

Nigerian Football System: Examining Micro-Level Practices against a Global Model for Integrated Development of Mass and Elite Sport

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Abstract : This study examines the current state of football in Nigeria to identify the country's practices, which could be useful internationally, and to determine areas for improvement. Over 200 sources of literature on sport delivery systems in successful sports nations were analyzed to construct a globally applicable model of elite football integrated with mass participation, comprising of the following three levels: macro (socio-economic, cultural, legislative, and organizational), meso (infrastructures, personnel, and services enabling sports programs) and micro level (operations, processes, and methodologies for the development of individual athletes). The model has received scholarly validation and has shown to be a framework for program analysis that is not culturally bound. It has recently been utilized for further understanding such sports systems as US rugby, tennis, soccer, swimming, and volleyball, as well as Dutch and Russian swimming. A questionnaire was developed using the above-mentioned model. Survey questions were validated by 12 experts including academicians, executives from sports governing bodies, football coaches, and administrators. To identify best practices and determine areas for improvement of football in Nigeria, 116 coaches completed the questionnaire. Useful exemplars and possible improvements were further identified through semi-structured discussions with 10 Nigerian football administrators and experts. Finally, a content analysis of the Nigeria Football Federation's website and organizational documentation was conducted. This paper focuses on the micro level of Nigerian football delivery, particularly talent search and development as well as advanced athlete preparation and support. Results suggested that Nigeria could share such progressive practices as the provision of football programs in all schools and full-time coaches paid by governments based on the level of coach education. Nigerian football administrators and coaches could provide better football services affordable for all, where success in mass and elite sports is guided by science focused on athletes' needs. Better implemented could be international best practices such as lifelong guidelines for health and excellence of everyone and integration of fitness tests into player development and ranking as done in best Dutch, English, French, Russian, Spanish, and other European clubs; integration of educational and competitive events for elite and developing athletes as well as fans as done at the 2018 World Cup Russia; and academies with multi-stage athlete nurturing as done by Ajax in Africa as well as Barcelona FC and other top clubs expanding across the world. The methodical integration of these practices into the balanced development of mass and elite football will help contribute to international sports success as well as national health, education, crime control, and social harmony in Nigeria.

Keywords : football, high performance, mass participation, Nigeria, sport development

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