

Success driver in the Japanese elite sport system: an examination based on evaluations of the elite sport climate by elite athletes

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Aim of abstract/paper and theoretical background

In recent years, many countries have adopted the elite sport system framework first developed in the former Soviet Union and former East Germany, which itself was developed against the political background of these countries' attempts to spread an ideology (Green and Houlihan, 2005; Bergsgard et al., 2007; Hill, 2007). While the elite sport system is made up of an infrastructure and practices to improve a country's international sporting competitiveness (Houlihan and Green, 2008; Böhlke and Robinson, 2009), the elite sport climate refers to "the social and organisational environment that provides the circumstances in which athletes can develop into elite sport athletes and can continue to achieve at the highest levels in their branch of sport" (van Bottenburg, 2000). In short, the elite sport climate is a sub-concept within the elite sport system, and it can also refer to the competition environment surrounding athletes that is created by the elite system. De Bosscher et al. (2008; 2009) conducted a survey on elite sport climate of elite athletes and elite coaches, who are deemed to be the primary users of the elite sport system, in order to evaluate items that are difficult to measure objectively and quantitatively. Therefore it is possible to examine the success factors in elite sport by evaluating the elite sport climate from the viewpoint of the consumer of the elite sport system (De Bosscher et al., 2009). The aim of this research was to examine policy-related success drivers of Japanese elite sport system by conducting an evaluation of the elite sport climate with Japanese elite athletes as the survey subjects (n=105). The sub-analysis investigated which specific policy-related factors describe difference between medallist (Elite α : n=43) and un-medallist (Elite β : n=62).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The questionnaires were administered by mail and at athlete group survey. A total of 155 questionnaires were sent to Japanese elite athletes (selected by few criteria) belonging to those NGBs that agreed to co-operate with the survey and 105 were returned, giving a response rate of 69.5%. The survey items pertained to basic attributes and the elite sport climate. For elite athletes to evaluate the elite sport climate,

21 Critical Success Factors (CSFs) associated with 7 pillars ('organisation and structure of sport policies', 'talent identification and development system', 'athletic & post-career support', 'training facilities', 'coaching provision & coach development', '(inter)national competition', 'scientific research') were selected from the 126 CSFs in 9 elite sport policy pillars that had been extracted by specialists in elite sport policies in various countries (known as the SPLISS Consortium); moreover, an overall evaluation scale for the elite sport climate was used. Each pillar's evaluation score was calculated based on "the scoring system (De Bosscher et al., 2009; 2010)", a method to calculate a single score by compiling the measurement items for each pillar. The subjects were classified into Elite α and Elite β and a t-test of the independent sample was conducted, with an overall evaluation of the elite sport climate as the dependent variable and sporting achievements as the independent variable. Finally, the scoring system was used to calculate each pillar's score for both Elite α and Elite β .

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The result showed that the elite sport climate was very well maintained for the evaluation items of 'talent identification and development system', 'athletic support', 'training facilities', and 'coaching provision and coach development', and these items could be considered to be policy-related success drivers in the Japanese elite sport system. In contrast, the elite sport climate was not adequately maintained in terms of 'post career support', and this item could be regarded as an underdeveloped area. The sub-analysis revealed that there was no correlation between athletes' overall evaluation of the elite sport climate and the winning of medals at international competitions, which suggested that the elite sport climate for Elite α and Elite β are maintained to the same standard. Furthermore, on analysing the differences in evaluation in each pillar according to sporting achievements, it was found that Elite α evaluated 'scientific research' lower than Elite β . This suggests that elite athletes with a higher level of achievement are less satisfied with the 'scientific research' climate.

References – limited to 5

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