

Why hasn't Malaysia won a gold medal at the Olympics?

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Abstract keywords

Elite sport systems, national governing bodies, capabilities

Aim of paper

The research set out below seeks to understand why Malaysia appears to be underperforming on the international sporting stage.

Theoretical background

Success on the international sporting stage is an aim for many governments, leading to increasing expenditure on the systems, organisations and athletes that create this success. Consequently, a growing body of research investigates the factors that might lead to, or contribute to international sporting success. Research has been carried out to identify factors in the sport system that might be adopted by countries to enhance their chances of winning on the world stage (de Bosscher, et al, 2006; Green & Oakley, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008). At the organizational level, Robinson and Minikin (2012) have argued that sporting success is the result of the competitive advantage that sport organisations can create by developing athletes capable of achieving international sporting success. Malaysia has had some international sporting success having gained a record number of medals at the 2010 Commonwealth Games (CGs). However, it has only won 2 silver and 2 bronze medals in the Olympics since 1956 and is slipping behind neighbours Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia at regional competitions.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was employed to collect information on the Malaysian sport system that involved desk research, the application of the Readiness Assessment Tool (Robinson and Minikin, 2011) and interviews with key stakeholders. Examples of the documents analysed were the Sport Policy for Malaysia and the strategic plans of key stakeholders. Interviews were carried out with key personnel in the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM), the National Sports Council (NSC), the National Institute of Sport (NIS), and the Ministry for Youth and Sport. Documents and interview data were analysed primarily using categories developed from the review of the literature on elite sports systems.

The Readiness Assessment Tool questionnaire was distributed to all 53 members and associate members of the OCM. The results presented below are based on 28 of the 36 full members and 5 of the 17 associate members of the OCM. The accuracy of the responses was verified against a recent survey of NSAs carried out by the OCM and by

interviews with selected National Sport Association (NSAs) covering each of the broad levels of development.

Results and discussion

A comparison of the Malaysian elite sport system against the SPLISS pillars (de Bosscher et al, 2006) shows a mixed picture:

- Finance: the government has systematically invested in sporting success since the hosting of the 1998 CGs.
- Integrated approach to policy development: Malaysia has a Sport policy and a Sport Development Act.
- Foundation and participation: the government sponsors programmes that encourage participation.
- Talent identification and development system: there is a systematic talent identification system.
- Athletic and post career support: those of school age are trained in special sport schools, however, little other lifestyle support is available.
- Training facilities: these are centrally provided.
- Coaching provision and coach development: Most professional coaches are foreign and there is little evidence of systematic coach development.
- Competition: elite athletes have opportunities to compete internationally.
- Scientific research: Elite athletes have access to scientific support based on research.

On the face of it, Malaysia has many of the requirements of a successful elite sport system. However, detailed investigation shows that the system and the main developers of elite athletes, the NSAs, lack real development. The results of the Readiness Assessment Tool show that the NSAs of Malaysia can be considered to be moderately developed, while the pillars encompassed in the SPLISS framework require a high level of organizational development. Specifically, the research showed:

- There is a lack of strategic planning in NSAs
- Very few sports have a holistic competition structure and most sports have no club structure
- Virtually no NSA keeps membership records
- The financial policies and procedures of all NSAs need substantial development.

This research suggests that although many of the pillars that lead to international sporting success are in place, they are either not well developed, or are only available to a limited number of athletes. More importantly, it is clear that the NSAs, responsible for elite talent development in most countries, do not possess the capabilities required to create competitive advantage through medal winning athletes.

References

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