

THE CHOSEN ONE. A STUDY ON COACH RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES IN SWEDISH ICE HOCKEY AND SOCCER CLUBS

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the sports career, termination of sports, can cause different kind of problems and crises and the socialization from the sports career to “the rest of the life” has been assumed to be difficult for many former athletes (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), on the other hand, argues that the career ending not necessarily has to be a definite, negative experience. The love for sports can lead to new forms for of assignments, as coach, sport manager etc. You can with the words of Werthner-Bales and Orlick (1986) talk about a ”second career”.

Studies in Swedish ice hockey have shown that the end of the player career very often leads to new positions within ice hockey (Fahlström, 2001). The ice hockey studies also showed that many ice hockey clubs look for experienced players with leadership skills at the end of their carrer and offer them jobs as coaches, assistant coaches etc.

”A life in sports” is a project focusing on different aspects of the sports career from athlete to coach or sport manager. The first part of the project focuses the process when athletes are recruited to different positions in the sport organizations. The second part studies the athletes at the end of the sports career, their attitudes and thoughts and how their experiences and skills can be used in a second career for example as a coach or a sport manager. The third part studies the often seen career transitions from athlete to coach and further on from coach to sport manager. This paper is a pilot study within the first part of the project. The aim is to study the coach recruitment process in Swedish top clubs in ice hockey and soccer: which recruitment strategies are identified, which policies do the clubs have, which qualifications are required, how do clubs value athlete experience compared to education etc.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews with officials in managerial positions in 40 different sport clubs, 20 soccer clubs and 20 ice hockey clubs, were carried out. They represented the two highest leagues in each sport in Sweden, The interviews were 45 to 75 minutes long. All the interviews were recorded and written out for further analyzes.

RESULTS

Earlier studies (Fahlström, 2001, Fahlström & Jennfors, 2004) have shown that Swedish sport organizations prefer and choose applicants with own experience rather than formal education such as university exams. These results were confirmed in this study. All clubs preferred coaching experience and even player experience rather than education. The recruitment strategies varied. The most long termed oriented organizations planned their coach recruitment many years ahead while others had a very ad-hoc-approach in the sense that they almost just choose among the available coaches when the a new coach was needed. The result also showed that even many of the more strategic organizations didn’t have a formal recruitment plan. Even though all the clubs in this study are professional or semi-professional only a few of the organizations had specific recruitment documents while the rest had some fragmental formal documents or no documentation at all.

DISCUSSION

In order to develop sport on all levels different kind experience and education is needed. This study shows, as well as earlier studies, that sport organizations value experience from playing or/and coaching higher than formal education, such as university degrees. The tradition of recruiting former athletes is worth a discussion. Through the playing career the player learns and assimilates the norms and values that exist in the actual sport. This successful player is then recruited as a coach. His education is in the first place his own experience as a player and the experiences he has gained as a player under different coaches. His point of departure for how training should be organized and planned is naturally stamped by the fact that he himself has succeeded in this world. So the sport reconstructs itself. The players own experience as a player makes it easier for the coach to understand what occurs in a match situation. But it can easily lead to a closed system. If a sport is built up in this way and with this point of view, it can be understood why the experience of players is important in the first place for the recruitment of coaches. In order to raise the level of sport it is also important to plan the recruitment of coaches and other officials. This study shows that even many of the Swedish top clubs have no long term strategic plan for coach recruitment.

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