INTRODUCTION

The task and ego orientation approach seems to provide valid predictors of sport and physical activity participation (Newton & Duda, 1999), which are sensitive to gender, age, and sport involvement level (Steinberg et al., 2001; Etnier et al., 2004). However, research on older athletes lagged behind studies on younger ones. Thus, this study aimed at investigating the task and ego orientation subtending senior participation in sport with reference to age class, gender and level of sport involvement.

METHODS

To represent the Italian senior competitive (N=175) and recreational athletes (N=205), 380 old individuals (294 males, 86 females) were randomly pooled. They were divided into two age groups (65-75 and >75yrs) and administered the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). A 2 (gender) x 2 (age group) x 2 (sport involvement level) MANOVA with the two subscales of task and ego orientation as dependent variables was applied.

RESULTS

Main effects emerged for age (Wilk’s Lambda(2.370)=4.0, p<.01) and sport involvement level (Wilk’s Lambda(2.370)=11.9, p<.01). Also, significant differences were found for age x sport involvement level (Wilk’s Lambda(2.370)=7.3, p<.05) and age x gender (Wilk’s Lambda(2.370)=4.9, p<.05) interactions. Following ANOVAs showed that the main effects of age and sport involvement and their joint effects were significant only for the Ego subscale (age: F(2.370)=3.8, p<.05; sport involvement: F(2.370)=9.5, p<.01; age x sport involvement: F(2.370)=7.2, p<.01), with higher ego orientation values for the older than the 65-74 yrs old athletes and for elite competitive athletes than recreational adults, respectively. The interaction indicates that ego values are significantly higher in the older age class only in the case of competitive athletes (2.8±0.8 vs 1.9±0.7), but not in the 65-75 age class (2.2±0.8 vs 2.0±0.7). With regard to the age x gender interaction, ANOVAs showed that it was significant only for the Task subscale (F(2.370)=2.4, p<.05), with female athletes showing higher values than their male counterparts particularly in the older age group (>75yrs=3.7±0.7 vs 3.5±0.9; 65-75yrs=3.9±0.7 vs 3.7±0.7).

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Age and level of sport involvement influence ego orientation jointly. Ego orientation seems to be a psychological disposition that discriminates between competitive and recreational senior athletes only at very old age, with competitive athletes being more ego oriented than recreational ones. These differences in ego orientation as a function of age and sport involvement were not modulated by gender. Present results only confirmed the existence of a gender difference in task orientation, which holds also for very old athletes.

REFERENCES