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Political recommendations for improving in the social status of referees

Y. Bizen¹, Y. Takahashi², T. Sano³

¹Tenri University, Faculty of Health Budo & Sports Studies, Tenri, Japan

²University of Tsukuba, Institute of Health and Sport Sciences, Tokyo, Japan

³Keio University, Faculty of Health Management, Tokyo, Japan

y-bizen@sta.tenri-u.ac.jp

- Introduction

Referees play very important roles in sports games. Their role is to control a game; therefore it is impossible to complete any games safely without them. In the begging of 2008, their importance caught attention for a brief moment in the world at the Olympic Asian qualification round in handball. In Japan, many referees are working very hard in all sports, and some of them are nominated as excellent referees to appear on international tournaments such as Olympics and world cup games. Many referees who are relatively young are also training to acquire international licenses. However, unfortunately, their actual condition has not been revealed yet. Although their working conditions have been concerned for a long time, any changes hardly can be seen.

- Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the environment that surrounds referees who are working at top level ball sports games in Japan, and find solutions for improving their working conditions.

- Methods

This research was conducted in November 2009 as a part of the project supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Total 273 questionnaires were distributed via e-mail to the referees nominated by their national sport organizations as top level referees in the sports. Those referees in the study are from 8 sports, such as volleyball, basketball, rugby football, hand-ball, women soccer, softball, field hockey and ice hockey. Before distributing the questionnaire, the content of the questionnaire was checked by two experts who have been working as international referees. In addition to the questionnaire survey, interviews with chief referees in each sport were conducted.

- Result

164 questionnaires were returned in the research. That consisted of 142 males and 22 females, and the average age of the participants in this study was 42.12 (SD=7.14). And the average year of working experience as a referee was 16.24. There was no referee who answered “professional” in occupation. Consequently, all referees in the study earn their living by another main job. By occupation, “Teacher” was the most frequent answers, 71 out of all 164 answered. Moreover, including the jobs such as “Police” and “Public employee”, it was revealed that almost 60% referees in ball games engage jobs in public service. As to the average number of days working for a referee activity, they are assigned is 55 games (SD=35.87) in a year, and spend 60 days (SD=38.22) as a referee. Since most top level ball sports games are held during weekend, the number shows that most referees are engaging in the activity almost every week throughout the year. However, from the result of this study, it can be seen that their referee activities are not necessary understood and not highly evaluated by their coworkers or employers. Most scores of the questions regarding “evaluation by people around them” were very low. Many referees in the study also pointed that “Understandings by coworkers and employers are indispensable for continuing their activities. However, they have been having difficulties in getting the understandings in the social circumstances.” in the open-ended questions. Actually, from the interviews in this study, it was revealed that many referees had to cancel their nominations for international tournaments because they could not get an understanding by people surround them.

- Discussion

It seems that one of the biggest reasons that cause the problem above is “low social status of referees”. The importance of referees in sports has not yet been fully recognized. Needless to say, referee is a very important element in sports. Therefore, it is necessary to create a good environment that they can work without too much pressure. That also leads the development of whole sports. For the environment, political supports by the government are needed. We propose 3 policies by government on the basis of the result in this study, 1.promoting subsidy for referee activities, 2.enhancing understandings for referee activities, and 3.creating a new talent training system.