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Professionalization of Sports Management: Antidote to Dwindling Fortunes in Nigerian Sports

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Abstract – The paper sees management as the greatest challenge confronting Nigerian sports. Sports management is in the hands of non-professionals who know little or nothing about sports. This has led to the dismal performances of national teams in world sports. A way out of this imbroglio is to professionalize sports management and the Nigeria Association for Physical, Health Education, Recreation, Sports and Dance (NAPHER-SD) as a professional sports body is called upon to play a dominant role in this regard. It is recommended that Nigerian universities should mount post – graduate programmes in physical education to train well baked professionals in all areas of sports so as to complement the efforts of The National Institute for Sports in Lagos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Events across the globe especially in business circles have underscored the need for changes in tactics and management approach to survive in the 21st century. Change, according to Fasan (2002), has become a prevailing culture which every organization, be it private or public cannot underestimate. The philosophy behind change hinges on the fact that managerial approaches and strategies of the 20th century may not be able to sustain the trends in the 21st century. Sport is no exception.

Management of sports in Nigeria has become an all comers affair. While engineers are allowed to manage and direct engineering companies and institutions, doctors to direct and manage the medical institutions, everybody has been allowed to manage sports and sporting institutions (Abdulkadir, 2002). This clearly shows why Nigeria sports is in shambles. The sports environment is becoming polarized and some of the operators do not have the prerequisites to do the job but they merely learn on the job. Some have even been appointed on benevolence.

The desire to professionalize sports management has become a welcome idea following the trauma Nigerian sports has brought to stakeholders. A cursory look at the Nigerian Olympic Committee in time

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past revealed that physical educators were in the Committee, but now it will be a surprise if any is a member. What goes on in the NOC is replicated in the various Sports Associations or Federations.

Traditionally, the physical education profession particularly in Nigeria was viewed basically as that of teaching responsibilities (Mgbor, 2002). Other professionals in the field like Parks and Zanger (1990) have, however, identified other occupational roles of the physical education personnel to include those of sports coaches, sports marketers, sports programme manager, sports journalists, fitness programme manager, recreation services directors etc.

Before progressing in the discourse, there is the need to know the meanings of the terms “sports management” and “profession.”

a) Sports Management

Fasan (2002) sees sports management as an academic discipline, a field of endeavour which encompasses other disciplines utilized to bring sports programmes nearer to the people, provide heroic healthy struggle, graceful balance and harmony. It can also be seen as the application of management theories and techniques to sports programmes, programming and execution.

Desensi and Rosenberg (1996) see sports management as a field interested in the organization and administration of specific sports – related areas. It is a field of endeavour involving leadership, decision making process, staging of athletic events and marketing sports. Chelladurai (1983) sees sports management as the activities of personnel in an organisation from different disciplines working with limited resources with the aim of accomplishing the goals of the organisation.

Udoh (2002) sees many specialized areas in sports management and goes on to suggest that the professional in sports management in Nigeria, apart from the basic educational qualification should be exposed to series of training courses, seminars and workshops in the various areas of the sports enterprise after the initial training. To him, a bachelor degree in sports science (physical education) is a pre – requisite, a necessary platform from where to start on a life long training and experiences on how to manage sports.

Understanding the concept of sports management via its multifarious disciplines is a guide towards professionalism (Fasan, 2002).

b) *Profession Defined*

There are many definitions of the word "profession." A thorough examination of the various definitions clearly reveals almost the same idea(s) (Ladani, 2002). Hodge and Johnson (1970) define a profession as "a vocation requiring some significant body of knowledge that is applied with high degree of consistency in the service of a segment of society." Frost (1975) posits that a profession is "a calling or occupation requiring specialized knowledge, intensive education, a philosophy of commitment and service and high standards of conduct and achievement." Cratty (1971) identifies different criteria to define profession as follows:

- a) A profession provides a service to improve the capabilities of members;
- b) Membership requires academic credentials of rather high level;
- c) Professions constantly seek to improve the capabilities of their members and continually engage in self – examination and evaluation; and
- d) Practices carried out within a profession are based upon a valid body of knowledge which has been established as a result of a scientifically sound research programme.

Having perused the meanings of profession, there will also be the need to know the characteristics of a profession. According to Ladani (2002) the nature of a profession is quite different from that of a trade union, business concern or entertainment group. A true profession has certain characteristics as propounded by Hodge and Johnson (1970), Singer (1976), Baley and Field (1976), Resick and Seidel (1978) to include:

- (a) A rigorous and lengthy period of educational preparation;
- (b) A relevant body of unified knowledge;
- (c) Mandatory qualifying examination;
- (d) A code of ethics with potential elimination from practice for those violating the code;
- (e) A life career and permanent membership;
- (f) A profession sets up its own standard;
- (g) A profession exalts service above all personal gain;
- (h) A strong closely knit and cohesive professional organisation;
- (i) Members accept social responsibility in the society served by the profession;
- (j) A profession demands continuation in – service growth.

In some well known professions like law, architecture, accountancy, medicine or even in the armed forces, there are prescribed lists of dos and

don'ts which serve as guidelines to the practitioners and which must be strictly adhered to before a member is regarded as belonging to the particular profession (Udoh, 2002). The implication of a profession here is that there is an occupation or vocation which demands special education programme or training. Thus a professional is an individual who is highly trained and makes a living by the practice of that for which he has been trained. In sports such a person could be an athlete, performing in the sport he specializes in, a coach with expertise in the sport he coaches, or an individual who has specialized training in sports management; a term which is the core of this discourse.

Using the above characteristics as benchmark to assess our sports management, the undeniable conclusion is that Nigeria has not started and except there are concerted efforts by stakeholders in sports, the situation will continue to be bleak for us in the realm of success in our sports endeavour. The United States cannot be regarded as a failure in world sports because sports management is a recognized profession and its services according to Fasan (2002) are requested for in sports and other allied business. The schools, the media houses, fitness centres, clubs, recreational centres, private organizations, marketers, sporting goods manufacturing companies need them. This, however, is not the case in Nigeria because our career orientation and outlet are limited.

Sports have many divisions such as archery, athletics, basketball, power sports, baseball and other ball games, gymnastics, equestrian sports, aquatic sports, cycling, motor bike sports, motor racing and miscellaneous sports including traditional sports. Each of the sports or class of sports has its own peculiar nature, characteristics, body of knowledge, facilities, equipment, rules and regulations which a new entrant must know and understand to succeed.

II. RATIONALE FOR PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SPORT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has of recent failed woefully in sports. In the just concluded All Africa Games in Maputo our performance was dismal. Because soccer is about the most popular sport in the country, Nigerians cry out anytime we fail to qualify for any major international competition. A case in point is the 2012 Olympic qualifier in soccer for our U – 23 team in Morocco. The performance expectation of sports operators is very high and anytime we fail the blame is on the coach(es) as if other sports are performing magic. The sickness is Nigerian soccer is contagious with other sports. The major problem with Nigerian sports is management.

While it takes some countries like the United States and Germany four or more years to prepare for any major competition like the Olympics, Nigeria will

normally wait for one month to the competition before embarking on a fire brigade approach and we are expected to perform miracles. Adequate preparation is a desideratum if we are to achieve appreciable results. Any sport manager worth his salt should be able to plan, direct, organize, budget, delegate duties, control, report, co-ordinate, motivate and innovate as the case may be. These are all duties of a professional manager.

Scientific and technological advancement have compartmentalized sports into many areas of specialization thus creating a myriad of professional positions. For anybody to specialize in sports administration and management, therefore, he or she must among other things study the nature of the particular sport and know very well their body of knowledge as well as the practice of the sport (Ajiduah, 2002). He concludes that sport is so specific that it may be necessary to study separately the administration and management of football, swimming, basketball, tennis, etc because their characteristics and nature are quite different. This is not so in Nigeria where enthusiasts are appointed to run sports and until we professionalize sports management sport will continue to nosedive in the country.

III. CONCLUSION

Each of the positions of sports operators (managers) from the Honourable Minister/Commissioners for Sport through Chairmen of Sports Federations down to organizing secretaries and coaches is a profession under the Nigeria Association for Physical, Health Education, Recreation, Sports and Dance (NAPHER-SD) but unfortunately most of these positions are not occupied by NAPHER-SD professionals. The specific functions in each of the positions may be different but the main characteristic of these professional practices is that they manage people, materials and funds. Each of these operators is supposed to be well grounded in a body of knowledge from the academic discipline of sports administration and management.

We have seen that the all – comers and fire brigade approaches to sport in Nigeria have not yielded good dividends. Like some other well known professions like law, medicine and engineering, physical educators through NAPHER – SD need to rekindle the flame of sports management by being involved and their success will definitely remove sports administration and management from the hands of enthusiasts and opportunists. One needs to train to acquire the skills of competence from a body of knowledge that will make him / her a success in his / her chosen field of human endeavour. Professionalizing sports management will remove obscurity which physical education is currently suffering from and bring practitioners to prominence.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

To professionalize sport management in Nigeria, physical education has a great role to play. The pedagogical nature of the subject as it is now in our universities and colleges of education need radical changes. The curriculum has to be redesigned to put in practice the multi – faceted nature of sports. The universities through their departments of physical and health education need to mount post – graduate programmes in specific areas of physical education tilted towards sports management to compliment what goes on at the National Institute for Sports in Lagos.

For now, there should be a gradual replacement of non professionals from managing sports. Alternatively they should be sponsored to study courses that will make their services relevant to sports.

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