

Down under is the top of the rugby world

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Research question

In International Sporting Success, there are several areas of research trying to determinate the critical factors that could lead to it. And, in spite of paying much bigger salaries, and having much more players' numbers, evidence shows that England and France national rugby teams underperform, when compared to South Africa, New Zealand and Australia (SANZAR nations). Therefore, the aim of this PhD research was to find some indications on why SANZAR nations win so consistently.

Theoretical background

In Team Sports, 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 in 2011 that no one of his knowledge was able to connect sport's "Participation" and a National Team success.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The methodology used in this research was a bibliographic review with exploratory interviews to SANZAR players and coaches, in Portugal and Brasil. Then five Dimensions were drawn: "Balanced Competitions", "Resources", "Public Policies", "Branding" and "International Strategy". Crossing those Dimensions, three hypothesis were raised. We tried to figure out which indicators would best suit this research, to build the Questionnaire, which was applied in 87 interviews on local stakeholders (CEOs and Presidents), in a four months field research. Some semi-structured interviews took place, to understand and connect the data researched. The data was then analyzed through SPSS.

Results

The three countries handled the entire process of professionalization, from 1995, in a completely different pathway from european rugby. Club rugby remains mainly amateur, with representative rugby having an important significance to all three countries researched, and it's only semi-professional. All clubs' competitions are city-based, with compulsory grade teams. Super Rugby and International Teams are fully professional, with a Calendar built to promote sporting success, in all four-tier competition levels. There is no National Governments money in all three countries' rugby, although there are significant public policies that help Club, Representative and National levels (not Super Rugby), with almost all these being non-profit organizations. The percentage of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand and Australian rugby is above 35% of professional players, most of them raised from local immigrants, not imported. There are still racial issues on South African rugby. Travelling so much is believed for some

important stakeholders as a major reason for success, compared to Europe.

Discussion and implications

Whether this results can or will be replicated, either in Portugal or Brasil, we'll have to wait. In both cases, there are enough data to replicate. Although this research was geographically limited, the sample was a very strong one. In future researches, we would try to reproduce this study at High School level, Women rugby, 7s rugby (although Fiji would have to be part of it), and in no or under represented regions.

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