

Differences in the Elite Sport Development Programmes that Lead to a Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

Introduction

Although there is an increasing homogeneity of the training and support programmes for top performance athletes participating in the Olympic Games (O.G.) from countries such as Spain, United Kingdom (UK), France, United States (USA), Canada and Australia (Oakley & Green, 2001) the small differences are the ones leading to a competitive advantage.

Traditionally international sports success has been related to relatively stable macro-economic factors or socio-demographic factors. These factors contrast with the factors that can be influenced by integrated sport policies that include financial support, quality of coaches, training facilities, participation in sport, talent management, total support to athletes, international competition, and scientific research (De Bosscher et al., 2008). These controllable factors are part of our multidisciplinary study that also takes into account the characteristics of the organisation and the process of management.

The main objective of this research is to compare the organizational models of training and support programmes for top performance athletes in the UK, USA, Italy, Germany, France and Spain from a three-fold perspective:

- a) organization,
- b) sponsorship and
- c) athletes.

Methods

In order to evaluate the Spanish model three exploratory questionnaires were designed. These questionnaires were sent to:

- a) Representatives of the Olympic Sports Association (ADO) and the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE),
- b) the marketing executives of the sponsoring companies, and

c) a representative group of athletes and former athletes.

These questionnaires were based on a literature review regarding elite sport and international sporting success, and were validated by a panel of experts. The preliminary findings were confirmed by personal interviews.

The comparison of the Spanish model with other models was accomplished by interviews with executives from the NOCs studied. The guidelines of the interviews were based on the questionnaire sent to the Spanish Olympic Committee.

Results

In Spain, the CSD (High Council for Sport) manages the ADO Programme which is administered by ADO staff. The budget to 2008 is 252 million € from partner institutions, sponsors and supporters. The involvement of Spanish state radio and television (RTVE) in the ADO Programme, guarantees RTVE exclusive TV rights to the O.G. A total of 460 athletes and trainers are preparing for the Beijing 2008 O.G. with a 53.5% budget increment. Sponsors indicated the Madrid 2016 bid for the Olympic Games as a positive incitement for maintaining their support.

Unlike ADO in Spain, UK Sport is not exclusively dedicated to managing elite athletes. The BBC that is the Olympics TV rights holder does not participate in the WCPP. As a result of the celebration of the 2012 Olympic Games in London, funds which come from the Exchequer, the National Lottery, official partners and supporters, have rocketed. In Italy, elite sport is funded by the National Government and managed by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), and there is no specific sponsoring programme. These European models contrast with the American model that depends on the private sector.

Discussion

State financing is the main source of income of the Olympic teams studied, but private financing (or sponsorship) has permitted greater investment. The Olympic teams are governed by the NOCs which belong to the Olympic Movement. Olympic sports organizations (OSOs) are more and more focussed on economic efficiency. Thus to find a balance between their social and economic objectives, the OSOs should bear in mind that their clients are their athletes, and that they are continually exposed to public opinion (Ferrand & Torrigiani, 2005). The OSOs reveal particular characteristics which depend on their structure, internal policies, leadership and other factors (Chelladurai & Madella, 2006). The management process of this type of organizations centres on:

- a) strategy,
- b) resources, and
- c) performance, analyzing the environment, mission, vision, objectives, human resources, financial resources, information and evaluation methods (Chappelet & Bayle, 2005).

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Is there Room for Diversity in Elite Sport Development of Nations?

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Abstract

Introduction

As a consequence of internationalization and the pressure of globalisation (Houlihan & Green, 2008) elite sport systems from different nations have converged to a single model of elite sports development with only slight variations (Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset et al., 2007, Green & Houlihan, 2005, Oakley & Green 2001).

However there is room for diversity, caused in particular by social, cultural and political specificities that may limit the extent to which countries are able to adopt sport systems.

This study explores to what extent elite sport policies in six nations (Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom) have become more homogenous, and where differences emerge in relation to explaining (mainly) Olympic success.

Theoretical Framework

The basic theoretical framework for international comparison consists of nine sports policy factors, or “pillars”, that are commonly considered to be important for international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2006): (1) financial support, (2) Sport policies and structures, (3) participation in sport, (4) talent identification and development system, (5) athletic and post career support, (6) training facilities, (7) coaching provision and coach development, (8) (inter)national competition, (9) scientific research.

Methods

Researchers in each participating nation collected data on their elite sport policies (over 85 open-ended and closed questions) for each of the nine pillars. Additionally data were gathered directly from the main stakeholders in elite sport by means of written questionnaires, responded by 1090 athletes, 273 coaches and 79 performance directors. To support a descriptive analysis of elite sport systems and to increase objectivity of data comparison, a scoring system was developed, by measuring over

100 critical success factors on a five point scale and aggregating a percentage score for each nation on the nine pillars.

Results and Discussion

The results endorse the opinions of other authors that homogeneity has increased compared to several decades ago, but also show that there are considerable variations in each of the nine pillars and that large differences emerge in the way elite sport policies is implemented in the different nations.

Diversity is often related to the general sport structure. For example, whereas UKSport and Olympiatoppen (Norway) are only responsible for elite sport at national level, NOC*NSF (the Netherlands), Bloso & Adeps (Belgium, separated by Flanders & Wallonia), CONI (Italy) and Sport Canada also have responsibilities for general sport for all development, leading to increasing tensions between both areas.

With regard to talent identification and development, no sample nation has a well developed system. Similar developments of elite sport schools are found in the smaller nations (Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway), which do not exist at a national structured level in the UK, Canada and Italy.

Regarding financial support it appears that the best performing nations in the Olympic Summer Games (Italy, the UK, the Netherlands) also spend the highest amounts of money on elite sport. However, differences are found in the priorities made by these nations for elite sport (like Canada, the Netherlands and Italy) compared to sport for all (Norway, Belgium) and the number of sports that are targeted for elite sport. Furthermore, all nations provide financial support for athletes, but the criteria and the purpose of this support vary considerably.

Financial support for coaches is still slow in developing in all the sample nations, and may become a similar characteristic in future development.

The results yielded that it is impossible to create one single model for explaining international success, because of (1) the different priorities given to success by nations, (2) the lack of evidence on cause and effect explaining elite sporting success, (3) the different sport systems and cultural backdrop of elite sport and success and (4) the demographic and economic situation of nations.

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