

Introduction

General Significance

The British Olympic Team showed much better results in Athens than was expected by most fans. “Team GB won 30 medals, the best tally since Los Angeles in 1984.” (BBC.co.uk 2004). Success seemed to come unexpectedly even for the most experienced Olympic team members.

Such pessimism was entailed by significant lack of facilities for professional training. A clear lack of facilities seems to be contrasting with the great performance of the British Olympic Team. The current level of funds allocated to the UK’s sports development is neither appropriate nor promising. Bill Sweetenham, the national swimming coach, said: “In swimming, we have the worst facilities in the top 20 countries in the world. That's not investment in sport — that's neglect and negligence. None of the 36 British Olympic swimmers trains at a London club (Londonpoolscampaign.com 2004).”

Financing sport is an investment made for the future. Many promising athletes may not reach the Olympic podium because of the need for world-class training facilities, which are currently in great shortage. There are certain positive trends in this area: “Under the plans, young children aged between 10 and 16 will be able to apply for grants of up to £20,000 to help fund their training programmes” (The Evening Standard 2004, p.6).

The situation described above is a significant subject to the study because the effect the lack of facilities has on the overall performance of the British Olympic Team cannot be ignored. Many contemporary UK athletes were trained on the base of sport development level achieved in previous years. Therefore their current performance may seem contrasting. However, it is extremely important to determine what impact the current UK policy of investments in sport and the British Olympic Team will have. In the light of Olympic bid made for London 2012 it is crucial to find out whether the UK has sufficient facilities of world-class level to act as an Olympic capital for the year 2012.

Contribution

The research of the impact the lack of facilities has on the overall success of the British Olympic Team can serve as an argument as to whether the current governmental policy towards sport needs to be reformed or not. Determining how exactly the current level of investment helps or hinders to support winning athletes, world-class events and ethically fair and drug-free sport — aims considered by UK Sports as their mission — would help not only to determine whether it needs changes, but also could help to indicate what changes are needed.

This proposal gives insight into how the subject research should be held. Starting from questions raised it describes methodology which should be used when conducting the research. Interviewing and questionnaires were chosen as the main sources of data gathering. Additionally a case study of UK swimming could prove useful for demonstrating the results of survey.

Implications

Implications that should be considered when conducting the proposed research can be divided into two groups: research methods-related limitations and ethics-related considerations. Later on in the proposal both of these groups will be examined with more detail. It is important to stress that if not considered each of these implications could mislead researchers into false outcomes and thus inadequate recommendations on the investment policy.

Research question:

The research proposed will try to determine the role of government support in the overall success of British Olympic Team at the games in Athens, or more generally: to what extent does lack of facilities deride the success of the British Olympic Team?

Proposed Methods

Design of the Study

To answer questions pointed out in previous sections I suggest using a combination of a survey and a case study design. Arguments for using these methods are as follows: survey belongs to descriptive methods of research providing a descriptive information, which enables generalizations to be made; surveys gather data at a certain point in time to describe the existing conditions, therefore they are economically feasible and efficient; additionally a case study will bring the needed transparency for results supporting survey methods. A case study methodology is often called “the study of an instance in action” (Adelman et al 1980), meaning it can be used as specific instance illustrating a wider principle.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection requires conducting certain procedures for further analysis. Thinking about a survey or a case study, researchers generally use questionnaires and interviews supporting each other. Advantages of both methods amplify each other perfectly. Questionnaires allow data collection from a wide group of participants and has a fair reliability. “The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey

information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without

the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyse” (Wilson and McLean 1994). At the same time data gathered by the questionnaire often lacks ‘personality’ and depth.

Semi-structured interviews serve as a perfect addition to questionnaire’s reliability. It gives deeper insight into the subject of research and provides participants with better motivation, thus offering wider range of data collected. Semi-structured approach gives the researcher an ability to rearrange questions dependently on the way the interviewee is connected to the subject of research. More importantly interviews allow us to use observation of non-verbal information, which often provides an important correction on the answer of the interviewee.

Questions are to be covering the overall performance of the British Olympic Team; the state of facilities to which interviewee has a direct access; opinion on overall level investment into sport; and the evaluation of how it helps sports development in the region local to interviewee.

Selection of Participants

In the context of a case study I propose to research the impact of lack of facilities on the example of the Olympic Swimming Team, as it suitably reflects the state of governmental investment in sports. Therefore, a certain group of participants must be connected to swimming sports, e.g. coaches and athletes. It is important to differentiate the responses of professional sportsmen and women and young beginners. Also, it is crucial to research the differences between talented young athletes that have the financial ability to train themselves and those who do not have funds for individual training.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the gathered data is the stage when the mix of interviews and questionnaires reveals itself in the best light, as results of both methods serve as a check of each other significantly increasing its reliability. According to Moser and Kalton (1977) three main undertakings should be performed during questionnaire data processing: completeness (each question is answered), accuracy (check for misleading answers) and uniformity (check for uniform instructions’ interpretation). Meanwhile results of the interview require more complicated processing because of their qualitative nature. Cohen and Manion (2000) identify four important steps in the analysis of interviews: generating natural units of meaning (basing on what measures answers should be interpreted?), classifying, categorizing and ordering these units of meaning; structuring narratives to describe the interview contents; and

interpreting the interview data.

Limitations of the Study

Of course, chosen methods have certain weaknesses. For example interviews are much differentiated depending on mutual trust, interviewee may feel that questioning is too deep (ethics problem), dependency of the results on the interviewer's skills, etc. In turn, questionnaire provides limited opportunities for asking and is very limited because of the instrument it uses. Fortunately a mix of these methods significantly reduces the number of limitations, e.g. the variety of the information from interviews can be organized considering issues of questionnaire. Additionally use of case study can theoretically lead to improper generalization of the gathered results.

Temporal Plan

Temporal plan of the proposed research contains the following issues:

- Preparing questions for interviews and questionnaires: 1 day
- Arranging interviews: 3–4 days
- Holding questionnaires: 2 days
- Analysing gathered data: 2 days
- Producing report on results: 1 day
- Time reserved for unexpected occurrences: 2 days

Facilities/Equipment

Proposed research doesn't require any special equipment except for publishing questionnaires. It's also very convenient because it doesn't need any specific facilities.

Budget

Budget of the research includes the following costs:

- Publishing questionnaires (postage and printing);
- Payment to interviewers.

Ethical Considerations

Both interview and questionnaire can be seen as intrusions into the life of the respondent. That is why the following ethical consideration must be considered when holding the research.

- Interviewees must be given an opportunity to abandon the study at any stage;
- Factors in the questionnaire, i.e. the avoidance of bias and the assurance of validity and reliability in the questionnaire must be considered with needed methodological rigour. "Methodological rigour is an ethical, not simply a technical, matter" (Morrison 1996);
- Interviewees must be guaranteed that the research will not harm them and their

privacy will remain unharmed;

- Interviewees must be explained how exactly they will benefit from participating in the research;
- Data interpretation should be processed according to the objective information acquired, not the personal views of the researcher.

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