

Determining elite para-athletic development pathways: An investigation of Track & Field [abstract only]

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Determining Elite Para-Athletic Development Pathways: An Investigation of Track & Field

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Sport Development - Sport Development (Disability Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2020-262

virtual asynchronous

Session: Parasport

Aim

Parasport is attracting increased attention, with many nations adopting a systematic approach to para-athlete talent development in the pursuit of international sporting success. Patatas, De Bosscher, & Legg, (2018) suggest that the development of Paralympic athletes' pathways is potentially impairment-specific driven. This paper investigates this assumption whilst responding to the need for research in para-athlete development in a specific parasport context (Patatas, De Bosscher, De Cocq, Jacobs, & Legg, 2019).

Introduction

The Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) has been adopted by many national sporting organisations (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). Long-Term Athlete Development describes how to systematically develop sporting excellence and increase active participation in local, regional, and national sport organisations (Balyi, 2019). The LTAD has been used as a guideline to establish a structure of sequential, developmentally appropriate skill acquisition for athletes across the physical, mental, tactical, technical, and lifestyle aspects of sport. LTAD neglects to recognize the potentially unique developmental nuances of athletes with a disability (Dehghansai, Lemez, Wattie, & Baker, 2017; Paradis & Misener, 2018). This knowledge gap provides the rationale for this study, there is an evident lack of studies examining talent management in international parasport, sport specific contexts. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by analysing para-athlete talent management in UK para-athletics (track and field).

Methodology

The study undertakes a critical realist approach, using a mixed methods research design. A four-phase sequential design was adopted which included both quantitative surveys completed by elite para-athletes in the UK (n=42) and their coaches (n=38) and qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=14), with athletes (n=7), coaches (n=5) and UK Athletics Paralympic Talent Development Coordinators (n=2). An independent sample t-test was used to establish whether the different types of impairment (e.g. seated/non-seated athletes) and athletic development were statistically significant. Further analysis using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between event group (Throws, Jumps Sprints and Distance), classification group and nature of impairment (congenital or acquired). Interviews undertaken with UK Athletics staff, athletes and coaches were analysed thematically using template analysis.

Results

The results of this study suggest that talent management for para-athletics includes the characteristics identified the in LTAD model and in previous non-disabled studies but that there are additional variable factors for consideration. The relevant variable factors identified by this study are grouped as the nature of impairment (acquired or congenital); the level of support and care needs; and the level of equipment needs.

Conclusion

The acknowledgement of specific para-athletic variable factors can enable nations to improve structures and increase talent confirmation in para-athletics, leading to improving success rates and ensuring appropriate allocation of resources. This study identifies that the systematic approach to the management of talent in para-athletics should consider the nature of impairment, as well as para-athlete care and equipment needs. These findings can assist the development of para-athletics policies and the design of parasport support structures.