

Selection Standards for National Teams: Theory and Practice

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Abstract—This article deals with selection standards for national sport teams. The author examines the legal framework for selection criteria and suggests using the most honest criteria.

Keywords—National teams, Standards of forming teams, Selection standards, Sport legislations.

I. INTRODUCTION

VISUAL and commercial appeal of sport is increasing along with the increase of popularity and development. Therefore, competition among leaders is getting more intense. It is quite difficult to define a notion of “competition” in sports but no matter how versatile it is, it always aims at one thing – victory. The winner nowadays gets recognition, various benefits, and an opportunity to use their name for solving different problems, getting profitable contracts, etc.

On the one hand, competitions take place on ice rinks, tracks and judo mats. But on the other hand, there is also a so-called “backstage” competition between sports managers and coaches who go out of their way to promote their athletes’ interests. Such policies often end up with a situation where a country is represented by athletes who have no best results at national competitions.

Thus, the problem of determining precise and clear selection standards to form national teams arises. Moreover, it is vital to determine how effective such standards are to create a team, whose members are able to win international competitions after expanding loads of energy to actually get membership of the national team.

In order to elaborate an effective approach of forming a national team, it is necessary to study and analyze the experience of different countries and Russian sports federations in the field.

II. NORMATIVE REGULATION ISSUE IN RUSSIA

There are the following Russian statutory acts related to this issue:

- A. The Federal Law on Physical Education and Sport in the Russian Federation, dated 04.12.2007 N 329[1] (hereinafter referred to as “Federal Law on PE”);
- B. The Order of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Russian Federation dated 02.02.2009 N 21 on approval of common principles and standards to form the lists of candidates to sports teams of the RF and on the approval procedure of such lists [2];

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C. Russian sports federation’s regulatory acts (art. 15, Federal Law on PE);

D. Regulations of the sports federations about the procedure of selection to national teams of the RF by sports [3].

Legal regulation of this scope of public relations is conducted in the following way. First and foremost, the Federal Law on PE establishes the order of forming Russian national teams and names the sources of principles and standards to short-list candidates for Russian national teams. Then, the Order of the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation establishes common principles and standards for short-listing candidates for Russian national teams and approving the resulting lists. At this level, everything is quite clear and transparent. The main principle of short-listing candidates for Russian national teams is regularized in clause 5 of the aforementioned Order dated 02.02.2009 №21, which reads as “the short lists of candidates are formed according to the results of athletes in previous sport season, in particular, in official international competitions and official Russian sport competitions.” It is also important to consider standards of forming teams, which are presented in special tables. The standards in such tables are well organized and resemble the norms and requirements for granting sport categories and titles.

III. RUSSIAN SPORT FEDERATIONS REGULATION MODELS

At the next level of legal regulation (the level of Russian sports federations) other standards arise; many of them are quite subjective. This subjectivity causes conflicts of interest [4]. For example, on April 4th, 2011 the chairman of central management (the President of Russian Association of Fishermen and Hunters “Rosohotrybolovsoyuz”) approved a Regulation about the procedure of forming the Russian national fishing on the mormyshka team.

According to the paragraph 3, 4 of the aforementioned Regulation, the list of candidates is determined by the head coach, or by the coach council, in compliance with the requirements of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Russian Federation. The selection is conducted considering the stability of an athlete’s performance at national and regional competitions in ongoing and previous sport seasons; personal traits of character, discipline, an ability to adapt to complicated conditions and ability to work in a team. A few court judgments have already been made regarding this question. The court was on the side of the sports federation acknowledging the power of its inner regulations, when the question was who to include in national teams [5].

Here we face a situation when all the standards enumerated fade in comparison with the authority of a national sports team's head coach. The phrase of the forward of Dynamo (Moscow) Mikhail Anisin commenting on Zinetula Bilyaletdinov's decision not to include the athlete in the national team to take part in the world championship, perfectly fits the situation. He said: "I am really sick and tired of discussing such a topic. Mr. Bilyaletdinov told me he couldn't see me. How can I make him see me? I don't understand the standards of making the team. I agree with Pavel Bure who declared recently the national team members should be selected according to the results they show at the moment, because nobody knows what the future holds for us, and nobody cares how it used to be yesterday. I would refrain from further comments. If I were a coach, I wouldn't let anybody impose their opinion on me either» [6].

It is evident at federal level the state establishes standards and principles that are objective, transparent and meet the principle of a fair play. But at the sports federations' level, the system of forming national teams is quite messy. This fact causes a lot of problems and even scandals. For example, in Russian figure skating there is a selection formula "2+1". That means the national team to present Russia at the world championship will surely include those athletes who came first and second at the national championship. The third pair is to be determined by the coaching staff. The main advantage of this system is in case the leaders miss the selection tour for some reasons, they won't lose their spots on the national team. But its main disadvantage is the violation of the sport's principle. If combined properly, these principles may hold a key to success of the team at the international level. But unfortunately, in some cases, the coach subjectivity prevails. Is it possible to avoid it?

Thus, in high jumping just before the Olympic Games in Beijing, Andrey Silnov, the best candidate at that moment, didn't pass the selection after coming in fourth at the Russian Championship. Despite the fact, he was included in the national team as number one and won the Olympics [7].

Number two in this sport was the athlete winning the national selection. And those candidates, who showed identical results and the second place, had to compete against each other for an opportunity to participate in the Olympics. The sports federation and the coaching staff made such a decision [8]. This case was a successful combination of sport principles and a subjective decision of the coach.

Head coaching advice teams (hereinafter referred to as "HCAT") of Russian athletics is a permanent public body presidium LLC "Russian Athletics Federation" (hereinafter referred to as "RAF") on basis of the Regulations on the HCAT. In accordance with the selection criteria and forming of the national teams approved by the Bureau RAF (as of 30.10.2009 and of 24.12.2009) in the final formation of the Russian national team to participate in major international competitions in 2010, the state of athletes' health should be taken into account. The final team roster on the proposal is approved by the Presidium of the HCAT RAF.

Meanwhile, HCAT is entitled to take a prompt decision to exclude competitors from the Russian team in case of illness or presence of other medical contraindications, incrimination of an athlete or reasonable suspicion of the use of banned substances and of an athlete using banned methods and manipulations. According to § 5.5 Criteria, dated 24.12.2009, if the RAF Bureau is not able to gather for a meeting, and the exclusion of an athlete from the team is an urgent matter, the athlete may be expelled from the team by the decision of the HCAT. In this case, the RAF Bureau shall endorse the HCAT later, after the end of international competitions [9].

IV. FOREIGN EXPERIENCE

For instance, the USA national swimming team is formed by 6 athletes who show the best results at the end of the sport season. There is a motto put in bold on the website of the national team: "You know you are part of the national team if you are in the top 6 in swimming. The fastest swimmers are granted an honor to wear the colors of the national team. You can find other advantages of being on the national team below." [10] This requirement is the only one to implement if one wants to be included in the national team, according to the documents called "2013-2014 National Team and National Junior Team Selection Criteria." It is clear all of the 6 athletes can't take part in an international tournament on the same distance. Such rule was introduced after the 1980 Olympics, where the victory podium was occupied by athletes from one country. Nowadays in the majority of sports there is a restriction: only 2 candidates from one country can compete on the same distance. In the USA, these 2 are selected from the «sensational 6» according to the sport principle. Today most sports have a restriction - two athletes from one country on the distance. But all 6 get access to the resources of the national team: training centers, doctors, coaches, and various programs. Among them, there is a program called USOC Athlete Career Program, elaborated by the US Olympic Committee, which aims at assisting athletes to receive professional advisory in case they have to finish their sporting career. This program requires exceptional concentration and motivation from athletes so they may achieve the highest results. As it was stated by Galarza Pedro Mauricio, "athletes aim at achieving great results and often miss an opportunity of self-fulfillment in society during the period most favorable for getting useful life skills after finishing their careers" [11].

It is important to upgrade the standards all the time. For example, in the US snowboard national team the main selection standard used to be the results shown by athletes during the NorAm Cup. It was necessary to be in top-4 in 4 stages of the competition during the season. Now, the standards have been changed. It is necessary to be in the top-8 at least twice at the World Cup [12]. In China, the athletes' results in various national championships are considered decisive for the national Olympic team selection. 5 state-level Spartakiads are held in China once in four years: the Chinese National Spartakiad, the Chinese National City Spartakiad, the Chinese National Country Spartakiad, the Chinese competitions in traditional sports among national minorities

and the Chinese Parasparkiad. The most important one is supposed to be the Chinese National Spartakiad, which is held a year after the summer Olympics. The competitions embrace all sports, including Chinese wushu. Among the competing teams, there are country teams, including the one of People's Liberation Army of China. The main purpose of such competitions is to select the most promising athletes for the following 3-year preparation for the next Olympic Games.

According to the specialists, one of the most effective selection systems used to be employed in East Germany. The athletes were motivated to reach the highest results in the most important competitions of the year. There was a strict schedule specially organized to provide reasonable preparation for the main competitions. In case the competitions included in the international schedule interfered with the training process, the most powerful athletes competed in them without any preliminary preparation, using their participation as a test. Moreover, very often the most promising athletes used to miss even European Championships, in case they interfered with the process of their preparation to the Olympics or World Cups. It should be mentioned that such a system has a significant disadvantage – a weak rotation within the team.

V. CONCLUSION

The right to be a member of the national team in case of meeting the selection criteria and keeping the order of forming Russian national teams should be the subject of close protection by competent authorities [13].

Commercialization of sports and all interrelated issues led to the fact that the results of sport battles began to emerge not only in stadiums, but also in courts and arbitrations, which began to resolve sport and semi-sport conflicts. The competition results began to get solved not only by judges on the sports fields, but also by the judges in state courts, arbitrators, international arbitration, national sports arbitration courts, and other bodies established in the framework of the international sporting community [14].

Having analyzed various approaches to the procedure of forming national teams, it is possible to conclude this problem requires a large-scale discussion. Different approaches can vary depending on the sport. The only fact that remains unaltered is that the sport principle deserves to be decisive.

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