



Selections to top-level sport teams

Annika Johansson

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Pedagogiska institutionen

901 87 Umeå

Telefon 090-786 50 00

www.umu.se

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to increase the knowledge of selections of athletes to top-level sport teams. Selections in alpine skiing and soccer were investigated and modern validity theory was used as the theoretical framework. Key issues concerned the goals and criteria involved in the selection processes, how the processes were performed and notions from the selectors (coaches) about the outcomes and consequences of the selections. The study was based on 14 semi-structured interviews with top-level coaches (selectors) highly involved in the selection processes in the individual sport of alpine skiing (national teams) and in the team sport of soccer (club teams/national team). The results show great differences in the definitions of the selection criteria among the teams. The selection criteria ranged from very well-defined to very vague. This has implications for the validity of the selections with regard to both what is really used as the grounds for the selections and how stable those grounds are. Some of the coaches were convinced that clearly defined criteria are a necessity for good selections, while others were not. There were some disparities between the club and federation boards and the coaches as regards both the level and the types of goals and ideas for the selections. From a validity standpoint this is problematic, as there might then be different kinds of goals that the selection method has to be adapted to. The selection decisions were mostly a result of the coaches' discussions with each other. In some teams this was a fairly subjective process, and in other teams ranking lists played an important role in the decisions. Quite a few coaches from both sports said that they would choose an athlete with good behaviour and favourable personality over an athlete with better sports skills, if the system allowed for such alternatives. All coaches emphasised the importance of the selection criteria being formulated in such a way that they gave the coaches opportunities to influence the judgements themselves. All coaches stated that their eyes and their feelings were their most valuable selection tool. When it comes to the outcome and the consequences of the selections, the importance of the selections was experienced as very important. To be selected to a national team in skiing was by some coaches described as a career-changing event, whereas the soccer coaches described the selections in soccer to be very important although not crucial for the athletes' career. For the coaches it was said to be of utmost importance to select a successful team, as they otherwise could lose both their job and their respect. Most of the skiing coaches thought they selected the "right" skier, even if the athletes did not always achieve the expected results, while all the soccer coaches thought that they sometimes had selected the "wrong" player. Overall the results show that there are validity issues to be considered in the selection processes. It was also shown that many of the coaches regard the selection process as rather difficult and the evaluation of the process as challenging. The fact the coaches do not have any education concerning selections and how to deal with factors affecting the selections means that they have to figure out strategies for dealing with these complex situations.

Keywords: selections in sports, predictions of sport performance, assessment of sport performance, consequences of selections

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INTRODUCTION

In sports and especially competitive sports there are a number of measurements and judgements involved. One type of judgements in the sports world is the ones involved in the decisions concerning which athletes will be selected to teams and competitions. Judgements that might lead to quite a lot of discussions among coaches, parents, athletes, the media and other involved parties. What the athletes have to perform to be selected and the fairness in the selection process are often the subjects of discussion. At all levels discussions of sport selections take place and decisions about which athletes will be selected have to be made. In teams involving children, the selections might be based on a rotation system by which everyone will be able to participate. At the elite level, top results and top performances are expected and there the task is to select the athlete that can perform this. Many factors have to be considered when selections to sport teams are made and different ways are used to select athletes. With the aim of increasing the knowledge and understanding of selections in sports, this study focuses on the selection processes in some sport teams at the elite level. Teams at the elite level are studied, as the core of the activities at this level is to produce good results, which means that it is critical to select the “right” athlete for this. This means that the quality of the selections is of importance. The selectors (federations, coaches and others responsible for the selections) at this level usually have long experience of selections and their knowledge and perceptions are therefore valuable in understanding the selections. The concept of validity is in this study used as the theoretical framework and as a systematic tool when studying the different parts within the selection process.

Studying the selection process in sports and what the selectors base the selections on is interesting from many different perspectives. It is something that matters to the individual athlete, but it can also be seen in a wider perspective where the credibility and understanding of the selections in the sports world are in focus. For the elite athletes who spend a considerable amount of time on their sport, and often have their sport career as their profession, team selections can play a major role in their lives. Being selected into a team might have a big impact on the athlete as regards opportunities for training and competing as well as for getting good coaching, sponsors, etc. For the selectors at the elite level the selections can also be of major personal importance. Selecting athletes who produce good results and are successful is often strongly connected with the selector doing a good job. Selecting a team that performs good results might lead to continuous employment and respect

for the selector. If the selected athletes end up performing bad results this might instead be related to the selector performing a bad job and lead to low respect for the selector's ability. In the worst cases the selectors might even lose their jobs if the athletes' results are bad. Selecting athletes who perform well can be related to future financial opportunities such as sponsor contracts and the like. Chances connected with greater financial opportunities for training, coaching and selections of new athletes. Selecting athletes that perform well is therefore important to those involved but also for the sport's credibility. Good performances by teams and athletes can also be connected with increased market value for the city or the country the team represents.

Studying selection criteria and the selection process involves looking for knowledge of what factors and abilities are seen as the crucial ones in the selections and how these are of importance in the selection process. When the best performance is planned to happen is also of importance for the selections. What factors are regarded as the critical ones in selections to sports teams can probably be quite different depending on the nature of the sport. To get a wide perspective of selections and the factors of importance for them, two sports with different characteristics are included in this study. The team sport soccer, where the athletes are dependent on each other in the performance and the individual sport alpine skiing, where the athletes perform individually, are studied. In soccer the majority of the teams studied are club teams and in skiing the teams studied are national teams.

In soccer the team's performance has to do with many factors. Besides the soccer skills the cooperation between the athletes and the opponents is also of importance in the selections. This means that many factors have to be considered and valued against one another in soccer. As alpine skiing is an individual sport, it is the individual performance and skills involved in performing the sport that are of importance. In alpine skiing the skier is only indirectly dependent on the team members or opponents. In alpine skiing the competition tour consist of many competitions in a row and both the competitions and the camps are often far away. The considerable time that for this reason the athletes have to spend together might indicate that cooperation skills could be valued even if it is an individual sport. Previous results are often seen as a predictor of future performances. The results and ranking lists in alpine skiing provide a picture of the athletes' order of precedence and the athletes' results are hence fairly easy to value. In soccer the individual performance of the players is harder to measure, as the result in soccer is a measurement of the team's performance, and not only of individual players' performances. The individual players' performances are dependent in soccer both on how they play themselves and also on how their team-mates play, who the opponents are and in what position they play. How many athletes a team can consist of is another crucial factor in the selections. In soccer the team that

is playing always consists of 11 players on the field, but the total number of athletes in the squad can include up to around 25 players. In skiing the numbers of athletes that are allowed to compete depends of how many competition spots the country has in this discipline. This in its turn has to do with the athletes' former results. This number can vary from season to season.

A critical prerequisite in team selections is the financial factor. A team's budget will be a strong predictor of the number of athletes a selector can include in a team. Money from corporate and some times private sponsors, governments, and organisations like for instance Olympic Committees makes up the budget for the teams. The financial situation of the club and federation is related to the teams' and athletes' results and market value. It can also be related to the local and national economy, which affects the level of both sponsoring and other kinds of contributions. How an athlete's abilities are related to a monetary value can be discussed. Still, the fact is that economy is an inevitable determinant for the opportunities for clubs and federations to select the athletes they want. Both the numbers of athletes and which athletes it is possible to select are determined by the financial frames. The price of a soccer player varies depending on the player's former merits, the player's market value and the former club belonging. This means that the economic frames decide how many but also which players the club can afford. The selectors therefore have to value not only the skills of the players but also the skills in comparison to the price of the players. In the national teams the situation is a bit different. In skiing it is the costs for entry fees, lodging, food, travels and for some team health insurance that decide how many athletes there can be on the team. The contextual frames including the economic frames are essential factors when selections to sport teams are discussed. In this study the economic variables are of importance but they are not in focus. Here it is the reasoning about the selection criteria and the way of working with the selections that are in focus. Economic frames and factors are described here as one of many factors that are critical for the selections.

Selections to sport teams are a subject that raises many questions. Almost daily selections to top teams are discussed and debated in the media but also among athletes, coaches and the public interested in sport. These discussions are often based very much on personal feelings and are to different degrees based on facts. The aim here is to study and discuss selections and to provide knowledge about the selections from a scientific perspective. It is to be hoped that this study will result in further discussions and studies about what selections in the world of sport are based on and how the selections are made.

Outline of this study

This study begins with a review of previous research that is connected to selections to sport teams. This is followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework used in the study and leads up to the purpose of the study. Following this is a chapter where the data collecting methods, the selections of sports and informants and the data analysis are discussed. After this the results of the empirical data are presented and analysed. Finally, the study is ended with a discussion where conclusions and reflections are discussed with the research questions as the point of departure.

I. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Selections in sport

In sport, selection processes occur daily from the beginner level when children are selected into different training groups depending on age, gender, skills, geographic location, etc. For a coach at the elite level, judgements and decisions concerning the athletes' capacity, performances, well-being, results and injuries are factors that might play a role in the selections. In the search for literature about how to predict future performance and how to select athletes to teams, many of the articles found were articles related to talent identification and talent programs. There are some similarities between talent identification and selections to top-level teams but there are also some differences that should be recognised. In the search for talented athletes the main purpose is to identify young athletes that have a future potential to develop and reach successful performances. In the selections of athletes to top-level sport teams and competitions, the athletes who are going to be selected might be older but also more ready to perform top results right away. This is of course not the whole truth. Some athletes (that might very well be young) are selected to a top-level team to develop within the team and to be ready to perform well in some years. When talent identification programs are made at earlier stages in an athlete's career, questions about the interest of the child in comparison to the interest of the parent and the coach, financial opportunities, and how mature the child is are questions to consider. In selections to the national teams the athletes have often been in the sport for quite some time and have an understanding of what the sport is all about and what efforts and sacrifices have to be made to reach the top. It is of importance to point out that the discussions about previous performances as a tool for measuring future success at the elite level should not be confused with the performances that athletes made at a young age. Performing well at younger ages is not such a good indicator of future success as developmental capacity and developmental opportunities seem more important than the actual results at younger ages (Abbott & Collins, 2004). Even if there are quite a lot of differences between the selection process in a top-level team and talent identification and talent development for younger athletes, the latter should not be ignored when studying the selection process within sports. Similarities between talent identification and team selection might play a role in the selection process and the determination of the selection criteria.

Talent identification and talent identification programs

Talent identification programs play a big role in the search for young promising athletes. Still, a great deal of the research literature concerning talent identification is concerned with discussions about difficulties in being able to predict performances. In the 60s and 70s the research was trying to find stable characteristics that could differentiate athletes. No innate or genetic profile could be identified and the current research approach is orientated more towards studying individual interactive processes (Abbot & Collins, 2004; Serpa, 2008). Many different factors have to be considered when talent identification is made and it seems hard to find any unique characteristic that determines future success (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Abbot & Collins 2004). Still, factors related to anthropometric (refers to the study of the history of height), physiological and skill attributes for example often seem to be factors of major importance in different talent identification programs (Hoare & Warr, 2000; Reilly, Bangsbo & Franks, 2000; Philippaerts, Vaeyens, Janssens, Van Renterghem, Matthys, Craen, Bourgois, Vrijens, Beunen & Malina, 2006; Gabbett, Georgieff & Domrow, 2007; Sherar, Baxter-Jones, Faulkner & Russell, 2007). Because of the impact these factors are given and differences in young athletes' maturation levels, this often favours athletes born early in the respective sport's selection year. Birth date therefore seems to have a significant role in talent identifications (Sherar et al., 2007). This has become so evident that in research it is called the "relative age effect" (season of birth bias). Interesting in relation to this is a study looking at the relative age effect on youth soccer players who were considered by the US Development Program, where the results showed that there was a strong relative age effect among the male players but that among the females this effect was only marginal (Vincent & Glamser, 2006).

The research on talent identification has for a long time been unidimensional instead of multidimensional, even though most practitioners and researchers believe sporting feats are the results of a combination of many factors such as physiological, physical, psychological, behavioural and social factors. Multidimensional and dynamic talent identification with a focus on developmental aspects such as mental behaviours and transferable skills should therefore be seen as more important than just the early identification of talents. Later research also seems to go in for more multidimensional studies and talent is also seen as a more dynamic concept than before (Abbott & Collins, 2004). According to Morris (2000) and Abbott and Collins (2004), many talent identifications and development models have little emphasis on psychological factors. Humara (2000) discusses the coaches as experts on identifying the physical characteristics needed for success, but thinks that they do not have sufficient psychological skills to validate the psychological factors that are also of importance in the selections.

The psychological factors are valued in the practical field of soccer but in talent identifications this part is still in its infancy. Coaches and administrators consider psychological issues but they do not use any objective or systematic subjective ways to measure or assess those factors (Morris, 2000). From the 1950s to the 1970s studies to identify personality characteristics of successful athletes were carried through but no personality profiles could be established. Rather it seems that the use of certain psychological skills like for instance goal setting has been successful determinants of performance. While physical characteristics have been able to explain differences between athletes, only psychological factors seem to be able to explain the maintained success (Abbott & Collins, 2004).

One psychological factor that in the last decade seems to have attracted increased interest in studies concerning performance is the research on perfectionism and its effects on sport performances. There is a discussion among researchers of whether striving for perfection will enhance or undermine performance (Bieling, Israeli & Antony, 2004; Stoll, Lau & Stoeber, 2008). Perfectionism can have different forms and affect the athletes very differently. Perfectionism can be very positive for the athlete who is able to use the perfectionism to take the performances a step further. If the perfectionism is instead connected to stress and fear of not succeeding, the perfectionism can instead be very negative for the athlete. How perfectionism is dealt with is also discussed in relation to burnout in sports (Lemyre, Hall, & Roberts, 2008). Serpa and Barrerios (2008) studied perfectionism in young Portuguese elite soccer players with young talents and non-talents in two age groups. They concluded that the talented players did have a higher adjusted and lower negative perfectionism than the non-talented players.

The time period of tryouts for talent identification programs is to be considered. If the selections are made only on one or a few occasions, there is a risk that the athlete does not have enough opportunities for showing his or her true talents well enough. In some research a time period for being able to identify talent and make good assessments is suggested to be around two to three months (Hoare & Warr, 2000), while in some talent programs a two-day tryout is judged as fair assessment time (Mutch, 2001). To be able to develop and reach full potential, it is important to have opportunities for development. Abbott and Collins (2004) argues that it might be as important to identify over time what factors limit talent development as it is to identify the talents.

There is an interesting discussion in the research on talent versus deliberate practice. The 10-year rule (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996) indicates that someone who is trying to perform at world-class level in any field must endure and take part in deliberate practice in the field for a period of at least 10 years. For practice to be defined as deliberate practice some conditions must be met. It has to be practice of a well-defined task on an appropriate level for the individual.

Informative feedback should be available and there should also be opportunities for repetition and correction of errors. Howe (1999) thinks that the person that we perceive as a genius is the result of *“doggedness, persistence, the capacity for fierce and sustained concentration, as well as intense curiosity”* (p. 205). He has studied a number of geniuses and believes that many geniuses disclaim that they have superior intelligence but maintain that they possess abilities to work hard and be curious. According to this kind of research, everyone who is in a good environment and gets sufficient training for a long time should then be able to be successful in what they have been practicing.

In the Eastern European countries systematic databases of personal and performance variables together with formal monitoring of progress and development were used in the searches for talent (Kluka, 2008). These systems were used mainly for individual sports. According to Kluka (2008), the most systematic models for talent identification in sports were probably the models in the former East Germany. In these programs the young athletes who showed talent in their sport also needed to be healthy and have no medical anomalies, have psychological and physiological capabilities for hard training but also maintain good academic achievement. For the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia adopted some elements from that talent identification approach when they implemented a talent search program. This talent identification and the talent development programs were mostly targeted at individual sports such as rowing, cycling, swimming and track running. Some of those models for individual talent identification programs were experimentally applied to work for talent identification and development in the team sport soccer but the result of this did not manage to prove this talent identification to be the perfect way of selecting soccer players (Kluka, 2008). In a study by Hoare and Warr (2000), a model to identify and develop potentially talented female soccer players in Australia was tested. The program included a selection of 17 girls aged 15-19, who took part in a 12-month talent development programme. The programme was successful in that it demonstrated that anthropometric, physical and skill attributes made it possible to select potentially successful female soccer players. Some of the goals of this program were reached but the final goal that some of the athletes should make the national team was never reached. According to the researchers the program was seen as useful but should not be seen as the only way to select players. According to them it should rather be seen as an additional way to support existing programs and procedures (Hoare & Warr, 2000).

Predicting performance in sports

Different ways of predicting who will perform the best results in the future are used when selecting athletes to teams in the sports world. In research articles some of these methods and their relevance are discussed. One selection tool that

is used in the world of sport is previous performance and previous results. In both Boulrier and Stekler (1999) and in Trewin, Hopkins and Pyne (2004), the results show that rankings are good predictors for outcome in performance. In Trewin et al. (2004) the authors investigated the common belief of leading swimming coaches “that swimmers need to be ranked in the top ten in the world to be able to have a realistic chance of an Olympic or World Championship medal”. When investigating the relationship between world ranking and Olympic performance in swimming their results supported the coaches’ beliefs showing that 87% of the Olympic medallists in the 2002 Olympics had a top 10 world ranking prior to the Olympic Games.

In individual sports the results are visible and speak for themselves even if the results are not always regarded as a fair predictor of who is the best athlete (Johansson, 2001). In team sports it might be complex to find good measurable variables to use if looking at previous results as a factor to predict future performance. In team sports the results show which team is the best but not which players in the team who made the best performance. If previous results are to be a useful tool for predicting performance, it is of utmost importance that the right things are measured and looked at in the selection process. In team sports there are often a lot of statistics gathered during a game, statistics that could be used as predictive tools if they are valid for the performance expected in the future, in the sense that they measure what is important behaviour for different categories of players. As an example, it is important to score goals for a player in an offensive position in a team and statistics concerning the number of scored goals and assists etc. could therefore be useful statistics for that position. At the same time this kind of statistics would be a poor predictor of success for a goal-keeper. For some categories of players there might be more useful measurable statistics recorded, than for other players where more subjective measured variables might be a better predictor of future success. As a team player’s performance is dependent on the other players’ performance, the validity of statistical measurements has to be considered.

In a study of 740 players in the national Hockey League, Voyer and Wright (1998) attempted to determine which factors predicted performance in the National Hockey League. The studied variables mostly focused on previous playing experiences such as goals scored per game in a regular season junior career; assists per regular season game in junior hockey; points scored per regular season game in junior hockey; goals scored per game in junior playoff games, etc. but also variables such as entry draft rank; current height; and, current weight. Two dependent variables were then used to estimate the NHL performance; points scored per regular season game in career, and points per playoff game in career. According to their research the most important variable for predicting performance both in NHL regular seasons and in playoffs is the points scored per game by players in the regular season junior hockey and in

junior playoff games. Weight did not appear to be exceptionally important and entry draft rank did not at all seem to be an important factor in predicting performance in the NHL. These writers also point out the difficulties in measuring mostly factors of offensive ability as a predictor for performance, as defensive-oriented players like defensive forwards, defence men and goalkeepers will not fairly benefit from looking only at offensive statistics. They suggest that variables like "finished checks", "hits", "take-aways", and "plus/minus" should maybe be looked at to make a more fair and valid way to predict performance for all kinds of players in a team.

Many ways to predict team selections exist and in an article about sport league drafts Fry, Lundberg and Ohlmann (2007) model a decision-making process for player selection drafts. The model suggests that team selection is based on a combination of the player's estimated value, the value of the other players currently available, and the team's need at each position. As they felt that this was not enough, they also implemented a model with a spreadsheet-based decision support system to adjust it better to varied conditions. With perfect information about opposing teams' selection strategies, they believe their method is better than competing strategies. If they lack good information about other teams they do not believe their strategy will dominate but still be better than average strategies.

Skilled soccer players have good perceptual skills (referring to them being able to control the eye movement patterns towards important sources of information during the game) according to a study by Williams (2000). Due to this, perceptual skills can be seen to play a role when identifying future elite players in soccer. In a study of elite junior Australian footballers,¹ overall player development and players who were able to fulfil a range of positions appeared to be better selections than position specific players (Veale, Pearce, Koehn & Carlson 2008).

In top-level sports it is important to make the best results at specific events such as playoffs, finals, World Championships, Olympic Games and other major competitions. To have the best team ready for those main events might affect the way teams are selected. There is a need for balance between reaching the short-term and long-term goals, between winning games and competitions and development of athletes. To sometimes sacrifice short-term victories for the benefit of long-term goals is important for all levels of athletic competition (Naylor, 2006). This might therefore influence the selections. Letting other athletes than the best ones play and compete can in the long run lead to more victories and more success for the team, even if it might cost a victory in the

¹ Australian soccer here refers to Australian rule soccer where two opposing teams of 18 players play outside on an oval-shaped grass field. The ball used in Australian rule soccer is in the shape of a prolate spheroid.

short run. Even at the elite level the learning and development process is a key to future success. The balance between “coaching to win” and “coaching for learning” is a key factor for a coach to consider (Naylor, 2006).

The number of athletes available for selections might play a role in the final selection outcome. Gelade and Dobson (2007) show that 70 percent of the variance in international team ratings in soccer is dependent on factors such as the number of men who regularly play soccer, the length of its soccer tradition, the wealth of its population, the percentage of expatriate players in the national team and climate conditions.

The Olympic Games are often considered the most prestigious sport event in the world, especially in the eyes of the media, even though the Olympic Games are just one competition in comparison to a World Cup or other competition series reaching over a longer period. If the best athlete is the one who wins the Olympics, and is the best athlete that day, or if the athlete who wins a cup or tournament over a longer time period is the best athlete can be discussed. Nevertheless, the Olympic Games have tremendous importance for athletes, coaches and officials. If everyone has a fair chance to win can be discussed from various points of view. Different nations as well as different groups in the nations and different sports have different opportunities for reaching success, which is dependent on factors such as economic, organisational, social and knowledge factors. It has been discussed whether bigger countries with more athletes to choose from have greater opportunities for winning medals, but it has been shown that the population rate is not sufficient to explain the number of Olympic medals. GDP (gross domestic product, a measure of national income and output for a given country's economy) per capita is instead the best single predictor for the number of Olympic medals (Bernard & Busse, 2004). The host nation also has a notable increase in medals estimated to 1.8% of the medals beyond the ones predicted in the GDP quota.

Tipsters' ability

In some articles the possibilities for so called tipsters to predict and foresee performances are discussed. In an investigation of 1694 English soccer league games, the result showed that only one of the three tipsters seemed to use the information that was relevant for the games' outcomes in a successful way (Forrest & Simmons, 2000). The tipsters' success rates are higher than random forecasting methods like for example predicting wins for a home team or the like. Still, the expertise they claim to give is very limited (Forrest & Simmons, 2000). Andersson, Edman and Ekman (2005) discussed the prediction of performance through letting experts and non-experts forecast the results of the World Cup in soccer 2002. Their study points towards the same results as the one above and shows that the expert tipsters have limited forecasting ability.

This study supported the hypothesis that sport experts and non-experts forecast the World Cup in soccer equally well. They predicted the results better than chance but none of them outperformed the prediction rule based on former results. This prediction rule means that the team in a better position in the World ranking would win over a team lower on the ranking list. In research about predicting sporting events, Boulier and Stekler (1999) studied if rankings were good predictors of outcome in sports. They studied basketball tournaments and tennis games and developed a model that used rankings to predict the probability of which athlete would defeat the other. A significant relationship between the probability of winning and the difference of ranking was found.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the selections of athletes to sport teams and competitions, many decisions are made and many factors are considered. Those selection procedures include judgements and measurements of different kinds and different quality. From a scientific perspective, evaluation of measurements and judgements is often determined by the theoretical concepts of validity and reliability. Reliability, which earlier was treated as a separate construct, is here to be regarded as an integrated part of the evolved construct validity concept, as reliability is to be treated as a necessary condition for validity. The quality of the selections is discussed by looking at validity issues in the selection process. Simplified validity is concerned with the relevance and utility of the measurement process and its outcomes, and reliability is concerned with the accuracy and consistency of the procedures and their outcomes. As the purpose is to increase the understanding of selection processes in sport and the usefulness, the quality and the fairness of these processes are of importance these concepts are regarded as suitable and used as the theoretical points of departure. The concept of validity has over time gone from a fairly narrow and evidence-based concept to a much broader concept. Earlier validation had to do only with the test instrument itself but it has developed to also involve the meaning and the consequences of the judgements and measurements. The following statement from Cronbach (1971) can be seen as a milestone in the validity literature and describes the shift of focus in the development of the validity concept: *“One validates, not a test, but an interpretation of data arising from a specified procedure”* (p.447).

Samuel Messick's validity model called *“facets of validity”* (1989) is to be seen as a major contribution to the developed concept of validity. To the traditional test score meaning he added test relevance, values, and social consequences to be taken into consideration. As regards the selection process, this means that it is not only the selection method that is of interest but also the outcome, utility and consequences of the method used. Messick's model made it possible to see validity in a different perspective than before, but it was also seen as a rather challenging way of investigating and understanding validity. It focused on two aspects of validity, the first one being the measure itself and the interpretation of the construct together with the relevance and utility of the measurement, and the second one being the consequences studied through values of the measurements and the social consequences. In the 1980s Shepard and other researchers such as Chronbach and Meel, Anastasi, Landy and

Messick debated the content of the developed modern validity concept (Shepard, 1993). Shepard argued that this multifaceted way of evaluating validity through Messick's model was never going to reach as far as to the consequences. After this the discussions about the validity concept seem to have calmed down, but whether a consensus about the concept is reached is still debated.

A fairly new research area connected to validity issues in selections is research on applicants' reactions to selection procedures. How applicants view the selection process has become an issue of greater interest, both among organisations and among researchers in the field of recruitment and organisational justice. This has resulted in expansion of research in this field (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). In selections to sports teams the athletes' reactions and how the athletes are dealt with are of interest here, as this might affect the total validity of the selections. How the applicant perceives the fairness of the selections is seen to be central here, and this is often studied through the concepts of distributive and procedural justice (Gilliland, 1993).

Reliability issues are, as mentioned, closely connected to the overall validity of a measurement or a judgement and is to be integrated when validations are made. Reliability has to do with the "consistency" and "repeatability" of the measurement or judgements. This means that for a high degree of reliability to exist, the measuring procedures are so precisely developed that the results will be the same irrespective of who measures or judges the procedures. It also means that the measuring procedure will be so well developed that it will give the same result in repeated measures (if it is assumed that what is being measured is not something that is supposed to be changing). High reliability in team selections has partly to do with the consistency of the different selectors' choices, if there is more than one person responsible for the selections. If all selectors unanimously and independently of one another were to select the same athletes, the reliability of the selection would be high (Morrow, Jackson, Disch & Mood, 2005). It is stated that the more consistent repeated results of a measuring procedure are, the higher is the reliability of the procedure (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). In a team selection where the athletes' abilities are supposed to be changing and it is different athletes that are evaluated, this way of looking at reliability has its limitations. The opportunities for reaching high reliability in selections are connected with the design of the selection methods and with the extent to which the selections are influenced by possible errors of measurements. Factors of importance for the reliability of the selections are the stability and clarity of the selection criteria, the experiences of the selectors, and the length and time of the selections. Possible errors of measurements might be external influences and external pressure. If the athletes are selected for a long time (as for a season), a longer selection period should for example account for

more reliable selections. The longer time period would then help to increase the chances of avoiding errors caused by situational factors.

The measurements and judgements included in the selection process can be numerous and it is often a rather complex process with many different steps involved. In studying this complex process the evolved and broadened validity concept provides a systematic and structured way to understand the selection process.

The different steps in the research process

Studying the selections involves looking into the different parts of the selection process. To clarify and define what the involved selectors see as the goals for the selections will therefore be a starting point in the research procedure and a basic condition for validity discussions. Getting knowledge of the criteria or guidelines that are the basis of the selections is a key part of the understanding of what abilities and factors the selectors see as the most important ones. There might be some difficulties involved in this, as it is not sure that all selections even at the top level are in accord with very defined and explicit criteria. This might be related to many factors, but difficulties of finding satisfying ways of measuring some of the achievements might play a role here. Another difficulty is the fact that it is not possible to compare the future results of the selected athletes with those of the ones that were not selected. The conditions for the athletes that are selected and the ones who are not might be too different for a comparison to make any sense. The selection process, referring to the whole process from the development of the criteria to who are responsible and involved, to how the process is performed is interesting from a validity perspective. Who makes the selections as well as the stability and consistency of the process has to do with reliability and is of importance for the validity of the selections. Possible errors of measurements, or as in this case, errors in the judgements are of interest. The selectors' perceptions of external pressure and difficulties in the selections play a role in understanding what kind of errors there are, but also in getting an understanding of how this is handled. How the athletes are dealt with in the selection process, what kind of knowledge they have about the selections together with how they get the information about the selections is also of interest and related to the research area of applicants' perceptions. How fair or unfair they perceive the selections to be might influence their actual performances and have effects on the total selections. In the modern validity concept the outcome of the selections and the consequences of the selections are of interest and will also be studied. This is often seen as a difficult part and the aim is here to understand this through the selectors' perceptions. In discussions about the outcome, the relevance and utility of the selections will be related to an understanding of the context of competitive sport with all its rules and regulations.

Below the research process for this study is illustrated to give a visible picture of the different steps in the process. These steps, which are based on modern validity theory, will be the core of this study.

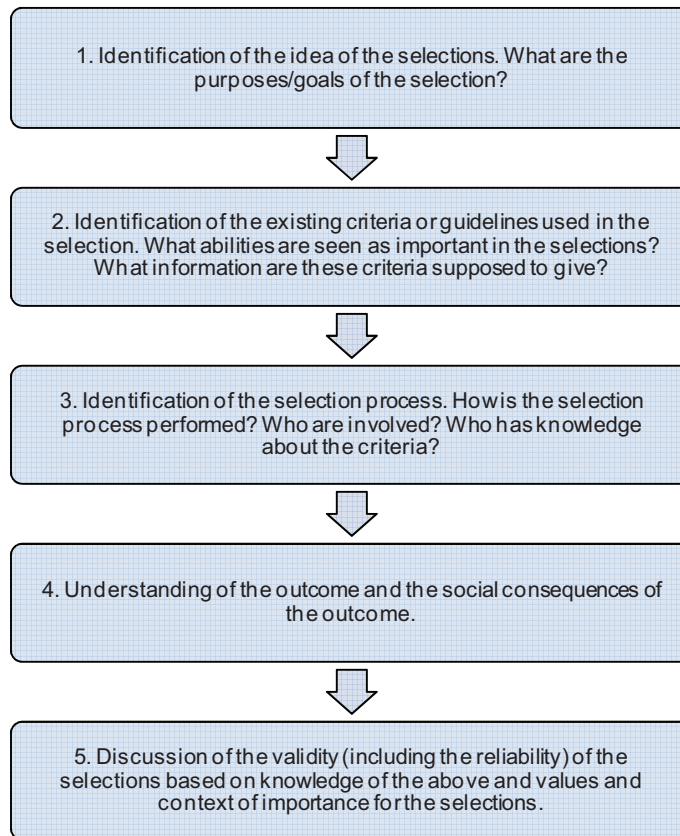


Figure 1. The steps in the research process

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge of selections of individuals to top-level sport teams. The focus will be on the selections in one individual sport, alpine skiing, and in one team sport, soccer. These processes will also be analysed from a validity perspective.

To fulfil this purpose the following key questions were formulated and organised into four groups:

- What are the goals and the criteria or grounds for the selections? What factors are of importance in the selections? How do the criteria correspond to the goals for the selections?
- How is the process of selections in these two sports performed? Who are involved? Who are responsible? Are there other factors than the ones in the criteria/grounds that might influence the selections? Have there been any changes in the selection process lately?
- How are the athletes considered in the selection process? Are the criteria and grounds for the selections shared with the athletes? How much do the athletes know about the selections and the reasons for them? How do the coaches perceive the athletes' reactions to team selections?
- What are the notions of the outcome and consequences of the selections for the athletes and coaches involved?

IV. METHOD

The sports and the selections of the sports

To understand selections to sports teams, selections both in team sports and in individual sports were of interest. Team sports will be seen here as sports that involve competition between teams of players. In a team sport the athletes interact with and are dependent on one another's performance. Individual sports are sports where the athletes compete individually, either against other athletes, for example running a 100-metre race. It can also be an individual performance where the athlete receives a score, time, length or similar measure, for example alpine skiing or long jumping. In an individual sport the athletes can also be organised in teams like national teams or regional teams, but here the athletes' performances are not dependent on the other members. Even if the athletes in individual sports are not dependent on one another's performance, individual athletes also interact with one another to some degree. Often they interact through telling one another about things like for instance the current snow conditions, obstacles, or as in cycling where the team-mates take turns in setting the pace. The coherence of the team in a team sport and the ability to match athletes in the best way will be factors that have a significant impact on a team player's performance. In individual sports the team might also have a significant importance for the individual athlete. In some sports like alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, freestyle skiing, where the athletes travel together during long parts of the year, the performances can probably not be unaffected by the team coherence. Selecting athletes to teams in team sports and teams in individual sports might involve different factors. As the purpose of this study was to increase the knowledge of selections to sport teams from a wide perspective, both a team sport and an individual sport were chosen. I also wanted to look at well-recognised sports that have well-developed competition programs at all levels. I wanted to study sports that are recognised as Olympic sports and have many contenders and public interest in many countries, as I believe this means that selection issues are important in those sports. With regard to the above factors my choices of sports became alpine skiing and soccer. One individual and one team sport that both have well-developed competition programs with competitions and games for both genders at all levels. Both of these sports are also spread and recognised over big parts of the world.

Alpine skiing is a sport consisting of different disciplines in ski racing. The disciplines in the FIS² World Cup series, FIS Alpine World Ski Championships and at the Olympic Winter Games include five events: downhill, super G, giant slalom, slalom and combined events. In all the disciplines there are competitions for both men and women. The rules for men and women are the same but the courses are set differently and they compete in separate classes.

The competition format is normally individual races, and the best skier is the skier with the fastest time from the top to the bottom of the course. There are sometimes competitions with additional formats than the above common ones, and an exception is the team event³ where the individual races are of importance for the whole team. For all races time is measured to 0.01 seconds and ties are permitted. Gates are used when setting the courses and gatekeepers control that each skier passes the gates in a correct way. Video uptakes are also used to control that the gates are passed correctly. There are rules for the equipment and equipment controls are made to make sure that skis, bindings, ski boots, suits, etc. follow the required rules (International ski federation, 2009a).

Soccer is a team sport played between two teams of eleven players where one player is a goalkeeper. The game is played on a grass or artificial surfaces and each team has a goal on their respective short end of the field. The idea of the game is to make goals on the opponent team, and the team with the most number of goals wins the game. If the score is tied at the end of the match there will be extra time to finish the game. The winner will then be determined through penalty kicks or away goals if the rules require that there has to be a winner. There are referees controlling the games according to the rules of the games. The goalkeepers are allowed to use their hands and arms when being in contact with the ball while the other players use their feet to kick the ball. The players are also allowed to touch the ball with their torso or head. The players have to act in accordance with the rules and are not allowed to use violence against the other players (International Soccer Association, 2008).

The informants and the selection of the informants

The informants in the study are the ones who perform selections to sports teams, so called selectors. As selectors at the elite level most commonly have been involved in sports and made selections for a number of years, their

² FIS - abbreviation for Fédération Internationale de Ski or in English; the International Ski Federation.

³ In the team event the whole team is a dependent team in the sense that the different racers' results are of importance for the whole team. The team event consists of two runs (Super-G and slalom) and both women and men are included in the team (International Ski Federation, 2008b).

knowledge and experiences are of interest. They can be seen as experts on selections in sports due to their long experience and the level where they make the selections. Therefore, their methods and decisions are of great interest to study. How decisions are made and how things are valued at the top level in sport is also something that often has a significant impact also for sport at lower levels, as athletes on lower levels are often striving to reach the top. Because of this and the impact that selections to top-level sport teams have, the informants in this study are selectors from top-level sport teams. In this study all the selectors are coaches of their respective teams. The coaches in this study are coaches from both male and female teams in both sports.

As the skiers competing on the elite level perform most of their competitions for the national team, national teams became the targeted teams in skiing. As the soccer players at the elite level play most of the games for their club teams and some in the national team, both the national team and club teams were targeted in soccer. The selection of the informants was partly made through looking at the current rankings of the teams in the sports, in skiing global ranking and in soccer national ranking. A geographical spread of the teams was included so that they were from different parts of the world (skiing), and different parts of the country (soccer) were also taken into consideration. The club teams in soccer were besides playing in the highest soccer league in Sweden also playing international games and tournaments.

An e-mail letter with a brief explanation of my study and a request to them to participate in the study were sent to coaches of the different teams. All the contacted skiing coaches answered fairly soon and said that they were interested in participating. As regards the soccer coaches, some of them immediately answered that they were interested in participating, but some I had to contact again either by e-mail or by phone to get some response.

All the skiing coaches that were contacted from the beginning participated in the study. A couple of the soccer coaches that I had selected were not possible to reach and a couple who had said yes to the interview did not participate in the end. This was due to factors such as their having switched to other clubs, or that their busy schedules did not allow for a meeting. The coaches that never replied to my contacts (done by email and phone and text messages) ended up having very tough seasons with their teams which might have played a role in them not answering. With the same selection method as mentioned above, other soccer coaches were then contacted and agreed to participate in the study. All of the interviews with the skiing coaches were performed in connection to a trip to Sölden, Austria. There the national skiing teams of the world gathered for the season opening of the Alpine World Cup. The interviews with the soccer coaches were all but one made in the hometowns of the coaches. The one coach that was not interviewed in his hometown was interviewed during a tournament.

Fourteen top-level coaches divided into six skiing coaches and eight soccer coaches were included in the study and interviewed about selections. In skiing two coaches of men's teams and two coaches of women's teams and two overall coaches (responsible for both male and female athletes) were interviewed, this being due to different structures in different countries). In soccer five coaches of female teams and three coaches of male teams were interviewed. All but one of the coaches interviewed were male. When the meaning of the coaches' answers is interpreted, it should be taken into consideration that the alpine coaches are national team coaches and that the soccer coaches are mostly coaches of clubs and that only some are national coaches. Six of the interviews were performed in English and eight in Swedish. All the coaches had fairly long experience of working with teams at the elite level. The least experienced coach had five years of coaching experience at this level while the most experienced ones had been coaching for 27 years. Most of them had been coaching around 15 to 20 years. All but one of the coaches had been active as athletes in the sport they are now coaching in. The one coach who did not participate in the sport he is now national head coach of had been competing in other sports at a high level. Coaching is a full-time job for these coaches, which means that they see the athletes a lot. Some of the alpine coaches travel around with the athletes for months every year (around 200 days per year is mentioned in the interviews), and the soccer coaches meet with their athletes almost every day. They are all highly involved in the selection process and some of them have the total responsibility, while others share the responsibility with other coaches and/or team managers or the board of the club or federation.

Interviews as the data collecting method

As I was interested in acquiring knowledge and understanding of the process of team selection, I choose interviews as the method to gather data. By using interviews I was able to get perceptions about the selections from people involved. Through the conversations I was also able to ask for clarifications and explanations and also to use follow-up questions to get more knowledge from the participants. By performing interviews I could gather extensive answers about the selection process, which resulted in more extensive information than had been possible to obtain through a questionnaire (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The data acquired in the interviews was mostly of a qualitative kind, as they were focused mostly on the participants' thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences of selections rather than on statistics and facts about the selected athletes. Observations could also have been a possible way to acquire this type of knowledge, but as the process of selection in many cases is a process extending over quite a lot of time, and as it was in my interest to study different selection processes, observations were too time-consuming and would have

limited me to studying and obtaining knowledge of fewer selection situations. Therefore, interviews were chosen as the method for my data collection.

The interview questions (see appendix 1) were based on central aspects of modern validity theory and were divided into seven areas: 1. Background/Context; 2. The idea of the selections; 3. The selection, divided into three different areas: a) The basis/criteria, b) Values/philosophy behind the selections and c) The process; 4. Difficulties in team selections; 5. Outcome and consequences – Is the “right” person selected?; 6. Reactions from the athletes; and 7. Other thoughts and ideas.

One pilot interview was carried out with an experienced soccer coach to test the interview questions. With some minor adjustments in the interview guide that had mostly to do with the structure of the questions, those questions were then used in the interviews. Going through and listening to the pilot interview was helpful not only regarding the content of the questions and answers, and the order of the questions, but also as a help to increase my awareness of the influence I could have on the interview. I was especially getting aware of the risk of prolonging and explaining the questions too much.

All the interviews were performed by myself, and were all made through personal communication when meeting the participants in person. Both the verbal and the non-verbal part of the communication are of importance to be able to understand the nuances in the words (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Kvale, 1996). It was also felt that meeting the informants in person rather than over the phone would create a better opportunity for creating a respectful and good atmosphere. The interviews should be seen as semi-structured interviews containing prepared questions in the above seven areas. There were also opportunities for the respondents to bring up new topics as well as opportunities for me to ask follow-up questions based on their answers. All of the seven areas were gone through in all the interviews but not always in the same order. I tried to follow the informants' way of talking about the selections and ask my questions in connection to them talking about the different parts in the selections rather than interrupting too much by following the order of the questions in my interview guide. My purpose of this approach was to create a good atmosphere where the informants felt that they could express their opinions as the experts they are. By doing this I was trying not to steer the interviews too much or limit the informants to discussing only my prepared questions.

This approach made the interviews have a good flow and led to interesting discussions. Most of the time this approach worked well but in some interviews I felt that I was unsure that I had covered all topics. At the end of those interviews I had to go back through the interview guide to ask some questions I felt that I had missed. I managed to get all the areas covered well, but some specific questions were missed for some of the participants. As a whole I believe

the atmosphere and climate created by performing the interviews in this way gave me more information than an absolutely strict and structured interview would have done. By conducting the interviews in this way I tried not to stop or limit the informants' train of thoughts too much by interrupting them, but still to be able to cover all the areas that were of interest to me. By using semi-structured interview questions my attempt was to get answers to the questions I thought I needed to cover and also give opportunities for the informants to bring forward their own thoughts. My feeling is that selections to sport teams is a subject that is very important to the coaches and something they were interested in talking about. The above approach together with the interest in the subject and the coaches being used to communicate their ideas probably helped the interviews to run smoothly.

The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and transferred to sound files in my computer. All but two of the sound files, were transcribed by me. The interviews were transcribed word by word. When transcribing the interviews the same structure for how to deal with pauses, hesitations, emphasis on certain words, parts that were difficult to hear was used in all the interviews. For the two transcriptions I did not work with myself, I had developed a manual with clarifications concerning how the above factors were to be dealt with. When I got those two transcriptions back, I went through the transcriptions and checked them against the sound files.

To know how many interviews should be made in a study is difficult to know before the interviews are performed. Kvale (1996) has an interesting answer to the question of the number of interviews that should be made and states, "*Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know*" (p.101). As it is not so easy to predict what is necessary to know, this is not as simple as it sounds, but it was nevertheless an objective in my work. Saturation in the answers (Gratton & Jones, 2004) is another concept used to express the same thing and a way to express that no or hardly any new knowledge will arise by conducting more interviews. In my study I believe I received answers to be able to describe and discuss selection methods in the two sports in focus. If more interviews would have rendered other kinds of answers is hard to say, but my belief is that the interviews gave me "*the answers I need*" to be able to understand and discuss selections to top-level sport teams. Still, there is always the possibility that there are other answers and explanations to be found if more interviews had been made. I have worked very thoroughly with preparing and analysing the interviews, as this is very important from a quality perspective (Kvale, 1996).

Analysing the interviews

Biased interpretations of the interviews are always a risk when interviews are used as the method to gather data (Bell, 2007). Through making myself very

familiar with the material and through using different structured methods in the analysis process, I worked thoroughly to understand the meaning of the participants' answers. Now and then during this process I went back and listened to the recorded interviews, and reminded myself of the situation, the atmosphere and feelings connected to the interviews and certain parts of them. This was done in order not to be stuck with looking at the transcribed words on a sheet of paper as my main data to build this work on. Listening to the interviews gave me a different and wider understanding of the meaning of the words on the paper. Through listening to the interviews it also became more obvious to me how my interaction with the participants not only created the atmosphere, but also how I sometimes influenced the participants when asking them to develop a subject.

When analysing the interviews the seven areas in the interview guide were used as a main frame. Through reading the interview answers thoroughly, other different topics within the main areas emerged as important for the understanding of the selection process. In the compilation of the interviews the results are presented through subheadings of the main interview areas. These seven areas were further on in the analysis process assembled into four main areas: 1. The idea of the selections; 2. Criteria for the selections; 3. The selection process; 4. Outcome and consequences.

When analysing the interviews different methods were used. As I performed all and transcribed almost all the interviews, I had made myself familiar with the data. Still, the first step in the analysis process was reading through all the transcriptions to update myself on the content and get an overall picture of the material. After this, I started to look into the different areas of the interview. The areas of the interview were based upon the key areas in validity theory, and in all the areas I tried to get an understanding of the participants' expressions. When working through the participant's answers I tried different ways of working. One way was to physically copy and paste all the answers to a certain question into one document and go through them. This method worked but was difficult as it contained a lot of information. It was not very effective, so instead of cutting out all the answers from a participant I tried to make 'meaning condensations' (Kvale, 1996) where I gathered and formulated the participants' expressions into shorter formulations covering their main meanings in their answers. Other ways of working with the material were going through the participants' answers in an attempt to find and understand what phenomena and perceptions were described as the important ones for the selections. This was done with the aim of categorising them if this was possible, and sometimes I also compiled how often these things were brought up. This method Kvale (1996) calls 'meaning categorisation'.

During my first steps of turning the data into a readable text describing the participants' views, I was using the participants' words and ways of expressing

themselves in order to be as close to the data as possible. Some way into the process of analysing and understanding the meaning of the data, I felt that this did not give a clear picture at all, as often the participants used different words to describe the same thing and the same words to describe different things. To make sense of the material and bring out the essence of the interviews in a clearer way, I felt that an interpretation and analysis of the meaning of the words of the participants would give a clearer but also truer picture of their answers. In the beginning I had also picked out many quotations, as I wanted the real words of the coaches to be a core of the text. After going through the material a few times, some of those quotations were taken away as they neither added anything to the text nor did they give a fair expression of what the participants were trying to convey through the answers, according to my interpretation. Still, I chose to work with quite a few quotations, as I believe that they are a tool for bringing out the participants' expressions in a way that sheds light on their perceptions/feelings.

This way of working with the data, and the way of reworking the text in different steps yielded a final text where my interpretations of the participants' answers are structured into a text that I believe brings out the key content of the interviews. As always with interpretations there is a risk of misunderstandings and misconceptions. To avoid this as much as possible and to be able to be as true as possible to the material, the methods used in the analysis processes are very structured and I have tried to understand my own pre-conceptions and their possible influences on my interpretations.

My aim is to be as true as possible to the empirical material. As regards the question of whether there is a world out there that can be described objectively or whether it is interpretations of the world that are described, I believe that an interpretation is always made when something is described. Writing or telling someone else about a phenomenon will always involve a certain amount of interpretation and the recipient will also interpret the same data, story or research according to his or her former experience and knowledge. In the research process it was important to me to work carefully and systematically with my data. Through explaining the steps in my research process I am trying to make the process transparent. During the work with this study it was also important for me and for this research to be aware of and try to understand the power of my previous knowledge of and feeling about team selections. As a former athlete in a national team I have ideas, knowledge and feelings about selections that I have tried to understand to be able to use them in a way beneficial for this study.

V. RESULT ANALYSIS

In the following chapters my empirical data from the interviews is presented with the aim of increasing the knowledge and understanding of selections to top-level sports teams. The perceptions, experience and knowledge found in the interviewed coaches' answers are analysed, structured and interpreted here into a text divided into four main parts. Through structuring the result analysis of the empirical data in this way, the aim is both to give an understanding of the main steps in the selection process and also to highlight areas of importance when discussing validity and reliability concerns in the process. Understanding and possessing knowledge of these areas is necessary in order to be able to discuss validity in the selection process. These four parts are the following:

1. **The idea of the selections** – here the goals for the selections and the goals for the team and who are responsible for the goal setting are analysed.
2. **Criteria for the selections** – here the criteria or grounds that the coaches use when selecting the athletes are described, explained and analysed. The prerequisites for the selections, such as e.g. how many athletes there are spots for in the competitions and games are also clarified.
3. **The selection process** – here questions like how many persons are involved in the decision process, how it is performed, possible difficulties and influences from others are dealt with. The athletes' reactions, knowledge and opportunities for influencing the selection process are also analysed here.
4. **Outcome and consequences** – here the coaches' perceptions of the athletes' feelings about the selections, consequences of the selections, the outcomes and similar things are analysed.

The idea of the selections

The idea of the selections, or the reasons for the selections, has to do with what goals there are for the team and the selections. The relation between the goals and the grounds for the selections plays a substantial role from a validity perspective. In following section the goals and who sets these goals are therefore analysed.

High-level outcome goals

The teams in this study are all teams where the athletes participate in their respective sport at a very high level of competition. Reaching top results is the core of their participation in competitions and games. When the coaches are asked about the goals for their teams and the goals for the selections all but one coach answer that these goals are high-level outcome goals. Goals such as *“winning the league”, “winning the games”, “make podiums”, “win everything we participate in”, “be top 30 at world cups for the whole team and podiums for the more established athletes”, “to win as many medals as possible in World Cups, Olympics and World Championships”* are the types of dominating answers. To stay successful is another goal. The skiing coaches in particular mentioned that it is important to stay on top and provide for continual success. The soccer coach who did not contribute an outcome goal, says that they are not working with outcome goals in his team any more. He explains that the reason for this has to do with media attention. He thinks that the media have a tendency to focus on criticising the world of sport too much based on results, something he believes has a negative effect on the players. In his team they talk instead about process goals or performance goals, goals related to things that increase the opportunities to achieve good results rather than the results themselves. These goals include for example factors such as working on having confidence in reaching success, and having barrier-breaking visions, to a great extent attained through mental training. Although this coach in the beginning of the interview states that they do not use outcome goals in his team, he later on in the interview says that some outcome goals are used. This is then done to keep the media satisfied, but he explains that these goals are outcome goals that are not very specific.

Among the coaches who stated outcome goals as the goals for their teams, other kinds of goals were also discussed. It seems that before the selections are made, outcome goals are the main goals. When the selections are made and the athletes are in the teams, the coaches seem more to work with performance-related goals and goals focusing on development as a complement and sometimes instead of the outcome goals.

The main goals are set by the boards or similar bodies

In all the interviews the boards or other managing positions in the clubs or federations are said to be involved in the goal setting process. The level of the coaches' influence differs from some to hardly any influence at all as regards the main goals for the teams. Some of the coaches described how they are involved in the goal setting process through discussions with the club or federation board, but how it was the boards that seemed to be the ones taking the final decisions.

I do not think it is very often the goals are set together with the board of the club [read; they are set only by the board], I hardly think I have ever experienced that. There is a goal on the part of the club and then we have to...often that goal is perhaps not really relevant for those who are placed in the group and for me, but that's it. Maybe they have a bit too... they [the board] think very highly of the team sometimes, while we perhaps realise we will never achieve that (Soccer coach women's team 3).

For some of the teams, there seemed to be some disparities between the board's and the coaches' opinions about the goals. Some coaches' statements also indicate that it is not totally clear if it is the coaches or clubs/federations that are responsible for setting the goals.

I cannot really say we will be top 3 if they [the board] say that we are going for gold, but we are very close to each other (Soccer coach women's team 5).

I do not want to have anyone whose top level is like 10th in the World Cup...[he wants to have better skiers]. That is my goal but I think it is also the federation's goal... (Skiing coach women's team 1).

One of the coaches stated that his belief was that the long-term and the strategic goals should be set by the club rather than the coach. He said this when talking about himself as the coach. He believed that the goals should not be connected too much to him as a person. He felt that it was important that the goals could "live" past his time in the club and thought that this could only be done if the club had a long-term plan and goals that were not dependent on which coach the club had for the moment. He pointed out the advantage of having very clear goals. He also believed it to be important to go through the goals with the players who are being selected to the club, so that they really understand the goals and what is expected from them. He thinks that he and the club are very close in their opinions and have a good communication, but still he emphasises that the club or the board has the last say.

Summary – the idea of the selections

- Irrespective of the types of goals (outcome, performance or process goals) used, the main goal for all teams is to reach top results in the competitions and games they participate in. The idea for the selections is consequently to find the athletes that will achieve these top results.
- A common feature of most of these teams is the roles the board of the federation or club had as regards having influence on the goal setting.
- For some of the teams there were some disparities between the board's and the coaches' opinions about the goals.

The criteria for the selections

In this part the focus is on the criteria or grounds for the selections, i.e. what factors the coaches take into consideration when making their selection decisions. If everyone could compete there would be no need for selections at all, but since in most competition and games there are limited numbers for participation, selections have to be made. The limitations of the number of athletes can be related both to the rules of the sport and to other factors. Factors such as the economy, the time a competition would take if everyone participated, the competition areas, etc. are factors limiting the number of athletes.

Selections in skiing

In skiing, the limitations of the number of athletes allowed to compete in international competitions sanctioned by the International Ski Federation (FIS) are decided by FIS. The number of spots given to each nation is connected to the nation's former results in the discipline. Good results achieved by the nation's skiers result in more spots for the teams and less good results in fewer spots. The quotas deciding how many athletes from each country are allowed to compete in a discipline are dependent on a basic quota and a national quota. The basic quota gives every ski association affiliated with FIS the right to enter one competitor in a FIS World Cup race if the skiers are qualified to compete at this level. To be qualified means that in previous competitions the athlete must have reached a certain ranking mostly connected to the FIS-point list⁴. For the national quota the spots for the nation are dependent on the skiers' ranking on the World Cup Starting List⁵ (WCSL-list). The quota is established here on the number of competitors per nation that are ranked within rank 1 to 60 in the WCSL-list and there are a maximum number of eight competitors per nation. For a nation that is organising a World Cup and has a total quota of fewer than six competitors, the quota for this competition may be raised to a maximum number of six competitors. This means that the maximum number of spots a nation can have is nine (one basic quota and eight national quotas) and the minimum is one (basic quota). The spots for competing in the World Cup can

⁴ The FIS-points is a seeding system calculated on international FIS-races. The calculation system is based on different factors including the standard of the race. The standard of the race has to do with the current FIS-point rankings that the participants who complete the race have, the racers' running time and differences between the racers as well as the different race categories (International Ski Federation, 2009b).

⁵ The WCSL-list is used for seeding of the top 30 competitors in the world and the points are scored by top 30 finishes in competitions such as the World Cup, the FIS World Championship and the Olympic Winter Games. The World Cup Starting List is used to create start orders for the competitions. (International Ski Federation, 2009a).

either be spots for the team that any of the skiers can use or personal spots belonging to skiers who have reached certain numbers of FIS points in competitions or won a Continental Cup⁶.

The coaches in this study use the words *criteria* or *guidelines* when talking about the grounds for the selections. Those “criteria” can be related to athletes’ places on a ranking list and are then dependent on the athletes’ former results but can also be related to a factor called “coaches’ discretion”. Coaches’ discretion then refers to a vote or opinion from the coaches about the athletes. The criteria related to the factor of “coaches’ discretion” can include athletes’ results but also other factors like for example attitude, skiing technique or potential. The terms *criteria* or *guidelines* and coaches’ discretion may be used by all the coaches, but what meanings they ascribe to these concepts and how these concepts are used differ considerably among the teams. In some of the teams the concept of ‘criteria’ refers to clearly defined grounds for the selections that are set by the federations and communicated officially on the team’s website, while other teams who also use the concept of ‘criteria’ when talking about selections do not have their grounds made in this explicit way, and they are not officially communicated either. The team using the concept of ‘guidelines’ seems to lie somewhere in between the other teams’ way of working. They have clearly defined guidelines from the federation for the coaches to follow, although those guidelines are not communicated officially.

How the criteria and guidelines are used and the impact this has on the selections varied among the nations in the study. It seems that the number of athletes to choose from has a considerable effect on how the selection criteria are designed. The tendency shown is that the coaches who are coaching teams from nations where there are a considerable number of skiers to choose from base the main part on their decisions on ranking lists and use the “coaches’ discretion” to a lesser extent. In the teams where the coaches have fewer athletes to choose from, the “coaches’ discretion” seems to be the main selection tool. The “discretion” then includes both factors that have to do with the athletes’ results and other things. When the coaches talk about criteria connected to previous results, these seem to be referred to as objective criteria and criteria connected to other factors are referred to as subjective criteria.

Previous results matter

For all the teams the athletes’ previous results are an important factor in the selections. When previous results are taken into consideration, the skiers’ results

⁶ Continental cups are FIS-sanctioned competitions at a lower level than the World Cup. The different continental cups are Europa Cup (EC), Nor AM Cup (NAC), Far East Cup (FEC), South American Cup (SAC) and Australia New Zealand Cup (ANC). (International Ski Federation, 2008a).

are often transformed into a place on a ranking list. This makes it possible to compare athletes from different parts of the world against one another. The ranking lists used when results are studied and compared in the selection process are mainly the rankings on the WCSL-list and the FIS-point list. The WCSL-list is based on the skiers' results in World Cup and championship competitions and is used for the athletes competing at this level. The FIS-point list, which is based on races such as Continental Cups and similar competitions, approved by FIS to be valid FIS-competitions, is used to compare the athletes competing at this level. In the FIS-point list athletes from different competitions all over the world are ranked in the same list, which makes this list a bit more complicated. The calculations in the FIS- point list are based on a fairly advanced calculation system considering the ranking of the skiers involved, the time differences between the skiers and the skiers' individual running times. In the teams where the clearly defined result-based criteria or guidelines connected to the WCSL-list and FIS-list and the factor of "coaches' discretion" are the selection tools, there is a difference in how the criteria are to be applied to the different levels of their national teams. For the top team in the national team the criteria based on the athletes' ranking are the main criteria, in some teams also together with an age factor. In the lower teams, B-, C-, D-teams and similar teams, the ranking lists and the result-based criteria based on those lists are the most important factor, but "coaches' discretion" and age are also a part of the selection decisions. This means that for the skiers trying to get a spot in the top team in the country, the only way is to make good competition performances. For the lower level teams it is also possible to be selected on other grounds than the results. As one of the coaches expressed this:

...national and A- team is no vote by coaches, it is just a question of real success (Skiing coach women's team 2).

In the teams who use result-based criteria or guidelines, it is decided which rankings the athletes need to reach in order to be selected into the different teams. These critical numbers, or critical cutting points, in the ranking lists that the skiers need to reach to be selected seem to be decided by the federations but with impact from the coaches. Two coaches from different national teams explain how they refined the critical numbers through knowledge acquired from research they had done themselves together with other coaches from their respective teams. One coach explains that he looked at performances from the 15 best ranked skiers in the world (in each discipline) at the age of 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 years during a ten-year period and studied what FIS-scores and what ranking they had had at the different ages. With this as the basis he then developed the critical points for selections to his team. The other coach explains that the federation comes up with the critical numbers for the selection for his

team but that these numbers are refined every year based on the research they are doing. For example (during a six year period) they looked at the results for everyone at the age of 23 and realised that at the age of 22-23 the (successful) athletes start to make top scores in the world cup. If the athletes have not made results by that age, it seems that only a few will start doing it later.

The national teams in this study are divided into different levels. These levels are named differently in the different countries; for example the teams that the highest ranked athletes are selected to, can in one country be called the national team and in another the World Cup team, and in a third the A-team. In the lower level national teams, different names such as for example B-team, C-team, D-team or development and junior team are also used. The number and distribution of athletes to the different levels of the national teams are also different from nation to nation. This seems to depend on factors such as the criteria for the selections, the number of athletes available, the economy of the federation and how the federation has decided to work with the teams.

As the national teams are divided into different levels, not comparable between nations, it is hard to give a clear picture of what results are needed for an athlete to qualify to a team. Still, as an average it seems that the rankings the athletes need to reach to be able to qualify to a nation's top team is a ranking between top 10 and top 30 in the world rank for the male skiers (based on the WCSL-list) depending on nation and how the team is defined, and top 15 to top 25 world rank (based on the WCSL-list) for women depending on nation and how the team is defined. Another way to qualify to the team is to be a medallist from a previous world championship (in some teams also to be a medallist from a previous Olympic Game). In the teams were criteria or guidelines are used as a selection device, the same system of WCSL- and FIS-points is used in the selections of both men and women.

The criteria needed for the women to obtain are said to be "tougher" than the ones needed for men. In all the teams this is explained by the drop of density and good quality skiers in the women's division. If the criteria really are "tougher" could be questioned. The actual criteria the women have to reach with regard to the numbers in the ranking list might be higher for them, but that seems to be due merely to there being fewer women at the top in their category. This would indicate that it is hard to say that the women's criteria are tougher than the men's in relative terms. Very probably this could be what the coaches meant as they were talking about the absolute criteria and not the criteria in relation to how many and the level of the athletes competing. It should be noted that it is hard to judge in which category the selections are harder or easier without doing more extensive research on this. Besides this, the grounds for selections are said to be the same for men and woman. Here one coach says that he thinks the mental aspect has a little bit more influence in the women's teams. He believes the women to be more team players in comparison

to the men who are more like individuals in a team. If this affects the selections in any kind is hard to interpret from his answers. This coach is responsible for both a women's and a men's team, and most of the other coaches are responsible for either a men's or a women's team.

One coach states that the criteria for qualifying to the team can involve different combinations of results from different disciplines, and this seems to be the case among all the teams with defined criteria. Good ranks from another discipline than the main discipline can then be of help when qualifying into the team. The reason for this is expressed by one of the coaches:

The idea is to try to capture the talent in different ways (Skiing coach men's team 1).

An issue in the selections is whether the skiers can be selected into a team if they only have shown results in one discipline. The opinion about this seems to be very similar among all the teams. This shows that at the highest level of the national teams it should be possible to be selected based on results in only one discipline. But at the younger ages/in the lower level teams the skiers (in all the teams) should be good at and show results in more than one discipline. Although all the teams seem to share the view that the younger athletes should have results from more than one discipline, it seems that the teams apply this view a bit differently. In one team it may be possible for a younger athlete to be selected due to results in only one discipline, but the athlete then has to show outstanding results in this discipline. In another team the coach explains that they used to be able also to select younger athletes that were good at only one discipline but that they have changed that now. This coach is very firm about this being a good change, as he believes the skiers have to be versatile to be able to succeed. He does not see this as risk that some possibly successful athletes will be missed in the selections:

No! Because if you are just a downhiller, at that point you have no chance if you don't have the technical skills, there is absolutely no chance, you can't go anywhere... (Skiing coach women's team 1).

Two of the teams that are using well-defined criteria for their selections mention that in addition to their criteria they also work with something they call a 'special criteria'. These individual performance criteria are used if the athlete meets the criteria to qualify into the team but is not developing or reaching results at the expected pace. Individual criteria are then developed for the athlete to reach in a certain amount of time. These criteria are to be seen as an agreement between the athlete and the coach. It was discussed whether the opportunities for the athlete to influence this agreement might change

depending on who is the coach. One coach mentioned that these special criteria are used every year for 2-3 out of 20 skiers. He also said that half the time the athletes meet those criteria and even far exceed them but half of the time they do not reach them.

In selections to championship competitions former results seem to have a big impact for all the teams. As the spots for every nation are limited to only four spots per team, and a personal spot for the former medallists, the competition for these spots can in some teams be fairly tough. In some teams where there are many good skiers they have to qualify to be selected to the championship competition during the season of the competition. In other teams where the competition among the skiers is not so tough, the skiers can be fairly sure they will have a spot to compete in the World Championship.

Ranking lists not always very useful

As regards the validity of the ranking lists, it seems that the WCSL-list is perceived to have a higher validity than the FIS-point list. It is pointed out that since the WCSL-list is a ranking of athletes competing in the same competitions, that list gives a more valid picture of the athletes' rankings in relation to one another than do the rankings on the FIS-list. In the FIS-list the results are based on competitions from all parts of the world and competitions where different skiers are involved. Quite a few comments concerning validity issues in the FIS-list are made. A coach of a team where most of the selection is based on coaches' discretion and where result-based criteria do not exist (although result matters) brings up problems related to the use of ranking systems like the FIS-scores as the basis for selections. The problems are connected with the opportunities for getting good FIS-points in a competition being so dependent on which skiers participate in the competitions⁷ and not just with the result of the skiers' performances. This coach is from a small nation and believes that the FIS-list can be a misleading ranking system. He thinks that the problem is that the FIS-scores the athletes can get in the competitions are not always so relevant in comparison to the total ranking of athletes in the world. He explains this by exemplifying how the level and number of athletes starting in the race affect the possibility of lowering the FIS-points. If there are only a few or no real good skiers (skiers with good ranking) starting in the FIS- competition, this will then affect the opportunities for the other skiers to lower their FIS-points. If the best skiers are not participating in the race, it has a higher calculation point and the skiers in the race might do

⁷ The racers try to get as low FIS- points as possible. The FIS-points possible to get in a race are dependent on how many top racers there are in the race and the time difference between the racers. The best way to lower the FIS-points is if there are top racers in the competitions and the racer trying to lower his or her points has a time in the race that is not too far away from (or better than) the top athletes' times.

extremely well but still end up much lower on the FIS-list than they should according to their actual ability. At the same time he points out that this could also be the other way round. If all the world cup racers in his team are racing home, this creates good chances for the other skiers in the race to lower their FIS-points. His opinion is that the FIS- ranking list does not give an accurate picture of a skier's ability in comparison to the world rank. The reason for this is explained as having to do with the system's sensitivity to the number of top athletes participating in the competitions. He thinks that this especially affects small nations with a less amount of top ranked athletes. Because of this they mostly use coaches' discretion as the basis for selections to "his" team. The FIS-points might also change a lot every year depending on the starting field and they are therefore a system he thinks is hard to use as a basis for the selections.

This coach is not the only coach having doubts about the FIS- point system. Other coaches also discuss that some athletes "chase" FIS-points in the spring when the world cup racers have opportunities for being in the competitions, lowering the penalty scores. One coach that uses the result-based criteria where FIS-points are central has some doubts about the validity of the FIS-point system. He thinks it is a system that is valid to some degree but does not separate the athletes that are around 40th and 60th rank in the world.

...you know it is accurate, but it is accurate to 25% maybe... 30% I do not know... so then you are making very hard calls on a system that maybe is not so valid, it is again my problem with it...(Skiing coach men's team 1).

He continues to explain why he doubts the system. He sees how the "game is played in the spring" when the fast World Cup skiers are in the FIS- races and are skiing slowly to lower the penalty points for the other skiers to give them opportunities for lowering their FIS-points. He reflects on how the upcoming skiers are chasing the FIS-races where the top athletes are present to be able to lower their FIS-points. He thinks that this is a game played worldwide in the spring. For the athletes who are not able to go to these races the opportunities for lowering their FIS- points are reduced. Another coach (who is also working with ranking based partly on FIS-points in the selections) is partly of another opinion. He also sees how the top skiers go to the FIS-races in the spring to help bring down the FIS- points for other skiers. Even if the younger skiers are going around chasing FIS races in the spring, he does not believe it always helps them lower the FIS-points. This because the time difference to the top ranked athletes affects the total FIS-points that are possible to get. His view of the system is that it is a good system:

It is very thought through.... actually...you can't cheat on it, it is like okay you know if somebody beats you by so and so much you know you can't lower

your points even if there is a low penalty in the race, but then you get so much race points, that is what they call it, in addition to the penalty because you are so far back so you can't lower your FIS-profile, your points profile (Skiing coach women's team 1).

One coach who work for a team where the selection criteria are based on ranking lists and the criteria are communicated on the team's website is concerned with how the selection criteria besides being a selection tool are also used to create outcome goals by skiers and coaches. In his view this is understandable, as it is a clear number for the athlete to reach. Still, he also sees this as a risk, as the selection criteria are set to show a minimum standard but instead become the goals that the athletes strive towards. He voices a concern that this will result in skiers striving to reach the criteria rather than skiers striving to reach good performances. To him a good performance means someone who is good at doing things at certain moments or, as he expresses it, skiers who can perform "*skills on demand*" rather than someone who can reach a pre-determined set of criteria on a ranking list.

Coaches' discretion a crucial part of the selections

The selection basis coaches' discretion, or as it is also called, the choice of the coaches, is a way for the coaches to nominate athletes based on other factors than results and ranking lists only. All the coaches think that this part of the selection is a crucial and important one, as it is a way for them to influence the selections.

As I say we lower the criteria all the time so it gets harder and harder to meet it, because we actually wanna have a little bit of influence on who we wanna take or not, because if it is too easy everybody get named and it is a huge team and some of them do not really deserve to be there (Skiing coach women's team 1).

The "coaches' discretion" factor is treated in different ways in the teams. In some cases it is clearly defined while in others it is rather a matter of the coaches relying on their own judgements and maybe on informal agreements with other coaches. Two of these teams have officially defined criteria for what the coaches should base their discretion on, while the other teams seem to have much more unofficial grounds for this discretion part. Those unofficial criteria also seem to vary quite a lot as regards how well defined they are. For a team where the content of the criteria for the factor of 'coaches' discretion' is officially communicated, the factors to base the 'coaches' discretion' on has for example to do with the athletes attitude, commitment, physical fitness level, opportunities the athletes has been given earlier and if the athlete has some outstanding results. Here it can be seen that these discretions are also partly

based on the athletes' previous results. These pre-set criteria for the content of "coaches' discretion" give the coaches a framework for their decisions and a shared frame when discussing with other coaches. It also gives the athletes an idea of what factors the coaches are taking into consideration when selecting an athlete based on coaches' discretion. For the teams where the grounds for the discretion factors are not officially communicated, there can still be a shared understanding among the coaches about what factors are included in this part of the selection. A few coaches talk here about having criteria for the discretion part, even if they are not written down or communicated to the athletes.

The majority of the coaches describe skiing technique and especially the technical bases in skiing together with skiers' potential as the factors they mostly look at when it comes to selecting someone based on coaches' discretion. The skiing technique seemed to be the main factor to look at concerning both the selections and how they predict the skier's chances of being successful in the future. As skiing consists of many disciplines, the abilities needed for each of these different disciplines vary to some extent. One coach of a speed team stated that they look for athletes that have courage and are somewhat fearless. The attitude and personality of the skier were emphasised by many of the coaches. As regards this part, they look at how the athletes behave, for example how they push themselves, how they are able to deal with changes of different kinds (changes in their technique, changes concerning new equipment, etc.). How they approach things and their willingness to train seemed to be important. The skiers' physical status was also described as important. One coach who mentioned the personality of the skier as being important says:

...the personality of a skier that is something we focus on, you know because the aspects of personality are things that are very stable, they do not vary a lot, so if some aspects are really good developed in critical situations, they are stable (Skiing team men's team 2).

This coach especially talks about motivation as a part of the personality that they see as important in his team. He states that they prefer skiers with intrinsic motivation rather than social motivation.

In alpine skiing the skiers compete individually but they train and travel together to camps and races. According to some of the coaches, they travel around together about 200 days a year. How well an athlete can fit into a team is important for this reason, and a couple of the coaches thought that this had practical implications for the selections.

Sometime you make a discretion call because you need a guy in the team for morality and to push the other guys... (Skiing coach men's team 1).

...if you have to choose on the same level [between two racers at the same level], it is more like, is there like selfishness or whatever that is affecting the team, then it can be that we do not pick somebody up (Skiing coach men's & women's team 1).

Many of the coaches claim that the possibility of using “coaches’ discretion” is important. This is emphasised as being especially important in the selections of younger racers as their lack of competition experience might result in their not being able to qualify through their results. Coaches’ discretion is then seen as a way to find these promising athletes and help them through the obstacles hindering them from achieving good results. The athletes’ physical development is described by a couple of coaches as a factor that can have a big impact on the results at the early ages and as something to take into consideration when looking at potential in younger skiers:

....if some are very tiny and have small weight, actually they have no chance even with good technical skiing, especially these people you can help then with the vote of coaches so they can get into the team [development team] (Skiing coach women's team 2).

Yeah, if you only have a look at the year [the athlete was born], it is too less because you do not know if he is born in January or December; it might be that they are born in the same year but it is almost a one-year difference... (Skiing coach men's team 2).

In two of the teams where ranking-based criteria/guidelines were the main grounds for the selections, the coaches estimated the ‘coaches’ discretion’ to be about 5% to maximum 10% in one team (team using set criteria) and around 30% in another (team using guidelines). One coach from a country where ranking-based criteria constitute the biggest basis of the selections together with a smaller part of coaches’ discretion expressed a mixed belief in their selection system:

I think criteria markers are important... for people that are not in the team to see a team goal what they have to do to make the team I think this is really important. You look at teams that don't have that and it is an internal politics, and this is like here is the line, you make the line you are in the team. I think that is really good, but on the other side I think the coach has a feeling for who could be fast, who can't be fast and this system allows no judgement from the coach besides discretion or special criteria and special criteria need to be done one year a head of time, so it is a very fixed system where I think the feeling of the coach is lost...and you look at other professional sports, yes, they have all those ways to measure, but you know you

put a team together based on intuition, feeling and our system has none of that or very, very little (Skiing coach men's team 1).

He wishes that the criteria based on rankings should not be more than 50-75% of the selections and the rest be based on "coaches' discretion". Last year 5% of the selections in "his" team (equalled 1 skier) was made through coaches' discretion and the rest was based on rankings, and the year before 100% of the selections was based on criteria. A coach who selects a team basing the selections mostly on "coaches' discretion" believes that this system is good. He thinks that this way of selecting athletes creates opportunities for creating more homogenous training groups. Groups where the athletes have almost the same needs, which is important for the skiers' development. He believes that if the selections are based too much on results and rankings, this might create problems if it leads to training groups consisting of athletes with very different needs. Groups where the athletes' needs are taken into consideration are felt to be of importance, in this case smaller groups but good support for the ones who are in the groups.

Age matters when you are a skier

In some of the teams there are age limitations defining a maximum age the skiers should not exceed in order to be a member of the different levels of national teams. In other teams there are no strict rules but a discussion about the age of the athletes. A common feature of the teams is that there are discussions concerning age, experience and how many chances an athlete will get related to her/his age. For the team that has set age limitations, those are the same for the different disciplines. In the teams without age criteria, there seems to be a somewhat different reasoning about the age for skiers in the different disciplines. One coach mentions downhill as a discipline in which it takes a longer time to develop and be good at than for example in the slalom discipline.

It is mentioned that the younger skiers need to have some time to develop in the team. Some of the coaches say that if they are selected into a team they then get a couple of years to develop. On the whole the teams' older athletes seem to have a tougher situation concerning what they have to produce. This seems to be because there are higher demands on them than on the newcomers to succeed in their performances. They usually cannot keep their place in the team if they do not keep developing and achieving results. One coach describes age as a difficult thing to deal with, if an "older" athlete is not delivering results.

The critical age it is over 30, if you are over 30 and you have never made the national team then it is... We discuss it seriously with the racer if it is worth even for her to go on or not. I think that then you have to think about it,

because then it is not a big chance actually to make it even the next two years (Skiing coach women's team 2).

One of the coaches from a team using age criteria does not believe in age limitations in the highest-level teams. He argues that team balance is really important and thinks that older athletes are good to have in the team as they benefit the team in other ways than merely through making results, but he also believes that skiers can achieve results at older ages. In his team there are different age limitations for all the national teams and a skier needs to reach the highest-level team at the age of 28 at the latest. If the skier has reached the critical age but is not meeting the criteria for the top team, he still has the possibility to keep skiing. He can then be selected into lower level teams at a discretion spot but not to the very top team. This coach is now doing research about age and number of skiers that are bumped out from the team at age 28 but are coming back to make world cup podiums and top 15 results. He hopes this research will prove that athletes can come back and achieve results at older ages and to show that it is important to give older athletes that are still performing more chances.

Injured athletes get a "second chance"

All these teams have medical staffs working with the athletes. The medical staff normally consists of a doctor, physiotherapists and maybe a massage therapist, a naprapath or a similar functionary. There are different solutions to how they work with the teams and what kinds of duties they have. All the teams have medical staffs that work together with them. The medical staffs influence the team selections by taking part, together with the athlete and coach, in deciding whether an injured athlete can go back to training and competition. In some of the teams the comeback has to be approved by the medical staff. In other teams there is more of a discussion between the involved parties, but in all the selection decisions involving an injured athlete the medical staff is involved.

In none of the skiing teams would an injured athlete be kicked out; instead the injured athlete gets a chance to keep his or her spot while working on rehab training. Sometimes the athletes can keep their spot in the team for a couple of seasons if they are injured, but it is more common that they keep their spot only one season after the injury. Some of the teams have a special injury clause in which the date of the injury (beginning, middle or end of the season) plays a role for how long the athlete will be able to keep their spot in the team without having to re-qualify to secure their spot. This clause also contains rules for how the athlete must follow prescribed rehabilitation or medical programs as approved by their team's medical staff to be able to maintain the position in the team. This is supposed to help the athlete get the help needed but also to prevent her/him from making too early a comeback. It is also used as a way to

remind the athlete to deal with rehab training and the injury seriously. Being injured is not good for the athlete but it is not good for the team either. It is costly for the federations to bring an athlete that cannot perform to camps and competitions. One of the coaches stated that he felt that the athletes should take better care of their injuries and that the injury clause was supposed to help the athletes understand the importance of the rehab training.

Hey,, you know, I mean you gotta make sure that this problem is taken care of, you know otherwise we are not gonna take you to camp anymore....(Skiing coach women's team 1).

Selections in soccer

In selections to soccer teams there are two types of selections discussed in the interviews, the selections to recruit players to the squad and the selections to pick the players for each of the games. In soccer there are international rules stating a soccer team in a game situation should consist of eleven players of whom one must be a goalkeeper. Apart from the goalkeeper the positions of the players are not specified but specified roles for the players have evolved. There are defenders, midfielders and strikers or forwards who have different roles and the number of players in each position determines the style of the team's play. According to where on the field they play, the positions are subdivided into more specialized categories such as for example central defenders, left and right midfielders. Mostly the players spend most of their time in a specific position on the field but there are few restrictions on the players' movements, which give them opportunities for switching between positions. The numbers of players in different positions are not specified by the law of the game but are dependent on the idea of the game⁸. Every team is allowed to have some substitute players in the games. These substitute players may get to play in the game because of other players' injuries, tiredness, and ineffectiveness or for a tactical reason. The number of substitutes is regulated and is three per game in international and domestic leagues. Depending on the type and level of the game, the number of substitutes can vary between three to seven players. The law of the games states that a minimum of seven players is required to constitute a team. (International Soccer Association, 2009). When selecting the players to a soccer game, the maximum number of players that can be nominated, including substitutes, is therefore 17 players. Not all of those 17 will be allowed to play and the coaches might therefore select a smaller number of players. Depending on the coaches'

⁸ The idea of the game refers here to the system of playing soccer. It is connected to tactics and the numbers of players in the different positions. Examples of formations of players are 4-4-2 and 3-5-2, where the numbers decide how many players there will be in the different positions on the field.

and club's philosophy concerning how soccer should be played and economic factors together with the chances of selecting the wanted players, the numbers of players in different positions in the team vary among the teams.

The coaches' judgements the crucial factor

The soccer coaches all base their selections on their own judgements of the players, which might be compared to the factor of "coaches' discretion" in skiing. To do this a couple of the coaches use well-defined criteria describing the factors the players need to be looking for. Still, most coaches do not seem to work with such well-defined criteria. None of the teams make their criteria for the selection to the games official. The criteria and grounds for the selections are partly seen and treated as secret, as the coaches are concerned that the opposing teams could get too much information about their teams. Values of and goals for the teams that are connected to the selections to the squad are however made official for some of the teams.

When talking about the selections all the coaches state that the complexity of the sport soccer makes the selections to soccer teams difficult to perform. In soccer it is important to be able to run fast at shorter distances but at the same time have endurance and power lasting during a whole game. Still, just being fast and having endurance are not enough. According to the coaches the players also need to be skilled in "reading and understanding the game", so that they run to the right positions and interact in the best possible way with the other players. Technical soccer skills, mental skills, skills as team players with ability to fit into a team and motivate others are other abilities a soccer player should possess according to these coaches. Because of this complexity concerning the abilities needed in the sport, many of the coaches state that selecting a team is therefore to a great extent about finding a balance of everything and making the best overall judgements.

The idea of the game and positions

When the coaches are asked about the grounds for their selections, many of them state that the idea of the game and the positions play a big role. The idea of the game is how they talk about the tactics and the way of playing soccer in their team. When they talk about positions they refer both to the needs of players to fill certain positions and the abilities that the players in these positions should have according to the chosen idea of the game. How the coaches work with these factors in the selection process seems to differ a lot. Two of the teams distinguish themselves as much more strategic in their selections than the other teams. These two teams and especially the coach of one of the teams explains that he and his assistant coach have worked thoroughly to develop their idea of the game. Out of the idea of the game they have then built strategies for how they want to play and what kinds of skills the

players in each of the positions need to possess. From that they have then developed profiles for every position in the team. The other of the coaches working in this structured way also describes how a clearly defined game idea is helpful in the selections of new players:

Using the idea of the game as the basis is pretty good, as then you know almost exactly what you are looking for. If we are for example looking for a left-footed fast left midfielder, then the choices taper off pretty fast and you have maybe two or three players to consider and then we look at them... (Soccer coach women's team 5).

The coach who seems to have the most structured way of selecting players says that for five years he has worked to develop the idea of the game and the profiles for the positions. He sees this as a rather big process. He believes that this will be a way for more teams to work in the future;

I believe it is starting to become pretty clear that having a clearly defined game idea and clearly defined profiles for every position is a success factor (Soccer coach men's team 3).

Even if many of the other soccer coaches also describe positions as important, they do not give as clear explanations of how they think and reason concerning what is expected in the different positions. For those teams the idea of the game seems to work more as a general guideline than a defined and structured tool/plan for what kinds of abilities to search for. This does not mean that these coaches do not have thoughts or plans for their selections. It is more a matter of their not expressing a clear and structured way of using the idea of the game as a basis for selections. Instead they talk about many other factors of importance. Other things mentioned as being of importance are balance, creating balance in the team. This balance can be about different things, like balance between offensive and defensive players, balance of different soccer skills, balance of age and balance where the team has some players at their peak, some that are developing and some that have been members of the team for a while and have ability to lead the team. Soccer specific skills are mentioned in all the interviews but seem to be hard to define, as different positions have such different demands and therefore the skills needed are very different. Factors that were mentioned by many of the coaches were speed, understanding of the idea of the game and playing in accordance with the principles of the game and the idea of the game.

As mentioned above, the level of how clearly defined the selection grounds/criteria are varies quite a lot among the different teams. Two of the teams might be said to be each other's opposites. One coach states that he has

worked thoroughly with developing the idea of the game for his team. He has developed the idea of the game and descriptions of what abilities each player needs to possess for the idea of the game to work and is now using this as a basis for the selections. The other coach uses the idea of the game more to support his ideas and selects the players based on his intuition. The other coaches work somewhere in between these two coaches' way of working. Not so many of them talk about defined criteria. How the teams are able to recruit players also depends a lot on economic factors and the location of the clubs. A difference can here be seen between the clubs. When some coaches search for a type of players possessing certain abilities, other coaches have to look at what kinds of players are available, and from this develop both the team and the idea of the game. This seems to be connected to the financial opportunities of the team.

Not always the best players

To find the most skilled players is not always the main goal of the coaches whether if it is about the selections to the squad or about the selections to a certain game. For them it is about selecting the best team, something that in their view does not necessarily have to do with each player's capacity and skills in soccer:

... the best team is not always the 11 best soccer players (Soccer coach men's team 1).

When interpreting the coaches' answers, it appears that they divide the factors they look at in the selection process into two main areas/categories. One category includes soccer skills more connected to physical performance and the game of soccer, where factors like speed, the ability to read the game, understanding of the idea of the game and similar things would be incorporated. The other area/category includes soccer skills connected to psychological and behavioural factors such as what the players are like as persons and how they behave and act in different situations of for example success and failure. These areas are to be seen as areas that are dependent on one another and with no clear lines or boundaries between them but still different areas. As regards the psychological and behavioural factors and their importance, it is striking that all the coaches bring these things up as being the most important factors in the selections. In some of the interviews the coaches start the interviews by stating that the soccer skills are the most important when looking at recruiting new players. Later on in the interviews they clearly express how important the personality and behaviour of the players are and that they would not choose players they know have bad behaviour.

It doesn't help if he is a really good player but misbehaves off the field, because then he will not be selected to the team anyway, because everybody participates under the same conditions, rules and frames (Soccer coach men's team 2).

All the coaches explicitly state that it is important to find players that work for the whole team. Players who are able to push not only themselves but also the others, players who show dedication and who behave in a correct way, meaning that they follow rules and guidelines. Traits such as character and personality are mentioned by many of the coaches as the most important things. When the coaches use the words *character* and *personality*, they talk about persons who work for the whole team, who are able to push not only themselves but also the others, and who behave in a correct way, meaning they follow rules and guidelines. The importance of finding players that are willing to work for the team, to achieve the team's goals and be part of building something together with the other players in the team, seems to be greater than finding the best players with regard to skills.

Some quality players are not good for the squad, and always when we are trying to get players from other clubs, we look at the character always. You don't get just good players that are very bad for the spirit in the team, never (Soccer coach women's team 2).

Many coaches state that being ambitious, ardently committed to playing soccer and wanting to develop themselves and their team-mates as well as managing to be professional and having strict training schedules are also important factors in the selections. In particular, a soccer coach of a female team who pointed out that most players in his team also had ordinary jobs by the side of soccer, expressed the need for the players to be professional and able to cope with practising early in the morning before their jobs and organise their food and sleep well as something that matters quite a lot in the selections.

Body language and how a player reacts to failure are also described as behavioural factors of importance, as a player's reactions does influence the other players in the team. The form and shape of the players as well as the opponents' idea of the game and strengths and weaknesses are other things playing a role in the selection. According to the coaches in this study, to select a team in soccer is a very subjective process as it is very hard to measure many of the factors that are important for the game. To be good at reading the game and understanding and being able to plan their playing are key values for a soccer player, but these values are hard to measure objectively. The coaches also mentioned the players' form, injury status and the opponents as factors to look at when selecting the teams for each of the games. When discussing the players' form, some coaches thought that it was the form the players had shown the last

10-14 days that should be taken into consideration, while one coach said that sometimes the form the players had in the last season played a role. There also seemed to be discussions among the coaches whether the form the players showed in training or the form they showed during the last games were of the most importance.

These coaches all emphasise the value of the players' co-operation and teamwork. A common belief seems to be that Swedish teams have a very strong team feeling, which makes them able to compete well with teams from other countries that have much better players in terms of individual soccer skills.

Accordingly, in the end the most important thing, when you are thinking about the team, is that you have selected players who you know can work together, who can co-operate (Soccer coach women's team 4).

Age not so important in soccer

In none of the soccer teams are there set age limitations as regards selection of players. Some teams still seem to have strategies about age and try to build teams that are going to be able to work together for some time, which means that they are not recruiting players that are too old. In other teams age seems to have considerably less importance. One of the coaches of a very successful male team stated that until a couple of weeks before my interview he did not have any idea about the age span and the ages of the athletes in his team. He explained that after he had got that question from a journalist he had checked the ages of his player but said that the players' age did not matter to him. Some others of the soccer coaches also thought that the ability of the players is what matters, not their ages. Some of them gave examples of athletes that were quite old but still very good.

The importance of physical tests and statistics

In elite sports it is very common to execute different kinds of tests mostly of a physical kind, to get a measure of how fit the athletes are. If these tests are used in the selection process, this might affect the outcome of the selections. More and more statistics are also available in sports, and if statistics are used in the selection process they might also influence the outcome of the selections. How the coaches in skiing and soccer look at test results and statistics will be presented here.

Physical testing used to a small degree

Physical testing is made in all the teams irrespective of the sport but how much the results of the tests are a factor of concern in the team selections varies between the teams. In soccer most coaches state that the physical tests function mostly as a quality control tool rather than a selection tool. If the players do not

have good test results, this means that they have to improve those results. In some teams they get special programs from the conditioning coach. Still, it seems that the test results are seldom a factor of concern with regard to the selections. Only two of the soccer coaches say they are using the test results as a decisive factor when making the selections. One of those coaches says that they have stated in the players' contracts that they have to manage certain test results if they are at all going to be considered as players in the A-team. In the skiing teams physical tests are also made and there too the results are dealt with in different ways as regards their importance for the selections. While most of the teams do not use them as a decisive factor in the selection process, others clearly do. One skiing coach explains that for their juniors it is not enough to only have good skiing results. They also have to reach certain physical test results to be selected into the team.

No, it is not enough to make the skiing criteria (Skiing coach women's team 2).

One skiing coach says that if the athlete is among the top 30 skiers in the world but does not meet the physical criteria, the athlete will be selected to the team but get a so-called 'physical criteria' to work on. That is individual physical criteria that the athlete has to meet within a certain time to receive any funding from the team. Another coach voices the difficulties with physical tests, as some athletes are genetically very talented and will pass the test, while others who work very hard have a difficult time trying to reach results and says:

For me it is more important to judge someone's effort, someone's dedication, you know. Are they accountable or not accountable, that is more important, because the guys that wins... (Skiing coach men's team 1).

Both in soccer and in skiing many of the coaches talk about form as an important and decisive factor. When they talk about the athletes' form they refer to a high degree to what they see when looking at the athletes' performances in training and competitions. The form and values of the test results do not seem to have the same impact.

Yes, we do make some tests but I am not so much in favour of tests, because a coach's most important tool is the eyes. You can never, never forget that the more tests you make, the further you get from your most important tool [the eyes] and I think it is priority number one when as a coach... when I can see if there is someone who is stalling, when I see if someone is feeling bad, when I see someone who is not concentrated... (Soccer coach women's team 1).

General tests of athletes' strength and fitness level are most often mentioned. The coaches talk about different kinds of endurance, power, strength, sprint, balance and fitness tests. Only one of the skiing coaches says that they use some sport specific test. This is a ski specific test for balance and coordination. Most of the other tests seem to be general strength and fitness tests. All the tests mentioned are connected to movements and physical performance.

Statistics – plane numbers that does not picture reality

Regarding the use of statistics as a factor in the selections, some of the skiing coaches use different forms of ranking lists (which can be counted as some form of statistics) as their main selection tool. The other skiing coaches use ranking lists more as a guideline or not very much at all. No other statistics are mentioned concerning selections in skiing. In soccer most of the soccer coaches seem to have a rather negative feeling about the use of statistics as a factor of importance in the selections. Only one coach says that statistics have any impact on the selections and this coach says that he sometimes uses statistics concerning final shots as a decisive factor for selections. It is claimed that statistics are plain numbers that do not really give a true picture of the reality. It is mentioned quite a few times that even if it is possible to get statistics about for example how much a player has been running during a game, this is not worthwhile, as it does not tell if the player has been running in the right places and doing the things needed.

I do not do them [statistics in the selection process], I think it is bloody nonsense, if you select a player who has run 13 kilometres in a game and another 14 and a third 12, who is the best one of them? Is it the one who has run 14 kilometres but 6 kilometres unnecessarily? Then it has been pointless, so no (Soccer coach women's team 5).

Although they do not use statistics as a selection tool, some coaches pay attention to statistics. One coach thinks that statistics can be used to get an overall picture of a player and his/her career. He can be looking at statistics to acquire knowledge of how many games the player played and what s/he has done in the games according to the statistics. Another coach says that in training he sometimes uses a GPS transmitter on the players to be able to analyse how they have run and at what speed they run. This is then used as a tool for training, not for the selections.

Drug testing – not a selection tool

Drug tests are not used as a selection tool to make sure the selected athletes are not taking any substances on the "prohibited list" (made by the World anti doping agency, WADA). All the coaches' general expectation on the athletes is a

very strong belief that they are “clean” and that they know they have to be. When they are in the team there are a lot of drug tests according to the coaches. None of the coaches say they have the right or the permission to carry out these kinds of tests. Other organisations work with this. One of the soccer coaches states that the athletes in his team have to sign a written contract where doping and the consequences for the athlete who takes drugs are manifested. I did not ask specifically for this and it is therefore possible that other teams might also have this kind of contract or a similar agreement. Even if drug tests are not a part of the selection process now, this is a variable that very possibly could be included in the selection process, according to all the coaches. In some of the teams the athletes have to go through a medical examination and get clearance before any participation.

Achieve results or develop?

As mentioned earlier, the goals for all of these teams are to achieve top performances. It also seems that one goal is to provide for continual success for the team. This affects the selections, as some athletes are selected to achieve immediate top results and others are in the team to develop so that they will be able to perform top performances in the future. One skiing coach called this “*the split philosophy*”. This means that the coaches work both with developing the newcomers and at the same time with the more experienced athletes who are in the team to perform top results. This way of working with the selections seems to be the same in both skiing and soccer. The inclusion of athletes from different levels into the team was especially emphasised as important for the national teams. These teams have to provide for continual success for their team through the existing athletes in their country. This seems to put stress on them to plan for continuous development in their own athletes. A couple of the teams (soccer) expresses how they have gone from being a team focusing on development to now be a top performance team and how this also influences the team selections.

The individuals in the teams have different goal settings and are supposed to reach different abilities, which means that the athletes also might be treated somewhat different. The more experienced and the longer the athletes have been in the team the better the athlete should be and top results are expected. For some athletes this means that nothing else than absolute top performances are expected as long as they are not injured. If the more experienced athletes do not perform, their spot on the team is questioned.

Who are selected the younger or older, less or more experienced?

In skiing it was very clearly expressed how important it is to give the newcomers in the teams opportunities for getting experience with the new slopes around the world. That seemed to be a factor of importance for their chances of

achieving good results in the future. In both the soccer teams and the skiing teams the importance of the games and competitions and the time of the season have an impact on what athletes are selected to perform. The selections to a championship competition in skiing are in all the teams very much dependent on the athletes' results. This is explained by the main goals of championship competitions being top performances and possible medals. This often results in the choice of a more experienced athlete to be the one competing in the championship competition. In the soccer teams the importance of the games also seems to have a big influence on who gets to play. The more important the game, the more experienced players used seems to be the rule most of the times. Some of the soccer coaches brought up the risk of this, as the less experienced players will then have a hard time getting chances to develop. They thought that many coaches choose the more experienced players in an important game, as this may be felt as the safest choice. This they thought that might be done to protect themselves. Another soccer coach, who expressed the same thing, thought that there should be more focus on and more chances for the younger and less experienced players. His feeling was that many coaches in Sweden have a very cowardly attitude towards bringing in less experienced players, as they care so much for the more experienced athletes and want to support them. He connects this to the importance of immediate results in soccer. Yet another coach talked about the need for long-term plans and good environment to provide chances for the less experienced players as well.

Rather the team player than the individualist...

All teams consist of athletes with more or less developed individualistic characteristics, where some athletes are much more ego-centred and others are much more so called 'team players'. In the soccer team the coaches think that there has to be a good balance of players. A team needs both players acting more like team players caring about the team and players who are more individualists, taking more chances and being more egoistic in their play. In both sports the coaches state that it is the individual who achieves the performances, not the team. In soccer, too, it is individuals that contribute to the team's performance. In skiing all the coaches point out that, since skiing is an individual sport, the skiers have to be individualists thinking of their own performances. Still, in both sports the 'team player', who seems to be the athlete who plays by the team's rules and is a kind of leader of the team, as he or she acts according to the rules, norms and values of the team, is very important for the team. In soccer some coaches very strongly believe the teams are in need of these 'team players'. The skiing coaches also mention the need for the athletes to be 'team players'. While the soccer coaches talk more about a balance in the team with both 'team players' and some more individualistic players, the skiing coaches emphasise the need for the skiers to be very individualistic but able to

fit into the team. As skiing is an individual sport, the athletes have to think of themselves and their own goals. Still, as they spend a great deal of time training, living and travelling together with other athletes as a team, they also have to function in a team. In skiing a couple of coaches state that it is their task to educate the skiers to work together as a team and act according to the values and norms of the team. The soccer coaches state that it is important to have clear values and norms, but there it seems that getting a coherent team mostly has to do with recruiting the “right” players. When selecting players into a soccer team, the coaches select different kinds of players in order to make sure the players will work well together as a team.

As regards the selections, the soccer coaches generally do not think that it is possible to have more than some ego-centred players in a team. This means that they try to find a balance of personalities when making the selections. In skiing it is expected that many athletes are individualists. Still, some of the coaches mention that if they have two equally good athletes and only one spot in the team, the one who is more of a ‘team player’ might probably be the one selected into the team. One coach (skiing) said that the athletes’ results count the most. He also said that if some athletes are equally good (just under the critical level to be selected through rankings/result-based criteria and coaches’ discretion has to be used), the behaviour of the athlete plays a role. He went on to explain that the team is important and that it makes a difference if the athlete is a leader or someone who will have a bad influence on the team. He said that they have had people like this on the team and that if he had two equally good athletes and the possibility of choosing, it would be very obvious that he would choose the one that would not be a troublemaker.

All coaches say that clearly not all athletes in a team will like one another but that they have to show respect for one another. To show respect seems to be the key thing for the teams to be able to work. In skiing the athletes all have individual plans and work partly with the team but partly on individual programs. Some of the skiing coaches talk about the necessity to give the skiers different options to choose among concerning training and competitions. They think that the skiers need to have some kind of freedom but still have to respect the team rules. One skiing coach explained that during the summer they provided ski camps in three locations for their athletes. The skiers were able to choose themselves to which of those locations they would go for training. All of these locations had good training facilities but some were better than the others. If one of the best skiers chooses to go to a location the coaches do not think is the best for this athlete, they will still have to accept it. They have to understand that the best training conditions do not always give the best results and that it is very important to the athletes to be able to choose the location that fits best for them in their lives.

Skiers' own teams

In skiing some of the best skiers in the world have established their own teams with their own coaches, physiotherapists and crew to be able to totally create their own individual training schedule. As this is very costly, it can be done only by athletes with a lot of money. The coaches believe it would be impossible for all athletes to do this for both financial and practical reasons. As an example of the practical difficulties, the summer and fall training on the glaciers is mentioned. This training is to a great extent performed on glaciers around the world. On the glaciers it would be practically impossible if all skiers had their own courses, as there would simply not be enough space for everyone to practise on the glaciers then.

Changes in the basis for the selections

The criteria and guidelines are discussed every year and have for a couple of teams stayed the same for the last five or six years. The coaches state that the criteria are becoming tougher in some skiing teams, and all the skiing coaches state that there has been a change towards smaller and smaller teams. The reasons for this seem to be fewer financial resources but also a change to working in a more concentrated way with a smaller number of skiers. This in its turn is making it harder to be selected to the skiing teams. For the teams using result-based criteria in the selections, the coaches state that they have changed the criteria towards tougher critical cutting points. This seems to be done in all teams but especially in the lower level teams such as development teams and C-teams. In the teams that do not solely use the result-based selection, the teams are also said to be smaller and the selections therefore tougher.

In a couple of the teams the coaches said that the system is more flexible now than before. Earlier on the number of athletes in the teams used to be based on a fixed number of skiers in each of the disciplines, but now the number and level of the selected skiers are connected to the available skiers and to which discipline they are competing in.

You go where your talent is (Skiing coach men's team 1).

It was also stated that more long-term thinking is now present in the selection decisions, and it seems that a contributing factor to this is the smaller financial resources forcing the teams to have a more planned strategy for the selections. Many of the teams talked about now having fewer athletes in their top groups in order to be able to give those athletes the necessary help.

Among the soccer coaches it was also mentioned that more long-term thinking is being introduced. This was then connected to how long the coaches will work with the teams, how long the players' contracts are but also to the

strategies for the selections. One soccer coach says that he believes that on the female side they are going from a system where the players had a lot of power to a system where the players will have less power. He thinks that the female soccer players have earlier on been able to exert pressure on the small organisations their clubs have been. This led to a system where the players had great opportunities for influencing the choices of both the coach and the players. Now with more professional clubs and organisations the power of the players will probably be diminished according to this coach.

Summary of the criteria for the selections

- All the teams use some kinds of criteria to select the athletes to their teams, but how well defined the criteria are differs considerably among the teams.
- Former performances are an important factor for the selections in both soccer and skiing. In skiing former performances were often measured in terms of the athletes' places on different ranking lists. In soccer former performances were based more on a subjective picture the coach had of the athlete.
- As regards the ranking lists in skiing and especially the FIS-list, there were some thoughts concerning the validity of the list.
- All the coaches pointed out how important it was that some part of the selections was based on the coaches' own judgements.
- In both of these sports the coaches emphasised the importance of getting the team to function together. This affected the selections in both of the sports.
- In soccer the selection criteria are based on the idea of finding the best team and this does not necessarily mean finding the players with the best soccer skills. The soccer coaches pointed out how important the players' personality and behaviour are and that they would not choose players they know behave badly.
- When the coaches talk about technical skills they seem to look for athletes that they think have good skills or good chances of developing these skills. When they look at behavioural and psychological factors in the athletes, there seems to be a difference, as they mostly seem to look at the skills the athletes already have and less at the potential to develop those skills.
- In some of the skiing teams there are age criteria making sure that the athletes selected are not too old. In skiing there seems to be a continuous discussion about age across all the teams. In soccer age does not seem to have as much influence with regard to selecting the squad, but when it comes to selecting the players to the games, quite a few of the coaches

thought that the older and more experienced player was often selected before the younger and less experienced player.

The process

When studying selections, factors such as how the selection process is performed, how many and what kinds of positions the persons involved in the selections possess and who has the final responsibility for the selections are to be taken in consideration as they affect the validity of the selections.

The process of selection in skiing

When the coaches use set criteria based on ranking lists, these lists will be the tool for the selections. Anyone who has made the critical number is selected and those who have not are not selected. In the teams working with guidelines and the coaches' discretion, the process of selection involves meetings among the coaches where they discuss the athletes. In all the teams the coaches say that this is a rather extensive process. The coaches of the different disciplines like downhill, slalom, giant slalom, super G etc. for the national teams, Europa cup teams, junior teams and development coaches meet to discuss the athletes. The meetings are held in both small and big groups and seem for most of the teams to be held separately for men's and women's teams, but one coach says that they check that they think in the same way and do the same things for both of the teams. One coach of a country that uses very strict result-based criteria says that the coaches come to the meetings with two lists of athletes. On one list there are the athletes that have made the selection on the criteria based on the rankings and on the other the athletes they want to take into the team on coaches' discretion. For the athletes that met the criteria, there are no discussions about their being qualified to the team, but for the other athletes there are a lot of discussions. This year the coach says that they had six names on the coaches' discretion list, but they could only afford to take one of those athletes into the team. A couple of teams that do not use such strict criteria mostly discuss the athletes, and one of those coaches says that they try to make a ranking of the athletes and discuss that list. One coach says that the discussions can go on for months before the decisions are taken, another says that it takes days or hours. All the skiing coaches talk about the process as being rather extensive. They see it as a process where many arguments for and against a skier are expressed. As the national coaches travel a lot in the winter with the world cup teams they have limited opportunities for seeing the racers that are not in the team, skiers that might be possible newcomers to the team. They state that they have to trust the judgements of the coaches who work with the athletes that are not in the team when they want to bring new people into the team. All of them seem to work on having good communication with these other coaches. They believe that the arguments these coaches have concerning the selections based on coaches' discretion are very important to them when making the final decisions.

When they meet to discuss the athletes all of the coaches have to bring forward arguments about the athletes they think should be nominated and one coach says:

And I think it is really good because everything gets laid out on the table and there are a lot of coaches that have been involved with that athlete for a long time and that person says that she has that quality and this and that and then the other person brings up different arguments and it all gets piled up on the table, and then you kind of go through it... and at the end, you know, something stays there... it is like ok...do we agree on it? (Skiing coach women's team 1).

The ski coaches stated that they think their decisions play a big role for the athletes and their skiing careers. It was said that these discussions were

...not taken lightly by any means, cause we know we are affecting people's lives and careers (Skiing coach men's team 1).

Who decides about the selections in skiing?

The national teams are divided into different teams depending on both the levels of the teams and on the gender and disciplines. In most federations there is a separation between the speed teams and the technical teams, where the teams have different staffs of coaches and medical staffs. Some nations have a head coach both on the women's and the men's side, while a couple of teams have a head coach who is responsible for both the men's and the women's teams. The interviewed coaches in this study are head coaches and make the selection decisions, but they need to have their decisions approved by the federation (board, alpine director or a similar body). The reasons for this seem to be merely financial rather than anything else. One coach tells me how disappointed he has been in the federation and that he had a very hard time when he felt that they changed their decisions about the team too late. He had got an approval from the federation to select the team they had agreed on and he had informed the racers that they had been selected. After this the federation had changed their minds about the athletes for financial reasons. The result was that against his will he had to tell two athletes that they were no longer part of the team. He felt steamrollered by the federation, as he had already told the athletes and they were very disappointed *by being told that* they were not part of the team anymore. This, he said, affected his trustworthiness with the athletes, and he felt that he had two options. Either he could quit the team as a protest or he could stay and do his very best for the skiers who were to be dropped from the team. He stayed as the coach and managed to help those skiers get opportunities for practising with the team even if they were not in the team. He

described this story as very difficult for him and how this started discussions among the athletes and blogs on the Internet.

The process of selection in soccer

In soccer there are some differences among the teams as regards how the selection process is performed. In some of the teams the selection process seemed fairly structured. In some other teams the coaches refer to “communication” with other coaches or their own thought process as the process for the selections. One coach explains that he and his assistant coach start with the selection process around five days ahead of the selections. They both write down their ideas about the selections. During the week they meet to talk and assess their thoughts against each other and against the notes they have written about the athletes during the week’s training. This process of analysing and discussing the players leads up to the decisions about who will be selected to play in the upcoming game. When talking about the process, the coach also reflects on how their thoughts about the players can change during the week:

It is a rather interesting process; it [the decisions about who will be selected to play] can change a lot. It may change at maybe two-three positions during five days (Soccer coach men’s team 3).

Another coach also says that this process can take a couple of days. He and his assistant coach make small cardboard pieces with all the names of the players. They line up the team, move the players around and discuss what they will do if anyone is injured, etc. This is described as doing a jigsaw puzzle and after moving around the pieces and discussed this a number of times, they come closer and closer to the same results on several occasions. At that time, he believes that they have reached the right solution.

A coach who makes the decision himself says that he trusts his intuition concerning the final decision. He normally thinks of three different formations of the team and is aided by his intuition to guide him to understand which of the formations will be the best. He analyses the different formations and lets this process take some time, and he uses different ways of relaxation to have his intuition guide him to the right answer.

When the coaches recruit players from other clubs and from abroad they try to get as much prior information about the players as possible. They look at and follow the players’ performances and behaviour for quite some time. When selecting a player from another country, some of the coaches go to the country themselves to look at and talk to the players, and others get the information through other coaches, agents and other contacts. Many of the coaches state that their biggest recruitment base is players from the younger teams in their own or nearby clubs. An advantage of recruiting players from their own club or

a club with similar ways of working is that the player is then already familiar with the norms and values of the club. This means also that their social situation might not be changed too much. One coach said that recruiting players from other countries might be a risk. As recruiting from abroad is often expensive and they are then competing with clubs from other countries with more money, there is a risk that they will only afford to recruit the “*second choice players*” and not the best players. The financial factor is said to play a big role here.

Who decides about the selections in soccer?

In soccer the selection concerns forming the team (squad) for the season and the selections forming the team for the different games. In the selections to the squads the coaches seem to have most of the responsibility but they work closely together with the board or other similar executive functions in the club. These other functions have to approve the budget for the recruitments. In soccer all the teams have a staff of coaches. Usually they have a head coach, an assistant coach, a coach for the goalkeepers, possibly coaches for the younger players, team managers, a medical team, kit managers, etc. In some of the teams there is a clear difference between who is the head coach and the assistant coach. In other teams the responsibility is more divided into different areas than into some hierarchical structure. In one of the teams the responsibility for the selections is said to be shared between the head and the assistant coach and both of the coaches are then equally responsible. In most teams the selections are described as being made in cooperation among the coaches due to discussions about the selections, but the final decision is taken by the head coach. How much influence other coaches than the head coach really have and how the selection process is organised are said to be rather different in the different teams. Quite a few of the interviewed head coaches say that they listen to and work together with the other coaches (assistant coaches, the goalkeeper coach etc.) in the selection process. At the same time they point out the necessity of having one coach who is responsible for the final decision;

I decide the team, I do, I believe you need to have one [person] that takes the final [decision] I believe so (Soccer coach women's team 3).

One coach differs from the others as he clearly states that he makes the decisions totally by himself. He talks to the other coaches and uses them as a “sounding board” but wants to and works by himself in the selection process. He does not want to have too much involvement of anyone else in the selection process. It is stated that the coaches value some factors differently. In soccer the players' form and how form is to be valued are mostly under discussion. Whether it is the form that the player had in the last game or in the last training session or whether it is the predictable form in the upcoming games that are to be valued seems to be something the coaches have different opinions about.

Among the skiing coaches the athletes' long-term development opportunities seem to be one of the major points of discussion. In both sports the questions about selecting the more experienced athlete or the less experienced athlete are a major issue in the selection process.

Selection tools

When the coaches in skiing work with set criteria defining the critical numbers an athlete has to reach, those that reach these critical rankings are selected and the others are not. For pre-set limits on physical tests and the like the athletes also have to reach a number that decides whether the athlete will be selected or not. In all other selections other selection tools are used. The coaches say that the most common tools are their eyes as well as their feelings. These tools, which are of a subjective character, are described as very important tools in the selection process.

My eyes are my best tool and they have to be used in all situations (Soccer coach women's team 1).

It is pretty much if you see something in an athlete and they do not meet the criteria and the coaches really see something and say "hey" she does not have the points but because... (Skiing coach women's team 1).

A feeling, or intuition, as some coaches call this, is something they have developed through years of looking at athletes. The coaches state in all interviews that by spending time with the athletes and seeing them a lot, they develop a feeling for the athletes and their future potential. This, together with the knowledge the coaches have of the sport, helps them to look at the right things;

Experienced coaches should know what is important for skiing (Skiing coach women's team 2).

No, I do not have a model, it is more a general opinion and feeling and after some years this is not so hard, it becomes pretty clear. There is no pattern or model that I look for... I am so confident with what I know and I know the game so well and what is demanded in every position (Soccer coach men's team 3).

In some way you can feel what kind of ambition they have. Out of ten players it might be one or two you misjudge, in my opinion (Soccer coach women's team 3).

You see, you see it with an experienced eye (Soccer coach men's team 1).

Gender issues in the selection process

In the interviews all but one of the coaches were men. The coaches were asked if they thought that their gender could be something that affected the selection process in some way. Quite a few of the soccer coaches thought that this was possible but answered that it was also probable that factors as the background and education of the coach play a role. Some of the skiing coaches did not believe that their gender played a role in the selection process and a couple thought that the question was very hard to answer. As they were not women themselves, they thought that it was difficult to know how a woman would have handled the selections. Two of the coaches said that they had a feeling that women generally might take “tougher” decisions than men. They thought that it would be possible that women would be “tougher” also in a selection process. One coach referred to his wife (whom he sometimes discusses selections with) and to “*women in business who have a little less emotion*” than men and therefore sometimes are able to take “better” decisions. The other coach referred to the female physiotherapists in his team (which he discusses decisions with) and thought that they are fairly strict and do not tolerate bad behaviour, etc. Taking “tougher” and “better” decisions are the coaches’ own words here. It was hard to interpret from the answers what was exactly meant by being “tough” and how that would make the decisions “better”. Still, it mirrored their view that there could possibly be a difference if the selections were made by women.

In both soccer and skiing there are separate competition classes for women and men. Most coaches in this study are responsible for teams with women or men, but a couple of the coaches are responsible for both women’s and men’s teams. In the process of the selections there seem to be some differences in how the coaches from the two sports look at women and men. This also seems to play a role for how the selection process is performed. While the alpine coaches have few reflections connected to gender issues, all the soccer coaches have quite a few thoughts about gender issues. A couple of the skiing coaches state that they have coached only male teams and do not have any opinion about the process of selection in a female team. The coaches of the women’s teams in the study seem to think that the selection processes are handled in the same way in women’s and men’s teams.

One skiing coach who was responsible for both male and female athletes said that men and women were sometimes compared and considered against each other in the selections and that this was considered to be problematic. Since women and men compete in different classes, it was explained that they should not be compared with each other. In their team they had no set number for how many athletes there could be in the team or how many of those athletes should be women or men. The athletes who were thought to be best qualified

and those with the best chances of achieving good results in the future were the ones that were supposed to be selected. As there was a limited budget for the team, it was inevitable that men and women were sometimes compared with each other in the selections. It was mentioned that this could give both the men and the women advantages and disadvantages. According to the coach it could be a disadvantage for the women to be compared with male skiers in the country instead of being compared with other female skiers in the world. This was thought to be especially unfair as the men were said generally to be “better” skiers than the women, which could diminish the women’s chance of being selected. At the same time the coach said that it could be an advantage for the women, since the competition was said to be less hard among the women than among the men and that this could lead to more chances for women to be selected. The coach expressed different views on the advantages and disadvantages and finally came to the conclusion that it might be harder for a female skier to be selected. Probably the female skier would have to perform better in comparison to what the man had to do to be selected. This reasoning was only mentioned by one of the coaches (who did not work with pre set result-based criteria), but the same problem might occur in other skiing teams too. As there are no fixed numbers of athletes in the different teams, the total budget of the team will in the end be the factor deciding how many athletes will be selected.

Among the soccer coaches, who all handle selections to games every week, there seems to be some kind of consensus or general understanding concerning gender. This “general understanding” among these coaches is then something they position themselves towards. This can be seen as a form of essentialism where the coaches talk about what men are and women are like. It was said that women connected feedback and explanations with internal personal factors more than men who related feedback more to external factors. According to the coaches, the consequence of this was that the women took the feedback about the selections a lot more personally than the men. This reasoning seems to affect the way in which the coaches communicate with the teams in general and how the communication concerning team selections is conducted. One coach of a women’s team says that he has to be careful about the way in which he expresses himself, as the women might take the feedback very personally. Almost the opposite scenario was described when the feedback about the selections to men was explained. According to some of the coaches the feedback to the males had to be very clear and to the point, as the players needed to understand and connect the feedback also with internal factors in order to develop their skills. Some of the coaches (coaches from both male and female teams) also said that women demand more explanations, feedback and clarifications than men. Women were also said to demand more consensus than the male players. A coach of a female team said that a woman who is not

selected wants to know why she is not selected but also what she needs to work on to get a chance of being selected another time. This, he says, means that the coaches get many questions from the female players, which might not always be very easy to deal with.

...the main problem is that they ask a lot of questions so that takes a lot of time, but it is of course no problem, we just want to help them (Soccer coach women's team 3).

Another coach of a female team believes that female teams usually have strong solidarity in their teams. He thinks that because of this the whole team and their reactions have to be taken into consideration when he tells the players about the selections. A couple of the coaches (coaches from both a male and a female team) say that there is considerably less talking between the coaches and the players in a male team. They see this as a negative thing, as they believe that it is important for men too to express their feelings. Both coaches believe that more communication and greater tolerance of the men showing and expressing their feelings would be good. One of them characterises male soccer as a “macho” world that does not allow the players to show feelings, but he believes that they would benefit from doing this. One coach of a male team says that when the players work with mental training like for example visualisation, it is important for them to be able to work with their feelings. He thinks that the male players would benefit from being more in touch with their feelings. He says that his players do not talk to him too much about selections. He hopes that they have someone else to talk to, as he believes that it is important for them to talk about this with someone. A coach (now coaching a woman team) who has worked with both men's and women's teams has a lot to say about how he thinks that there are different ways of working in male and female soccer. When working with women the unwritten rule or, as he says, “*the culture*” is that communication is very important. He says that when coaching a men's team, it is supposed to be understood that men do not need to talk so much. His belief is that the male soccer players also want to know why they are not selected but that they are supposed to be more “professional” and not question the selections. From his experience as an assistant coach of a male team, he believes that the men want to know and to talk more than what is done. He says that the players turned to him, the assistant coach, and to the physiotherapists and wanted to talk when they did not get explanations from the head coach. His belief is that the need is there but that the culture in male soccer does not really allow this to be seen.

A couple of coaches (from both women's and men's teams) believe that both male and female players take the selection far too personally. They state that too much consideration is taken of the players' feelings in both male and female

soccer. According to these coaches this is not needed. They believe that their players “*have to grow up and mature*”. They think that they have to understand why the selections are made in the way they are for a bigger reason than their individual concerns and that not everyone can be happy all the time in elite sports, because in elite sports it is the results that count and are the most important in the end. These coaches think that the players do not need to get so thorough explanations about the reasons for the selections. One view concerning the above reasoning about gender is the following quotation from a male soccer coach of a women’s team;

...and all coaches should try to work with a women’s team because it is... it puts more demands on you as a coach... I believe... (Soccer coach women’s team 1).

Gender and cultural differences, social constructions that affect the selections

A couple of the soccer coaches say that they think that in soccer there have developed ideas about what men and women are like. Even if these ideas about what men and women are like are considered not always to be connected to reality, they have become a part of the norms in the sport. The soccer coaches see this as some kind of construction that they do not really believe in themselves. This social construction of gender also effects the selections and seems to help the reproduction of gender. A couple of the soccer coaches also talk about cultural differences among players and discuss this in connection with gender issues. They think that players from other nations have different ways of reacting to feedback and coaching styles than the Swedish players depending on what leadership styles they are used to. This and how familiar the players are with the new environment might, according to these coaches, be connected with more differences among the players than the gender differences. As an example of this a coach of a women’s team talks about the reactions of some foreign players in his team. These women are used to a very authoritarian leadership style and have a hard time dealing with his more democratic leadership style, which involves discussions, explanations and interaction with the athletes. According to the coach, these girls are much more used to being told what to do and not question the coach’s words than to being involved in the decision process. He thinks that this shows how their background and culture in their former clubs affect how they are acting and reacting now. He believes background and cultural differences to be more crucial to players’ behaviour than their gender. An example of how an African male soccer player came to Sweden was also used to illustrate how the cultural differences played a greater role than the gender. This player was new to everything in Sweden and did not understand how things worked here neither on nor off the field. It was said that he was in need of having someone to communicate with about all

these new things. The example was used to point out that his need for communication was not connected to his gender but to cultural factors, as he was not used to the Swedish environment. The soccer coaches who talked about cultural differences wanted to point out that differences in what players are like as well as gender differences could also be related to cultural differences. This discussion about gender and cultural background as social constructions in relation to the discussion about how the coaches act gives a rather mixed picture of what it is that should play and what does play a role for how the coaches act in the selection process.

External pressure in the selection process

All the coaches say that they have a good relation with the club or federation board and managers, who they think have confidence in the coaches being the ones with the knowledge of the selections. Even if they have to discuss and get their decisions approved by higher levels in the club or federation, this seems to be more a question of economy. This probably mirrors the financial situation and has to do both with the different opportunities for choosing special athletes and with the number of athletes than can be selected. Here there is a difference in the recruitment to a club in comparison to the recruitments of athletes to a national team. If a soccer player is recruited, the club normally has to buy the player from the club the player belongs to and, in addition to this, be able to provide for the player in their club. The sum they will buy the player for is dependent on factors like the level of the player, the marketing value of the player and the club the player is from. All these things might then affect the selection opportunities. When the athletes are selected to the skiing teams, the federations do not pay the ski clubs but they have to provide for the athletes that are in the team. How much depends on the athlete's level and the level of the team he or she is selected to.

The coaches do not feel that they are pressured to select certain athletes due to wishes of the board, the managers or the directors. In soccer quite a few of the coaches mention the risk of this becoming a factor of concern in the future, as they believe the board of the club and the managers might get more and more control of everything. They mention that this is happening in other countries and it is not seen as a good thing. The coaches state that that they are the ones that know the athletes and their future opportunities the best.

I do not believe in the "foreign" way, when it is a manager who barely sees or talks to the players, someone who sits on the stand and then will select the team... my philosophy is that you should try to talk to the players. A team is a team that will try to win together, coaches and players all together (Soccer coach men's team 2).

In the interviews with the skiing coaches the question about influence from others was not discussed to the same extent as it was with the soccer coaches. It seems as if someone tries to influence the skiing coaches' choices, it is the parents who are very much involved in their children's skiing career. The media were hardly mentioned at all when I talked to the skiing coaches. Even if they talked about having a good relation with the federation, one coach at the same time felt that he was very much in the hands of the federation and their decisions. As explained earlier, he had got permission to select a number of athletes. After he had done this, the financial situation had changed, and due to the board's decisions he had to drop some of the already selected athletes from the team.

In soccer the coaches often said that they have to deal with people trying to influence them. The media, agents, the general public and parents were mentioned. All of these groups had an opinion about the selections and tried to influence the coaches. How the media discuss team selections is something they all have to face and deal with, and this seems to be done in different ways. Some coaches try to ignore and block out what the media write. One of them reads what the media write as pure entertainment and laughs at it. One mentions that if the media have a different view than he, this might push him to believe in and want to prove his point even more. One coach says that he is not influenced but irritated by the media. The majority of the coaches do not believe that they are influenced by the media. Still, a couple of them when discussing say that as coaches they have to be strong to deal with this pressure. One of the coaches also describes how when he was new in his coaching role he was a lot more sensitive to what the media were writing than what he is now. It was mentioned that the media's exposure of or way of lobbying for certain players to be selected after a while becomes the "truth" and the right choice in the eyes of the public. One coach said that this results in people he does not know but also friends coming up to him, asking him to explain why he did not select a certain player. For him this was hard to deal with in the beginning of his career.

Strategies for dealing with pressure from others

When the coaches deal with people who try to influence their decisions, different strategies are used. One strategy is said to be to have and follow a very strict game plan as the guide for the selections. Another strategy is not to get too closely involved with those that could possibly have some influence on their decisions. Agents and sponsors are mentioned here as the people that the coaches try not to have too close relations with. One of the coaches describes a situation when earlier on, as a coach of another club, he got involved in a difficult situation. His intention was not to have too close a relation with sponsors, as that might put him in a biased situation, but still he was involved

in a very difficult situation. This situation had to do with the head sponsor who wanted to have some control over the selections to the squad. The head sponsor had a relative he wanted a spot for in the A-team. The coach had told the sponsor that his relative would be selected if he qualified on the same preconditions as the other players. The relative did not qualify, so he was not selected and the result of this was that the head sponsor pulled out all their money from the club. As this was a big amount of all the sponsor money for the club, it was a difficult and strange situation both for him and for the club. He had to tell the club that he could not be the coach, if it was going to be possible to “buy” a place in the team. He also had to tell the team that if this was to be the intention of the club, they would have to find another coach. Other stories about coaches being influenced by others in the selection process were told, stories that did not include themselves but were about situations in other countries. For example it was mentioned that an agent in England bribed a coach so that he would get a certain percentage of the money if he bought certain players to the club. Even if the coaches do not think that bribes are a part of the selections in Sweden, they think that they might be in other countries.

One coach who is now coaching women but used to coach men said that the pressure from the media and others is a lot less on the women’s sides than on the men’s side. Another coach felt that the media are not so knowledgeable about the women’s soccer, so what they write and ask about do not have such a big impact.

“Expensive players” should play...

The economic investments in the soccer players are a delicate question with regard to the role this plays in the selections. The coaches want to believe that all their choices are made in accordance with the best interest of the sport. At the same time they state that they are aware of the role that the financial situations and investments made in some players have. One coach says that if they get involved in situations where they have two equally good players and one is bought to the club for 10 million kronor and one is bought for one hundred thousand kronor, this will have an effect on who is going to play. It is important for the club to get something for all the money invested, so the expensive players should play. As the clubs’ economy also depends on selling players and earning money, it is important that the players that might give the club money if they are sold get enough playing time, so that they get time to be seen and considered as a choice for other clubs. Other possible sources of influence are other coaches’ views, as they might have comments on the team selections.

Recruiting athletes that are friends of or have relations to the coaches was discussed, but here too it was mentioned that this probably happens more

abroad than in Sweden. One coach joked about this and said that he himself was a result of this kind of friendship recruitment. None of the coaches had been part of or heard of situations in Sweden where one player was recruited with a request or wish that another player was also recruited to the same team. They believed that this kind of recruitments might happen elsewhere. In connection to this it was mentioned that it was fairly common to recruit two or three players rather than one when selecting players from abroad. Even if the players did not necessarily know each other, it was thought that as they shared the same culture and language they could support each other. This was explained as a way for the players not to be alone when adapting to the new country and new club.

Is it easy or hard to select a team?

All the coaches talked about difficulties involved in the selections and all but two coaches answered a direct question about whether it is easy or hard by stating that it is hard to make the selections. Two coaches thought that it is fairly easy to select a team. They thought that it is “just” a matter of following the guidelines and criteria they have for team selections. Most coaches said that the selections are quite difficult to make, but at the same time they are something that is part of the job and something a coach has to learn to deal with. The following quotations express some of the coaches’ feelings about the selections:

It is not easy... there are nights when you do not sleep well (Skiing coach men’s team 2).

It is difficult almost every time... (Soccer coach women’s team 2).

Of course it is hard, you pretty much decide about the future of a young person (Skiing coach women’s team 1).

I think it is pretty easy. If you know what you want and in the end you wanna have a strong [mentioning the name of the nation] skiing team in six years and that is how you select the junior groups (Skiing coach men’s & women’s team 1).

Coaches from both the sports said that it is quite easy to select the majority of the athletes, because it is obvious that they should be in the team as they are very good, but that the problems are the very last spots.

You have a two-hour discussion about one athlete but in the end it is probably not that athlete that makes you the gold medal (Skiing coach men's & women's team 1).

A couple of them bring up the question of whether it really is worthwhile to put that much energy into decisions about a couple of athletes. One of the soccer coaches philosophises about this and says that they are putting so much energy into selecting the last names of the team, when those persons anyway are probably not the ones that will make a difference in the end anyway. He wonders whether it would be better to look more at the athletes they have already chosen and to look at their abilities to find players that complement those players. In skiing it is mentioned that every year the same names are up for discussion and it can almost make the situation quite funny, to discuss the same athlete's year after year.

Difficult or problematic situations

The selection processes involves quite a few situations that the coaches perceive as difficult and sometimes problematic, but these are situations they have to cope with. To tell an athlete that he or she is no longer a member of the team and will not play in the upcoming game is perceived as difficult from many different angles. The soccer coaches mention how hard it is to tell someone who is used to playing that in this upcoming game he or she will not be playing. Especially if the player has been playing for a long time, it is hard to tell her or him that they are not good enough for the moment. At the same time those talks are seen as very important for a coach to be able to conduct.

...but if I have another player that is better and I if I'm afraid of having this talk with her [the one that is to be dropped from the team], because it takes some energy you know...,but the day I choose not to have this talk and instead choose to play with her even though I feel I have a better player, then I will have to quit, because then I will have lost my idea..., so these talks are very difficult but they are also the most important ones. That you dare to change if you feel things are not working (Soccer coach women's team 1).

Two other coaches state that it is hard to tell a player that he or she will not play, if they have based their decisions on intuition and feelings. They say that they do not think that this is a valid explanation to the players and feel forced to come up with some more definite reasons:

... to explain that you have done it based on your intuition, that is really hard. It will never really be accepted to say you have done it because of a gut feeling, your intuition, so you have to come up with explanations based on

the game. That will be more accepted by the player (Soccer coach men's team 1).

Another coach described how hard it was to drop an athlete that was a very good team-mate but did not meet the expected results. If two or more athletes have similar experience and are equally good, it is also a hard decision, as one (soccer) coach says:

...then it is difficult, then you almost feel sick because you feel both of them are so good that they deserve to play, but I have only one position... (Soccer coach men's team 3).

Quite a few of the coaches also mention how hard it can be to say tough things to athletes that they have a personal relation with from years of working together. One coach even says, *"probably the biggest issue is the personal contact"* and goes on to express how hard it can be when you come to the point where you have to tell the athlete that he or she does not qualify for the team anymore;

...it is very, very difficult because you are not dealing with probably reality, it is more emotional, so it is the hardest part (Skiing coach men's team 1).

The reactions from athletes that are not selected are also said to be difficult at times for the coaches to deal with. One coach (skiing) had a couple of athletes (male athletes) who said that if they were not selected to the team (national team), they would like to change and ski for another nation instead. The coach did not feel good about this. He wanted to find a way of working together and not losing the racers for the future even if they were not selected that year. A soccer coach says that it is easier to tell a girl that she is not selected than to tell a man, as it is not so often that girls "make a scene". He believes that the girls mostly show what he calls "professional behaviour" about the selections when it is time for the game, even if they are of course disappointed too. This coach says that he has heard male players say that they want to quit playing for the club and instead play for some other club when they have not been selected in six to seven games. In his view women might say that they want to change clubs if they have not had an opportunity of playing for the whole season and feel that they will develop better in another club.

To deal with athletes that are or have been injured is another area that the coaches describe as something that may be difficult. Many coaches say that they have a very good communication with the physiotherapists, doctors and athletes concerning the degree of the injury and whether the person can compete or play. Still, the injury status is described as something affecting the selections

quite a lot. It is described as hard to know what to do if an athlete is injured but might be able to perform but will have to wait to just before the game or competition to get the final answer from the medical staff.

In soccer, recruitment of players from abroad can sometimes involve difficulties. It was said that players from other countries are often used to more authoritarian leadership than the Swedish coaches are using. This then has to be understood and taken into consideration, as those players are often used to being told what to do and not used to being included in any discussions. One coach who had players from a foreign country in his team said that those players had a great “winner instinct” but hated talking about a loss after a game. These players were said already to be very much aware of the result and did not see the point of talking about it. To include players from countries or clubs using a totally different leadership style was said to put great demands on the coaches as well as on the other players in the team. It was said that this was sometimes a reason not to have players from so many countries in one club.

The language barrier that some foreign players face together with their inclusion in Swedish society and their social situation were described as things that could affect the players and sometimes lead to difficult situations for the coaches. The language was especially described as a difficulty, as many players from foreign countries were not very good at English. On the field the players might understand each other but in the dressing room and off the field it was felt that it was important that those players experienced that they were a part of the team. If they could not communicate with the other team members this could result in problems. All the teams that had foreign players seemed to work to create opportunities for the players to study Swedish. In some teams it was demanded of the players to learn Swedish. Factors like the above ones had to be and were therefore often taken into consideration when selecting players from other countries.

Athletes’ concerns in the selections

A person’s knowledge of the selection process has in the last few years been taken into consideration as a factor that has an effect on the validity of the selections. This is connected to the amount of knowledge that the person has about the criteria and the reasons for the selections. Those things might influence the athlete’s behaviour and feelings in the process, which might then have a direct or indirect effect on their chances of being selected.

Athletes’ knowledge of criteria and reasons for the selections

How much the athletes know about the criteria and reasons for the selections might have effects on the chances of being selected. The coaches were asked about their perceptions of the athletes’ knowledge of the criteria and reasons for selections. As regards the alpine coaches’ perceptions, the majority of the

coaches' said that they believe that the skiers know the grounds for the selections well. Still, the opportunities for the athletes to acquire any knowledge of the selection criteria and reasons for the selections seem to be quite different among the teams. In some alpine teams the grounds for the selections are posted on the web and on paper given to the skiers. According to the coaches of these teams there is no doubt that the skiers know the selection criteria.

I think it has to be lined out [to be official] so there is no discussion about it [the criteria] it is you know... you made it or you didn't... (Skiing coach women's team 1).

It turns out that there are different policies for and ideas about presenting the criteria and reasons for the selections in the different skiing teams. In one team that uses what they call guidelines for their selections, these are not posted on the web but the skiers get them on paper. In another team the coach thinks that the athletes know what the grounds are, but at the same time he says that they are not posted on the web anymore (have been posted earlier) and not written anywhere. It is also unclear if they are or are not orally communicated to the athletes. This coach mentions that both rankings and other factors are of importance in their selections. He also says that they have no clear definitions of their criteria describing exactly what factors are taken into consideration in the selections. The selections are more about a total picture of the athlete. He gives no examples of how the athletes should be able to know the reasons for the selections but says that the skiers "just know". One coach says that they use some kind of "criteria" but have not posted them anywhere or really defined them. They are not given to the skiers, so they probably do not know too much about how the coaches are thinking as regards the selections. This coach believes that it would be better if the skiers had more knowledge of the grounds for the selections. If the skiers knew more they would have better chances of creating better conditions for themselves and better opportunities for making the team, according to this coach. The coach thought that something would have to be done about this. Yet another coach does not think that the athletes care too much about knowing the criteria and reasons for the selections. A bit into the interview this coach changes his mind a little and says that this of course depends on how sure the athlete is about a spot in the team. The surer they are about being selected, the less they care, and the more critical position they are in, the more they care about the criteria for the selection.

The spontaneous answer from all the soccer coaches was that the players know the criteria and reasons for the selections. When I asked how they players had obtained this knowledge of the criteria, most of the soccer coaches hesitated. They changed their first very sure statements to more vague statements like saying that they 'believe that' the players know or that they are

‘pretty sure’ that the players know the grounds for the selections. Here many of the coaches also said that they did not think that the players needed to know what the selections were based on. When asking them to clarify this, it became clear that the coaches had different ideas about how much the players needed to know concerning the selections to the squad and the selections for every game. They said that the player who was going to be selected into a squad should know and did know about the rules in the teams, the values that are important in the teams, the roles they have been assigned and what physical demands there are on the players in the team. The coaches regarded these factors as being related to being part of a squad. In a couple of teams these values and rules are expressed in written form, but all the coaches talk about the importance of continuously communicating these values. Some of the coaches believed that they are doing this, while some of them said that this was probably talked about mainly in the beginning of the season and not so much later on during the season. When there are meetings with players that are possible new recruits to the teams, these things are said to be presented to them.

As regards the selections to the different games, the coaches state that the athletes should know the idea of the game, their role in the team and what positions they are competing for. It was not necessary or possible that they should know the exact reasons for the selections. This was explained to be connected to the selections being hard to explain, as they are a valuation of many factors such as the players’ present skills, attitude, form, the opponents and similar things and these are factors that the players do not necessarily need to have information about. The coaches state that it may be better if the athletes do not know everything. To tell an athlete exactly why he or she will not play might cast too much attention on factors that the athlete should not focus so much on. As an example of this, one coach mentions a player who has not been able to play well against a certain opponent during the last games when the teams have met. The player will not be selected to play against them in an upcoming game but will not be told the exact reason for this, as this kind of information is not seen as beneficial to the athlete.

How and when are the athletes informed about the selections?

In skiing the majority of the teams have some kind of meeting or official way of announcing the teams. This usually happens at the end of April or beginning of May, so that in good time before the upcoming season the athletes will know if they are part of the team and if so, which level (A-, B-, C-teams, etc.) they will be part of. With this information they can then plan for the summer and autumn training depending on their team’s schedule. In all the teams the athletes that are new to the team and those that are dropped from the team are contacted by one coach or team manager before the meeting and/or team announcement. Those that are already members of the team and will keep their

spot are not always contacted but just selected to the team again at the meeting. One coach says that he contacts all skiers, because he has a close relation to them and wants them to know this from him even if they are sure of their spot in the team.

One coach answers a bit differently from the others and says that they have not made the nominations official or communicated with the athletes in the best ways during the last few years. This is explained to be because of circumstances such as change of coaches, etc. There have been no new athletes selected to the team, so no real selection or nomination has taken place. This is something that according to this coach could have been done a lot better. The coach mentions that the skiers in the national team had given comments and giped/joked about this, asking question like *"Aha, so I am in the team or?"* as they probably felt that they had never really got official information of whether they had been selected that year too. The coach thinks that this has to be taken care of in a better way but mentions that it has been worse earlier on. Examples of this are that some skiers that got the information that they are, or even worse, that they are no longer in the team through reading it in the paper before being contacted in person.

In a couple of teams the skiers are first nominated and after this they have to sign an agreement, and when this is done the official team is announced. If the skier does not sign this agreement he or she will not be part of the national team. It has happened that some skiers did not sign the agreement. As an example of this, a couple of skiers signed a different agreement, which makes it possible for them to compete for the nation, but as they did not sign the initial agreement they are not part of the national team. It is their own choice to do this, as they believe that they will have better training opportunities or better conditions by having their own team. Those skiers then pay for themselves and their coaching and sometimes even have their own medical staff.

In soccer the common way is to present the team one or even two days (one team) before the games. In one team the team might either be presented one day ahead of the game but sometimes a couple of hours ahead of the game. The factors given as the reasons for presenting the team a day ahead of the game are that the selections trigger a lot of feelings in the athletes. Feelings they need to be able to control and adapt to, especially if they are disappointed because they are not selected. Not being picked to the team might involve quite a lot of feelings. Many of the teams seem to have the policy that it is okay to react on the day when the selection is presented but that the next day the athletes must have accepted the situation. Then they should not in any way show their dissatisfaction either through verbal or non-verbal communication. The coaches state that it is a relief for some coaches to have made the selections and the presentation of the team a day before the game, as it gives them some time to start focusing more on the game. In the team where the selections are

sometimes presented a couple of hours before the game, there were several reasons for this. One reason could be that the coaches had not finished the decision process earlier, as they were not sure about the players. It could also be that they wanted all the players to be prepared for the game. Especially if they were going for a longer trip they would want all players to believe that they had the chance to play and prepare as if they were going to play. If the team was presented the day before the game, they felt that the coaches' ranking of the players became very obvious. If something then happened and someone was injured and the coaches would have to select a player from "the bench", this player might then be disappointed and think that now when someone is injured, then he is useful but not otherwise. Another explanation of why the coaches of this team sometimes choose to present the team the same day was because of the media and their speculations and coverage that might reveal secrets to the opponents. This coach mentioned that this is the way the national team works (although this was not a national team). He said that they always select the team 1.5 hours before the games in order not to give the opponents too much time to acquire knowledge of the team's line-up. This coach mentioned that some clubs have training sessions closed off from the media, as they would be able to figure out the team by looking at the training. He said that his team did not do this but sometimes chose to have training that was not announced to avoid the media attending the training.

When the teams are presented, the common way seems to be to simply present the positions and the players' names without a great deal of explanations or justifications. If there is something that is not usual in the selection, as if there is a very young player who will be included in the team, if someone who has been part of the team for a long time is dropped or something similar, then the coaches generally talk to those athletes before the presentation of the team to prepare those players. There are somewhat ambiguous ideas about how much information the players should have. Many of the coaches emphasise that communication is very important, but at the same time they do not believe in explaining the selections too much. There are several reasons for this. As mentioned above, one reason is the risk that the players start focusing on negative things about themselves if they are informed about their flaws. Another is how time-consuming it would be to explain every selection and the difficulties involved, as the coach does not always know but feels who should be playing or not.

One of the coaches said that in previous years he had tried a system where every time when he switched some players, he had individual talks with them. He did this to explain the reasons for the selections but felt that the content of and the preparation for these talks took so much time and energy that it inhibited the other parts of his work too much. He has now changed to a system where the players know that they are welcome to come to his office to

talk about the selections. The players have not taken the initiative for doing this. This way of working seems to be how most of the coaches work; they talk to the players if the players take the initiative. Many of the coaches think that the players should ask more questions about the selections than they are now doing, but at the same time they seem somewhat afraid of the time this would take.

No, it becomes [laughs], it becomes..., of course it could be done but it would be a damned extensive talk, it would be the talk of a lifetime (Soccer coach men's team 3).

Athletes' opportunities to protest against a selection

All the coaches say that the athletes always have the possibility of coming to them and talking about the selections and their feelings about the selections. The chance that the selection decisions would change if an athlete talks to the coach is very small or non-existent, as all the coaches say that they would not change the decisions due to an athlete's input. One of the soccer coaches say that he would maybe make some changes half time in a game if an athlete really wanted to switch positions on the field. He is the only one who says that a talk with the coach might lead to a change. One alpine coach pointed out the necessity to have a good communication with and knowledge of the athletes. This was said to be important to be able to be observant if other factors than the ski-related ones had influenced the skiers' results. As an example of this the coach told me about a skier who had a close relative that died from a serious disease during the season. This of course put a lot of extra stress on the athlete, who was not able to perform as expected. He thought that things like this have to be taken into consideration in the selection process.

Many of the soccer coaches said that they encouraged the players to come and talk to them about the selection. At the same time they were all very firm about their role as the ones making the decisions. They emphasised that it should not be possible for players to "*talk their way into the team*". The coaches believe that the point and meaning of talking to the athletes is a way for them to explain their decisions and a way for the athletes to be able to voice their feelings. Still, these are not supposed to be talks where the decisions can be changed. In soccer it was very commonly stated that the athletes could or should not go to someone with a position above the coaches, like a club manager or the board or some similar decision-making body to protest against a selection. To do so was said only to hurt the athletes' future opportunities for being selected. In skiing it seemed to be accepted and okay for the athletes to go and talk to someone in a higher position, but even there too it was said that it would not probably have any impact on the selections. One coach of a skiing team where the selection criteria are posted on the web said that it is always

possible that an athlete with money could sue the federation, but he did not think that this had happened. In comparison to this, a coach from a country without official selection criteria said that the athletes could never sue them about the selections. He said that they could not even do it, as they would have nothing to base their case on, as the criteria were not official. This year a couple of athletes (skiing) who were dissatisfied with the selections had, besides talking to the coaches, also been writing letters and blogs on the Internet concerning their frustration about the selections.

Reactions from the athletes

Concerning how the athletes perceive the selections, the coaches believe this to be rather individual. Still, all the coaches think that the selections are a big thing for the athletes and say that there are both happiness and frustration involved. One question concerning how the coaches thought the athletes felt about the fairness of the selections was answered in a similar way by some of the coaches. Quite a few of them expressed themselves almost identically to this coach's answer:

A lot of them actually think it is fair....they are the ones that meet the criteria and the ones that don't, they think it is not fair... [laughing]... it is as simple as that... (Skiing coach women's team 1).

Some other coaches did not think that the athletes could really judge if a selection is fair or not. This is both because the athletes' feelings and wishes to be selected might influence their objectivity and because they do not see the whole picture, nor really know the ideas behind the selections. This might then result in the athletes having negative thoughts about the selections:

...I never believe a player thinks it is fair, I believe they always think they are wrongly treated or that I treat other players differently, I do not think you can escape that ever (Soccer coach women's team 3).

A couple of the coaches of female soccer teams say they believe that the players have a fairly good knowledge of and a feeling for the selections. A couple of the coaches of the male soccer teams say that the players do not have so much self-criticism or self-image, so they have a hard time really judging the selections.

How the player should behave if he or she is not selected is described by the soccer coaches as something that is important. They say that it is okay for an athlete to react with disappointment if he or she is not selected. It is said that a reaction which shows disappointment can even be good, as it shows that the athlete cares about the selections. As a player might influence the other players

badly if he or she has negative reactions about the selections, it is described as very important that the player pulls himself or herself together before the game (or before the day of the game).

We usually say like this: everyone has the right to react to a team selection with disappointment but when you show up the next day, [read the day of the game] then your disappointment must not be seen on you (Soccer coach men's team 1).

Summary of the process

- In all selections in this study the coaches have a lot of responsibility and power to take selection decisions, even if the board or other managing positions have the main responsibility for the selections.
- In most selections the coaches make the decisions about the selections together. One soccer coach differs from the others, as he says that he makes all the selection decisions himself.
- Whether the coaches use very clearly defined selection decisions or not, they all express how important their own judgements and discretion are in the selection process.
- The most important tool in the selection process is said to be the eyes of the coaches. They also talk about feelings and intuition as important.
- In soccer the coaches have to deal quite a lot with influences from others. In skiing the influence from others is limited, according to the coaches.
- When talking about the selections and how the coaches told the athletes if they were selected or not, none of the skiing coaches described any differences in how they worked with their male and female teams, but the soccer coaches talked about differences. This mostly had to do with their belief that the females in soccer dealt with feedback differently from the male soccer players.
- How much the athletes knew about the selection criteria seemed to vary. How much the coaches thought that the athletes should know also differed among the coaches.
- How the athletes are informed about their being selected or not is done in most teams through talks between the coaches and the athletes. In most teams this procedure seems to be fairly formalised.
- The coaches welcome the athletes' initiatives to talk to them about selection decisions that they perceive as wrong, but the coaches will not change the decisions because of these discussions.

- Quite a few of the coaches state that they think the athletes who are selected feel that the selection decisions are fair, while the athletes who are not selected feel that the selection decisions are not fair.

Outcome and consequences

The consequences of the selections influence the validity of them. The consequences of the selection process have to do with the consequences of the outcome of the selections. All selections have some consequences for the involved parties whether they are the ones to be selected or the ones making the selections. What consequences there are for the athletes not being selected or the coach taking bad decisions in the selections process are examples of things affecting the validity of the selections. Questions about how certain ways of selecting athletes can also have effects on how the athletes and coaches train as well as how the sports develop are of interest here. How the coaches think and feel about their selections is connected to the consequences of the selections and might be of importance for selections in the future.

Are the “right” athletes selected?

The outcome of the selections refers to the result of the selection. Do the coaches think that the “right” athletes are selected or what kinds of thoughts do they have about the outcome of the selections?

Most of the skiing coaches believe that they select the “right” skiers. Still, the selected skiers do not always reach the results they expected them to reach, but this, they say, does not mean that they selected the “wrong” skiers. They think that the long and thorough discussions preceding the selections are the reasons for this. A couple of the skiing coaches say that if they select a skier that ends up not performing what is expected, they will stick with the skier anyway for a couple of seasons to give the athlete opportunities for developing. When a skier is in a team the first years, he or she might have a disadvantage in comparison to the skiers that have been part of the team for some years. They do not have the valuable experience and knowledge of the ski slopes that are new to them, and often the new athletes are also too light to be able to perform really well in the first years.

One skiing coach said that it had happen skiers who he would not have selected if it was a “*discretion call*” was selected due to their results and the set ranking criteria. He says that he sees other values than only results as being important to the team and believes strongly in the importance of the team members helping one another. Earlier on he had used his discretion vote to nominate a skier that was good for the team, a skier who could help the other guys in the team. This, he explained, resulted in some people being critical of him and his selections.

All the soccer coaches say they have sometimes selected the wrong players to the team. They describe how difficult it can be to select the “right” team. After the selections they sometimes realise that their choice was not the best. Even if

they do that, they say that it is very difficult to predict the future and that they might have taken the same decisions again if they had to do the same selections under the same conditions. When analysing the reasons for those wrong decisions, they mention factors like overestimating the capacity of their players, wanting to use the “better” players, but failing to see that these players were not working well together, how they were not being consistent in their choices or not choosing players according to their coaching philosophy.

Well, it has happened a couple of times, it happens regularly, ooh... now I am acting wrongly... and then it is because you act too much on feelings and are not being consequent in your leadership (Soccer coach women's team 1).

The coach who says this goes on to discuss how he tells all the players that the most important thing for them is to do their best during training, to be motivated and committed. Despite this he says that he sometimes did not choose the player who was really motivated and did his very best during practice and instead used a player that was a better player but was injured and therefore could not do her best in practice. He said that he had a lot of regrets about this, as he felt that then he was not consistent in his leadership, as he said one thing and did something else.

Consequences for the athletes

According to all the coaches the athletes feel that it is very, very important to be part of the team. The skiing coaches believe that it plays a big role for the skiers to be selected to the national team. It matters as regards having good training conditions, opportunities for practising together with the best skiers, being provided with good coaching, but he also mentions other differences. Economic differences, sponsor opportunities, sponsor contracts and free insurance (in this case paid by the federation) are differences that are considerable depending on whether an athlete is on the national team or not. One coach pointed out how hard it can be for athletes that are just outside the national team to get the same opportunities for developing as the athletes that are in the team. The athletes outside the national team are a step behind already from the beginning, when they do not have the above things provided and instead have to organise everything themselves. At the same time he thinks that if they can manage to do well then, they are strong and can even be the best ones because of that. He calls it “*a good school, a good education*” to manage to develop at the highest level and not be in the national team. Not being part of the team also means that the athlete is farther away from the coaches’ eyes, something that should not but might be of importance for upcoming selections, according to one of the skiing coaches. The coaches said that being selected to the very top team in the national team in comparison to being selected to a lower level team within the

national team, not matter so much as regards opportunities for competition, training and coaching (even if it is mentioned that the first team might sometimes have some more camps). As regards some other things, it was said that there were quite a lot of differences involved in being selected into different levels of the teams. Here factors such as the funding of the individual athlete, chances of getting skiing and sponsor contracts, chances of being funded by the Olympic committees and chances of getting insurance paid for by the federation are factors that are said to be different at the different levels of the teams.

In soccer too the coaches believe that the athletes think it is very important to be part of the team and to be selected to play the games. A couple of the soccer coaches say that they think the players sometimes put too much focus on being selected. They believe that it is of importance for the players to realise that they are important to the teams no matter whether they play 5, 30 or 90 minutes. The players should also think that they need to understand that they also can influence the team from the side of the field. One of the soccer coaches said that they used to have bonus money to give to the players who were selected to play the games. It is no longer like this and instead all the players are now getting the same amount depending on the team's performance, which is based on their ranking in the league. The coaches also thought that being part of the team and being selected to play the games were also connected to social values such as for example the identity of the player. For an athlete to have to tell family, friends and the media that he or she is not selected was regarded by the coaches as something that affected the players to a considerable extent. A coach of a female soccer team said that he felt that the women in his team had a tendency to take selections to the games much too seriously. The coach felt that they took the selection both as a confirmation of their being good soccer players but also as a confirmation of their being successful persons. He was not too happy about this, as it affected them quite a lot if they were not selected.

Consequences for the selectors

The consequence for the coach if he or she does not manage to select the "right" team is described by the coaches as a risk of losing their jobs. According to the coaches this has happened in both of the sports. To produce good performances and good results is part of their jobs.

I think in the end I have to have sustained results, you know how I am judged depends pretty much on sustained results at all levels, and make budget... . . . really what are most important to our company are results. We are a result-based company under the current [the name of the Nation], so if the results are not there they [the federation] tell me: - Get it done, this we

wanna have right here, and then they put some other guidelines... You can only do this... (Skiing coach men's team 1).

Even if the coaches know that they have to produce results, they also work to cope with this in a way that does not stress their daily decisions too much. Not thinking about the possible consequences and instead focusing on their tasks seems to be a coping strategy for handling this.

If you were to think about that [the consequences] every day you would not manage the situation... It doesn't work to think about it everyday, every time I make a decision, what is the consequence of this decision... (Soccer coach women's team 4).

To stand for the decisions themselves and not feel that they have been influenced to make the decision because of someone else also seem to be of importance:

If at any time you get into a situation to leave your job, then you should do it because of your own decisions, not because you have done things other people have forced on you, that is not good, it would not feel good afterwards, if I am forced to "go" then I will do it because of my own decisions (Soccer coach women's team 4).

Evaluations of the selections

The coaches were asked if they evaluated the selections. The usual answer was that they evaluate the games and competitions a lot but that those evaluations are focused mostly on the performances rather than the selections. As the performances are closely related to the team selections, they still seem to be part of evaluations more indirectly, as a soccer coach said:

... I believe you should always evaluate the performance and what it is that influenced the performance and the team selection influences the performance (Soccer coach women's team 5).

The soccer coaches think that it is hard to evaluate the importance that the selection really has for the performance, as it is only if a player they just put into the game scores a goal or does something very obvious that it is easy to say that was a good or the "right" selection. If a team wins it might be because of good selections but other factors can play a part too. Some of the coaches do not think that the selections have too much to do with the performances, as they are instead more dependent on the form of the players and the opponents. Still, the majority of the coaches say that they are also looking at the selections when evaluating the games. A couple of the coaches say that there are no real "rights

and wrongs” as regards the selections. They would like to believe that if their team, won the reason for this was that they selected the “right” players. At the same time they say that it could happen that a player they had selected played badly but the team managed to win anyway. It could also be the case that they made bad selections and their team still won. How they knew if it was or was not the right team they had selected, they connected a lot to a feeling, a feeling for the team and the team’s performance. These evaluations are made in soccer mostly by the coaches themselves first and then together with assistant coaches and after this they are sometimes discussed with the players.

The skiing coaches seem to discuss the selections continuously during the season and during the meetings for the team selections for the coming seasons. One skiing coach mentioned that they had an official meeting to discuss the selections six months after they were made. There they evaluated the development of the skiers during this first training period. They also considered if it could be possible to select some more athletes to the team, if someone who was not selected had shown great progress. In soccer the games and the performances in the games are the things that are mainly analysed, and in skiing there seems to be a greater focus on what development the selected skiers have shown.

No formal education about selections

Questions and tasks concerning the selections are a fairly large part of a coach’s job. One coach said that around 50% of the coaching job has to do with selections (soccer) and another coach answered:

Yes, to some part everything is about the selections as you prepare all players for being selected eventually (Soccer coach women’s team 5).

The selections are described as something that takes a lot of thoughts and energy. In both these sports there are many different levels of coaching education containing different parts that are seen to be important to the coach in his or her job. To my knowledge and according to the interviewed coaches in this study, no material or parts of those educations seem to concern team selections. Knowledge of selections seems to be something the coaches have to acquire on their own. The coaches in this study see the selections as a big and quite difficult part of a coach’s job.

Changes that might improve the selection process

Some of the soccer coaches (of male teams) described increased communication as something they thought would be of help in the selection process. Increased communication could especially help the players that were not selected. To communicate more with the players during the week of training was described

as something that the players could benefit from. They could benefit from having more knowledge of the coaches' thoughts about their abilities. It was mentioned that there could be a rather great discrepancy between the players' picture of themselves and the coaches' pictures of them and their abilities (concerning male soccer players) and how this could sometimes be problematic. More communication was seen as a way to decrease this discrepancy. To increase the involvement/participation of all players was mentioned as a success factor.

One soccer coach thought that it would be good to have someone who would evaluate his work and question his decisions. He wanted to discuss and be questioned concerning how he acted as a coach, whether his behaviour was consistent or not. If he really adhered to the norms and values that he insisted were so important was something of interest for him to know. He said that he had been working with a sport psychologist sometimes to discuss these things and felt that this was very good. Other coaches in both sports also said that they were working together with behavioural scientists and sports psychologists to support them as coaches and to discuss important things with. In some teams this was an organised support service to the coaches and in others it seemed as if it was not as organised. All the coaches who said that they had this co-operation described it as very useful for them as coaches.

According to the soccer coaches, the trend in soccer seems to be towards more long-term thinking with regard to hiring coaches as well as to recruiting players. "Long-term thinking" seems to be appreciated by the involved persons as it enables the coaches to work towards a more planned and well thought-out development. This in its turn can increase the opportunities for reaching success in the future.

Selection tips from the experienced coaches

As a final question the coaches were asked to use their experience of selections to give some advice to other coaches or to just highlight some things they felt are of great importance with regard to selecting athletes. The advice and thoughts of the soccer coaches were quite homogeneous in comparison to the skiing coaches' answers, which were more heterogeneous. The answers of the soccer coaches had a focus on describing their own behaviour in the selection process, while the answers of the skiing coaches were somewhat more focused on the selection process itself, even if the question was asked in the same way to all coaches. The two things that the soccer coaches most often described as important for the selections are the importance for a coach to trust and believe in their own choices and to be very clear in their information to and communication with athletes. As was mentioned earlier, there are many persons that try to influence the soccer coaches in their choices. The advice from these coaches strongly emphasised the importance for coaches of making decisions

they believe in themselves. To listen to their own gut feeling and to trust and believe in their own choices rather than being talked into taking some decision they do not really believe in was emphasised here. Some coaches discussed the importance of this in connection with the fact they might lose their jobs if they do not make the right selection decisions. It is extremely important for them to make decisions that they themselves believe in rather than to make decisions that others tell them to make. If they are then fired from their positions, they will at least be so because of their own decisions. To have a clear idea of how to play the game and clearly defined values and norms for the team members' behaviour are also said to be important in the selection process, as they influence the selections. It is stressed that communication with the athletes about team selections, values, and the idea of the game should be conducted in a clear and honest way, so that everyone knows what is going on. Other things they bring up are the importance for a coach to be very well prepared and the importance of finding her/his own leadership role. Here one coach described how he positioned himself vis-à-vis the players as a factor that was of importance in the selections. He had chosen not to have too much contact with the players when they were "off the field". As he believed that too close a relation could influence the selections, he was trying to keep a certain distance between himself and the players.

The skiing coaches, who do not make as many selections per season as the soccer coaches but make selections that they feel have very big consequences for the athletes, give somewhat different advice. One piece of advice was the importance of really considering the resources and what opportunities the athlete would get if he or she were selected into the team. It was said that it was important to only select an athlete if it was felt that it was possible to provide for her/him. Other advice concerned evaluations, always working with developing the selection system and trying not to be so locked up in the old way of thinking and selecting. To remember to see and be aware of the person behind the rankings and FIS-points was also mentioned. The skiing coaches also said that the relations with athletes that they spend a great deal of time with and live with for long periods of time could affect the selections. Therefore, it was said to be important to be aware of this and to follow the criteria and be as objective and as fair as possible in the selections. They also pointed out the importance of looking at and focusing on who can be the World Cup winner and not letting factors like how nice someone is or friendships or looks influence the selection.

Summary of outcomes and consequences

- The importance for the athletes of being selected is described by the coaches as very great. Some of the skiing coaches see it as a career-

determining event to be selected to a national team where the athletes can get very good training opportunities.

- For the coaches in both soccer and skiing it is of great importance to make the right selection decisions. For them it is both about their own credibility and keeping their jobs, but the selections are also connected to their personal feelings towards the athletes.
- Most of the skiing coaches believe that they select the right athletes, even if the athletes do not always achieve the expected results.
- All the soccer coaches think that they have sometimes selected the “wrong” player.
- Selections are a big part of a coach’s job, but they seem to have got very little if any education about this subject.
- Evaluating the selections can be difficult, as it is hard to state if the selections or if the athletes’ form and performances are the factors that are the most important for the performances.
- Increased communication is thought to improve the selection process in soccer.
- To be true to oneself and believe in one’s decisions is a selection tip from the soccer coaches.
- To really consider the opportunities for future development that an athlete would get in connection with the resources was described as important by a skiing coach.

VI. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge of selections in top-level sport teams in alpine skiing and soccer and analyse this processes from a validity perspective. This was done through interviews with coaches from the two sports. The study clearly pointed at the selection process being a complex process where different values and goals are set against each other and where the outcome of the decisions has a big impact. The structure of the selection process and whether the criteria are visible or more implicit differ among the teams in the study. Partly it seems that the context and especially the variability of athletes to choose from influence the differences in how structured the selection process is. In identification of the criteria and the different steps in the selection process questions concerning the validity of the selections are raised. The sports studied are sports with different characteristics, as one is a team sport and the other an individual sport. This had implications for both the formulations of the criteria and the process of selection. In soccer, where the coaches selected teams almost every week, the selection process was a major part of their coaching job during the whole competition season. In skiing the selections to the national team took place once a year, but some teams had separate teams selected to World Championships, Olympic Games and similar competitions. For them the focus on the selections were especially high around the time of the selections. It was said that the selection in soccer had a lot of media interest, which also put great pressure on the coaches during the whole season. The external pressure in connection with the selections did not seem to be something that affected the skiing coaches in the same way as it did for the soccer coaches. Because there were many games in soccer, the coaches there had many chances to select different players, and in that sense practise their selection skills. In alpine skiing, where there were fewer selections, there were also fewer chances for the coaches to select the “right” athletes. The selections in alpine skiing were also said to be crucial for the athletes’ future opportunities in the sport. In comparison to the soccer coaches, the skiing coaches also had a longer time to make their selection decisions. The definition of the goals for the selection was not always totally clear to those involved. Especially how much knowledge the athletes were supposed to have about the selections was something the coaches had different views about.

The results from this study indicate there are quite a few validity concerns that are of importance when discussing, working with or developing selection

methods. In the description of the purpose of the study four main groups of research questions were specified. These questions are the basis for the disposition of the below discussion of the results. Each of those research areas will be discussed based on both the results from the informants' answers and validity and reliability issues connected to these results.

The goals and criteria for the selections

Question group 1:

What are the goals and the criteria for the selections? What factors are of importance in the selections? How do the criteria correspond to the goals for the selections?

The goals for the selections

To be able to discuss validity issues and the outcomes of the selections against something, the identification of the goal or idea of the selections is crucial. This study indicated that there were some disparities between the club and federation boards and the coaches as regards the goals and ideas for the selections when it came to both the level and the type of goals and ideas for the selections. The federations and club boards like to express the goals as outcome goals, while many of the coaches prefer to talk about performance-related goals. In some cases this leads the coaches to reformulate the goals to make them more suited to their practical work. The coaches also mentioned things like the development of athletes, getting athletes to support each other, and learning from the leader of the team as important factors. If these factors should be seen as goals for the selections was not totally clear, but they were important. From a validity standpoint this is partly problematic, as there might then be different kinds of goals that the selection method has to be suited to. This will be especially problematic if some of those "goals" are visible and explicit and some are neither visible nor communicated but still have an impact. The more clear and common the goals are and the fewer underlying individual goals there are, the better the chances are of making the selection methods valid and reliable.

The criteria for the selection

In this study there were great differences in the definitions of the selection criteria used among the teams. How precise the selection criteria used by the coaches were ranged from very well defined to very vague. Here it should be understood that the criteria I interpreted as vague might have been very clear and defined in the mind of the coach. Still, they are dealt with as vague here, as the criteria were neither elucidated in the interviews nor seemed to be agreed upon by everyone involved in the selection process. Another way of formulating

this may therefore be to talk about very explicit criteria and more implicit criteria. The stability of these criteria can be discussed based on how well defined they are. If they are written down and officially communicated, it is harder to change them during the season. If on the other hand they are not so clearly defined and not communicated, they can be changed during a season. They could also be differently applied in relation to different athletes. These issues have consequences for the overall validity and are concerned with the total quality of the selections. Flexibility in a system is often good but depending on the level of flexibility of the criteria the chances of stability in the selections are affected.

Some of the coaches seem to be convinced that clearly defined criteria are a necessity for good selections, while other coaches do not see well-defined criteria as a necessity. Having the selection criteria visible and communicated to the athletes has both advantages and disadvantages according to the coaches. Having officially communicated criteria is foremost expressed as an advantage for the athletes, who will then know what it takes to be selected. It is also to be seen as a helpful tool for the coaches making the selections and it is a way for the coaches to be able to motivate the selections. A couple of the alpine teams had well-defined and explicit criteria; a couple had well-defined but not very well-communicated criteria and a couple more implicit criteria. In soccer a couple of the teams described very well-defined criteria, but most teams did not seem to have such well-defined criteria. None of the soccer teams communicated their criteria officially. Some coaches who use officially communicated selection criteria mean a disadvantage of official criteria is that some athletes use them as goals. They see it as negative if the athletes focus too much on meeting the selection criteria instead of trying to develop to their maximum. Used this way the criteria might limit the athletes' performance. On the other hand, with no criteria they believe that it is hard for the athletes to know what to strive towards as it then is unclear what it takes to be part of the team.

A mix of past performances and predictions of future performances determined the coaches' selections, although past performances seemed to have a very big impact. All the skiing coaches mentioned former results as a major factor in the selections. This was the case irrespective of whether criteria based on ranking lists or on coaches' discretion and judgements were the main grounds for the selections. In soccer the coaches did not talk about former results in the way the skiing coaches did, but they also seemed to value the athletes' past performances highly in the selection process. To relate future performances to past performances is seen as a valid method with regard to predicting future performances (Boulier & Stekler, 1999; Trewin, Hopkins & Pyne, 2004). Also, according to the behavioural consistency method, a valid predictor of future performance is said to be past performance (McDaniel,

Schmidt & Hunter 1988). Still, what has to be measured and how to measure it to cover the important part of the former performances is a major issue. How to measure and value former performances can be seen as easier for the skiing coaches, who have results and ranking lists to compare, than for the soccer coaches, where it is a team and not individual athletes that win. Quite a few questions about the validity of the ranking lists in skiing were nevertheless brought up by the skiing coaches, who thought that these lists are not a hundred percent valid. It was said that the ranking lists, and especially the FIS-list, had different validity depending on the context they were used in. Because of this some of the coaches had chosen not to give those lists too much value in the selections, while other coaches based the main part of their selections on those lists. Another validity issue connected to this is that the quota that determines the number of athletes from each nation who can participate in a competition is based on the athletes' placing on those ranking lists.

In soccer the complexities of the sport were described as a difficulty in the selections. These complexities were described as all the factors that were connected with the teams' results. Here the players' sport specific skills, together with their understanding and perception of the game, their cooperation with the team members and their understanding of the opponents were mentioned as factors included in this complexity. To compare and understand the value of all these things was said to make it hard to value who has performed the best and who will be the ones performing the best in the future. Some of the coaches talked about the idea of the game as the frame for the selections. The idea of the game could be interpreted as the basis for the selection criteria. How well an athlete's abilities fit together with the abilities of the other players in the team was seen as very important but very hard to define and express. Because of this complexity it seemed that one of the most important things to reach was "balance" in the team. In the selections this means that it was not always the players that had the best skills that should be selected but the players that made the best team together.

The athletes' performances are of key importance in the selections and the individual performances are the focus in skiing while in soccer it is the team performance that is said to be the most important factor. From a validity perspective this makes it harder to value the validity in the soccer selections, as these are dependent on so many different factors that are and probably have to be flexible, as so many individuals are concerned. This can be seen as problematic from a validity standpoint but also as something that can increase the validity and the total quality of the selections. This is because a flexible way of valuing the athletes might be more suitable here in order to select the "right" athletes. To increase the knowledge about what exactly it is that is valued and what the consequences this leads to is of importance to be able to further discuss the validity.

All the coaches talked about the athletes' sport specific skills, but to a great extent they also put a lot of weight on factors related to psychological and behavioural skills. The fact that many of the coaches say that they would choose an athlete with good behaviour and a favourable personality before an athlete with the best sports skills may indicate that those factors are seen as the most important ones in top level sport. This might also be an expression of these factors being seen as hard to develop or as something that the coaches have neither time nor knowledge to develop. One of the coaches stated that he saw the personality factors as stable factors and indicated that the athletes he would select should possess the desirable skills at the times for the selections. Some of the other coaches also expressed similar thoughts, while some meant that it was their job to develop the athletes and get the team working well together. The athletes who are considered for the selections in these teams are all athletes with developed skills in their sport. This could imply that what differ the most at this level are factors connected more to personality than factors connected to the athletes' sport specific skills.

The fact that some of the teams use age limits and have quite extensive discussions about age raises a couple of questions related to validity. It would be interesting to study the importance of age for the performances of athletes. Is there any correlation between age and top performances, and if so, are there any differences between the performances in skiing and soccer with regard to age? The skiing coaches, who had done some research to find out the critical cutting points deciding which athletes should be selected from the ranking list, believe that age matters to some degree in skiing. One skiing coach said that at the moment he was making studies connected to the relevance of the age limit in his team. He felt that it was not so relevant to prevent the older athletes from being part of their top team due to their age, if they had shown good results but not absolute top results. He hoped to be able to prove that athletes could come back and produce top results also at older ages. In soccer only the coaches of some of the teams mentioned age as a factor of importance for the selections. There the focus was more on finding the player that was the best "match" for the team and not so much on selecting players of a certain age. Still, age was discussed in some of the teams.

When the coaches discussed the selection criteria, they emphasised that it was important that the criteria were formulated in such a way that they gave the coaches opportunities to influence the judgements themselves. In skiing this was done and expressed as the factor of "coaches' discretion", and in soccer all the coaches made sure that a great deal of the selections were made according to their own judgements in comparison to for example statistics and test results. Being physically fit for the sport was discussed as important but almost all coaches saw physical test results and statistics as being of secondary importance in comparison to their own judgements of the athletes. What they saw when

they spent time with the athletes was valued more highly than any test results. Ranking lists, physical test results and other kinds of statistics were felt not to give enough information about the athletes, as numbers could never give a complete picture of a person and a performance.

In all the teams the team feeling and cooperation were seen as important and something that could influence the selections. How well the team cooperates in soccer were said to have a direct influence on the performance. In the skiing teams where the athletes compete independently of one another but travel and live together for long time periods, this is seen to influence the athletes' performances more indirectly. According to quite a few of the coaches, the consequences of this are that, if possible, they would choose an athlete they believe will fit into the team over an athlete that is seen as a little bit more of a threat to the team's coherence. This is if the athletes are valued quite equally with regard to their performances and possible future performances. Quite a few of the soccer coaches mentioned that a player with less good sport skills but good behaviour would probably be selected before the player who had better sport skills but bad behaviour. Among the skiing coaches this was also discussed. Coaches of skiing teams where the selection criteria for the absolute top teams did not involve any "coaches' discretion" but only result-based criteria said that this was sometimes felt as a limitation for these selections. There the coaches could not have any opinion about the athletes' behaviour, as it was only the former results that mattered.

To what extent and how well cooperation between athletes, the athletes' behaviour and similar factors are defined in the selection criteria in relation to how well the sport specific skills are defined is an issue for the validity of the selection. In some teams behavioural abilities are mentioned in the selection criteria and are also communicated to the athletes. In the teams where these, or none of the selection criteria, are defined, this is a validity issue, as it is unclear what it is that matters in the selections. To have high validity in the selection, not only all factors but also the relative values of the factors are important to have knowledge of and to consider in the selections. This also affects the opportunities for stable and replicable selections.

The process of selection

Question group 2:

How is the process of selections in these two sports performed? Who are involved? Who are responsible? Are there other factors than the ones in the criteria that might influence the selections? Have there been any changes in the selection process lately?

High reliability of a judgement can be that all those that make the judgements independently of one another come up with the same or almost the same judgements. In the selection process this means that all the coaches who make selection decisions together independently of one another would name the same athletes for the selection. All skiing teams had formal meetings where they discussed which athletes were going to be selected. In the teams that had clearly defined selection criteria to discuss the selections against, the chances of reaching high reliability would be better than for the teams with more implicit criteria. A problem identified here is that those responsible for the selections have not always seen all the athletes that are up for discussion. In the skiing teams the head coaches or similar functionaries are the ones who make the final selection decisions (in some teams the decisions also have to be approved by higher bodies in the federation). As the head coaches of the national skiing teams spend a lot of their time on tour with their teams, their opportunities for seeing other skiers than the ones that are already in the team are limited. As regards information about the skiers that are not in the team, the coaches of those skiers have to give information about them to the national coaches. With this information the decisions concerning who will be selected are then taken. This could be seen as a validity issue as how well the goals, the selection criteria or philosophy are defined, communicated and understood among the coaches affects the reliability of the selections. Those selection meetings were said to contain thorough discussions about the athletes. The opportunity for a lot of experts to have their say about the skiers might possibly enhance the quality of the selections. Being on tour and so close to some skiers may be seen as both good and bad for the validity of the selections. The more knowledge the selections are based on, the better they should be, but if this knowledge is also tied to personal connections and feelings for an athlete, this can be a risk in the selection. When some athletes are well known and some are not known at all by the coaches, this is also something that could and probably does matter in the selection decisions.

In soccer some of the coaches have more informal and some have more formal meetings about the selections. The soccer coaches know the players in their teams, but when they recruit new players they to some extent have to trust other coaches' and agent's statements of the athletes. In soccer it seemed that most coaches tried to get a lot of information about new players by travelling to see them, talking to them and by looking at video recordings of games they were in. They seemed to have a fairly good knowledge of the new players they selected. One soccer coach differs from the others as he says that he makes all the selection decisions himself, while the other coaches say they decide the selections together with their assistant coach.

It is difficult to know to what degree the coaches in this study come up with the same names in the selections independently of each other and to what

degree this is done with the selection criteria as the basis. As much of the selection criteria are not explicit it is hard to value if they are the basis for the selections. In the ski teams where the top team is selected only according to the athletes' former results this is visible but in the other teams this is not clear. If anything else than the criteria influence the selections, this might affect the validity as either what is valued is then clear and the reliability issues of stability and repeatability in the selections then are threatened. This might occur if the criteria are not followed or not clear. It might also happen if some of the coaches have more power or are better at arguing for their athletes, which then becomes the deciding factors. It is mentioned that it is important to have one coach who has the "final say", someone who takes the last decision. Still, which factors are decisive are critical for the validity.

The one coach who makes the entire selection decision himself and does not express any explicit selection criteria can be seen as making selections with low reliability. This is because those selections are hard to replicate by someone else. It should also be noted that this does not mean that those decisions are necessarily bad. Still, with no visible selection criteria it is hard to value the consistency of the use of the selection criteria. Here repeated selections of the same athletes might indicate that the selection criteria are consistent, but from a reliability perspective this is still problematic, as the criteria are invisible and cannot be discussed in relation to anything. In a reliability perspective the reliability would be high, if the same judgements (the coaches' selections) resulted in the same athletes being selected repeatedly. In cases like this where the athletes' abilities are supposed to change and possibly improve, this is not a suitable way of looking at reliability. Here the goal for the selections is not necessarily to select the same athletes all the time but the "right" athlete for a specific occasion. How the criteria are defined and formulated becomes a more important factor when the reliability of the selections is understood.

In the process of making the selections, the coaches all say that their eyes and their feelings are their most valuable selection tool. These are "subjective tools" in comparison with test results, statistics, result lists and other more objective tools. The favouring of the "subjective tools" is interesting from a validity perspective. It raises questions of whether human performances are too complex to measure by means of objective and measurable factors, whether statistics and tests cannot measure human performance well enough, or whether this has to do with the coaches' own wishes to control the selections. As the coaches interviewed here are all involved in sports at the elite level and have long experience of selections in sports, they should be seen as experts in the field. To have them value what factors to use and in what way these factors are best at measuring might be a way of creating high validity because of their being experts. Expert judgement is a current and usable way of evaluating test content

and what factors are of importance to focus on (Shepard, 1993; Morrow et al., 2005).

External pressure in the selections was not seen as a big issue by the skiing coaches, although it was mentioned that parents sometimes tried to influence the coaches. In soccer, on the other hand, the external pressure on the coaches was perceived as big. The soccer coaches who continually made selections to games every week talked about the media, sponsors, agents, friends and the general public as having opinions about and wanting to influence the selections. The soccer coaches talked about different strategies for dealing with other opinions and thought that they handle this fairly well. Some of them said that it was hard to deal and cope with this in the beginning of their careers but that it was something they had to learn how to deal with. It was also mentioned that the media focused more on men's soccer than on women's soccer. This was said to put higher demands on abilities to deal with pressure for the coaches of the male teams.

As regards the process of selections, the skiing coaches did not have many reflections concerning possible gender issues. In soccer all the coaches had some thoughts about gender and its effects on the selections. It seemed fairly clear that some of the soccer coaches were of the opinion that both their own gender and the players' gender had some influence on the way the selections were carried through. One skiing coach said that it could be problematic if men and women were compared with each other in the selections. Even if this was not supposed to happen, it was hard to totally prevent it, if there was no fixed number of spots for how many men and women would be selected. It was felt that the economic frames could then restrict the number of athletes and that the athletes were then compared with one another. As the number of spots in the skiing teams did not seem to be fixed, this could possibly be an issue in other skiing teams too. If men and women are compared in the selections, this involves complicated reasoning. The athletes are then selected not only in relation to the selection criteria and the athletes they are competing with. They are then also compared with a factor that has nothing to do with their chances of performing well in the future, which the selection criteria are supposed to indicate. In a validity perspective this is problematic, as neither is the "right" things valued nor is a reliable selection made.

The soccer coaches said that there were differences between what men and women are like and this had led them to adjust their behaviour to fit the selection situation. According to the soccer coaches, the communication was dealt with differently in men's and women's teams in the selection process. As the female players were said to relate feedback to internal factors and men were said to relate feedback to external factors, the feedback was adapted to this. The amount of communication performed and how many explanations that had to be made were also said to differ between the genders. It was said that women

needed more feedback than men and that in general there was more communication in women's teams. It was also said that the male players would probably benefit from more communication and that they wanted more communication. Masculinities and femininities are according to Connell (2002) something that is actively produced through the acting in different settings. The way in which the coaches adapt their behaviour may be seen here as a way for the gender constructions to come into existence.

The perceptions that the soccer coaches have of male and female behaviour in soccer are rather contradictory. On the one hand the coaches describe differences between the genders that have effects on how the selections are performed. On the other hand they say that there are no real differences between men and women and their needs. These perceived differences were instead explained as being connected to the norms and values in soccer, which presuppose that men and women have different needs. Here it is interesting that asking many questions and wanting clarifications, etc. are partly described as something that is difficult to deal with as regards the women but something the men could benefit from doing more. Women taking the feedback personally are also partly described in negative terms, as the coaches then have to be very careful in their feedback. At the same time some coaches describe it as a problem that men tend to explain things in terms of external factors and therefore do not feel a need to change their behaviour.

The interpretation of this is here that the soccer coaches claim that these contradictory perceptions can be explained with the social construction of gender, which is not a true picture but a construction of reality. These constructions influence the norms and values of the sport, which then has an impact on the behaviour of the persons involved. The segregation of women and men's sport through different competition classes may be seen as a way of both reinforcing and reproducing gender differences. Sport has long been seen as a field that has contributed to the reconstitution of gender. Dworkin and Messner (2002) describe sport as an area where conventional masculinity and femininity persist: "*Sport, as a cultural and commercial production, constructs and markets gender; besides making money, making gender may be sport's chief function*" (p. 17). To understand the power this social construction of gender has in sport might be a way of understanding these contradictory thoughts from the coaches. If the social construction of gender in the selection process contributes to behaviours that are not beneficial to the athletes, this can be seen as a threat to the validity of the selection and also as unfair to the players. A couple of the soccer coaches also discuss cultural differences in comparison with gender differences. They said that players having different behaviours could result from other things than gender. The background of the player and especially the country that the player came from and the culture in the country were mentioned as factors that could have a greater impact on the player's

behaviour than any gender differences. It should be mentioned here that cultural differences are also social constructions and have the same influence on validity as the gender issues.

It is also notable that the coaches in one sport so clearly describe gender differences while the coaches in the other sport do not. This raises many further questions about the norms and values in those sports and how this affects how the athletes are treated and dealt with in the selections. It also raises questions about what knowledge the coaches have about gender constructions but also about if my (the interviewer's) gender and the way of asking the interview questions might influence the coaches' answers in this subject.

Athletes' concerns

Question group 3:

How are the athletes considered in the selection process? Are the criteria and grounds for the selections shared with the athletes? How much do they know about the selections and the reasons for them? How do the coaches perceive the athletes' reactions to team selections?

The coaches have different opinions about how much the athletes need to know about the selection criteria and the reasons for the selections. The different opinions seem to be related to how they are currently working with the criteria. It is interesting that all coaches said that their athletes did know about their selection criteria, but that only a few of them could describe what it was that the athletes knew or how they would have obtained this knowledge. The fact that the coaches thought it was so obvious that the athletes knew the criteria indicates that this is something the coaches think that the athletes should know. Here a distinction should be made between the knowledge of the selection criteria and the feedback on the selection that the athletes should get. The common understanding is that the athletes should have an understanding of what it takes to be selected, but not every coach believes that the athletes need to know the exact reasons why they were not selected.

Most teams seem to have fairly formalised routines for how and when the selections are made and how they are communicated to the athletes. In one team where they do not have this, the coach states that this will have to be changed. The coaches are generally those who tell the athletes whether they are selected. It is said the athletes normally have reactions of disappointment if they are not selected and because of this the selections are presented to them in good time before the competition or game. This is done so that they will have time to adapt and get rid of their reactions before the game. Quite a few of the coaches thought that the athletes perceived the selections as unfair if they were not

selected and fair if they were selected. This is interesting and can be related to research in personnel selections where it is stated it is likely that applicants' experiences during the selection process have an impact on the hired individuals and that this might also affect the climate in the organisation (Gilliland, 1993).

The athletes who are not happy with a selection decision are welcome to talk about this with the coaches. On the other hand, all the coaches are firm that these talks will not change any decisions. The majority of the coaches also say that there is no point in appealing a selection decision to a higher body in the club or the federation. In some cases this is seen as something that is bad for the athlete's future chances of being selected.

If the athlete has scarcely any knowledge of the selection criteria or the selection process, this can be a validity issue. If the athletes do not know what the critical selection factors are, it may be argued that it is hard for them to be selected. In elite sport where the athletes continuously get both internal and external feedback on their performances, they probably have fairly good ideas about what it takes to be selected with regard to their sport specific skills. If then their behaviour and way of acting in the team have as big or possible even bigger influence than their sport specific skills, it can be questioned how good knowledge they have about this. It would be of interest here to know how much feedback they get about these kinds of skills in comparison to other skills. How fair or unfair the selections are perceived to be might also depend on how much the athletes know about the selection process. How much the athletes know about the selections might here be related to their chances of doing well, how fair or unfair they perceive the selections to be, but also to something that might affect their view of the coaches. The consequences of this might be impact the athletes' future chances of performing well in the sport and something to consider in the selection process.

Outcome and consequences

Question group 4:

What are the notions about the outcome and the consequences of the selections for the athletes and coaches involved?

The importance that a selection has for the individual athlete is seen as big. Some of the coaches described being selected in skiing to the national team as a career-determining event. In soccer the selections are also seen as very important although not as crucial in relation to former performances in the sport. The reasons for the selections having this huge importance are numerous. Being selected is for the athletes connected to better training opportunities, good coaching, and opportunities to practise and learn from other top athletes as well

as funding, sponsoring and insurance opportunities. In soccer it was also mentioned that the athlete's identity was connected to being selected and being part of a team. This can very probably be seen as an important factor in both sports. For the coaches themselves it is also of the utmost importance to select the team that will achieve results. They know that they can lose both their jobs and their respect, if they make too many wrong selection decisions.

According to the coaches, it happens that the wrong athletes are selected and this seemed mostly to be connected to how the coaches valued and predicted the athletes' future performances based on wrong estimates of their current performances. The coaches said that they were aware of the importance of their decisions. They had developed strategies to be able to cope with this, and one strategy was not to focus too much on the consequences of bad selections. The soccer coaches described how important it is to be true to themselves in the decision process. They thought that it was important for them to have done what they felt was the best in the selections and not to have listened and been too much affected by others. If they were then fired from their positions due to the selections, they could at least feel that they had done the best they could and taken the decisions they believed in. This being so clearly expressed by the soccer coaches indicates that they are under quite some pressure from others. Evaluating the selections was seen as a rather challenging task and no really systematized way of doing this seemed to be used. Improving selections to sport teams involves understanding the advantages and disadvantages of different selection systems. To take the evaluations a step further and look into the consequences of the selections will also be important.

As is shown in this study, many of the coaches regard the selection process as rather difficult and the evaluation of the process as challenging. The fact the coaches do not have any education concerning selections and how to deal with factors affecting the selections means that they have to figure out their own strategies for this. All the interviewed coaches seemed interested in discussing the selections and expressed how selections played a great role in their jobs and how questions concerning selections are of importance for them.

...team selections, this is an interesting subject Annika as those are absolutely the sharpest situations I have in my job (Soccer coach men's team 3).

This study has hopefully raised thoughts, questions and knowledge of selections and critical factors in selection to sport teams. With the help of knowledge and through discussions about selections, the hope is to inspire and encourage work resulting in increased quality in the selections to sport teams. This would benefit the selectors, the athletes and the sports' credibility.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Background and context

1. Tell me something about you coaching background, how long you have been involved in this team or other teams and at what level you are coaching at now etc? (earlier experience as an athlete, coach, selector, team- captain, organizer etc.)?
 - Is this a full time job? How much time do you spend together with the skiers/players during a season?
 - Are you alone responsible for “your” team?
 - How many skiers are you responsible for?
 - Girls mens/ team....
2. What role do you have in the team selections (position and responsibility/power)?
 - Do you have other experiences of selections (other levels, other areas, in another function etc.)?
 - How many skiers/players try to get a spot in this team?
 - How much do you know about them?
 - How many spots are available?

2. The idea of the selections – the goal with the selections.

3. Can you describe the goal/purpose with the selection (the goal this team is supposed to reach)? What is a successful selection to you?
 - Who is deciding this goal?
 - What qualities do the skiers/players need to possess to reach this goal?

3. Selections

3.1. Selection criteria or the “base” for the selection

4. Are there any criteria/base/guidelines used when selecting the athletes to the team? If so what are those criteria/guidelines and if not how are you working with the selections?
5. Tell me about how you know (are measuring /valuing) if a skier/player reaches the criteria and if they should be selected! (tests,

selections events, judgements?)

- What abilities/skills/features are measured through those criteria/those guidelines?
- Are the same abilities and criteria used for different positions/disciplines?
- Players from other clubs, other countries how to you know if they are reaching your criteria/standards?

6. What is the reason for these factors to be the crucial ones in the selection? Why are those factors seen as important?

- How did the criteria/base for selections develop? What was the background to use this criteria/base and who developed them?

7. What significance do they have for success in the sport/to reach the goal with the selections? Are those things predictors of future success?

- Are the criteria very precise and detailed or are they of a more overall (all-embracing) character?
- Are the criteria the same from the seasons before or have there been any changes in the criteria's/ "base"/grounds over time? If so what is changed and what are the reasons for this?
- Do you as a coach have any possibility to as a compliment to the criteria give your opinion about a player/skiier "Coaches' Discretion"?
- Is age a factor for the selections?
- Is drug testing a part of the selections?
- How is the relation between objective and subjective measurements in the criteria's?

Skiing:

- Coaches' discretion, what does it mean and how it is it used, possibilities/risks with using it...
- To what extent are and can coaches' discretion be used, is it used?

8. What knowledge do the involved persons have about the bases/criteria for team selections? Are this bases/these criteria/grounds official (meaning they are decided by the federation and publicly acknowledged)? If they are official how and when are they communicated to;

- The players/skiers?
- Other involved coaches?

3.2. Coaching philosophy/values:

9. What do you believe are the most important factors to consider in the selection process? (Physical, skills, mental, social ... etc.)

Some questions to take stand on/take side for:

- What is most important in your team, to be able to do results immediately or to be in the team to develop?
- If the choice is between a young promising skier/player and an older skier/player with more experience, how do you reason about this?
- Do you believe there are the same criteria for a young skier/player trying to get a place in the team for the first time and experienced skiers/players in the team that have shown results earlier?
- How do you value sports skills towards mental skills?

Skiing:

- Are there a set number of spots for the total team?
- Are there a set number of spots in each discipline or is the distribution of spots flexible?
- Egoistic/ego- centred skiers towards more team- related skiers how do you reason about this?
- Factors of importance to how the skiers work/fit together in the team (interpersonal factors) how do you reason about them when you are selecting the team?

Soccer:

- If you have to choose between two similar (equally good players) what is it that can make you choose one of them?
- If the choice is between a player/skier that is more egoistic or a player that is more of a team a team player how would you think and what would your choice be?
- Do you want to have more egoistic players or more team players in the team? How do you reason about this? (If egoistic players, how many do you think you want to have?)
- How are you reasoning when you are selecting the team, are you searching for players to fill a position or more for overall ability? What are you looking for?
- What is the most important to consider when selecting a team to a team sport? Individual factors or interpersonal factors (both on an off the arena)?

3.3 The selection process

10. Describe the selection process... who are involved and responsible and during how long time period are the selections going on?
 - Are there many or one person that are responsible for the team selections? Do you know why it is like this?
 - Does it happen that different coaches/officials have different views of who should be selected? If so what are the reasons for this?
 - Does it happen that different persons involved interpret the criteria/guidelines differently?
 - If there are discussions about the decisions what are those discussions mostly about?
 - Injuries, sickness... etc. how are factors like this influencing the possibilities to be selected? How is this dealt with?
 - Have you ever felt pressure from someone to select certain skiers/players? If so what did you do, how did you react?
 - Have you ever heard of bribes or been offered bribes to select some skier/player?
 - Is there a risk of biased decisions?
 - Except the criteria/base for the selection are there any other factors of importance for the selections, other things that might influence the selections (FIS- points, economical restrictions, pressure from federations, media etc.)?
11. How do the skiers/players get to know they are selected or not selected? How is this communicated to them? The ones that are not selected do they get some information about that?

4. Difficult/Problematic situations

12. Are there some situations that are especially difficult in the selection process? If so, give some examples...
 - Has it ever happened that someone (athlete, coach, and selector) is not accepting the selections? What happens then?
 - Is there a possibility for an athlete (or someone else) to appeal against a selection decision?
 - Have protests or appeals occurred?

5. The outcome of the selections

13. Have you ever felt that it was not the “right” athlete that was selected or not the “right” team playing? If so what do you felt was the reason for this? (Anything that could have been done

another way?)

14. How do you “know” if it is the “right” person that is selected? Are the selections evaluated in some way? If so how?
 - With your experience of team selections, do you believe the way the selections are now are the best way or do you think other ways/methods could /should be used?
 - Are there any other criteria you think should be included or some that should be taken away or be modified, discuss....
 - Do you believe other clubs in your sport are working in a similar way as you are?

5.1. Consequences

15. What consequences is it for a player to not be selected to a team/to a game? How important is it to be selected?
16. What are the consequences for you if you are selecting the wrong players/skiers (and are not reaching the goal with the selections?)
17. Does it mean anything for the sport as whole that it is these players/skiers that are selected?
 - Are the consequences of the selection discussed? If so, what are the discussions mainly about?
 - Are you thinking/reflecting about these criteria?
 - Do consequences of the selections influence the criteria/base(grounds) for the selections or the selection process?
18. Do you feel it is easy or difficult to select a team? Develop...

6. Reactions from the athletes

19. Have you seen or felt some reactions from the players/skiers about the selections? (both from the ones selected and the ones not selected)
 - How fair do you believe they see the selections? Do you think that has any influence on them?
 - Are there any discussions about the selections with the players/skiers?
 - How involved are they in the decisions about team selections? Do they have any possibilities to influence the selections?

7. Other things

20. Do you believe it has any importance for the selections and the way they are done that it is a team with only women/only men that are

being selected?

21. Do you believe your gender has any importance in the selections (during the selection process?)
22. If you from your experience of team selections would give some advice to someone (*not so experienced as you*) about team selections what advice would you then give?
23. Is there anything you are thinking about that are of importance with team selections that we have not been talking about?

Thanks for the interview and your time!