

STREAMLINING THE SELECTION PROCESS OF SPORTS TEAMS: A PRESENTATION OF VALUABLE TIPS

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ABSTRACT

The personnel charged with the responsibility of managing the technical facets of sports must never escape from the task of formulating and implementing a team selection format that produces the most desired athletic performance. The inevitable desire to achieve the highest performance, set new records and win the highest honours in Sports competitions creates the need to avail the most effective mechanism of selecting the best and outstanding sportsmen and sportswomen for competition. Crucial to the selection process is the requirement for high standards of professionalism and objectivity that ensures that only those sportsmen and sportswomen who rightly deserve place(s) in a given team or competition are accorded the chance (s).

The task and process of selecting the "best" team(s), unfortunately, has never been easy. Team selection has often been a controversial issue. It has not been uncommon to hear of, and also witness cases of animosity, suspicions and even court cases relating to selection procedures employed by some of the national sports federations in Kenya, and in many other countries of the world. This paper presents some valuable ideas that will assist in streamlining team selection procedures and formats and minimize some of the controversies that often arise whenever sportsmen and sportswomen are selected for local and/or international sports competitions.

KEY WORDS: *Selection, team(s), athletes, format, mode.*

INTRODUCTION

The competitive level of sports puts emphasis on winning as the most desired outcome of any sporting activity. The desire to emerge victorious and gain the recognition and honour associated with it creates the need to have the best sportsmen and sportswomen selected to participate in competition. Unfortunately, many sports managers and coaches have often admitted the difficulty encountered in the entire process of selecting the most outstanding

athletes and teams for various competitions. There is no doubt that the process of team selection is fairly intricate, and has frequently generated anxiety and controversies. The requirement to achieve the highest level of fairness in the whole selection process is a cardinal factor that must be observed (Siedentop, 1994). There should be proper and relevant criteria and format used in carrying out any selection of competitors for any given competition or tournament.

The sports scene in Kenya has not been devoid of controversies relating to the mode of selecting athletes, for either local or international competitions. Although most of the national sporting federations have been sensitive in ensuring effective team selection procedures, cases of complaints, unfairness, frustration and related anxiety have not been uncommon. Most of these cases have often been highlighted in the local media, and have thereby led to raising of eyebrows from most of the stakeholders in sports. It becomes necessary, therefore to provide some insights and guidelines that will assist put in place selection procedures and formats that help minimize controversies.

DANGERS OF POOR TEAM SELECTION PROCEDURES

It is an unwise endeavor to gamble with the selection of sports teams and individuals for competition. Those charged with the responsibility of carrying out any selection process must ensure that the processes are beyond reproach. Once a given procedure and mode is agreed upon, objectivity must prevail, and any personal interest and biases must be put aside (Munyasia, 2000). Flawed selection procedures and modes are bound to deny the best or outstanding performers' chances of representing their sporting organizations and/or countries in competitions. The inevitable consequence of any such situation is anxiety, frustration, confusion, conflicts and even the most unfortunate cases of legal tussles involving the concerned parties, sportsmen /sportswomen and their managers (The Athlete, 2000). In addition to this, sportsmen and sportswomen who fall victim to flawed and or unfair selection processes often end up losing interest in their sport and at times discontinue their sports careers (The Athletes, 2000). Failure to apply effective selection criteria also poses the danger of denying an individual or team the chances for victory and the coveted recognition, honours and

incentives associated with it (Kelong, 2000).

In view of the adverse effects of haphazard selection processes, it is important that special attention and care is accorded any such endeavor. Relevant knowledge and skills must be effectively applied to avail the most desired skilled sports performers.

TEAM SELECTION: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

The process of team selection has been widely acknowledged as a touchy issue, which must, therefore, involve a lot of technical knowledge and skills (Cox, 1994). It is a task that cannot be entrusted to any handpicked, voluntary or laypersons. Unchecked and unassessed opinions and views of fans and bystanders may not necessarily be helpful in the selection of individual athletes and teams. Renown technical personnel who are adequately knowledgeable of the sport and concerned sportsmen and sportswomen should be accorded their rightful opportunities of conducting any selection process. Coaches, trainers and to some extent, sports psychologists who maintain constant touch with a given group of athletes stand a good chance of picking outstanding performers for competition. For the sake of easing selection procedures, it is wise to form a selection committee or team of technical personnel to carry out the task on the basis of consensus rather than leave it to an individual (Siedentop, 1994). While coaches will be expected to examine the technical and tactical performance, as well as team adjustment of every potential competitor, the trainers or the exercise physiologists will serve to provide information on the participants' physical and physiological status. Sports Psychologists, on other hand, have to make their contribution of assessing the mental preparedness of potential contestants for any impending competition.

TIMING ELEMENT IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

Selection of teams and individual competitors should be viewed as a continuous process. Limiting the selection process only to the act of assembling of the "final" team in one day or a few days is inappropriate. A suitable selection procedure starts from the stage of talent identification, development of the talent (training) and related pre-competition exposure, and ends with a suitable selection format. The point to be noted, therefore, is that concerned selection personnel must spend a lot of their time with their sportsmen and sportswomen so as to monitor progress in their performances. The best sportsmen/sportswomen need to be determined after their consistent display of exemplary performance several times and their determination to achieve even higher standards (Siedentop, 1994).

VARIABLES TO BE CONSIDERED IN TEAM SELECTION PROCESS

Several physical, physiological, technical, tactical and to some reasonable extent, historical variables provide the foundation for the determination of superior sportsmen and sportswomen (Wamukoya, 1996). Team selectors must, therefore, be firmly conscious of these variables and use them as guidelines in identifying the best performers in sports.

Physical factors

The physical factors of sportsmen and sportswomen, which must never miss the eye of the selectors, include age, height, weight and body type (somatotype). Whereas the requirements for each sport in terms of these variables are bound to vary, it is the responsibility of the selector(s) to determine the status of each of these quantities that are suitable for competition in each given sporting discipline. Each competitor's past experience should be closely compatible with the requirement of his/her sport. In competitions in which age limits or restrictions are not provided, research and/or references to past events

and experiences of competitors who have excelled in major sports competitions will help determine the most suitable age for competitors in a given sport. It is widely acclaimed, for instance, that tall basketballers are likely to be better players than short ones, and hence, talent identification for, and selection of basketball players in countries that are generally known for exemplary performance in basketball starts with consideration of players' height. While the ectomorph has been known to perform well in track events, the mesomorph have done well in weightlifting, wrestling, tug-of-war, rugby and so on.

Physiological factors

The physiological factors that provides the basis for one's selection for competition include the various qualities of fitness and well-being, which include cardiorespiratory efficiency, body composition (per cent body fat), flexibility, muscular endurance, muscular strength, speed, agility, balance, power and co-ordination. These qualities of every individual potential competitor should be objectively assessed either through observation or acceptable scientific procedures in order to determine the competitors with the best levels of fitness. Physical fitness attributes and levels required for optimum performance have been known to vary from one sporting activity or discipline to another. Arising from the specific nature of movement involved in every specific sporting activity, each coach and trainer must be able to determine and develop the fitness qualities crucial to the performance of the sporting activity. For instance, cardiorespiratory endurance and muscular endurance are the most important physical fitness variables to long distance running and; agility, muscular strength, power speed and cardiorespiratory endurance are variables that are crucial in the games of field hockey and soccer. The point of emphasis, therefore, is that every sports trainer should aim at determining and

developing the fitness levels of his/her sportsmen or sportswomen that are specific to their sporting discipline.

Technical and tactical factors

Effective application of appropriate techniques and tactics in competition is a vital factor that determines the final performance of any team or individual competitor. Every coach, therefore, concentrates his efforts towards improvement and polishing on the execution of these activities by his or her competitors (Berger, Harre and Ritter, 1982; Turner and Martinek, 1992). Players and or competitors who outmaneuver others through their mastery and effective execution of sports techniques and tactics are considered more superior, and therefore, have an advantage during team selection process. The level of each individual's execution and application of relevant techniques is determined using a scientific method that is generally referred to as match analysis. In its broader usage, the match analysis method refers to the observation and quantification of play actions and situations, which are crucial to performance of a competitor or team (Gerisch and Reichdt, 1991; Turner and Martinek, 1992). The quantification helps in determining each competitor's degree of effectiveness, and hence partly forms the criteria for selection into the final team.

Psycho-social factors

The psycho-social dimension is invaluable in the determination of the outcome of sports competition. In general terms, this has to do with mental preparedness of participants for competition. It is possible for technical selectors to distinguish elite, high-level performers from low-level performers based on the physiological states and traits profiles of the concerned athletes (Wamukoya, 1996). Such psychological factors as motivation, anxiety, hostility, emotion, stress and depression have a part in determining one's success or failure (Wamukoya, 1996). In addition, a number of measurable mental traits such personality

and level of intelligence (I. Q) are important to one's athletic achievement, and therefore, every sports participant should be subjected to the assessment of these qualities. Influence of significant others stressors and management of the same is also important in the final team selections (Omotayo, 1989).

The ability of each individual athlete to socialize with others helps to build team spirit and is also reflected in the degree of co-ordination in team play or competition. Sociability and adjustment to one's team is a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked in deciding on one's chances of being selected for competition (Siedentop, 1994).

Historical factors

The historical variables that need consideration in determining superior sports participants include experience of sports participation and past performance(s) of the concerned sports competitors (Siedentop, 1994). Sportsmen and sportswomen with long experience of participation and competition, coupled with a record of consistence exemplary performance deserve attention and consideration in the course of team selection process. Experienced sportsmen and sportswomen are bound to be familiar with the knowledge and physical challenges of their sport than the inexperienced ones. Omotayo (1990) reported that participation duration has significant influence on athletes' personality and performance.

BLEND OF SELECTION FORMATS

No single team selection format is best for use at all times and in all sports disciplines (Cox, 1994; Siedentop, 1994). The stiff competitive situations experienced in the sporting world tend to dictate the type(s) of formats that should be adopted in the selection of teams or individuals for competition. Since each of the known selection formats have inherent advantages and disadvantages, combinations of two or more of them have

often been found to work better than a single one. Examples of the selection formats or modes to choose from include the following:

(i) Setting of Standards

In order to select the best athletes, standards are set to be achieved by competition candidates. The standards must be challenging and achievable only through maximum exertion. The most desired level of performance in a given sport serves to provide some guidance as to the standards that should be set. Those who attain the set standards automatically qualify for selection for competition.

(ii) Ranking System

In this format, a variety of procedures are utilized as the basis of ranking and selection of the best teams and individual competitors. They include the following:

- Holding of a series of trial competitions culminating in a final trial during which the best ranked athletes are selected.
- A series of pre-competition trials are conducted and participants are ranked on the basis of summative score (s) attained by each of the participants in all the trials.
- Quantitative assessment of each players or competitors performance. A quantitative assessment of the physical, tactical, technical, physiological, psychosocial and experiential attributes of each of the participants is conducted to form the basis of ranking. A battery of fitness tests is useful in determining the fitness levels of each of the participants. Match analysis instruments will determine their technical and tactical levels as observed in their pre-competition trials. The psychological variables that include intelligence, personality, motivation, anxiety, stress and others can be effectively assessed using scientifically proven

psychological tests or through observation. Once all these procedures are carried out, the rating of participants is then determined using scores attained by each one of them on all variables involved.

- Ranking may also be determined on the basis of observation and consensus of a team of technical selectors who are knowledgeable of the sport and familiar with the participants.

(iii) The Wild Card Mode

This procedure has been found to be effective in the selection of sports teams and individual competitors (Njenga, 2000; Tirop, 2000). In spite of some element of subjectivity inherent in this procedure, it is mainly useful in unfortunate circumstances in which a well known superior performer is found to be unable to qualify or participate to his or her optimum level of performance at the moment of selection due to some justifiable causes such as sickness, injury, unfavourable weather or climatic conditions, psychological distress, and so on.

CONCLUSION

Arising from the relatively high competitive level of sports in the world, it is imperative for every sporting nation to carefully examine procedures and modes applied in the selection of competition teams. Selection processes of sports teams and individuals are technical in nature, requiring the involvement and efforts of suitably qualified technical personnel. High degrees of objectivity and fairness are required to set up teams that have the potential of winning, and at the same time eradicate any possible controversies or conflicts. From available blend of selection guidelines and formats, selectors should carefully choose and apply the ones that are suitable to their sporting activity and to the prevailing circumstances.

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