

Developing national sport pathway plans: An Australian perspective

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Aim of paper and research questions

This paper introduces a framework for the talent development process as described by Australian national sporting organisations (NSOs), the national bodies responsible for talent and athlete development.

Literature review

Existing studies on retention and transition focus on (a) athlete career changes, (e.g., McNight, 2007; Zaichkowsky, Kane, Blann & Hawkins, 1993); (b) volunteer and coach retention (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Pastore, Inglis & Danylchuk, 1996) or (c) sport fans, spectators, and sport participant commitment to consume sport (e.g., Funk, Haugtvedt & Howard, 2000; Van Leeuwen, Quick & Daniel, 2002). To a large extent research on talent identification and development processes has focused on the technical and scientific aspects (e.g., coaching techniques, sports sciences and technological advancements). Even though identifying and developing talented athletes is a well researched field from a sports sciences viewpoint, the talent development process has not been explored from an organisational perspective. In an effort to depict talent identification and development processes in a more inclusive way, this paper offers an evaluation of the ways Australia identifies and retains talented athletes from NSO's perspective.

Research design and data analysis

The study is based on a document analysis examining 74 annual reports from 35 NSOs over a period of four years, 1999-2002, and offers a generic framework of the Australian talent development process.

Results

Results show that the main intent of the talent identification and development process is following a successful intention to retain the young participants with the most promising athletic future and transform them into successful elite athletes. The resulting framework shows that various interested groups are involved with identifying and retaining talented athletes through either initiating (e.g., institutes of sport) or implementing (e.g., coaches) especially designed programs or other strategies that cultivate talent identification and development.

Discussion and conclusion

The implications of successful talent identification and development processes include not only filling in the gaps left in sports that emerge when athletes retire, become unavailable or sustain injury but also ensuring the creation of pathways to produce high quality elite athletes that can represent Australia at an international level.

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