

Military Offers Opportunities for Women in Top Sport

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Appendix A: Competition Opportunities.

SYNOPSIS: The utilisation of top level sport opportunities by women in the Armed Forces is a burning issue. The current paper explores this issue and proposes twelve checkpoints as final conclusions to unlock the available opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

1. During the 1996 Scientific Symposium, the Warendorf Case Study was presented. This presentation raised pertinent questions on the development of female sport in the Armed Forces. Although opportunities were indicated, the comprehensiveness and equality between member states were identified as an area of growth. With this as background the South African delegation analysed its specific situation and identified a few critical issues which should be addressed in future. In sharing these issues, using the current paper, we would like to stimulate discussions and further input from the richness of CISM thought to enhance the role of female sport.

AIM

2. To make recommendations on ways to utilise the existing opportunities for women in the military to participate in top level sport.

SCOPE

3. During the presentation the following issues will be addressed:

- a. Environmental Scan
- b. Strong Points
- c. Weak Points
- d. Opportunities
- e. Threats
- f. Integration Between Strong Points, Weak Points, Opportunities and Threats
- g. Opportunity and Checklist
- h. Recommendations

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

4. In addressing a sensitive issue such as female sport in the Armed Forces it is always important to take the different environmental factors into account. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the detail of the South African National Defence Force's (SANDF) environmental factors pertaining to female sport, but it is important to note that there is a positive drive from Government to address gender equality in all spheres of life. This intention by Government is strongly supported in the SANDF. With reference to sport three major aspects must be taken into account viz: Competition, Leisure and Health awareness.

- a. Competition. The most significant trend is the importance of competition, the focus that is placed on results and the formal conduct of sport events, with an intensification of rivalry, victory, defeat, rules and regulations. In competitive sport, the quest for performance will generally continue and will result in a further increase in achievements, both at the top level, and for the overall standard in all relevant disciplines. Results will not only be improved through extra training time, but will improve through quality and circumstances affecting participation.
 - b. Leisure. The need for play, enjoyment, adventure in the field of sport, along with a reduced dependence on clubs and a pronounced detachment from norms and roles. The result is a social life becoming more sports-orientated.
 - c. Health Awareness. The third main trend is gaining in popularity. Fitness and related sports, are a reaction to bodily shortcomings as an immediate result of our high-tech world and thus as a biological regulator to stimulate bodily movement. Sport became a specialised means for rehabilitation after illness or accident. Sport closely connects the concept of health awareness with the awareness of one's the individual manifestation of which body, language, and self assessment is included as a strong social component.
- health
Sport
body,
5. The environmental scan led to an analysis of the strong points, weak points, opportunities and threats to female sport with special reference to top level participation.

STRONG POINTS

6. The Military Psychological Institute of the SANDF was contracted by the Directorate Sport to identify the strong points of female sport. The research identified nine significant areas in order of priority.

- a. It ensures a healthy way of life and promotes personal health.
- b. It promotes self-confidence and team work.
- c. It develops high group moral.
- d. It promotes the image of the SANDF.
- e. It promotes physical fitness and ensures that members of the SANDF portray an acceptable personal bodily profile of themselves
- f. It promotes psychological alertness.
- g. It promotes the integration of different military and life cultures.
- h. It develops a high spirit of victory, but not at the expense of good sportswomanship.
- i. It contributes to operational skills through institutional types of sport.

7. These nine strong points can be seen as the driving force behind female sport participation in the SANDF:

WEAK POINTS

8. A questionnaire was sent to 1 000 SANDF women who identified the following WEAK POINTS of female sport.

- a. Workload, shifts and the shortage of personnel.
- b. Access to facilities catering for female sport.
- c. Domestic obligations. (Motherhood and house wives).
- d. Women are under-represented in sport decision-making bodies.
- e. There is no equity between the funds allocated to male and female sports people by private sector sponsors.

OPPORTUNITIES

9. Analysing the opportunities open to women in the SANDF reveals a strong positive picture. The current system allows opportunities in all levels of participation. These opportunities are not only available within the Military leg of competitions but also in the civilian sector. These opportunities are ensured by the sport participation policy of the SANDF. The opportunities are open ended. (See Appendix A for competition opportunities).

THREATS

10. In the same study, where a 1 000 women were questioned, the following threats to female sport were also identified:

- a. The influence of traditional cultures which do not always value the achievements of women in top level sport.
- b. Economic and social barriers related to the traditional role of women. Marriage, motherhood and domesticity are still valued as priorities above top sport achievements.
- c. Recognition of women's achievements by the media is still inadequate and selective; resulting in only a few effective role models for young women.

INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE STRONG POINTS, WEAK POINTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

11. Reading through the different aspects enables one to clearly see the *gap* between the strong points and opportunities on the one hand and the weak points and threats on the other hand. Bridging this gap is the challenge to each and every sport practitioner. This gap indicates the developmental potential in female sport. It must be remembered that we are searching for future solutions in a positive sense. This immediately directs us to the area of opportunities, although the other areas are no less important and provides us with a wealth of information, the focus of this paper is how to unlock the endless opportunities. To prevent a theoretical discussion the writer proposes a checklist which can be utilised to guide the sport practitioner in unlocking the opportunities for females to achieve, in top level sport.

OPPORTUNITY CHECKLIST

12. Growth in Number of Participants per Level of Competition. Put a statistical system in place which can provide management information on the tendencies of female participation per level of competition. Set aims to steadily increase participation annually.
13. Facilities. Do an annual audit of all the facilities catering for female disciplines. Set goals to improve the numbers annually.
14. Health Measurement. Install a program to evaluate the health status (fitness) of women in your organisation every six months. Motivate them to show a steady improvement over time.
15. Sport Disciplines. Do an audit of the sport disciplines available to women in your organisation. Set goals to improve this situation over time.
16. Perceptions and Negative Attitudes. Facilitate discussion groups where participants question old beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes.
17. Multi Disciplinary Approach. Did the organisational team apply the multi disciplinary approach to improve performance (Force multiplier).
18. Support of General Staff. Plan and execute a frequent briefing to General Staff on the gains and achievements of sportswomen.
19. Management. Audit the representation of women in sport decision-making bodies where decisions are made which will have an impact on female sport. Set clear aims to increase participation.
20. Organisational Constraints. Put a workgroup together to analyse organisational constraints with reference to female sport eg Policy. Rectify such imbalances.
21. Role Models. Utilise appropriate sportswomen to act as role models. Distribute these role models between the different sport codes. Use role models to introduce lesser known codes.
22. Sponsorship. Negotiate sponsorships with those companies which can benefit from the relationship.
23. Administration. Train and utilise ladies in officiating, coaching and other leadership roles.
24. Recognition. Re-evaluate the way in which women receive recognition for achievements. strive toward parity between males and females.
25. These 13 practical check points stand out as priorities in the effort to unlock opportunities. It might differ from situation to situation. Other points may come into play under specific circumstances. The writer however believes that the check points mentioned will go a long way to open up opportunities for women to participate in top level sport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. Each CISM member country should have a set-out plan to unlock opportunities for women to participate in top level sport.
27. Each member country must install a statistical system to gain management information on female sport participation.
28. A checklist as was described in this paper which must form part of sport practitioner's duty sheets. This should be part of the performance appraisal of sport officers.
29. These three recommendations puts into practice a plan, measurement and control to enhance female sport in the Armed Forces.