

Elite Netball Players' Perspectives on Long Term Athlete Development Programmes in South Africa

Authors : Petrus Louis Nolte

Abstract : University sport in South Africa is not isolated from the complexity of globalization and professionalization of sport, as it forms an integral part of the sport development environment in South Africa. In order to align their sport programmes with global and professional requirements, several universities opted to develop elite sport programmes; recruit specialized personnel such as coaches, administrators and athletes; provide expert coaching; scientific and medical services; sports testing; fitness, technical and tactical expertise; sport psychological and rehabilitation support; academic guidance and career assistance; and student-athlete accommodation. In addition, universities provide administrative support and high-quality physical resources (training facilities) for the benefit of the overall South African sport system. Although it is not compulsory for universities to develop elite sport programmes to prepare their teams for competitions, elite competitions such as the annual Varsity Sport, University Sport South Africa (USSA) and local club competitions and leagues within university international competitions where universities not only compete but also deliver players for representative national netball teams. The aim of this study is therefore to describe the perceptions of players of the university elite netball programmes they were participating in. This study adopted a descriptive design with a quantitative approach, utilizing a self-structured questionnaire as research technique. As this research formed part of a national research project for NSA with a population of 172 national and provincial netball players, a sample of 92 university netball players from the population was selected. Content validity of the self-structured questionnaire was secured through a test-retest process, with construct validity through a member of the Statistical Consultation Services (STATCON) of the University of Johannesburg that provided feedback on the structural format of the questionnaire. Reliability was measured utilising Cronbach Alpha on $p < 0.005$ level of significance. A reliability score of 0.87 was measured. The research was approved by the Board of Netball South Africa and ethical conduct implemented according to the processes and procedures approved by the Ethics Committees of the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Johannesburg with clearance number REC-01-30-2019. From the results it is evident that university elite netball programmes are professional, especially with regards to the employment of knowledgeable and competent coaches and technical officials such as team managers and sport sciences staff. These professionals have access to elite training facilities, support staff, and relatively large groups of elite players, all elements of an elite programme that could enhance the national federation's (Netball South Africa) system. Universities could serve the dual purpose of serving as university netball clubs, as well as providing elite training services and facilities as performance hubs for national players.

Keywords : elite sport programmes, university netball, player experiences, Varsity Sport netball

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