

How Olympic Inclusion Impacts High Performance Training: The Case Study of Rugby Sevens

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Synopsis:

In 2009, the International Olympic Committee announced the inclusion of the sport of Rugby Sevens in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Olympic inclusion has profoundly increased the physical and mental capital invested into the game around the world as nations vie for Olympic qualification. This study addresses the question of how does Olympic qualification influence the management of high performance training regimes within a focal sport?

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Study Aim: In 2009, the International Olympic Committee announced the inclusion of the sport of Rugby Sevens in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Olympic inclusion has profoundly increased the physical and mental capital invested into the game around the world as nations vie for Olympic qualification. This study addresses the question of how does Olympic qualification influence the management of high performance training regimes within a focal sport?

Theoretical Background: Using an institutional theory perspective, this study explores the various ways in which national unions have strategically responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by Olympic inclusion. An institutional approach was adopted because an institutional environment encompasses social forces such as norms, standards, and expectations common to all the relevant stakeholders of a focal organisation or organisational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These forces have been empirically proven to exert a heavy influence on the strategic, structural and normative characteristics of organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; O'Brien & Slack, 2004). The study's findings have also been informed by the work of De Bosscher, De Knop, van Bottenburg, Shibli and Bingham (2009); Hodge, Henry and Smith (2014); and Phillips and Newland (2013), who each examined the high performance sport environment from multiple angles and identified key characteristics of successful programs.

Research Methods: At the time of writing, data collection is currently ongoing.

Data on men's and women's Rugby Sevens HP training programs have and will be collected at World Sevens Series tournament sites in Wellington, New Zealand (2-5 February); Hong Kong (23-26 March); London, England (11-14 May); and, Amsterdam, Netherlands (16-19 May). Data are derived from questionnaires distributed to coaches, managers, and players from 30 national teams. Ultimately, there will be questionnaire data from in excess of 200 respondents. The questionnaires ask respondents their opinions on the Rugby Sevens high performance training regimes in their respective countries, and seek to conceptualise "best practice" with respect to Rugby Sevens high performance training at the various resource levels that exist in the international rugby environment. These questionnaire data have assisted in formulating interview questions for national Rugby Sevens high performance managers and coaches from around the world. The interviews provide richer data and allow for deeper probing of issues that become apparent from the questionnaire. The study has been commissioned by World Rugby (formerly the International Rugby Board) – the world governing body for the sport of rugby union, and a final report on the study's findings will be submitted to World Rugby by July 31, 2016. The study's findings will inform World Rugby decision-making around future HP training policy formulation and resource allocations. Results, Discussion, Conclusions: With Olympic qualification of paramount importance, the area of high performance training is receiving intense focus among national rugby governing bodies. This research illuminates a trend that has emerged in which many national governing bodies are centralising their respective national Rugby Sevens HP training programs in their pursuit of Olympic qualification. At the time of writing, we have completed the first phase of data collection in Wellington and the data are suggesting a number of key characteristics for the more successful centralised Rugby Sevens HP training systems. The data seem to be coalescing around certain categories of facilities and services that range from critical to optional. In addition, the division of resources between both men's and women's training systems, and traditional fifteens rugby and Rugby Sevens is also producing interesting results. By the time of the EASM Conference, all three phases of data collection will be completed and the final report submitted to World Rugby. This presentation will provide a synopsis of that final report.

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