

Comparing Practices of Swimming in the Netherlands against a Global Model for Integrated Development of Mass and High Performance Sport: Perceptions of Coaches

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Abstract : This study was designed to help and improve international performance as well increase swimming participation in the Netherlands. Over 200 sources of literature on sport delivery systems from 28 Australasian, North and South American, Western and Eastern European countries were analyzed to construct a globally applicable model of high performance swimming integrated with mass participation, comprising of the following seven elements and three levels: Micro level (operations, processes, and methodologies for development of individual athletes): 1. Talent search and development, 2. Advanced athlete support. Meso level (infrastructures, personnel, and services enabling sport programs): 3. Training centers, 4. Competition systems, 5. Intellectual services. Macro level (socio-economic, cultural, legislative, and organizational): 6. Partnerships with supporting agencies, 7. Balanced and integrated funding and structures of mass and elite sport. This model emerged from the integration of instruments that have been used to analyse and compare national sport systems. The model has received scholarly validation and showed to be a framework for program analysis that is not culturally bound. It has recently been accepted as a model for further understanding North American sport systems, including (in chronological order of publications) US rugby, tennis, soccer, swimming and volleyball. The above model was used to design a questionnaire of 42 statements reflecting desired practices. The statements were validated by 12 international experts, including executives from sport governing bodies, academics who published on high performance and sport development, and swimming coaches and administrators. In this study both a highly structured and open ended qualitative analysis tools were used. This included a survey of swim coaches where open responses accompanied structured questions. After collection of the surveys, semi-structured discussions with Federation coaches were conducted to add triangulation to the findings. Lastly, a content analysis of Dutch Swimming's website and organizational documentation was conducted. A representative sample of 1,600 Dutch Swim coaches and administrators was collected via email addresses from Royal Dutch Swimming Federation' database. Fully completed questionnaires were returned by 122 coaches from all key country's regions for a response rate of 7,63% - higher than the response rate of the previously mentioned US studies which used the same model and method. Results suggest possible enhancements at macro level (e.g., greater public and corporate support to prepare and hire more coaches and to address the lack of facilities, monies and publicity at mass participation level in order to make swimming affordable for all), at meso level (e.g., comprehensive education for all coaches and full spectrum of swimming pools particularly 50 meters long), and at micro level (e.g., better preparation of athletes for a future outside swimming and better use of swimmers to stimulate swimming development). Best Dutch swimming management practices (e.g., comprehensive support to most talented swimmers who win Olympic medals) as well as relevant international practices available for transfer to the Netherlands (e.g., high school competitions) are discussed.

Keywords : sport development, high performance, mass participation, swimming

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