
RUGBY BACK TO OLYMPICS: HOW DO COMPETITION MODELS INFLUENCE INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS ?

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Type: Scientific

Category: K: Elite sport organization and management for world class performance

Abstract

Team Sports performing in the Olympics always get a special attention from public in general, and therefore from civil society and governments. With Rugby back in the Olympic program on Rio 2016 Games, it won't be different, in all rugby countries as a whole, with Brazil in particular.

Competition models are often researched, as they usually lead to what stakeholders aim to achieve. In 2002, Morgan compared the North American "Cartels" with the English Premiership "Oligarchy" and the "Hierarchical Governance" of Rugby's southern hemisphere. Later in 2006, Mehra criticized the US Big Leagues "Cartelization", using the English Premiership as an example of Free Market. Finally, Szymanski wrote on 2011 that no one of his knowledge was able to connect sport's "Participation" and a National Team success.

This study tried to focus on how Morgan's "hierarchical governance" of the southern hemisphere Rugby unions' competitions helped those national teams - South Africa, New Zealand and Australia (SANZAR) - won six out of seven Rugby World Cups (RWCs) to date. This is interesting for Brasil, as a Federal country -with three governance levels: Federal, State and Municipalities -, as the host of rugby's comeback to the Olympics, and with a lot work to do to present itself as an honorable competitor in Rio 2016.

The method used in this research was a revision on SANZAR competition models, at all levels, crossed with recent literature review, official Unions' sites and sample interviews on some stakeholders from those nations.

When researching the Competitive Models of SANZAR, but also in England and Ireland, it seems that those ones are more successful, faster to implement, much cheaper, and that puts a lot more people playing in all corners of the country. These three countries were champions in six RWCs even with England having nearly half of registered players worldwide; and together with France, England is the

one who pays the highest salaries in the world of rugby. Still, the success of the Club model of England and France does not bring international success, and brings a lot of problems between clubs and national teams.

The SANZAR "Hierarchical Governance" comprises four levels: National Team (level 1), Super Rugby franchise (2), Provincial rugby (3) and Club rugby (4).

What most surprised us in this research was the coincidence of calendar, for levels 1-3 and 2-4. Thus, each player trains and plays with a team in the first semester and in another one in the second, and that in a different level ("above", if he is selected, or "below" if he is not). Whoever trains / plays in the National Team (1), wakes up every day and will train with the national team (2nd semester); but in the 1st semester, he is cleared to play/train for his Super Rugby's franchise (2); Those who are not selected for the National Team, "fall" to train/play for their Provinces (3), competing in the Currie Cup (South Africa) or ITM Cup (New Zealand), joining players who are drafted from Clubs; Clubs (4) play their provincial championships in the first semester, and in the end of it, some players are selected for the Provincial teams to play the Currie Cup or ITM Cup in the 2nd semester.

The major problems found were labor restrictions that lead to emigration of several SANZAR players on signing contracts for France and United Kingdom clubs. Minor provincial unions also claimed that their Super Rugby "provincial leader" sometimes is unfair on player's selection to play on the professional level. Some racial problems were raised, but the general idea is that rugby is a professional career open to all. Perhaps South Africa's blacks are a little bit behind than Australia's aboriginal and New Zealand maoris, on this subject.

Apart from the above problems related, it was interesting to verify that power/dependency relationships between the major stakeholders in the network seem to flow with ease, but this needs to be confirmed with further studies.

Brazil Rugby Union (CBRu) has come from a £30.000 budget in 2009, to an actual £1,4 Million (2012), since the re-introduction of rugby in the Olympics, starting in Rio 2016. CBRu has hired New Zealand Union`s expert coaches to develop rugby across a continental country (as large as 80% of Europe`s territory), and a reorganization of Brazil's competitive models are on their way. Coming from a São Paulo clubs based rugby to an overall country rugby is a challenge that we are interested in witnessing.

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EASM 2014