Athlete Satisfaction at Universities in Gauteng, South Africa

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One of the most frequently studied sectors of sport management is university or collegiate sport (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). University sport in the South African context includes the overall experiences of student-athletes of Higher Education Institutions in relation to the sport department/ bureau, their personnel, activity programmes and offerings, as well as the sport related support services provided by their institutions.

Traditionally, numerous researchers have expounded on the personal and cultural benefits accruing to students from participation in university sport, particularly personal fitness, character building, sportsmanship and fair play, improved academic achievement, and entertainment (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). More recently, however, researchers have also proposed arguments regarding university-wide benefits of student participation in sport. These range from providing a positive influence on the general welfare of a university, institutional loyalty and unity, increasing revenues, increasing prestige to the institution's reputation, and in turn, to enhanced student applications, enrolment, fundraising and sponsorship.

Higher education institutions in South Africa have undergone major changes in terms of their structure and functioning as they have been subjected to the demands and competition of the market in which they function. There has been a steady increase in the level of competitiveness of the higher education sector because of factors such as increased globalization, internationalization, technological innovation and integration, and commercialization. Quality service and customer care have assumed heightened importance not only in commercial organizations, but also in the higher education sector. In order to retain and expand their market share, a high quality service must be offered by all organizations.

The issue of athlete satisfaction has been studied from several research perspectives, predominantly in the US, and to a lesser extent in Canada and Europe. There has been a vacuum in the South African sport management literature regarding student-athlete satisfaction with services offered to them. In the past there has been a reliance on theoretical extrapolation from the more general literature on job satisfaction, rather than research related to athlete satisfaction in particular. It was against this background that the present study was undertaken to ascertain the satisfaction levels of student-athletes with their overall experience of university sport.

The participants in this study comprised a convenient sample of 400 student-athletes at Universities in the Gauteng province of South Africa. For purposes of this study the athlete is regarded as the individual who is a skilled performer who participates competitively in sport. These athletes were eligible to participate in inter-university sports under the auspices of the South African Student Sport Union.

Relevant literature on Athlete Satisfaction was reviewed. In addition, an empirical investigation involving the administration of 400 athlete satisfaction questionnaires (ASQ) developed by Riemer and Chelladurai (1998) was undertaken. Participants were requested to indicate the extent of their satisfaction on each item on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 7 (extremely satisfied). In addition athletes were also requested to indicate their gender.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the items. The responses from the ASQ were subjected to principle axis factor analysis. Using a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 and a varimax rotation, a total of 5 first order factors, namely support, individual performance, personal treatment by the coach, team task contribution and strategy were identified as important indicators of athlete satisfaction. The Cronbach alpha values ranged from 0.874 to 0.929 which were much higher than the suggested benchmark of 0.7.

The findings of the study have important implications for the university as a whole as it can influence the reputation and image of the institution, the financial and other resources being made available for the institution, the number of quality athletes that can be attracted to the institution and the culture of the institution. Institutions can use inter university sport athletics to gain a competitive advantage. There are also implications for further research. For example, the relationship between sport type and athlete satisfaction, the coach and athlete satisfaction and the sports bureau/department and athlete satisfaction could be investigated.