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The Effective Factors in Promoting of Iranian Sport National Teams

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ABSTRACT

Background. Today, success in international and championship sports comes with various benefits because of a sense of national pride, economic profitability, as well as diplomacy. **Objectives.** The aim of this study is to identify and analyse factors that are effective in promoting the national teams of Iran. **Methods.** This study used a mixed method and data was collected through desk studies, interviews, and questionnaires. The study population consisted of managers, coaches and players of the national team as well as academics in the field of sports science. Sampling was at the purposeful stage, and 12 interviews were conducted until reaching a theoretical saturation. At the stage of distributing questionnaires, 384 participants were randomly selected using Cochran's formula. Factors affecting improvement of the national team were identified after desk studies and semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, these factors helped form a questionnaire and after confirming its validity by 12 experts and reliability by Cronbach's alpha test, with reliability coefficient 0.94, the questionnaires were distributed to the samples so that the importance of these factors is determined in the promotion of national teams. **Results.** In desk studies and interviews with experts, 20 factors affecting the promotion of national teams were identified. Analysis of the data was obtained by the questionnaire by binomial test that showed that the effect of 16 factors out of the 20 is significantly higher than the average. Friedman's test results also showed that the main factors affecting the promotion of national teams include talent find, base teams, financial resources, coaches, facilities and equipment, procurement competition, and management stability. **Conclusion.** Planning on the factors can contribute to the promotion of national teams.

KEY WORDS: *Talent Find, Base Teams, Financial Resources, Coaches, Facilities and Equipment, Procurement Competition, Management Stability, Sport National Teams.*

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, there has been an increasing consciousness about the success of sports championship among countries. For the United States, the Soviet Union and European communist governments, championship sports are a means for ideological superiority and even so for the former East Germany. While contributing to the country's sovereignty claim, it

had an additional appeal. Recently, success in the international sports arena has different values, because of a sense of national pride, economic profitability potential, as well as overall diplomacy. Countries have found that the development of championship sports and taking advantage of the direct and indirect benefits are not possible without proper planning and policy-

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making as well as attention to the affecting factors (1). The widespread use of sports and its importance in international relations has attracted governments to this phenomenon. A country's success in international sports arenas, in addition to the social and economic effects, is considered a symbol of stability and comprehensive competence in those countries, and one of the reasons for high investment by the countries in athletics and professional sports (2).

Researchers have carried out lots of work on the factors influencing the progress and success of sports. Some of these factors have been shared by researchers. Truyens *et al.* (2013) referred to ten key categories as competitive advantage of a sports organization to achieve success in athletics. These categories include competitive and training facilities, supporting the sports profession, discovering and nurturing talent, youth participation, governmental, organizational as well as financial support, environmental conditions of sports elite, scientific support, competitive opportunities, and training and equipment of coaches (3). Brouwers *et al.* (2014) believed that financial sponsorship, coherent organization and structure, participants' involvement in exercise, discovering and nurturing talent, supporting athletes during activity and retirement, holding training and coaching classes, providing competitive opportunities, training facilities and scientific research are effective in international sporting success (4). De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) believe that 9 essential elements are effective in the success of international sport. These 9 elements include financial support, the organization and structure of sports politics (holistic view to development policy), participating in sports, a system for identifying and nurturing talent, supporting athletes and champions, training facilities and courses, holding courses for coaching and promotion of coaches, holding national and international competitions, and ultimately scientific research. According to the researchers, financial resources, supporting the athletes, training facilities, and the development of a coach's knowledge are the key to improving the quality and quantity of elite athletes (5). Sotiriadou & Shilbury (2009) refer to the importance of economic, cultural and scientific roles and scientific methods in training elite

athletes. Also, in a study during the four years before and after the Sydney Olympics, they came to the conclusion that discovery of interested and talented people, development of long-term strategies to achieve success, attracting financial contributions, acquiring social status by attracting people to sports and finally training of elite athletes (6) are the key to success. Alidoust *et al.* (2014) believe that the most important strategies to promote judo in Iran include talent find, funds, management and planning, hardware equipment, sports tournaments and camps, coordination and communication, improving the coaches and human resource, and motivating and supporting human resource (7). Tondnevis and Ghasemi (2007), felt that promoting scientific and technological knowledge of coaches, controlling and monitoring their activities, talent find among beginners via professional and scientific methods, increasing the facilities and halls for gymnastics equipment, and equipping salons with specialized teaching aids and facilities are the most important factors in development of gymnastics in Iran (8). Farahani and Abdavi Baftani (2006) stated that selection of qualified managers in order to attract professionals and the experienced and comprehensive programmes and better utilization of sports championships in order to discover talent can help in the development of sports (9). Gilbertson (2000) believes that seven major components of leadership, motivation of group individuals, financial resources, goals, creativity, structure and skills are vital for the success of a sports team or organization (10). De Bosscher *et al.* (2006) believe that the most important factor in the development of championship sports is facilities and equipment (11). Tucker (2015), in a research on the development of women's rugby national team, came to the conclusion that mental preparation of these women for participating in camps and competitions, employing a bodybuilding coach for the national team athletes, frequent cross-border competitions, use of foreign coaches, and promoting scientific and technical knowledge of domestic coaches are among the important factors in development of the sport (12). Sajjadi (2000) feels that the main causes of failure of Iranian youth football teams in the Asian Youth

Championship competitions are insufficient and traditional camps, lack of job security for coaches, lack of scientific advisers and medical staff, difficulty in planning, organization and procurement of football federation permission and technical difficulties (13). Monazami *et al.* (2011) in their study, suggest that four factors affect the development of physical education and sports. They are financial and facility, human and technical, managerial and structural as well as cultural and social (14). Amirtash (2007) also argues that holding more competitions, improving facilities, use of more efficient coaches, fund raising and motivational factors are most important in improving handball championship at the university level (15). In general, in the modern sports world, there are two main views for growth and promotion of athletes for major sporting events. These are also evident in the world of politics and economics. These views divide the countries into Western Bloc and Eastern Bloc. Since 1980, in Eastern countries such as Russia, a hierarchy of sports schools were established in the Soviet Union, and in these schools, adolescents and the youth engaged in sports activities. In the Soviet sports system, its greenhouse system helped conduct training and exercises for athletes from an early age so that they could win championships.

In contrast, in Western Bloc countries like Canada, creation of sports infrastructure was in the form of both software and hardware processes so that by creating numerous sports spaces, a large crowd poured into the championship sports cycle and sports experts completed the cycle (16).

According to the above, researchers have talked about various factors in the development of championship sports and international success and each of them laid emphasis on some key factors. Given that success in international championship arena necessitated having powerful national teams, the researcher's in this study looked to specifically identify and analyse factors affecting the promotion of national teams.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants. The population under study consisted of managers, coaches and players of the national team as well as academics in

the field of sports. The sampling was purposeful at the stage of quality and 12 interviews were conducted for reaching the theoretical saturation stage and identifying all the factors affecting promotion of national teams. Due to the uncertain number of communities, Cochran's sample size determination was used at the stage of distributing the questionnaires. At this stage, 384 subjects were randomly selected. Table 1 shows the distribution of participating groups in this research.

Table1. Distribution of participating groups in the research

| Stage | post | frequency | Percent of frequency |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Quality | Professors of university | 2 | 16.66 |
| | managers | 2 | 16.66 |
| | coaches | 4 | 33.33 |
| | players | 4 | 33.33 |
| | total | 12 | 100 |
| Quantity | Professors of university | 125 | 32.55 |
| | managers | 22 | 5.72 |
| | coaches | 54 | 14.06 |
| | players | 183 | 47.65 |
| | total | 384 | 100 |

Methodology. This research used a mixed method of the consecutive exploratory (qualitative-quantitative) type. That is, theoretical studies and semi-structured interviews were used in order to identify factors affecting the promotion of national teams. The findings of interviews along with the information obtained from desk studies formed a questionnaire for the next step to investigate the importance of the identified factors. This research is applied in terms of purpose.

Data Collection. Data collection was done through desk studies (reviewing articles, books, documents and related websites), and field operations (in-depth, individual semi-structured interviews and questionnaires). Questionnaire validity was approved by 12 professors in the field of sports and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.94).

Statistical Analysis. All the identified factors affecting promotion of national teams, which were identified by the researcher's information and interviews, formed the questionnaire. This was done so that important factors could be selected using Delphi technique and the factors were identified by screening experts (the factors chosen were effective ones, according to majority of the experts). The final and important factors selected were distributed among the population in the form of final investigation and the rate of importance of each factor was determined. Finally, using the Kolmogorov-

Smirnov test, binomial and Friedman tests data collected was analysed by SPSS software.

RESULTS

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results showed that the distribution of data is not normal with regard to the factors affecting the promotion of national teams ($p < 0.05$). Thus, the binomial test was used to test the significance of each factor affecting the promotion of national teams. As is clear from table 2, the importance of 16 factors out of 20 is significantly higher than the mean (given that the questionnaire was designed according to the *five-point Likert*, the mean was 3).

Table 2. binomial test results about the importance of factors affecting the promotion of national teams

| No. | Factors | Less than or equal to 3 | More than 3 | Percent less than or equal to 3 | percent more than 3 | sig |
|------|---|-------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| 1 | Facilities and equipment | 71 | 313 | 18 | 82 | 0.001 |
| 2 | Training camps | 141 | 243 | 37 | 63 | 0.001 |
| 3 | Financial resources | 90 | 294 | 23 | 77 | 0.001 |
| 4 | Management stability of relevant organizations | 143 | 241 | 37 | 63 | 0.001 |
| 5 * | Benchmarking of known countries | 200 | 184 | 52 | 48 | 0.444 |
| 6 | Psychologists of national teams | 126 | 258 | 33 | 67 | 0.001 |
| 7 | Procurement competitions | 109 | 275 | 28 | 72 | 0.001 |
| 8 * | Financial and moral support of coaches and athletes | 200 | 184 | 52 | 48 | 0.444 |
| 9 | Clubs | 110 | 274 | 29 | 71 | 0.001 |
| 10 | Talent find | 52 | 332 | 14 | 86 | 0.001 |
| 11 | Coaches | 34 | 350 | 9 | 91 | 0.001 |
| 12 | Base teams | 70 | 314 | 18 | 82 | 0.001 |
| 13 | Securing the future of athletes and coaches | 161 | 323 | 42 | 58 | 0.002 |
| 14 | Championship sports station | 126 | 258 | 33 | 67 | 0.001 |
| 15 | workshops | 144 | 240 | 38 | 62 | 0.001 |
| 16 | Tournament Leagues | 89 | 295 | 23 | 77 | 0.001 |
| 17 | Players' mental issues | 90 | 294 | 23 | 77 | 0.001 |
| 18 * | Scientific Research | 218 | 166 | 57 | 43 | 0.009 |
| 19 * | Media support | 199 | 185 | 52 | 48 | 0.507 |
| 20 | Strategic planning | 20 | 277 | 28 | 72 | 0.001 |

* No significant difference was seen for these factors and their effect was lower than the mean.

Table 3 shows Friedman's test results to prioritize the factors affecting promotion of national teams. As is clear from the table, the difference of factors' rating is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). According to the results of

Friedman's test, the most influential factors in promoting national teams include talent find, base teams, financial resources, coaches, facilities and equipment, procurement competition, and management stability.

Table 3. Results of Friedman's test about ranking of factors affecting the promotion of national teams of the Islamic Republic of Iran

| No. | Factors | mean Rank | X ² | DF | P | N |
|-----|---|-----------|----------------|----|-------|-----|
| 1 | Talent find | 14.24 | | | | |
| 2 | Base teams | 13.02 | | | | |
| 3 | Financial resources | 12.24 | | | | |
| 4 | Coaches | 11.88 | | | | |
| 5 | Facilities and equipment | 11.87 | | | | |
| 6 | Procurement competitions | 11.77 | | | | |
| 7 | Management stability of relevant organizations | 11.31 | | | | |
| 8 | Strategic planning | 11.27 | | | | |
| 9 | Training camps | 10.95 | | | | |
| 10 | Tournament Leagues | 10.68 | 1004.72 | 19 | 0.001 | 384 |
| 11 | Clubs | 10.35 | | | | |
| 12 | Psychologists of national teams | 10.19 | | | | |
| 13 | Players' mental issues | 10.10 | | | | |
| 14 | Workshops | 9.31 | | | | |
| 15 | Financial and moral support of coaches and athletes | 9.08 | | | | |
| 16 | Benchmarking of known countries | 8.99 | | | | |
| 17 | Securing the future of athletes and coaches | 8.93 | | | | |
| 18 | Championship sports station | 8.89 | | | | |
| 19 | Media support | 7.52 | | | | |
| 20 | Scientific Research | 7.40 | | | | |

DISCUSSION

Progress and development in sports has attracted the attention of many governments in search of internationally successful elite athletes or for the society to participate in sports (17). Results of the research call for the explanation of the 20 factors affecting the promotion of national teams. The importance of 16 factors out of 20 is significantly higher than the average. The most important factors affecting promotion of national teams include talent find, base teams, financial resources, coaches, facilities and equipment, procurement competition, and management stability of the related organizations.

Congenital talent is the most important success factor in championship sports (18). According to the emphasis by experts, talent find is the most important factor in promoting national teams. Brouwers *et al.* (2014), Truyens *et al.* (2014), Sotiriadou & Hilbury (2009) and De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) believe that identifying talent and nurturing it are the most important factors in the development of championship sports (3,4,6,11). Also, Tondnevis and Ghasemi's (2007) search talent among

pupils with scientific methods are the most important factors in the development of gymnastics in Iran (8). Alidoust *et al.* (2014) believed that talent find is the most important strategy to promote judo in Iran (7). In recent years, a lot of work has been done in the field of talent find in the country. But, according to experts, sports officials should focus more on talent identification and by discovering, developing and directing talent, they should lay the groundwork for having a strong national team.

According to experts, investing on base teams is the second-most important factor in promoting the national teams of Iran. If countries such as America, Russia, China and Britain gain a lot of success in the Olympics and World today, that's because of much attention to the base lines. No doubt, investing in base levels complements the talent find, and if talent identified isn't supported and guided, it will fail to grow. The importance of investing in base levels is deemed necessary for success in championship sports and in international arenas, according to the research by

Hosseini *et al.* (2013) and Mozaffari *et al.* (2012) (1, 2).

Financial support is the third factor affecting the promotion of Iran's national team. Brouwers *et al.*, (2014), Truyens *et al.*, (2014), Sotiriadou&Shilbury (2009), De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) and Alidoust *et al.* (2014) also emphasized on financial support as a key factor in international success of championship sports (3, 4, 6, 7, 11). As noted in the discussions of the management, financial resources are the fuel and driving force for an organization. Governments, organizations and sports federations will have to strive to improve national teams by supporting them.

Efficient coaches are the fourth leading reason that helps in the promotion of national teams, according to experts. Coaching is among the complex businesses that people can hardly do. A coach must have expertise in his area (19). Truyens *et al.* (2014), Brouwers *et al.* (2014), Alidoust *et al.* (2014), Tondnevis and Ghasemi (2007), Taghi Poor (2007) and De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) also said that holding coaching courses and promoting coaches' knowledge levels is among the main factors for developing sport championships(3, 7, 8, 11, 12). Also, Mozaffari *et al.* (2012) believed that establishment of a new coaching system is a strategy to boost the championship sports system (1). Relying on their knowledge, experience and information, the coaches play a crucial role in order to take the athletes to the highest level. They are critical in the development and progress of the players and make them familiar with the required skills and knowledge leading them and the sports team to their success (20,21). Sports federations should employ the elite and prominent coaches in the national teams. There should be classes, coaching courses and educational seminars for coaches to strengthen their scientific and practical knowledge of the national team.

The fifth affecting factor in promoting the national teams of Iran is facilities and equipment. Gholipour *et al.* (2015) and "Paul (2008) say that facilities and equipment are an important factor in heroism" (22, 23). De Bosscher *et al.* (2006) believe that the most important factor in the development of sports is the facilities (11). Tondnevis and Ghasemi

(2007), Salimi *et al.* (2012) and Alidoust *et al.* (2014) also stressed the importance of hardware facilities in the development of championship sports (7, 8, 24). De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) also believe that one of the important pillars for the development of sports is facilities (5). Fairley *et al.* (2013) suggested that sports organizations should provide ample opportunity for all members of the society to participate in sports, because as more people turn to exercise, more will make their way to higher levels (25).

The sixth factor affecting the promotion of national teams is procurement competitions. This is the factor that Truyens *et al.* (2014) and Brouwers *et al.* (2014) refer to as competitive opportunities(3,4). De Bosscher *et al.* (2009) talk of holding national and international competitions (5) and Alidoust *et al.* (2014) want more tournaments and sports camps (7). In recent years undoubtedly, one of the good moves by sports federations is to allocate money and resources to this sector. Playing with the world's greatest teams, while learning scientific and technical issues, reduces stress. It also reduces psychological pressure and boosts confidence and self-esteem in players and coaching staff of the national team of Iran. The seventh factor effective in promoting the stability of national teams is management of the related organizations, including the federations. Audas *et al.* (2002) suggests that management changes negatively affect the performance of sports teams and other organizations (26). Firkins and Shilbury (2010) and Sotiriadou & Shilbury (2009) pointed out the role of strategic and long-term planning for the success of sports organizations and development of sports championships (6, 27). SeifPanahi Shabani *et al.* (2011) also said that organizations having strong management based on strategic planning must achieve their objectives. They said such organizations achieve significant success in various activities, including championship sports (28). The emphasis on planning for success in championship sports can be seen in the research of Mozaffari *et al.* (2012) and Farahani and Abdavi (2006) (1, 9). Often, when a new director leads an organization, he applies many changes in a holistic manner, especially plans of the former director, and financial and non-financial matters are looked into so that more money

could be allocated for developing a new programme.

CONCLUSION

What is certain is that progress does not take place by chance in any field, including championship sports. Planning the factors affecting the promotion of national teams and constant attention to them can boost the performance of Iran's national team and international success in competitions and sporting events could become a reality. Due to the variety of sports branches and national teams, the scope of this research is limited. Moreover, factors affecting the performance of national teams need to be investigated separately and specifically.

APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Best talent identification techniques can be designed. In this context, leading nations in the field of talent identification can be modeled, including the US and Russia.
- Basic teams should be formed by talents in different age groups, this will, in addition to fostering talent; provide the conditions for having powerful national teams.

- The government should allocate more resources to sports federations, and the federations themselves must also use from the huge industry of sport to generate revenue.
- The use of foreign elite coaches in national teams will transfer their experience and knowledge to domestic coaches, as was the use of foreign elite coaches as one of the most important factors in the development of Iranian football and volleyball.
- Modern sports facility and equipment should be provided for national teams. In cases where there is no vehicle or tool for training or competition inside the country, it should be purchased from other countries.
- In order to compete with the first world countries, the coordination of domestic federations is necessary. For this purpose the multidisciplinary sports tournament, in which weaker national teams sit together with stronger national teams, it will be very useful.

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