DEVELOPING A MODEL TO PRODUCE ELITE AMATEUR GOLFERS IN MALAYSIA: A CONCEPT PAPER

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Abstract: *The Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success also known as SPLISS model identified nine pillars or policy areas that influence elite sporting success. The research was initially an international comparative study on the relationship between elite sports policy and international sporting success of nations and to benchmark against other competitors. In Malaysia, there are gaps on the relationship between the elite sports policy in golf specific and its international sporting success. This research intends to use the model to determine the relationship of effective sports policy in golf and the generation of elite amateur golfers who can win at the international level. The nine pillars that determine the effectiveness and efficiency of elite policies are financial support, structure and governance in elite sport, sports participation, talent identification and development, (post) athletic career support, training facilities, coach education and support, international competition and scientific research and innovation. This paper also aims to evaluate how these throughputs are applied in order to maximize the possibility of Malaysian amateur golfers become successful in international competitions and improve their world amateur rankings. This concept paper intends to be an introduction to a new model that will be beneficial to the national governing body (NGB) responsible for the policy and development of elite amateur golfers in this country.*

Keywords: *SPLISS model, elite sports policy, international sporting success, national governing body*

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Introduction

There are many models of conceptual research based framework for the development of young talents or elite athletes in sport. A model introduced by Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) called *Deliberate Practice* which is a highly structured activity engaged in with the specific goal of improving performance. The exceptional performance reflects extended period of intense training and preparation where in most domains take at least 10 years to attain expert levels of performance.

Another is *Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD)* developed in the early 2000s by Dr Istvan Balyi. The underlying aim of the LTAD framework is to match the coaching and development of children, to their physical and psychological growth and so optimizing both their enjoyment and training. According to Golf Canada which adopted the LTAD in its "Long term player development guide for golf in Canada": it provides a valuable roadmap to develop a pathway to creating champions.

Cote & Hay (2002) introduced the *Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP)* that emphasizes the importance of developmentally appropriate training patterns through three stages of development: Sampling (aged 6-12), specializing (aged 13-15) and investment (aged 16 and above). In contrast to deliberate practice theory, athletes should undertake deliberate practice only in the specializing and investment years, which will result in athletes attaining sporting excellence in fewer years.

In contrast to the previous models, Green and Haulihan (2005) argue that four dimensions of elite sport development feature significantly in determining the nature and adequacy of any elite sport system. They are: (1) the development of elite sport facilities; (2) the emergence of 'full-time" athletes; (3) developments in coaching, sports science and sports medicine and (4) competition opportunities for athletes at the elite level. Elite is defined as those competing at a national and international level.

Following Green and Haulihan (2005) elite sport system, and one of the more popular models used in measuring elite sport organizational effectiveness is the SPLISS model. According to De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg and Shibli (2006), the success of an athlete or team is increasingly dependent on the performance capability of the national organization and its effectiveness in utilizing all related means for the advantage of the elite sport.

Robinson and Minikin (2012) later accorded that sporting success is the result of the competitive advantage that sport organizations can create by developing athletes capable of achieving international sporting success. It is generally accepted that any sport development program can be considered as a product of strategic management. Hence, a systemic and strategic view of the sport organization is extremely useful to identify critical factors that may impact or influence the performance and international sporting success (Green and Oakley, 2001).

In elite sport the immediate output is athletes achieving success at the highest levels both local and internationally. Competition in international sport is increasing and more nations are adopting strategic approaches to develop world class athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2010). The positive impact of elite sport success on national pride, international prestige and increasing participation (Grix and Carmichael, 2012) has led to many countries emphasizing the need for excellence in performance and medal winning success.

In the case of golf, international success can be winning major tournaments like the PGA or be in the top 100th of the official world ranking. The ranking is determined by the athlete's current performance in competitions held by the respective professional or amateur organizations.

State of Golf in Malaysia

Malaysia is very much a sporting nation. Sports continue to be part of its culture and lifestyle. In fact, Malaysian National Sports Policy 1988 declared: "Sports deserve the same recognition and encouragement which were accorded to other basic social programmes such as education, transport, housing and health services so as to enable the government to achieve national development, unity and continued stability."

University of Stirling, Scotland in its research on "Developing the Malaysian Sport Industry" (2011) found that sport development system is not fully matured and considerable investment is necessary to bring its system to a higher standard. One of the many recommendations was that the National Sport Associations (NSAs) should lead the elite athlete development system in Malaysia. This is because the NSAs should know their sporting needs and requirements for their talent development.

Minikin and Robinson (2011) argued that NSAs have a central role in three key areas: running of competitions; athlete development and development of coaches. De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibli, van Bottenburg, and De Knop (2008) defined NSAs as the organization responsible for administering eligibility, rules, and competitions for their sport within a given nation. The use of strategic planning by NSAs is also encouraged to create the competitive advantage besides depending on high grade management skills.

The game of golf has a long history. Its origin can be traced to St. Andrews, Scotland some 250 years ago. Golf was brought to Malaya then by the British planters during the colonial era of 1880s. The golf courses were built in the estates as recreational facilities for the managers and senior government officials who were mainly expatriates.

Today, Malaysia has more than 200 golf courses and the latest estimate is in excess of 400,000 golfers (source MGA). With some of the best golf courses in the world such as the Mines Resort and Golf Club, Royal Selangor Golf Club and Kuala Lumpur Golf & Country Club (now TPCKL) and designed by top professionals from around the world, Malaysia has become a popular golf destination in South East Asia.

Malaysia is also known for its ability to organize big events like the CIMB Classic which is part of the PGA Tour, the Sime Darby LPGA Tour, the EurAsia Cup and the home grown Malaysian Open. Unfortunately, all these did not generate world class golfers given golf's popularity, availability of excellent facilities with great infrastructure and the investments that have gone into the game over the last four decades.

There is not much research being done specifically on the development of elite amateur golf in Malaysia. Basing on the many previous research on sports in general, the objective of this paper is to examine policies or factors and to propose ways that can contribute to an efficient and effective elite golf development model that can generate successful Malaysian golfers. Top golfers Annika Sorenstam and Jesper Parnevik describe themselves as 'product of the Swedish model' where support from their clubs, from the national team and from the competition structure in Sweden as important factors contributing to their success (Janson, 2004). Hopefully, future elite Malaysian golfers can be proud to associate themselves with the Malaysian model that contributes to their being in the world class category.

Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success in Golf

According to De Bosscher et al. (2006), sport policies have the interference of three levels: macro, meso and micro. The macro-level consists of the geographical, social and cultural characteristics where they cannot be controlled by political systems and policy makers. The meso-level includes the sport policies and actions that can influence sport performance in the long term. Micro-level is the individual characteristics of the athletes. The micro level is connected to the individual athletes and their close environment where certain elements of it can be controlled.

Strategic decisions at meso-level has become increasingly crucial and provide athletes greater chances of success in major international events. Meso-level sport policies are factors that can be intervened or changed and can have a fast effect on improving athlete performances in the longer term. It has implications for the management of elite sport, for policy makers and sport governing bodies like Malaysian Golf Association (MGA) and Professional Golf Association of Malaysia (PGAM).
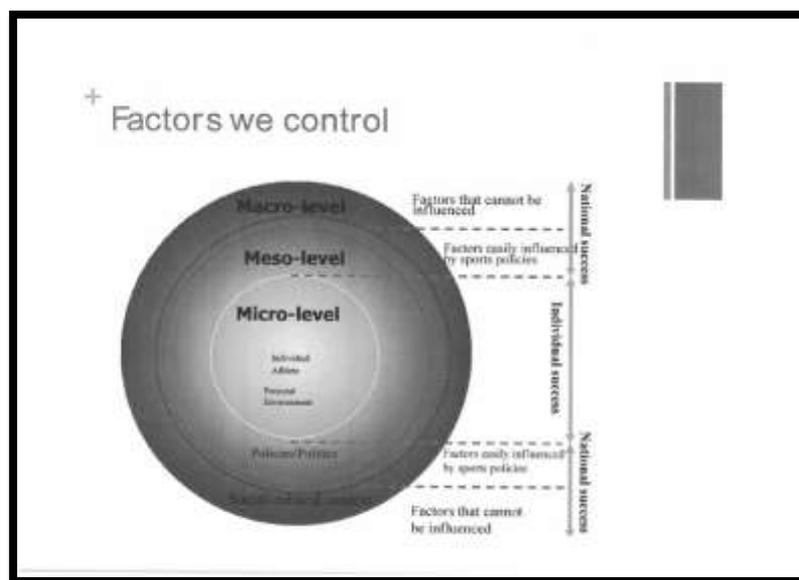

Figure 1: The 3 Levels

One of the most inclusive studies of meso-level factors that influence international sporting success is the Sport Policy Factors that Lead to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) model (De Bosscher, De Knop, van Bottenburg & Shibli, 2006, De Bosscher, De Knop, & van Bottenburg, 2009, De Bosscher, De Knop, van Bottenburg, Shibli, et al., 2009). SPLISS identifies nine pillars or policy areas as key elements that are necessary to improve the elite sport success of a nation.

The model categorizes nine pillars or sport policy areas that determine success namely:
1. Financial support
2. Integrated approach to policy development
3. Foundation and participation
4. Talent identification and development system
5. Athletic and post career support
6. Training facilities

7. Coaching provision and coach development
8. (inter)national competition and
9. Scientific research

The nine pillars of the SPLISS model essentially represent strategic policies that underpin the development of successful national elite sport development systems (Valenti, Scelles & Morrow, 2020). According to Be Bosscher (2018) and based on a recent study, most pillars correlate positively and significantly with sporting success. As international competitions among countries in sports is becoming stronger and financial support for elite is increasing, national governing bodies should focus on strategic approaches to develop world class athletes (Nova, 2017).

This paper sought to propose in terms of the nine pillars, a suitable model for elite golf development to produce world class golfers in Malaysia. Also, to strategically evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of elite sport policies and to rank the most important sports policy factors leading to international sporting success in the Malaysian golf scene.

The SPLISS model also assumes an organization is an open system comprising input, throughput and output (De Bosscher et al., 2006). The organizational input are resources invested in the sport development system, the process is the throughput and the goal achievement is the output. In this study, inputs are the financial support, throughputs are the mechanism or the process of talent identification and development and the outputs are the medals won by successful elite athletes at the international level. An additional output would be the generation of world class athletes who are ranked in the top one hundredth of the world amateur golf ranking (WAGR). The effects of the output are international prestige, national pride and good feeling. At the same time, the system is influenced by the environment of which they are part (Chelladurai, 2009). Environmental or external factors can have strong impact on the athletes' development like cultural, social or political system within the country.
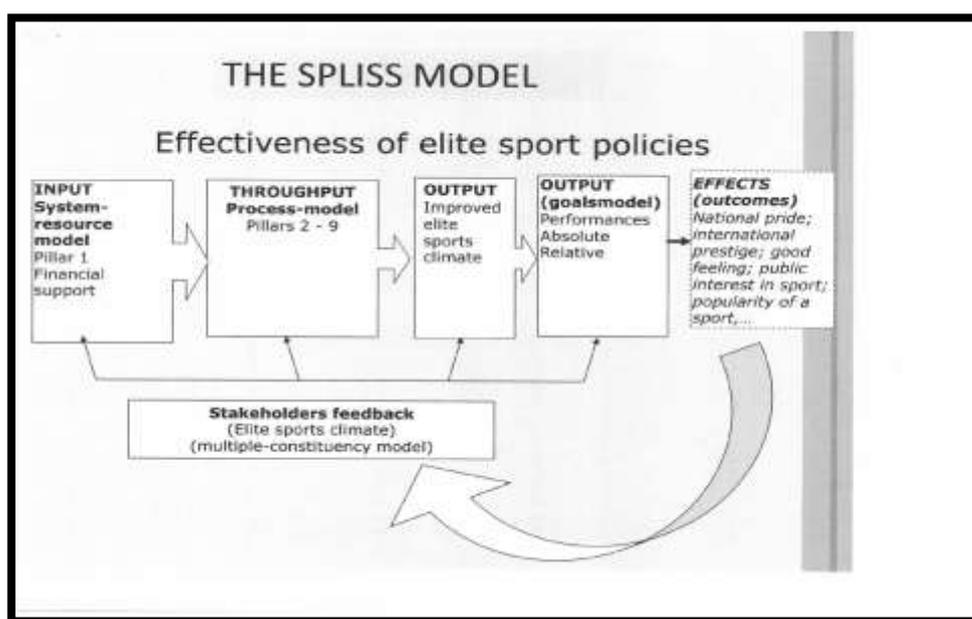

Figure 2: The SPLISS Model

Due to the positive impact of elite sport success on the country, sport has become an important aspect of government policy by providing funding and support for elite sport development initiatives. Countries invest in effective high performance sport policies to seek good results in international sporting events for prestige and national pride.

Also, elite sport development and related policies are significant for various social, political and financial reasons (Haulihan and Green, 2008; Shilbury, Sotiriadou, & Green, 2008; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). For many countries, there has been a steady increase in the investment for sport development and elite sport success (Houlihan and Green 2008, Nauright and Little 2008). Malaysia is no different. Generally, these investments are carried for seeking good results in major international sporting events and indirectly achieve political goals like better international prestige, national pride and internal socio-economic development promotion (Grix and Carmichael, 2012).

Many research were conducted to explain the reasons of success achieved by some countries and not by others. This helped nations understand how they resemble or differ from each other and how they may need to prepare for future challenges in elite sport. A systematic view of the sport organizations is useful in identifying critical factors that may influence the performance and international sporting success (Green and Oakley, 2001).
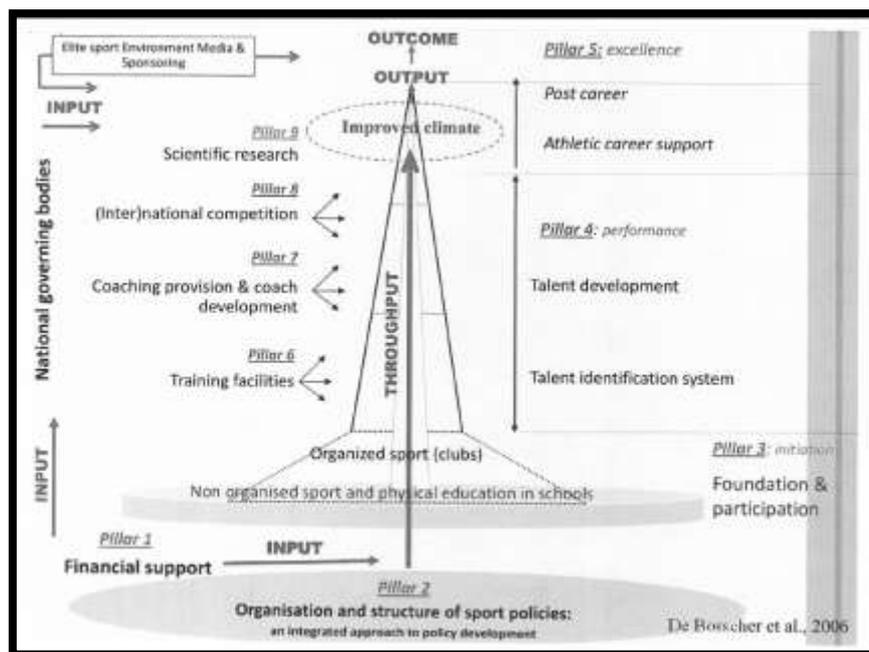

Figure 3: The Nine Pillars of SPLISS

Research Purpose

This paper addresses the need to study at the meso-level certain aspects of the elite sport policy and key success factors within a golf environment. The focus is on the relationship between policies and success, factors that will shape elite sport policies and the pathways in the development of elite or world class golfers in Malaysia. It will look at sport policy issues that can influence Malaysian elite golfers' personal performance and the nation's international sporting success.

Besides the nine pillars policy areas, the research also aims to highlight the importance of strategic planning in the quest to develop competitive edge by the NSAs. This is one of the key recommendations by Robinson (2011) for an internal driven strategic planning process amongst NSAs. There is a need for the NSAs to develop capabilities based on the strengths and values and create advantage by maximizing their resources that can contribute to the efficient development of world class golfers in Malaysia.

It is hoped that the proposed model is beneficial to the nation and can be put to use by the National golf associations in their effort to produce elite golfers.
The research questions driving this study are:
- What policy or factors that can identify talents in golf.
- Which factors are important for golf development?

Conceptual Framework
The SPLISS model indicates that elite sport policies can be evaluated at three stages; Inputs (pillar 1) as the financial support for elite sport. Throughputs (pillar 2-9) the support services and systems delivered to the athletes, coaches and organizations at each stage of the development process. Inputs and throughputs are the independent variables. Output, the dependent variable which will be the outcome or expected performance expressed in terms of successful golfers placed in the top 100th of the world ranking and winning major international competitions.

Methodology
Based on the theoretical model developed by De Bosscher et al. (2006), qualitative data via comprehensive investigation which will be carried out using open ended questionnaire with active golf professionals, top amateurs, golf teachers and coaches. Also, documents pertaining to elite development policies produced by the Nasional Sports Council, National Sports Institute and the golf NGB will be analyzed accordingly. Face to face in-depth interviews will be conducted with key personnel in the decision making processes of the Malaysian Golf Association and National Sports Council. These interviews will focus on validating the data collected and determine the strengths and weaknesses of each pillar and assess how the nine pillars of SPLISS can lead the NGB to develop an elite model that can contribute to producing elite amateur golfers of world class. The selection of the respondents will be based on their current involvement in the game of golf and the positions they hold in the associations during the period.

Conclusion
SPLISS focuses on the meso-level factors such as sports policies and politics that can lead to international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2010). This is the level where well considered sports policies and well-designed allocation of resources, programs and strategies may influence long term performance (Sotiriadou & Shilbury 2009). To achieve success at the international level, there is a need to have sport policies that are effective and efficient. The rivalry for medals at international sport competitions is getting fiercer, and achievement of sporting success is increasing significant to more and more countries (Brouwers, 2015). Elite sports success can be achieved by investing strategically (Oakley & Green 2001) which includes well-structured competitive programs, up-to-date facilities and availability of support like sports science. Thus, implementation of these measures can pave the way for effective elite golf development policies that can establish competitive advantage leading to success at the international level.

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