

US Track And Field System: Examining Micro-Level Practices against a Global Model for Integrated Development of Mass and Elite Sport

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Abstract : This study assessed the micro-level elements of track and field development in the US against a model for integrating high-performance sport with mass participation. This investigation is important for the country's international sport performance, which declined relative to other countries and wellbeing, which in its turn deteriorated as over half of the US population became overweight. A questionnaire was designed for the following elements of the model: talent identification and development as well as advanced athlete support. Survey questions were validated by 12 experts, including academics, executives from sport governing bodies, coaches, and administrators. To determine the areas for improvement, the questionnaires were completed by 102 US track and field coaches representing the country's regions and coaching levels. Possible advancements were further identified through semi-structured discussions with 10 US track and field administrators. The study found that talent search and development is a critically important area for improvement: 49 percent of respondents had overall negative perceptions, and only 16 percent were positive regarding these US track and field practices. Both quantitative survey results and open responses revealed that the key reason for the inadequate athlete development was a shortage of well-educated and properly paid coaches: 77 percent of respondents indicated that coach expertise is never or rarely high across all participant ages and levels. More than 40 percent of the respondents were uncertain of or not familiar with world's best talent identification and development practices, particularly methods of introducing children to track and field from outside the sport's participation base. Millions more could be attracted to the sport by adopting best international practices. First, physical education should be offered a minimum three times a week in all school grades, and track and field together with other healthy sports, should be taught at school to all children. Second, multi-sport events, including track and field disciplines, should be organized for everyone within and among all schools, cities and regions. Three, Australian and Eastern European methods of talent search at schools should be utilized and tailored to the US conditions. Four, comprehensive long term athlete development guidelines should be used for the advancement of the American Development Model, particularly track and field tests and guidelines as part of both school education and high-performance athlete development for every age group from six to over 70 years old. These world's best practices are to improve the country's international performance while increasing national sport participation and positively influencing public health.

Keywords : high performance, mass participation, sport development, track and field, USA

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