

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a country with a long and glorious tradition in sports and athletics has brought more medals at elite competitions for Sri Lanka than any other sport. Sri Lanka's failure to win a single medal at elite competitions in athletics during the last 10 years is a matter of prime concern for the country. Thus, it is of vital importance to identify an appropriate strategy that could help Sri Lanka to achieve sustainable performance and win medals at elite competitions.

This study undertook a critical evaluation concerning numerous aspects of elite athletes in Sri Lanka by a detailed analysis using qualitative research methods and focused on identifying a strategic plan for development of athletics by adapting the existing models that have led other nations to win medals. The organizations involved were the Athletics Association, National Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Sports. The literature review showed that this subject is a global sporting competition, where a country or specific organization has to do something remarkably special to yield success.

The data obtained was synthesized to provide an easy understandable analysis. In order to illustrate some structural aspects, information was displayed in form of SWOT, with the main purpose to reflect and include a comparison within and in between interviews and combine separate descriptions to formulate a coherent interpretation. The SWOT allowed to draw broader theoretical summaries and conclusions. A Sri Lankan version of the LTAD Model of Canada which is designed and developed as a framework combining the best research findings of latest sports science, is recommended for introduction in all schools and universities in Sri Lanka, in order to facilitate producing of elite athletes.

Having given due weightage, the Sri Lankan athletics scenario was summarized under the 'Traffic Lights' system. Out of the nine themes, only Training Facilities found to be under 'Light Green'. Seven of the themes viz., Financial Support, Integrated Approach to Policy Development, Foundation and Participation in Sport, Athletic and Post Career Support, International Competition, Talent Identification and Development System and Coaching Provision and Coach Development were found to be under 'Yellow'. The remaining theme of Scientific Research was under 'Red'. Thus, Sri Lanka appears to be lagging behind.

Contd.,

During the last 25 years Sri Lanka has reached the Asian Games podium in sprint events - 100m, 200m, 400m (Men and Women), 100m Hurdles (Women) and 4 x 400m Relay (Men). Accordingly, these events could be identified as high potential medal winning events for Sri Lanka. It is recommended that Sri Lanka Athletics consider Asian Games Medals as the measure of success particularly considering the size of the likely medal haul in a very successful Olympic Games for a country like Sri Lanka. One of the possible 'short cuts' to achieve short-term success is through 'cross sport' talent identification and development.

The key findings for implementation included having an additional three themes, viz., Parents, Family and Religion (T 10), Nutrition and Innovation (T 11) Media and Communication (T 12) also added for the study of athletics in Sri Lanka as well as recommendations on 'Unbeatable Coaches', 'Sustainability in the Quest for Gold', 'Excellence', 'Inspiration' and 'Pathway to Glory'. The Great Britain's World Class Performance Programmes', 'Podium' could be a short-term goal for Sri Lanka. Other distinct levels, 'Development' and 'Talent' mainly designed for athletes who have the potential to progress, could be long-term perspectives.

In order to develop a strategic approach in a Sri Lankan context to achieve sustainable performance at elite level, the National Federation should firstly strive to boost up the themes that blink 'Red' and 'Yellow' to reach 'Light Green' and then endeavour to make all the themes 'Dark Green', by optimum utilization of the available resources. The first and foremost need for the National Federation of Athletics would be to implement the proposed 'Strategic Plan for Athletics in Sri Lanka for 2018 – 2022' efficiently and effectively. The planning process should be comprehensive and should include the operating environment, role of vision, mission and objectives as well as developing plans.

In the face of remarkable human resources and infrastructure facilities available, it is not surprising to see why athletics remains one of the most popular sports disciplines in Sri Lanka. If properly concentrated on all twelve themes, Sri Lanka could certainly count on improved success at elite level in the most important Olympic sport of athletics.

Keywords: Elite Athletes, Sustainable Development, Strategic Plan, Elite Competitions