ABSTRACT

Early specialization (Ericsson, et al., 1993) and the DMSP (Cote, 1999) are two highly debated approaches to the development of elite sport performance. More research is needed to determine the types of practice that aid in the development of elite sport performance. Further, studies describing the practice and competition histories of high school baseball players are needed to determine the role of early specialization and non-specialization in the development of baseball players between the ages of 14 and 18. Two studies were conducted. The purpose of the first study was to determine whether predictions from the theory of deliberate practice (early specialization, Ericsson, et al., 1993) or the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (sampling a variety of sports, Cote, 1999) more accurately described the practice history of high school baseball players. Participants (n=51) began at an early age (5) and were playing year round for multiple baseball teams by age 10. In addition, total accumulated hours of practice for these high school players were similar to the hours for a different sample of high school players (Cathey, 2010). After 10 years involvement (between the ages of 5 and 14), players had accumulated an average of 3,200 practice hours. Similar patterns of practice and early engagement maybe necessary to become a successful high school baseball player. Results supported a trend toward early specialization and accumulation of deliberate practice (Ericsson, et al., 1993).

The purpose of the second study was to describe the knowledge structures of high school players. Interviews on five baseball defensive situations were conducted with 24 high school baseball players. Player responses were transcribed and analyzed for knowledge content. Results indicated high school players have more accurate and advanced knowledge structures than younger players. The high school players in this study reported practicing more advanced tactics
at early ages. Future research is needed to determine what types of interventions and practice activities can best facilitate tactical development in these age groups.