

Athletes' involvement in decision making process of uww



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Discuss on the Issues with Athletes' Involvement in Decision Making Process of UWW

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Sport governance has become an increasingly widespread subject for research and good governance is a key component of the effective sport organization management (Mu Yeh & Taylor, 2008). It is because of that sports governance enables not only national sports to achieve the greater heights—a source of national pride, joy, and honor for a country and its people but an international sports organization to guarantee its sport develop sustainably. (Dennis V. Blanco. 2017) However, due to the rapid increase in commercialization and globalization of sport, the national and international sports organizations are more and more in the public eye due to failure in governance. According to SIRC, “ Poor governance is always visible. Good governance is not always visible but it can make a good organization” (2010) One of the typical example is the decision of IOC to controversially drop wrestling from its 2020 program in February, 2013. (33)

Wrestling was actually scheduled to remove from the 2020 Olympic program in the 125th IOC Session even though it had long history in Olympic family and it was widely practiced all over the world. (27)

Therefore, more and more researchers are focusing on issues related to good governance in sport. Initiative – Action for Good Governance in International Sports Organizations (AGGIS, 2013) has set down guidelines for good governance.

One of the growing concerns about good governance and its important principles is the communication which enables the governing body to be transparent, accountable, engaging effectively with stakeholders and nurturing internal democracy. (1)

In this case, understanding interests articulated by all stakeholders and considering it in decision making is a very important aspect to develop the organization continuously because of that Decision-making is a fundamental element of any sport. (15) Athletes are considered as a key stakeholder of a sports organization and the decisions by the board usually affect them directly, however, their influence is very lack to the board. (4)

The aim of this essay is not only to highlight the importance of the athlete's involvement in decision-making process of United World Wrestling Federation (hereinafter refers UWW) but to raise the important issues about its development.

Importance of Athlete's Involvement in Decision-Making Process

The governance involves such concepts as responsibility, rules and policies, communication, transparency, and so on.

However, the central component of governance is decision-making.

It is the process through which a group of people make decisions that direct their collective opinions and efforts. When it is applied to the public sector, "governance is the process whereby, within accepted traditions and institutional frameworks, interests are articulated by different sectors of

society, decision are taken and decision-makers are held to account”.

(Plumptre T., & Graham, J. 2000)

In fact, governance exists whenever a group of people comes together to accomplish a common goal. If the group is too large to efficiently make all necessary decisions, an entity can be formed to facilitate the process. If that is the case, group members will delegate a large portion of the decision-making responsibility to this entity. In voluntary sector organizations, this entity is called the Board of Directors.

On one hand, stakeholders of an organization articulate their interests, influence how decisions are made, determine who the decision-makers are, and finalize actions to be taken. These are the inputs of the stakeholders and they are addressed to the decision makers.

The decision makers, on the other hand, should acknowledge these inputs and put them into consideration during the decision-making process. Decision makers are accountable to those same stakeholders for the organization's outputs and the process of producing it.

Therefore, the stakeholders are one of the keys to establish good governance in International sports organizations.

There are some arguments about which is more appropriate to define IF stakeholders in terms of their identity (i. e. as fans, athletes, coaches etc.) or in terms of their interests (i. e. in elite sport/club success, community/club development, youth sport etc.). (AGGIS, 2013)

The best and easiest way to identify organizations' stakeholders is using stakeholder theory, which is a powerful tool for sports managers to understand, systematically group and effectively communicate with different stakeholders. (Friedman, M. T., Parent, M. M., & Mason, D. S. 2004)

Usually stakeholders are classified into internal and external. Internal stakeholders are those who have direct interaction with organizational managers, and external are those who have not. (Freeman, R. E. 2010)

Generally, according to their importance, stakeholders are classified into primary and secondary. A primary stakeholder could be defined as vital for the organization and without which cooperation in the organization simply could not be possible. Meanwhile, secondary stakeholders are those who can affect or be affected by the organization but they are not vital for the organization for its survival. (Kristiansen, E., Strittmatter, A. M., & Skirstad, B. 2016)

Going deeper, stakeholders can be of three types: latent, expectant and definitive. Latent stakeholders' interests and power to organization are low; therefore they are not so important and noticeable, while expectant stakeholders have strong interests in organization's issues but lack importance and power which lead to more attention from managers. Finally, definitive stakeholders are the most interested and active; they require a lot of attention and are the most important (Ferkins, L., & Shilbury, D. 2015) for the organization.

Stakeholder theory and the specific environment which surrounds a sports organization suggest the further stakeholders' determination. It can be <https://assignbuster.com/athletes-involvement-in-decision-making-process-of-uwv/>

agreed that stakeholders' involvement directly affects the welfare of the organization.

Stakeholder's involvement is a process of communication.

Communication is a main key for right decision making in governance, therefore, organizations shall be transparent and accountable, engaging effectively with stakeholders and nurturing internal democracy.

It is because of that being responsive to stakeholders, understanding their interests and hearing their voice helps shape the organization's governance and strategy. And transparency about why the organization exists, what it is trying to do, how it is doing it and with what results empowers stakeholders by giving them the information about the organization that they need to know. (1)

The lack of communication fails internal democracy of the organization and outcome wrong decision making.

An example is failure of governance of FILA (International Amateur Wrestling Federation).

FILA was founded in 1921 and thrived for several decades in Olympic family. Roger Coulon, a former President (1952-1971) recognized the importance of wrestling's relationship with the Olympic Games and drove FILA to become the first International Federation to move their headquarters to Lausanne, Switzerland, home of the IOC. He was also credited with creating the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) as a way for

governing bodies of various sports to communicate and collaborate on the <https://assignbuster.com/athletes-involvement-in-decision-making-process-of-uwv/>

broad issues facing international sport. However, after his death, the FILA became very conservative and there was always lack of communication in the organization. It caused the decline of image of Wrestling Sport and finally IOC decided to controversially drop wrestling from its 2020 program in February, 2013. (29, 33)

Innovation of rules and regulations is one of the main aspects to make the sport easier for spectators to understand, and fascinating. Its innovation can be created by decision making process in governing body and it is possible by communication with stakeholders with specialized knowledge.

Sports rules and regulations directly affect athletes' professional and sometimes personal lives, however traditional hierarchic sports governance rarely solves sports policy questions in consultation with athletes and almost never in co-operation with athletes. (Houlihan, B. 2004)

Usually sports governance could be defined as a hierarchical pyramid structure which operates at international, national and local levels. At the top of the pyramid, there are international sports federations, a step below - national sports federations and at the lowest basis - clubs and athletes. In this structure, only units closest to international sports federations have legal power and control, while those at the bottom lack power and control. As a consequence, for many years, sports governance lack influence and involvement of athletes in decision making processes. (Geeraert, A. 2015)

As many complaints regarding athletes' involvement were received, development of athletes' rights was noticed by sports organizations.

(Thibault, L., Kihl, L., & Babiak, K. 2010)

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However, most governing bodies give athletes voice through limited membership, forum or athlete committee / commission. In this way, athletes are structurally provided with some kind of involvement but are safely isolated and buffered from any major decision making power. Although some sports organizations have institutionalized athlete participation and representation, the majority of organizations have not granted formal decision making power for athletes. (4)

Therefore, athletes have a voice but do not have a vote.

However, the importance of athletes' involvement in decision-making has been raised within International Olympic Committee with viewpoint of that Athlete involvement in decision-making is a core component of good governance and the Athletes' Commission enables athletes' voices to be heard and experiences used for the improvement of sport.

Tomas Bach, the President of IOC said that " The Olympic Movement is about the clean athletes. They are our best ambassadors, they are our role-models, they are our treasure."(10)

Greater athletes' involvement in decision making processes is undoubtedly necessary and could be beneficial not only for athletes but also for the entire organization and this evidence is:

- Athletes inclusion in governing processes makes policies more effective as individuals whose opinion is heard tend to accept governance decision as their own.

- Athletes could provide specialized knowledge and understanding concerning specific issue which leads to more effective problem solving mechanism. (Koppenjan, J., & Klijn, E. H. 2004)
- If participation in policy process is legitimate, athletes' inclusion decreases the possibility of legal issues and conflicts. (Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. 2009)

Growing demand of athletes' greater involvement triggered discussions and created conditions for athlete-centred system development within some sports organizations. The main idea of athlete-centred system is that a sports system exists because and for athletes, therefore the main focus in the development of policies, programs, and procedures should be on involving them in ongoing decision making process.

Athlete centred sports system is not only ensuring support, resources, good training, coaching or facilities; it is also about formal athletes' involvement in decision making and policy formation. (Kihl, L. A., Kikulis, L. M., & Thibault, L. 2007)

The Measures of UWW to ensure Athlete's Involvement in Decision-Making Process

In the previous section, it was argued that the lack of communication fails internal democracy of the organization and athletes' involvement in decision making processes is undoubtedly necessary for democracy and it could be beneficial not only for athletes but also for the entire organization. In this section, it was mentioned the measure of UWW where efforts to increase athlete involvement and expand the role of athletes in the sport policy and

decision-making process have emerged in the pursuit of an athlete-centred sport system.

For the UWW, the athlete representation was the approach to increase involvement of athletes at the policy and decision-making table.

Following the decision of IOC in 2013, the International Wrestling Federation took actions to change its image and retain its position in Olympic family. From 2013 to 2014, FILA approved change of wrestling rules, change of its name (UWW) and logo and its constitution included more representation and inclusion of women and athletes in the governance. Several new commissions were created and some of the existing commissions were reconstructed. The Athletes Commission was one of them. (30, 31)

The mandate and task of the Athletes' Commission of UWW with 7 members are as below.

Mandate

The role of the Athletes' Commission is to protect the rights and interests of all United World Wrestling Olympic style athletes. The Athletes' Commission members reach out and communicate with active athletes as peers to collect feedback. The Athletes' Commission acts as the voice of the athletes to United World Wrestling.

Tasks and Duties

- Meet in person at least once a year and actively communicate and work toward upholding the mandate

- Actively communicate with all UWW Olympic style athletes
- Provide important information to all active UWW Olympic style athletes
- To propose improvements on behalf of the athletes to the United World Wrestling Bureau.
- To contribute their opinions to the United World Wrestling Executive Committee on amendments to the Rules.
- To propose to the United World Wrestling Executive Committee possible improvements to the competition system and to the Rules.

However, unfortunately, this Athletes' Commission is no more than structure which is actually not working and the commission has not had even a meeting so far.

Ms. Barbara Kendall, Chair, ANOC Athletes' Commission said that “ Due to the distances between our members, the Commission could only physically meet once a year, so we kept in close contact via email and a closed Facebook group. We initiated a post-Games questionnaire to all athletes, enabling the Commission to have the direct feedback from the athletes in order to ensure their work is in line with the voices of the athletes themselves across the region.” (10)

This is the basic initiative for athletes' commission to participate in decision-making process as an active one.

Houlihan (2004, p. 421-422), criticised the IOC's Athletes' Commission as being micro-managed and the representation of athletes as being a tokenistic one. Along similar lines, Jackson and Ritchie (2007, p. 407) determined that ‘ despite claims by policymakers and other stakeholders

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within the sport system that athlete-centeredness should be a central priority, athletes have not been significantly involved in decision-making processes with respect to a policy [on anti-doping] that significantly affects their working lives.'

It means that the athletes should be not only represented at policy meetings but also becoming engaged as participants in the formation of policies that affect them.

Some sports organizations like IOC have taken steps to solve this problem, however, the UWW has still issues to be solved regarding this matter.

In order to enhance athletes' influence in the governance, the UWW should make them accountable and should consider providing more jurisdictional power to the athletes' commission.

Issues to increase involvement of athletes at the policy and decision-making table.

In this section, the practical issues and recommendations surrounding athlete representation and participation in the policy and decision-making processes of UWW was raised.

Activation

There is no doubt that athlete representation on committees provides a platform for athletes to influence decisions, actions, and policies. It depends, however, on their capacity for coalition building, bargaining, and

influence, a process in which athletes often cannot afford to engage (particularly in terms of time).

Habermas (1996) argued that bargaining is particularly problematic when such powers are unequally distributed.

As Kihl et al. (2007, p. 22) argued, providing athletes with more 'voting' rights is perhaps the approach that has been adopted and unquestioned as 'the way' to ensure an athlete-centred system and realise a democratic organisation that provides athletes the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

However, the actual circumstances of high-performance athletes (i. e. training full-time and perhaps working to meet financial needs) is not enable them to focus on representing the needs of athletes at decision-making tables, and thus bargaining power is not equally distributed. (Habermas 1996, p. 167).

Furthermore, we can suggest some questions regarding selection of athletes' commission.

In cases where athletes are elected by their peers, are they the ones who serve to represent? Are elected athletes equipped with the necessary skills and resources to truly make a difference? In other words do they have the time, the information/knowledge, and the power to represent all their peers? As full-time athletes, their first (and possibly only) priority is to train and perform in international sport competitions.

For these reasons, the retired and educated athletes may be better positioned to serve as representatives because of their recent experiences and current understanding of the issues that most affect high-performance athletes. In this case, the financial budget for them should be allocated. And, the rewarding and recognition of athletes who suggest good ideas could be helpful to motivate and encourage all athletes.

Jurisdictional power

As mentioned above, the athletes' commission could:

- 🌐 Propose improvements on behalf of the athletes to the United World Wrestling Bureau,
- 🌐 Contribute their opinions to the United World Wrestling Executive Committee on amendments to the Rules and
- 🌐 Propose to the United World Wrestling Executive Committee possible improvements to the competition system and to the Rules.

According to the constitution of UWW, the president of athletes' commission is automatically elected board member and each member has one vote.

As a result, athletes' abilities to influence policy-making and/or decision-making may still be severely limited.

Therefore, to enhance athletes' impact on organisational decisions, especially regarding change of rules, adoption of more appropriate mechanisms for athletes to provide advice to Board could be recommended.

Accountability.

If all above conditions are satisfied, the board should evaluate the performance of athletes' commission annually.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, an important group of stakeholders in sport – high performance athletes – have started to play an increasing role in the development of sport policies and decisions affecting them. 2 (Alvad, S., 2008.)

However, their level of effectiveness or impact on decision making/policy making remains several issues. Houlihan (2004, p. 421-422) argued from a different perspective that sport policy is generally made for, or on behalf of, athletes, rarely in consultation with athletes, and almost never in partnership with athletes ... The few governing bodies of sport that do provide a voice for athletes do so either through limited membership of the body's decision-making forum or through the formation of an 'athletes committee/commission' linked to the main forum, but safely quarantined from any significant decision-making opportunities.

From the recognition of the importance of athletes' involvement in decision-making process, UWW has taken some measures, however, it has still issues to be solved regarding this matter. In order to enhance athletes' influence in the governance, the UWW should make them accountable and should consider providing more jurisdictional power to the athletes' commission.

Now it is the task of UWW to provide athletes with more opportunities to increase their voice in decision making process in order to develop the organization sustainably.

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