Sports Talent Identification and Selection in Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to review how Korea Institute of Sport Science (KISS) had carried out sports talent identification and selection for enhancing athletic performance over the last three decades. In the 1980s, KISS had to prepare for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games. So, KISS developed test items for sports talent identification for various sports and had identified 4,359 sports talents over 30 sport events. Moreover, KISS developed the standards for elite athlete and had selected talented athletes using them. In the 1990s after the two big sports events, KISS established Talented Athlete Selection Center and constructed the foundation of elite athlete recruitment system. In the 2000s, Korea had suffered a lot of difficulties in recruiting new athletes because of government's birth control policy effect and economic affluence. So, KISS developed an innovative sports talent identification program and had searched about 500 talented children every year. And KISS developed a new talented athlete selection program and had selected 1,682 talented athletes during 2000s. These new sports talent identification and selection programs are flourishing until now and would be the best sources of national team members in the future.

Key words: Sports Talent Identification, Sports Talent Selection

Introduction

Korea’s elite sports have been developed with policy support and coordination of the Korean government. Korea started to secure the position as a powerhouse in international sports through 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Summer Olympics. It strengthened its position as an international sports powerhouse retaining its place in the world’s top 10 through Barcelona 1992 Olympics. It won 13 gold, 8 silver and 7 bronze medals in London 2012 Olympics to achieve its best-ever results after 1988 Summer Olympics.

It is urgently required to have the systematic identification, selection and development for an ideal hierarchical for young and national team athletes along with the base expansion for a pool of athletes for the sustainable development of elite sports. In recent years, a decline in athletic performance has occurred as the number of student athletes has reduced due to the shrinkage of school athletic teams and changes in social awareness. In a situation that this decline in athletic performance is presented as a fundamental problem, it is more desperately needed to have the scientific athlete selection and systematic development.

The talented athlete identification and development project in Korea started with the launch of Sports Science Committee affiliated with Olympic Committee (KOC) in the 1960s. Korea Institute of Sport Science (KISS) established as the Sports Science Research
Center of the Korea Sports Council in 1980. And in 1989 KISS became an independent sports science research institute and served as a momentum which brought about a full-scale start of Korea’s sport science and played a key role in the support for talented athlete identification and development projects. KISS played an important role in stimulating the application of sport science for Korea national team athletes’ scientific training through continuous effort and development. Accordingly, it made a significant contribution to talented athlete development.

KISS has continuously made every effort to provide scientific support for talented athlete identification and development after its name was changed into Korea Institute of Sport Science. The projects implemented by KISS can largely be divided into the following three projects based on a 10 year period: ‘Identification Project for New Athletes in Preparation of 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympics’ promoted in the 1980s as Korea was scheduled to host 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympics; ‘Talented Athlete Identification Center Project’ newly carried forward since 1993 through know-how accumulated from ‘88 Prospective Young Athlete Project and the supplementation to the problems; and ‘Prospective Young Athlete Selection Project’ newly push ahead since 2000 and ‘Sports Talent Identification Project’ carried forward by Korea Foundation for the Next Generation Sports Talent (NEST). This study summarizes the activities and supports that Korea Institute of Sport Science had made related to talented athlete identification and development for the last thirty years.

Spots talent identification and talented athlete selection during 1980s

KISS started ‘Sports Talent Identification Project’ to support talented athlete identification and development in the 1980s. The project was launched as the opinion that Korea’s national team athletes’ performance had to be at the level suitable for the status of a host nation had been emphasized since Seoul was decided as a host city of Seoul 1988 Olympics in 1981. At the initial stage of ‘Sports Talent Identification Project’, KISS supervised and carried out the identification project for new athletes called ‘Identification Project for New Athletes in Preparation of 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympics’ with the strong support of the Ministry of Sports.

For this project, it first conducted the studies to set up physical fitness test items and standards for the selection of new athletes. After that, it carried out the support project for talented athlete development and the management of ‘Talented Athlete Selection Center’.

KISS performed the following functions: identifying new promising athletes with great potential in preparation of ‘86 Asian Games’ and ‘88 Olympics’; calculating the appropriate age to demonstrate the best performance at ‘86 Asian Games’ and ‘88 Olympics’ with the purpose of expanding the base for a pool of promising athletes; and creating the standards through many different tests and studies related to physique, physical strength, physiology and medicine (Lee et al., 1983).

KISS had established all the plans and completed an education for test administrators between March and May 1982. It prepared a vehicle for a test, made a tour of seven physical education high schools in the country to conduct sample tests in June 1982. The test was administered in a total of 46 items in five sectors: 12 items in the physique factor such as height, weight, and chest circumference; 14 items in physical strength such as running, long jump and pull-ups; 4 items in psychological testing related to a stability, a human nature and self-concept; 13 items in physiology such as EMG (electromyogram), ECG (electrocardiogram), lung capacity and blood; and 2 items in other sectors such as hereditary nature and sporting history. The test had been administered for 1,280 students (901 physical education middle and high school students, 366 champions by event in National Junior Sports Festival and 13 national team athletes) in seven physical education