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Attitude of University Community towards Sporting Life of Students in Nigeria

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigerian universities have been blamed for failing Nigeria in producing elite athletes for international sports competitions. This recrimination stems from the fact that most successful sporting nations of the world like the United States, Russia, and Germany recruit most of their athletes from among the universities. Since Nigeria's appearance and participation at the World University Games (F.I.S.U), it was only in 1975 that a home-based athlete in the person of Late Major Taiwo Ogunjobi won a bronze medal in 400 metres hurdles in Rome. Subsequent medals in 1983 and 1985 were won by foreign-based athletes (Andah, 1986; Obajinmi, 1996; Akiga, 2002). Where athletes are produced from the universities, evidence abounds that such nations invest a lot of money in providing standard facilities and equipment and athletic scholarships and other forms of motivation are at the disposal of the student athletes (Amuchie, 1984). In Nigeria the story is quite different generally. Most star athletes who have basic qualifications for university admissions are frustrated by the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB). The alternative at their disposal is to seek greener pastures overseas where they not only perform well academically but in addition have their athletic abilities developed for national and international sports competitions. Only very

few Nigerian universities give recognition to the athletic performance of their students. Very few Nigerian universities possess adequate standard sporting facilities and equipment that can be used in producing Olympic materials. There seems to be a little or no relationship between the State Sports Councils coaches, Ministry of Sports officials and the university efforts to produce star athletes. Yet the universities are expected to perform miracles at international sports meets with all these glaring examples of shortfalls. Serious motivation strategies are either absent or not properly utilized by university coaches and sports administrators (Jeroh, 2005). One major problem facing sports development in Nigerian universities today is the uncompromising attitude of the universities to sport. Attitude as used here refers to the lack of sports and admission policies as well as negative disposition of many academic staff towards sports (Jeroh, 2005). The lack of functional sports policy, according to Mshelia (2002) also affects the development of sports in the universities and thus affects the performance of the students. Ojeme (1998) asserted that there is no well thought out and documented policy for university sports. As a result, he concluded that sports development is not seen as a statutory duty of the universities. Mgbor and Obiyemi (2001) criticized the present status of sports in Nigerian universities as being grossly under funded, lacking adequate facilities and equipment, lacking adequate and competent staff, improper training programmes for athletes and lack of incentives to athletes and coaches. Sport according to them, is regarded as an area for the never-do-well in our tertiary institutions.

Quoting from Williams Committee Report of 1983 on the attitude of universities to sports. Egborge (1986) said as follows:

"On the whole it can be said with a great measure of truth that at the moment, the universities of our land have not evolved any policies, and have not been able to evolve any policies to meet the problems (p. 160)"

On the attitude of the university students, the report says:

"There have been occasions when university students who have been called to camp refused to show up. Usually, the reason for such refusal is connected with lectures and examinations (p. 160)"

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The pressure on the universities to fulfill the expectations of producing the nation's sportsmen and women has been on the increase. The universities have consistently come under sharper criticism for failing in this regard. The accusations have centred mainly on over concentration on academics with little or no cognizance for physical development through sports (Ikulayo, 1986). In a speech at the University of Benin Sports Dinner in 1984, Group Captain Emeka Omeruah, the then Federal Minister of Information, Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture chastised Nigerian universities for not fulfilling the role expected of them on national sports development effort. Lamenting the position. Ekpeyong (1986) posited that our academics do not allocate any period for sports in their curricula. He argued that in other countries, university undergraduates are made to register for a certain number of courses in one form of sports or another. Though some Nigerian Universities Senates have decided to allocate some afternoons as lecture-free to enable students participate and excel in sports, such decisions are never implemented. These are all pointers to the fact that the universities have no articulated policy for sports development. In all these, the undergraduate athlete's effort at improving himself/herself sports wise is stultified.

Another great criticism against the universities is on the attitude of lecturers and other university staff towards sports. Many lecturers have been known to discourage sportsmen and women from participating in sporting activities. Ekpeyong (1986) said that "in Nigeria, there are many retrogressive academics who believe that those students who take part in sports are not serious students. Some of these teachers go an extra length of threatening students involved in sports". Evidence abounds that many athletes are occasionally victimized in examinations because of their participation in sports (Amuchie, 1986).

A contemptuous issue that arises is the rivalry that exists between academics in the Departments of Physical Education or Human Kinetics and their professional colleagues in the University Sports Council. This attitude, according to Salau (1996) has contributed greatly to the poor results recorded by Nigerian university undergraduates. Lamenting her ordeal. Miss Saidat Onanuga of the University of Ilorin, and an international 400 metres hurdler was quoted as saying "I missed my examinations because I went for a competition and nobody could assist me". How then can the students be interested in sports participation? Many university athletes have not been able to put in their best because they are torn between two loves-academics and sports. Though sports are of the moment, their educational qualification is a lasting effort which they won't forgo.

One other important problem identified with the universities' inability to develop sports concerns the recruitment of athletes with a view to training them to produce star and winning teams that can bring prestige and honour to the nation. Nigerian universities, according to Kamiyole (1986), have rigid rules on admission that make many university sports administrators helpless. As a result of this handicap, many universities nowadays result to the use of "mercenaries" and athletes that do not make admission requirements in an attempt to win medals (Adio, 1996).

Universities in the United States are famous for recruiting sporting talents from all over the world with their admission policies relaxed. Both admission and visa requirements are eased by the institution seeking to admit the athlete. Ijirigho, Porbeni, Obasogie. Egbunike. etc. are Nigerian beneficiaries of this gesture. We are all aware of the performances of these illustrious sons in international sports competitions donning Nigerian colours. Nigerian universities have not fully embraced this practice which has seen the cream of Nigerian athletes migrating to the United States from where they have come to represent the country in major international sports competitions.

There are many cases where a Nigerian has been considered academically unfit for admission into a Nigerian university only for him to get admission abroad, get a higher degree, and then come home and be employed as a lecturer in the same university which had rejected him (Egborge, 1986). What an irony? Nigerian universities must find ways and means of encouraging athletes with their admission policies.

In a goodwill message to the 13th NUGA games in Calabar in 1990, Air Commodore Anthony Ikhazoboh appealed to university authorities to help design a curriculum and programme to enable them admit potential sportsmen and women who could combine their academic work with their sports training programme. This, according to him, is the position in the United States among others from where NUGA has had to "borrow" Nigerian students for FISU (World University Games). Unless this is embarked upon, there will be little or no progress in the nation's march to sports excellence.

While supporting a relaxation in the admission policy in favour of talented athletes, Ikulayo (1986) cautioned on the inherent danger of waiving admission requirements for athletes. She said that one of such dangers is that of harassment by their counterparts within the same university. The comment such as "if not for sports you would not have been here" could be demoralizing for a sportsman or woman. So long as athletes and some lecturers perceive sports as antithetical to academics so long will the best sportsmen and women withdraw from active sports participation and competition (Amuchie, 1986).

This study was therefore embarked upon to examine if the attitude of the university community has any effect in sports performance among Nigerian university students.

II. MATERIALS & METHODS

The study employed the ex-post facto study design.

a) Participants

The balloting technique was used to select nine universities from the three geo-political zones in Southern Nigeria. The sample consisted of student captains (male and female) of fifteen NUGA sports, directors of sports and their assistants full time and honorary coaches who are full time staff of the universities (three from each zone) that were selected from thirty one universities in Southern Nigeria. There were 153 sports officials and 270 students.

b) Instrumentation

A self-developed structured questionnaire with a modified four-point Likert scale was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, "A" and "B". Section A sought information on demographic data of respondents which included name of institution, sport participated in and the status of respondents. Section B sought information on the independent variable (attitude of the university community) of the study. The instrument was validated by colleagues and the test-retest method was used to

establish the reliability using 30 students and 4 staff of Delta State University, Abraka who were not part of the study. The correlation of the scores yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.90 which was considered high enough for the study.

c) Procedure

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire with assistance from the directors of sports of the universities used and retrieved them resulting in a 100% return rate.

d) Statistical Analysis

Five items were used to test the null hypothesis. The responses for each of "strongly agree" and "agree" and those for "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were added for the two categories of respondents (athletes and officials) after which simple statistical tools of frequencies and percentages were used. The non-parametric tool of chi-square (X^2) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

III. RESULTS

The data analysis is based on the hypothesis formulated to guide the study. The hypothesis was tested based on the responses of both athletes and sports officials.

Ho : There is no significant role played by the attitude of the university community in sports performance among Nigerian university students.

Table 1: Frequency and Chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Attitude of University Community and Sports Performance Among Nigerian University Students.

Respondents	SA	A	% SA + A	D	SD	% D+ SD	TOTAL
Officials	39 (31.47)	26 (22.79)	42.5	41 (48.17)	47 (50.64)	57.5	153
Athletes	48 (55.53)	37 (40.21)	31.5	92 (84.89)	93 (89.36)	68.5	270
Total	87	63	35.5	133	140	64.5	423

Source : Field work.

NB: Expected frequencies are in parentheses

Calculated X^2 value = 5.59

Degree of freedom (df) = 3

Level of significance = 0.05

Critical Value = 7.82

Decision = Hypothesis Accepted.

The table above shows the frequency, percentages and chi-square computation of responses on the role played by the attitude of university community in sports performance among Nigerian university students. The combined percentage responses for "strongly agree" and "agree" for officials was 42.5% while those of "disagree" and "strongly

disagree" was 57.5%. The combined percentage of "strongly agree" and "agree" for athletes was 31.5% while that for "disagree" and "strongly disagree" 68.5%. A combination of both categories of respondents resulted in 37% for "strongly agree" and "agree" whereas, "disagree" and "strongly disagree" amounted to 63%.

To determine the significance of role, the calculated chi-square value of 5.59 was matched against the critical or table value of 7.82 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated chi-square value of 5.59 is less than the table value of 7.82, the null hypothesis was accepted.

IV. DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table 1 returned a verdict no significance on the role played by the attitude of the university community in sports performance among Nigerian university students. This position is disturbing when experience has shown that students who participate in sports have been victimized and scorned by lecturers. The fear of lecturers has led many athletes in the university to shun sports. The threat of victimization by lecturers in the Nigerian scene has been widely reported in the literature. (Amuchie 1986; Ekpeyong, 1986; Kamiyole, 1986; Adio. 1996; Salau. 1996).

The admission policies in the universities have made many of our talented athletes to go to the United States of America and Europe where conditions are better. Universities abroad are known to recruit talented athletes into their institutions through the offer of scholarships and other incentives. Sportsmen there are well catered for and extra lectures/tutorials are organized for athletes who miss lectures while representing their institutions. All these opportunities are non-existent in Nigerian universities. Athletes who were denied admission in Nigerian universities on the basis of their basic qualifications went abroad, qualified and came back to lecture in the universities that denied them admission (Egborge, 1986; Ijirigho, 1986). From the foregoing, one can conveniently conclude that Nigerian academics do not encourage and support student athletes. The researcher strongly feels that our academics should treat university athletes as their wards if not as their children by counseling and encouraging them instead of deriding them.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the finding, the conclusion is that the attitude of the university community is not antithetical to sports performance among Nigerian university students.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

From the study, the following recommendations are made. It is the ardent belief of the researcher that if they are properly and meticulously implemented, Nigerian universities would wake up from their lethargy to produce star athletes for the nation.

1. There should be a co-operative deal between the academic staff and staff of the Universities Sports Councils as their functions complement each other in the overall development of the students. University ego and pride are boosted by sports and all hands must be on deck to encourage those who bring such honour.
2. Extra lectures/tutorials should be organized for athletes who miss lectures as result of competitions.

There is need for attitudinal change by lecturers who must encourage rather than discourage athletes who they should regard as their children/wards.

3. Special consideration should be given for the admission of talented athletes as done in the United States and Europe. While not supporting the admission of recluse in the name of sports, it will be sufficient if the prospective student who is good in sports has relevant credits in his area of interest rather than demanding compulsory credits in English Language and Mathematics.
4. University management should enforce the lecture free afternoons to enable athletes have the good opportunity to train in their respective sports. Engagement in sports could lead to the eradication/elimination of anti-social behaviour on campus.
5. Physical Education and Sports should be made compulsory in our universities and domiciled in the General Studies (GST) or General Education Studies (GES) Department. This provision will also serve the purpose of talent hunt, discovery and grooming.
6. There should be a policy that clearly defines the position of sports in the universities. The situation as it exists now where Universities sports are left to the whims and caprices of each university should be discontinued. A directive where each university is requested to make appropriate budgetary allocation to sports should emanate from the National Universities Commission (NUC) to the Vice Chancellors.
7. Sports in the universities should be run by a Committee/Council under the Vice Chancellor's office with membership drawn from the various Faculties/Colleges. This will bring the much desired co-operation between the sports office and lecturers as well as students.

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