

# **A Better Performance to Elite Student Athletes? The Case Study of School Athletic Class System in Taiwan**

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## **Aim**

The race to win medals at international sport competitions had clearly escalated in the past few decades for many countries, so most of the governments had been directly intervening in policies designed to improve the international competitiveness to their elite athletes (Hiroaki Funahashi, et al., 2014). Therefore, in the era of high sport performance, the cultivation of youth athletes for competing in international sport competitions had gradually become the focus of attention in many countries (Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). In Taiwan, the major elite sporting systems to student athletes was “Athletic Classes” which was a special system for schools by concentrating students with athletic potential on same classes and coaching sport skill in order to promote their performance (Sport Administration Taiwan, 2018). As the system of athletic classes was regarded as the cradle of training elite athletes in Taiwan and the effectiveness of athletic classes were crucial to the achievements of Taiwan's competitive sports, the aim of this study was to explore the national elite sporting systems to student athletes in Taiwan by discussing: (i) the performance of elite students athletes from athletic classes; (ii) the challenges and improving strategies to this school sport policy and also offered suggestions to the government of Taiwan.

## **Theoretical Background or Literature Review**

Sports had become a powerful global phenomenon, so many advanced capitalist countries invested much in developing elite sport to perform well and win the medals in mega sport events (Grix, 2012; McNeill & Wang, 2005); therefore, there would be a continuous focus on performance improvements and so did Taiwan. Taiwan government formulated laws and regulations related to athletic classes as a basis for promoting the elite sporting system to student athletes. However, according to the evaluation reports by the Sport Administration Taiwan and relative researches or literatures made by local scholars of Taiwan, the dilemmas of training system for elite student athletes included the participation of competitive sports in population reduction, training and academic conflict, over-training and sports injuries, insufficient sports training funds, and lack of career planning which were also the difficulties and challenges that the athletic classes system faced (Sport Administration Taiwan, 2018).

## **Methodology and Data Analysis**

This study conducted a thorough analysis of documents from 1984 when Taiwan governments started implementing the school athletic class system. For the research, official government documents which were only published directly by the authorities and collected from national sport governing bodies, sporting committees, and so on were all analyzed. Furthermore, this study included semi-structured interviews with five key persons from the Sport Administration Taiwan, scholars, and three principals of schools who were involved in sports diplomacy. All participants were informed that their responses would be confidential and used for research purposes only and the interview materials would be recorded under their permission and sent to them for the post-view.

The questions to semi-structured interviews were as the following: (i) the reasons/objective for schools to set up athletic classes; (ii) the difficulties/challenges in managing athletic

classes; (iii) the most urgent need for improvement for the national elite sporting system to student athletes.

### **Results and Conclusion**

(1) The national elite sporting system for student athletes in Taiwan was legalized after the lurching of “National Sport Act” in 2001 and “The regulation for the establishment of athletic classes in high schools and elementary schools” in 2003. At present there are a total of 676 schools and 1,862 athletic classes in Taiwan and more than 700 coaches assisting the student athletes on sport training.

(2) According to Dr. He Zhuo-fei (2018), the former Director of Sport Ministry Taiwan, most of the elite student athletes of the high school athletic classes performed very well. There were more than 95% of the medal winners of Taiwan delegation to 2017 Taipei Universidad were from high school athletic classes, which was the evidence of the performance to athletic classes.

(3) The difficulties to manage athletic classes included: (i) the insufficient budget to support the student’s training; (ii) the reduced participation in competitive sports.

(4) The urgent need to be improved for student athletes of athletic classes were: (i) the difficulties with time management of sport training and academic studies; (ii) the lack of career and social development opportunities.

(5) Taiwan government was advised to construct sustainable development indicators for athletic classes and provide them adequate support in order to enhance the performance of national elite sporting system in Taiwan.

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