

Financing high performance athletes through national Sports Associations in Spain: Comparative analysis with other European countries

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Aim of paper and research questions

The task of Sports Associations is governance, management, organisation and regulation of sports under their tuition. They have to manage the funds that they get from their activities or from Public Authorities. In this context, the aim of this paper is to identify how Spanish Associations finance high level athletes. Moreover, we try to find if they use performance measures oriented to evaluate the socioeconomic return of the money spent on elite athletes. Finally, we have looked for differences among the financing systems in England, France, Italy and Spain.

Literature review

Literature on the economic effect of investing in elite sport has focussed mainly on the effects of staging the Olympic Games or Major events. However, the field of high level sports funding is almost unexplored. De Bosscher et al. (2009) is one of the few studies that succeeded in testing a conceptual model of elite sport policy factors in an international context.

Furthermore, information about this topic can be found on the websites of the institutions that are in charge of the different programmes for financing sports in each country (e.g. in Spain: www.ado.es and www.csd.gob.es; in England: www.sportengland.com and www.uk sport.gov.uk; in Italy: www.acsi.it and www.alleanzasportiva.it; and, in France: www.jeunesse-sports.gouv.fr).

As for performance measurements see the document of the Audit Commission (2000) and AECA (2002).

Research design and data analysis

There are 59 National Sports Associations in Spain. A questionnaire with open and closed questions was addressed to all of them. The survey was carried out by phone in July, August and September 2008. There was a response percentage of 62.7%, which can be considered satisfactory. Ten Associations organise collective sports and the rest of them individual sports. The majority of questions referred to the investments or expenses that each Association incurs in regard to high performance athletes. We conducted an analysis of difference between Associations regarding the type of financing programme and how these compared to the ADO plan (in the case of Olympic Associations) and if specific budgets for certain athletes were set. A filter question was set at the beginning to classify Associations. Some control questions verify the quality and accuracy of the answers. Qualitative questions about the goals and measure of performance complete the questionnaire.

Descriptive and comparative analyses among the financing systems in four European countries were carried out.

Results

Regarding the Spanish financing system, the main source of funding for high performance athletes in each Association is the Superior Sports Council (Consejo Superior de Deportes, CSD). Some Associations add money from their competitions, licences and public administrations. Olympic Associations have alternative programmes for funding their high level athletes apart from ADO (Olympic Sport Association).

Associations mainly agree on two basic goals: promotion of sport (33%) and fostering sport practice (25%). Supporting elite competition is relevant as a goal for 11% of Associations. All the Associations have a budget for funding elite level athletes. Looking at the results of the qualitative part of the survey it is worth remarking that the second most important objective for sport associations is to negotiate sponsorship agreements. This fact emphasises the relevance of financial issues for Associations.

Discussion and conclusion

There are no remarkable differences between the financing systems for high level athletes in England, France, Italy and Spain. In every country a separate institution manages the financial subsidies for Sports Associations. The selection of Olympic athletes is often based on previous performance. Athletes receive –through their corresponding Association- the money depending on that qualification.

In future research it will be interesting to analyse the tax incentives for companies and the tax rules for these athletes. This is an additional way for funding high level athletes.

On the other hand, performance measures are not common among Spanish Associations, although they consider them as a useful tool in order to estimate the socio-economic return of money spent on the athletes. This will also be the subject for future studies.

Moreover it would be advisable to extend the questionnaire to the Associations in the other countries.

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