership as a fundamental concept in youth team sport. Shared leadership according to Van Vugt & Ahuja (2011) concerns a human phenomenon for complex cooperation as a response to the need for collective action. Based on literature review, the P-model of Hopman and Van den Berg (2015) was adapted and the different determinants of how to develop youth leadership and shared leadership were identified. To develop shared leadership in youth sport it matters to approach leadership holistically by taking the 5 Ps (precondition, person, process, position and purpose) and its context into consideration simultaneously. The second study analysed natural leadership as an early form of shared leadership in a real sporting context. Research was conducted into the practical value of the Evolutionary Leadership Theory (ELT) of Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011) at the micro (team) level in youth football. Making use of an exploratory factor analysis the study results delivered three rather than the six different leadership factors that make up the instrument of Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011). The factors were

labelled as 'the communicating leader', 'the resourceful leader', and 'the competitive leader'. In the third study, an instrument to measure shared leadership in youth elite football teams was developed. Confirmatory factor analysis delivered three factors: 'steering', 'coaching' and 'intervening', and the researchers named the scale the 'Youth Athlete Shared Leadership' (YASL) in football. Confirmatory factor analysis delivered three factors: 'steering', 'coaching' and 'intervening', and the researchers named the scale the 'Youth Athlete Shared Leadership' (YASL) in football. Theoretically, this study contributed to closing the gap regarding the identification of reliable and valid measures to assess shared leadership in sport. Practically this PhD contributed to providing coaches and team members insights into which persons can be granted the leadership position. The fourth study explored football coaches' views on how to develop shared leadership capacity in youth team sport. Because of its explorative character with a selective sample of ten respondents, this qualitative study did not deliver outcomes that should be generalised. Using coaches' views will help to understand current knowledge about how youth leadership can be activated in the context of a football club. Based on the results of the study it can be argued that next to the micro-level of team sport also the meso-, and -macro level should be taken into account.

This doctoral research proposes shared leadership as a fundamental concept for youth leadership development. It encompasses of individual-, distributed-, and shared leadership styles with an emphasis on the social constructivist approach. Shared leadership development in youth sport hereby requires a holistic perspective taking the 5-Ps (precondition, purpose(s), position, process, and person(s)) into account.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Gerco van Daltsen worked as a PE teacher in The Netherlands and gained a master degree in sport management at Northumbria university, United Kingdom. Currently he is working as a senior lecturer at the Institute for Sport Studies and as a researcher for the knowledge centre for Sport Science at Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, The Netherlands. His areas of specialisation are entrepreneurship, strategic sport management and leadership development.