

WINDS OF CHANGE: GOING BACK TO THE BASICS

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ABSTRACT

The recent formation of a committee to develop policies on Sports for All in Kenya indicate the new thinking in the area of sports. Our Universities' sports programmes for a long time have depended on voluntary participation of students in the various sports provided. Once finances have been allocated for sports and the sports tutors assigned responsibilities, it has been assumed that everything else will take its course. However, observation of sports programmes in both public and private universities has shown that only few students are involved. The rest of the students are relegated to passive participants or at best they never appear near sports grounds. In this article focus has been placed on early sports Training as a determinant of future participation. The article also provides case studies of how some countries have tried to enhance youth sports programmes. Lastly the article provides some examples on how sports can be organised in our Universities.

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, Burnett (1989) discussed the issue of recreation in modern Kenya. He observed then that extra curricular activities were markedly absent from Kenyan campuses. Colleges and universities neither sponsor nor involved themselves in intramural or extramural sports. He also observed that where students were involved in any sport, the organisation, coaching and discipline of the teams was entirely left to students. In addition, recreational programmes emphasizing individual performance, lifetime sports and recreation as a tool for maintaining health and work productivity had not been highly regarded.

CURRENT SITUATION

Kenya has five public universities (Nairobi, Kenyatta, Jomo Kenyatta, Moi, and Egerton), one university college and five private universities (Nazarene, Daystar, United States International, Catholic, and Baraton). These ten universities provide recreation facilities to thousands of youngsters. Each one of the public universities has a department of sports with qualified personnel to organise and run sports programmes in their campuses for all students and staff. Some of the major sports offered include ball games for instance soccer, volleyball, rugby, basketball and track as well as field athletics. Swimming, indoor activities such as table tennis, badminton, aerobics and chess are also organised. However, the number of students who are involved in any one of these sports still remain so small. Only those who play on the university teams are seen practising on the fields. Even when sports competitions are conducted, very few students are seen on the courts cheering their

teams. This is a phenomenon that is becoming more pronounced year-in year-out. All in all, soccer, basketball, rugby and hockey remain the most popular sports at the campuses. However, women participation in sports is still very minimal.

Although Kenya is well endowed with many athletes of international standard, athletics has not reached the mass sport it should be at the universities. Very few students engage in athletics and as a result, universities struggle every year to raise teams to compete in the many Kenya amateur athletics meetings, conducted through, out the year. In addition, universities' impact is very insignificant at the national sport forum. This situation in Kenyan Universities has persisted even with the formation of an umbrella sports association of Kenyan Universities (KUSA) to organise and run sports in these institutions. The only sports that university students participate in competitively at national level include rugby with Mean Machine (UON) and Blak Blad (KU) having been very consistent in the national league for many years; handball, field hockey, and basketball.

It may be appropriate to support Burnett's (1989) view to some extent, except that KUSA has now tried to harmonise and provide some direction and encouragement for sports in campuses. Through KUSA, universities are now able to organise competitions and even further training for games tutors. Universities have also been able to participate in national competitions locally (eg. cross country) and internationally. The recent world university competitions in Japan).

BARRIERS TO SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

The ideas given below are based mainly on anecdotal reports or observations.

Finance

Although many times finance is the major hindrance to implementation of any programme, the issue of finances in universities can not be over emphasized. The university management in all campuses have budgetary allocations for sports. The allocations are however, inadequate.

Attitudes

All through from primary to secondary school, sports activities are not taken seriously by students and teachers. Although physical education has been included in the curriculum, many schools rarely provide it on the timetable. Physical education lessons are mainly left for learners to recreate freely.

This situation is even compounded as one observes the upper classes where PE is replaced with examinable courses. Young boys and girls in standard eight are not allowed to play as they have to study for their examinations through-out the day including the games time in the evening.

Siedentop (1983) has shown that academic learning time or what is generally referred to as learning time on task is very low in physical education. That is, even where physical education classes are conducted, teachers rarely have high expectation of their learners to acquire skills. This attitude has a far reaching implication in the way the teaching of sports programmes in schools is done. Many youngsters go through the P.E. classes without mastering any skills that would help them later to participate in both competitive and recreational sports.

As Magill (1980) has indicated, motor skills are acquired in stages i.e. getting the idea about the movement (cognitive stage); identifying fundamentals of the skill (associative stage) and attending to specific motor cues (autonomous stage). Unless learners are given adequate guidance on how the sport skills are performed, practice the skills in varying environments and finally correct modelling of the skill, they may not reach the third level of autonomous stage.

The autonomous stage enables learners to internalise skills so that there are no errors in performance of motor skills. At this stage individuals have gained mastery of skills that they can use later in life. For example, once one has acquired mastery of bicycle riding, it will not be easy to forget the skill even if it takes many years without riding a bicycle. Because of scanty learning of motor skills in physical education lessons, learners rarely automatize sports skills, thus the inadequate participation in sports tasks later in life.

Burnett (1989) observed that in Kenya, youngsters pass much of "their time in work and play with peers, benignly guided or bullied by other children, far removed from a largely indifferent adult world"(p47). Those who are strong and sociable have the chance to acquire sports skills from their peers while the weak fall back in a helplessness situation which is perpetuated even at the university. In addition, many of the skills youngsters learn in free play may be poorly modelled so much so that the youngsters ability to build on the skills is hampered and consequently this leads to drop out in sports.

Skill Mastery

A cursory observation of the PE syllabus clearly reveals a comprehensive curriculum which if implemented would give learners adequate mastery of sports skills. The physical education content is wide and covers individual, dual and team sports. Most of the skills described can be taught in many schools without much financial requirements. (K.I.E 1985).

However, the time available for teaching each skill is so limited. The ministry has provided for two lessons per week for P.E in secondary schools. In many schools this has been reduced to one lesson per week. In other schools even this lesson is not provided especially to the upper classes.

Yet, skill acquisition in sports is not a simple matter. Adequate time is needed to learn and practice the skills in various situations (Magill 1980). It is also important that as skills increase from simple to complex both practice and correct modelling must be considered.

Since physical education is not compulsory and examinable in schools, many youngsters go through the programme without mastering skills that they would use later in life.

In addition, the PE syllabus emphasises sports skills that are competitive and complex. That is, skills in sports that will be used in team sports, and where strength is important. Wall (1989) observed that during the later years of high school and university there is usually a decline in the demands in physical activity settings as individuals choose to participate in less competitive sports and become more involved in individual and dual activities that make use of selected reactive and simple skills. This trend continues in adulthood where individuals are likely to be involved in activities that require less skill. As physical educators, we are familiar with this fact and we see attrition of participants in competitive sports as they move up the academic ladder. This factor explains what we are seeing in our universities today. That is, many of our students are not keen to participate in competitive sports, yet many of our programmes give more stress to such sports. If we can help them to select and become involved in activities that require mainly simple and reactive skills during their junior and high school years, then they might be able to experience more success and enjoyment in recreational sports at the university.

Many sports skills taught in high school and organised at the university level are competitive in nature. There is need to evaluate the curriculum we present and even the skills imparted to trainee teachers on whether they help in encouraging enjoyment and participation of learners in sports.

The Canada Fitness Survey (1983) revealed that many people get involved in activities that are either too difficult for them or require attitudes and values that are foreign to them. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise when these individuals soon drop out of such activities. These observations are not unique to Canada but are applicable here in Kenya. We need to ask ourselves two pertinent questions:

1. How should we handle the teaching of physical education activities to enable those who take part to appropriately place themselves where their physical ability will allow them to enjoy and sustain participation?
2. How do we motivate learners to continue in sports even when it hurts?

Which Way for University Sports

From the description of what is happening in Kenyan universities, it is necessary to identify the initial point of departure so as to improve the situation. It is important to go back to the basics to correct what has gone wrong. Clearly we have to make PE compulsory and examinable at primary and secondary school level. In addition, we have to lobby for courses in physical education to be offered as core courses to all university students. This will be in the same category as the many core courses being offered in all the public universities.

Many countries abroad (USA and Canada) have included PE in all undergraduate programmes so that by the end of the course each student will have learned adequate skills of his / her choice. The choice of sports activities would encourage more of life long skills that students can use even when they complete university education.

Many students who may wish to learn a new sport find it difficult to find teams or colleagues with similar abilities or skill level. It is therefore important that the sports departments start instructional programmes so that those students who may have the interest to learn a new sport get the opportunity. Already the few institutional programmes conducted by the games departments such as karate, tae kwo-ndo clubs, keep fit, weight lifting are very popular. What is required is to organise for more instructional programmes with qualified instructors. Other instructional programmes that can be introduced include lawn tennis, swimming, badminton, bowling, golf, fitness training, archery etc.,

Those instructional programmes apart from offering opportunities for students to acquire new skills, enable the elite performers to move up the ladder as instructors. This would give them a chance to pursue the higher level of coaching so that as they retire from active participation in sports, they would still be involved in developing the sport at a new level. Sports departments should lobby through their university senate to have instructional programme student instructors to be considered for the job study programme.

This will be a big incentive for such skilled students and a big support to the departments. It is however, commendable that some universities e.g Kenyatta and Moi have hired skilled personnel in specific sports to help enhance the coaching and training of students interested in some sports. This however needs to be extended to cover many more recreational areas.

There is also the need to diversify current inter-collegiate competitions so that it does not concentrate on elite performers who make it to the university teams. There is a need to concentrate on building the fraternity among students in all the campuses. It is suggested here that the various sports run in our campuses be divided to cover the two semesters throughout the universities. In each semester, various activities can be scheduled by the Kenya University Sports Association (KUSA) to be practised and competed for on league or tournament basis covering all these universities. Within each university, build up competitions and identification of those to represent their respective universities can be as in the following format:

1. Intramural Sports - Inter-block competitions
 - Buddy competitions
 - Inter-year competitions
 - Inter-faculty competitions
2. Inter-mural Sports. These will be competitions between universities and can follow the following format:
 - Inter faculties
 - inter year
 - inter university teams

Such a diversified approach will likely bring to the sports grounds many students who have a common bond to participate and cheer their colleagues. The competitiveness of elite sports will be toned down to encourage many shy students to participate at some level for their group, block, class or university. Again, during these competitions the elite performers can be used as team coaches, referees and organisers.

Due to congestion of the teaching timetable, many students find they are attending classes well into the night. The times when students are free to participate in sport now is not limited to after five O'clock. At Kenyatta University for example, classes begin at 7.00 am and end at 8.00 p.m. Other universities have similar situations and in addition have a very high student enrollment for limited facilities. Yet the sports departments are expected to organise serious and effective games programmes for students, staff and community members.

How can this be done?

1. Sports facilities should be opened to students and staff from 8.00 a.m., to 10.00 p.m. every day. All those who are free should be encouraged to utilise the facilities whenever they are free. Indoor facilities can be opened till late in the night.
2. The facilities and equipment available should be scheduled for various interested groups to use at given times. Currently the facilities seem to be assigned permanently to specific teams and groups. This has to change so that even the soccer pitch can be assigned to hockey team practice at certain hours.
3. The games stores should be reorganised to have a section for students to borrow any equipment they need for practice during the day as long as they can return. This will encourage some who need to practice even for a short while to have access to the equipment.

Many universities abroad which have excelled in sports have been able to do so through enacting rules that allow students who are highly skilled in certain areas to enroll in various programmes on the strength of their motor abilities. The new admission requirements should allow various students to be admitted on the strength of their sports abilities to pursue various courses. What this means is that one will now be able to award a sports scholarship to study physical education. The advantage of this is that the student who is admitted to pursue a course in physical education will be entering with a positive attitude towards P.E. and also a repertoire of sports skills that make it easier to master other sports skills easily. Currently, what we are seeing are some students who are enrolled in P.E. because they could not be accepted to register in other courses. After qualifying, such trainees shift base to concentrate on teaching the second subject. Another advantage of lobbying for sports scholarship admission is that university sports programmes will be strengthened. It is only then that universities can gain a position in the national sports forum.

Many students in foreign universities which have benefitted from athletics scholarships have represented their countries in Olympics and other world sports competitions. Through such an admission arrangement, the university can acquire recognition internationally through participation of their students in international sports. On the other hand, universities can assist to retain many of the sportsmen and women who have to go to colleges outside the country on track scholarships. Some of the money gained by such sportsmen and women in appearance and participation fee would be used by the University to enhance University sports programmes.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as discussed, let us look back to the basic and identify the ills afflicting sports in our universities. It is through identifying these ills that appropriate programmes can be drawn to improve students participation in sports. This calls for us to pull our resources together and work as a team irrespective of whether we are in physical education or games department. Through networking and lobbying we should be able to provide an environment for university communities to identify their abilities so that each one can choose appropriate sports activities suitable to him/her to maintain a lifetime of active living.

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