

TRANSFER OF TRAINING IN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PLAYER PARTICIPATION IN THE INAUGURAL WORLD BASEBALL CLASSIC

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Aim of abstract/paper

Players are one of the most valuable assets held by a professional team. Thus, teams seek to protect these assets through contractual provisions that limit off-season activities and training. Yet, there are a variety of sporting events that a team's players compete in that are outside the control of the team, including national team competitions, the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, and Major League Baseball's (MLB) World Baseball Classic (WBC). Players who compete in these events view them as opportunities to maintain or increase their skills, while their employers view them as potential opportunities for injury and asset devaluation. The aim of this research is to use transfer of training theory to determine the extent to which players who competed in the inaugural WBC increased or decreased their performances in the subsequent MLB season.

Literature review

Training has long been viewed as a way for organizations to update and increase their employees' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) with hopes of improving both their individual and organizational performances (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006). Transfer of training refers to "...the extent to which the learning that results from a training experience transfers to the job and leads to meaningful changes in work performance" (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010, p. 1066). In recent years, the theory of training transfer has come to consist of two major dimensions, generalization and maintenance. While generalization is concerned with "...the extent to which the knowledge and skill acquired in a learning setting are applied to different settings" (Blume et al., 2010, p. 1067), maintenance is based on "...the extent to which changes that result from a learning experience persist over time" (Blume et al., 2010, pp. 1067-1068). Although researchers have studied both dimensions within a variety of settings, time intervals, and contexts (Blume et al., 2010), little of this work has been conducted within the realm of sport.

In August 2004, MLB owners approved the creation of the WBC, an international baseball competition, as a platform for building the sport's international popularity (Bortstein, 2006) in light of its removal from the Olympic Games. While the success of the inaugural WBC has been documented on many fronts, some question remains as to the impact that participation in this pre-season event had on the subsequent performances of MLB players (Dobrow, 2006; Miller, 2006). Leading up to and following the first WBC, critics lamented that the timing of the event, combined with the pressure to represent one's country, would lead to a greater incidence of injury and/or inhibit the regular-season performances of participating MLB players (Dobrow, 2006; Miller, 2006). On the contrary, proponents of the WBC argued that playing in high-pressured games during the pre-season would be beneficial to players' development and force participants to accelerate their off-season conditioning programs (Bortstein, 2006; Miller, 2006). Although there are countless anecdotal accounts of successes and failures linked to WBC participation by MLB players, to the best of our knowledge, no research has addressed this issue empirically. When viewed as a form of training, the inaugural WBC provides a naturally occurring field experiment for testing the extent to which participation in the tournament led to improvements in MLB players' subsequent performances (i.e., generalization), and if so, how long these performance improvements persisted over time (i.e., maintenance).

Methodology

Individual performance data for MLB hitters (n = 304) and pitchers (n = 215) with a minimum playing experience (i.e., 130 At Bats for hitters; 50 Innings Pitched for pitchers) during the 2004 through 2006 MLB regular seasons were collected from the MLB website. For those players who also competed within the 2006 WBC, performance statistics were retrieved from the WBC website. Player performance data from the 2004 and 2005 regular seasons were used to control for the effects of previous performance in an effort to help isolate the impact of WBC participation on players' subsequent performances during the 2006 regular season. Known moderators of the transfer of training effect, such as age, education, and experience, are also incorporated into our regression-based statistical analyses.

Results, discussion, & implications

The final results of this exploratory study will be available at the time of presentation. This research has implications for any organization involved in asset risk management. Specifically, should sport organizations be concerned with controlling the actions of their players by restricting their participation in off-season tournaments? Or do these tournaments offer sufficient opportunities to transfer training and skills so that players ultimately improve? The results will inform decision making by team personnel.

References

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