Processing Input Factors for Jamaica’s Athletics Successes at the Olympics

Richard Toomer, University of Ottawa
Milena M. Parent (Advisor), University of Ottawa

Governance/Policy - Policy (Elite Sport) virtual asynchronous
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Session: Sport Law/Policy
Abstract 2020-065

This study explored the development of elite sport through national sport policy within a developing country, Jamaica. The Sport Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) conceptual framework (De Bosscher et al., 2006, 2015) provides guidance in understanding the contribution of meso-level factors from a logical approach of inputs-throughputs-outputs leading to the achievement of national outcomes. Research applying this framework has been criticized for its inability to provide understanding for the ‘black box’ of the throughput process in contributing to sporting success (Dowling et al., 2018; Henry & Ko, 2015). Furthermore, the literature identifies the importance of environmental factors (e.g., De Bosscher et al., 2015; Houlihan & Green, 2008), however, there are limited empirical evidence regarding the contribution of combining micro-, macro-, and meso-level factors for the development of elite sport leading to actual success at international sporting events.

Research Design and Data Analysis

This study used a qualitative approach. First, a comprehensive analysis of archival records, including national development plans for over 70 years, annual reports, legislative acts, ministry papers, and policy documents contributed to establishing an historical context and a description for the case (Yin, 2018). The case description allowed for the identification of contextual factors, such as, cultural, social, political, and economical components of the national sport system. These documents provided context and assisted the purposive sampling method used in an interview process (n=31). An interview protocol provided structure, and all interviews recorded and transcribed. The qualitative software, NVivo 11 assisted with the management of the data. The data analyzed deductively, was guided by the nine pillars suggested by SPLISS, and additional themes identified inductively for environmental factors. A theoretical and rival proposition facilitated the creation of logic models, which allowed for the analysis of a multifaceted series of events (Yin, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Jamaica first achieved Olympic success in 1948, 14 years before independence, and 46 years before its first national sport policy in 1994. The findings identified several environmental factors, such as, tradition, culture and passion, the system of training and development, the impact of role models and private actors, a link to educational institutions, and the high school sport system. For example, the financial input from private actors can influence talent identification and development, athlete support, and facilitate national and international competitions, which are key pillars in the acquisition, nurturing and development of elite athletes, especially in individual competitions. These environmental factors indicated that a successful informal but working network for the development of elite sport was in place prior to formal sport policy. This study identified country-specific and sport-specific factors at the micro-, macro-, and meso-level that combines both environmental input and government intervention that led to the achievement of national outputs and outcomes. The findings are consistent with the literature regarding the importance in understanding the historical context in the development of a nation’s elite sport system; therefore, international sporting success can occur outside of the influence of government at the meso-level.