

Examining The Sailing League's Potential For Recruiting Young Sailors To The Sport: Competitors' Perspective.

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Aim of the research

This abstract aims to investigate competitors' views of the 'Norwegian Sailing League' (NSL) as a recruitment strategy by the Norwegian Sailing Association (NSA). NSL utilizes a 'youth rule', meaning that a minimum of one U22 sailor is present in every competing team.

Theoretical background

Due to a trend of decreasing memberships in Norwegian sailing (SSB, 2014), the NSA looks for strategies that contribute to turn this undesirable development. One initiative to recruit and maintain memberships in the NSA has been the NSL. The NSL utilises a so called "bag sailing" concept meaning that teams can show up with their sailing clothes in a sailing bag, the organizer owns and prepares the boats, and the participants are just sailing. The NSL concept has gained international interest, and made visible through the establishment of a Champions League of sailing with 13 competing countries. The U22 rule as a recruitment strategy is however unique to the NSL and, to date, no studies have investigated the effect of such a rule. The NSA states in their annual report (2015) that the sport of sailing needs renewal to recruit new participants, maintain memberships and to make the sport more attractive for the athletes. Thus, the NSA aims are congruent with a traditional pyramid model of sport participation (Green, 2005) consisting of recruitment, retention and advancement phases, respectively. In general, in the field of organisational strategy and change in sailing, research is scarce. Yet, a number of sport related studies highlights the importance of a contextual understanding to guide strategic initiatives.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A series of deductively developed individual semi-structured interviews of the attending youth (N = 15) and the captains (N = 15) in the NSL was conducted. Data was recorded, transcribed verbatim and exposed to notions of content analysis.

Results and discussions

The results indicates that the 'youth rule' kept the young sailors in the sport rather than recruiting them, meaning that the strategy of using the NSL for recruiting new sailors seems misguided in the short term. However, youth participants seemed to enjoy the sailing format and were motivated to maintain their participation. Some athletes even reported that the NSL inspired them to advance their sailing from dinghy to big boat sailing. As such, the NSL contributes to promote two out of three key aspects in a traditional pyramid model of sport development (Green, 2005). A finding of contextual value was that most of the U22 NSL sailors seemed socialized into the sport through their (sailing) families. This finding relates to Haycock and Smith (2014) who found a strong correlation between athletes' adulthood participation in leisure-sports and parental support based on joy and love of the sport. The NSA initiatives seems to appeal to a broader range of young sailors and therefore, in the end, NSL can be a powerful strategy for member recruitment and maintenance. Not least because the "bag sailing" concept is likely to eliminate the reliance of parental interest and support, and that the 'youth rule' helps facilitating the transition from smaller to bigger boats. As such, the positive impressions that emerged from the NSL participants indicate that both the 'bag sailing' concept and the 'youth rule' have appeal and are likely to gain popularity in Norwegian sailing. Future initiatives should therefore consider an extension of the 'bag sailing' concept to dinghy sailing to make sailing more accessible. Future research should examine existing club based initiatives that has shown to increase and maintain sailing activity among young sailors that are not socialized into sailing through families. Such knowledge might add useful knowledge in how to shape modern day sailing environments to develop the joy and love needed for new sailors to maintain within the sport.

Implications

This abstract will provide rich qualitative data that can be used to improve the precision of overarching recruitment strategies within the context of Norwegian sailing, and in sports in general.

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