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INTERNATIONAL SPORTING SUCCESS FACTORS FOR UNITED KINGDOM PARALYMPIC ATHLETES

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AIM OF PAPER

The aim of this paper is to identify the critical success factors that influence international sporting success for Paralympic athletes in the sport of athletics in the United Kingdom.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Competition in international sport for disabled people is increasing and more nations are adopting strategic approaches to development of Paralympic athletes. Elite sporting success has frequently been regarded as a resource valuable for its malleability and its capacity to help achieve a wide range of non-sporting objectives (Green & Houlihan, 2005). Much of the focus of this discussion has centered on Olympic sport, neglecting to consider Paralympic sport as an elite, professional entity worthy of consideration in its own right.

The British Paralympic Association (BPA) has identified the biggest obstacles to future success in Paralympic sport as being the strength of grassroots involvement and the number of people playing sport at community level. The Active People Survey (2008–2009) shows that 57.1% of the adult population does not participate in any sport. Importantly, the survey shows that this rises considerably to 79.2% when considering disabled people, and perhaps even more alarmingly, only 6.5% of disabled people regularly participate in sport. With the growing number of competitions and prestige events such as the Paralympic Games, there has been a shift from sport for those with disabilities being solely for the purpose of its therapeutic abilities, to that of elite-level competition that carries intrinsic prestige (Kavanagh, 2012).

Jaarsma et al. (2014) acknowledge that the limited previous studies into Paralympic athletes were not based on a framework or theory, which has led to a lack of coherence in their results. This observation is consistent with the author's experiences and it provides some initial justification for the proposed research approach, that is, the application of the SPLISS conceptual framework (De Bosscher et al., 2006). The nine pillars of sport policy factors influencing international sporting success model will be used to determine international sporting success factors in a Paralympic context. There have relatively few comparative studies in sport, and there is a notable gap in this regard concerning Paralympic sport. In order to ensure international comparability is possible, the framework must be considered in a Paralympic context. This research will therefore examine the elite sport structure of Paralympic Athletics in the UK and will form the basis of further research in the area of Paralympic elite sport structures.

METHOD AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This research will consider micro-level factors as classified by De Bosscher et al. (2006) by exploration of individual athlete perceptions of key success factors. Data for this research will be obtained by semi-structured interviews with six Paralympic Athletes in the UK. All athletes included in the study will be ranked in the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) top 10 for the 2014 season. This research will be exploratory as it will highlight and explore an unexplored and uninterpreted phenomenon. This will help to improve understanding of Paralympic elite sport structures and will enable further research in this emerging area whilst providing in-depth, rich data and descriptions upon which to build new theory. This research seeks to identify and explore international sporting success factors in Paralympic sport, as experienced by the athletes.

RESULTS

Results for this research are not yet available as interviews are scheduled to be conducted in July, 2015. The results will be transcribed and analysed in time for the conference.

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