

‘THINK-HOME’: A PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MOVING SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA INTO NEW FRONTIERS

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Abstract

Sports management in Africa is still lagging behind those of the more advanced nations of the world. Lack of sound and relevant philosophical guide-post was implicated as one of the factors responsible for this unsatisfactory situation. This paper, therefore, recommended the “Think-Home” philosophy for African countries. According to this philosophy traditional physical education and sports activities which are consistent and relevant to Africa’s way of life should guide sports management decisions and actions. It is a call on African countries to rediscover themselves vis-à-vis their performances in global sports meets. This paper highlighted some of traditional physical education and sports activities in African contexts and then drew attention to colonial incursion as being responsible for Africa’s poor performance in international competitions. The paper also related excellence in specific sporting activities to some specific cultures. It was then concluded that it is only when African nations focus their sports development efforts on sporting activities that are consistent with their culture and environment that they can move sports management in their respective countries into new frontiers.

Keywords: Think-Home, Philosophical Framework, Sports Management, New Frontier

Introduction

Today, Africa has realized that she is lagging behind such sporting nations as United States of America, Germany, Canada etc. Most countries in Africa do not record impressive sports performances both at the national and international meets. The records set at such mega sports meets as the Olympic Games provide standards for each nation to judge itself.

A look at the positions of African countries on the Olympic medals table will be necessary to enable us appreciate the performance level of Africa.

	Olympic	1 st African Country on the Medals Table	Position
1.	2004 – Athens	Ethiopia	28 th
2.	2000 – Sydney	Kenya	29 th
3.	1996 – Atlanta	Kenya	28 th
4.	1992 – Barcelona	Kenya	22 nd
5.	1988 - Seoul	Kenya	17 th
6.	1984 – Los Angelis	Kenya	25 th
7.	1980 – Moscow	Ethiopia	18 th
8.	1972 – Munic	Kenya	16 th

Source: <http://www.darmoni.net/joete.htm>

By any stretch of imagination the picture of Africa painted in the above table is unacceptable. There is the need for African countries to improve their performances, especially, in international sports arenas. The table raises so many questions like: Is Africa made up of Ethiopia and Kenya alone? Are the performances of the two countries so wonderful? Where are the other countries in Africa? What is the problem with sports development in Africa?

The 8th All African Games, otherwise called Abuja 2003, named the game’s Mascot “Wakie Wakie” which is a call on Africa to “wake-up.” In one of the games bulletin titled ‘Nigeria awaits the 8th all African Games’, it is explained that Mascots convey the spirit and character of the games; they communicate the mood, style and aspirations of the games. The choice of a cock, then, as the Mascot for the 8th all Africa Games appropriately signifies the need for Africa to wake up in sports matters. It

is popularly acknowledged in Africa that cock heralds the beginning of a new dawn. The opportunity of this game was expected to awaken a new thought and direction for moving sports in African into new frontier.

African countries have had enough dwindling sports fortunes. Many factors can be held responsible for this poor showing. This author believes that lack of clear-cut philosophy in sports management is one of those factors. Sports management entails the effective manipulation of the men, materials, money, and machines so that ends could be attained optimally and adequately (Ikhuoya, 2001) A good and relevant philosophy is necessary to secure achievement of the above stated expectations. According to Bucher and Krotee (1998) philosophy promotes the development and clarification of beliefs and values that serve as a foundation for the behaviour and ultimately the performance outcome of the management team and organization. They noted that one of the fundamental components of management and one that is often neglected is the establishment of a sound philosophy concerning physical education and sports. Writing on Physical Education in Nigeria, Momodu (1998) observed that in the statement of objectives not clear enunciation of the philosophy of the curriculum or its rationale and aims is evident. While contributing ideas on effective organisation of sports in Nigeria too Amuchie (1977) suggested development of a sound philosophy. Still on the importance of sound philosophy Okeem (1982) quoted Maritain as having stated thus in relation to philosophy of History:

The philosophy of history has an impact on our actions. In my opinion many mistakes we are now making in social and political life proceed from the fact that, while we have many true principles, we do not always know how to apply them intelligently. Applying them intelligently depends to a great extent on a genuine philosophy of history. If we lack in this, we run a great risk of applying good principles wrongly – a misfortune, not only for us but for our good principles as well .

This author shares the view that a relevant philosophy of sports management practice in Africa, and indeed any other country or continent, should derive from the history of such nations. It is from this perception that this paper hopes to address the problem of inadequate philosophy for effective sports management in Africa. The ‘Think-Home’ philosophy is, therefore, being propounded for the African countries as a promising guide for moving sports management in African into new frontier.

The ‘Think-Home’ Philosophy

The “Think-Home” Philosophy was propounded by the first civilian Executive Governor of Anambra State of Nigeria, His Excellency Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, in 1992. The press Department of the Government House Awka (1993) explained that this was a strategy adopted by the governor to persuade the wealthy people of Anambra State to contribute individually and collectively to the speedy development of the young state. The governor made the call when he noticed that wealthy people of Anambra State origin, who live in other states of Nigeria, play very significant roles in the development of those states but without much contribution in their home state. Hence the call to “Think-Home”.

In the face of dwindling sports fortunes in Africa today it has become necessary to redirect the minds of sports managers in Africa towards a viable approach to moving sports in Africa forward. The “Think-Home” in relation to sports development in Africa, would require every country in Africa to look back to their history and identify those sporting activities that are consistent with their culture and environment and channel their effort and resources towards their development. Cultural and environmental factors do suggest certain physical education and sports activities for a group or society. Such activities are usually interwoven with the people’s way of life. Performance of these activities are usually natural to the people of the society in question. When such activities are identified and development efforts focused on them in different countries of Africa, it is expected that the hope of making it to even international level will be brighter.

The Issue

Sports development and management in almost all Africa countries is very much tied to their colonial experiences. The practice is, therefore, dominated and determined by foreign ideas and influences. The scramble for Africa in the 19th Century by the British, French, Portuguese, and the German resulted in colonization of the counties in Africa by these overlords, Fafunwa (1980) noted that during the colonial regime, Western education of one type or another was introduced to the countries and that each of the affected countries has taken on some of the characteristics of the cosmopolitan power in terms of the social, cultural, economic, and political practices. Writing on the situation in Tanzania Okeem (1982) reported that the German enforced their sovereignty and established their administration by a series of wars, punitive expeditions, and suppressive campaigns. The average African was conditioned to believe that the European was a superior individual and therefore, made themselves slaves of the colonial systems (Fafunwa,1980). Cultural values and practices were therefore abandoned for the foreign and completely alien way of life. This new way of life completely neglected the traditional and familiar practices. According to Okeem (1982) exposure to the modern led to the abandonment of the old and the acquisition of the new life-style which implies triumph of the new over the old order.

In the spirit of the 'Think-Home' Philosophy being propounded in this paper, all hopes for rekindling African nature in sports development and management are not lost. "If Africa is to make progress unconventional approaches ... will have to be devised (Fafunwa, 1980). In the words of Joyce Cary as reported in Okeem (1982):

...any given civilization however primitive, in Africa as in Europe, has a life of its own. It consist of people who have grown up with certain ideas, ties, obligation, expectations, and a certain relation with their government. Any sudden and violent change in such a civilization, or its method of government, is like the dislocation of a human body. It breaks what was a living and homogenous unit, possibly crude and simple in form, but self-respecting and energetic, into a mere scattering of human units, despondent and usually corrupt p.158.

African countries can still wake up from this despondency in their sports management. One of the sure way to achieve this is by focusing sports management practices in the sports that are consistent with Africa cultural heritage. Every country in Africa and elsewhere has some physical activities and sports skills which are traditional to her in which she has a competitive advantage over other nations.

Physical Education and Sports In Traditional African Contexts

Before the advent of Europeans various ethnic groups in Nigeria and indeed in Africa had sporting activities as components of their cultural life (Omoruan, 1996). He also noted that in African tribal life, men and women enjoyed leisure, not according to "Clock-time" but whenever they were free from the routine of daily life. Such leisure time activities, according to him, include wrestling, archery, horse racing, acrobatic feats, fishing, and hunting. Commenting on physical education and sports in the early days in Nigeria, Oduyale (1983) reported that there was a great deal of natural play in the streets and alleys. According to him among the local people in Lagos for example, wrestling, dancing and acrobatic activities were common physical activities which had been handed down from their great ancestors. Around 1900 in Nigeria, children practiced physical and sporting activities after school in front of huts, on the farm, in the open private spaces where boys were taught various techniques in wrestling, sword bearing, throwing the spear and archery by their peer groups (Adedeji, 1980). According to him, dung hills were used in teaching stunts, somersaults, and tumbling skills, roadsides were used as practice areas by boys while running errands for agility like Cart-wheel, Arab spring, high and long jumps over tree trunks and across streams.

Illustrating Kenyan sports performance structure, Njororai (2003) identified two major players as external and internal factors. Contextually the external factors fit into the present discourse. According to him the external factors consists of the natural environmental conditions such as climate, weather, attitude, terrain etc. In a similar sense, Pufaa (2003) noted that before colonial incursion into Ghana the communities practiced traditional games and sports which were generally related to the economic and social interest, traditional practices, as well as environmental needs of the people. In specific terns he identified rope pulling, running, rowing, swimming, boxing, throwing of missiles,

wrestling, climbing, shooting and jumping. Writing on sport in Tanzania Ogundare (2003) noted that the country is made up of about one hundred and twenty -three tribes and that in their traditional setting games and sports were practiced according to the needs, ways of life and style of the diverse communities. "Think-Home" is of the view that the various traditional sporting activities in African countries are suggestive of areas where the countries are most likely to have competitive advantage in international competitions. Presently most African concentrate and channel their resources and energies towards sporting activities which their colonial masters brought to them only to go to international sports meets to compete with them.

From the afore - going, the following sporting or related sporting activities seem to have been suggested for African Countries to channel substantial part of their available resources towards their development. These include: wrestling, boxing, swimming, gymnastic activities, tract athletics, sprints, middle distance raced, long distance raced, field athletics, Javelin, shots put, discuss, long jump, high jump, relays, and hurdles etc.

The 'Think- Home' Philosophy would require countries in Africa to recapitulate the traditional African nature of Physical activities as a guide to the choice of sporting activities to emphasis in their sports management plans. To do this African nations should consider their geographical features, religious dispositions, level of technological development, the anthropometric dispositions of her citizenry, and the economic and political climates prevalent in the localities. Management of culturally related sports in Africa is expected to yield more impressive results as against management of foreign ones. The sports related to people's way of life promise to be less expensive to develop as availability of personnel and natural facilities can always be guaranteed and people are naturally familiar with the skills. African countries should, for now, prune down the number of championship sports and channel development efforts to the few which are consistent with their culture and environment. It is better to participate and make impact in few sports than to participate in every sport with little or nothing to show for it.

When the Europeans colonized Africa they introduced their own systems of education, which included sporting activities. They brought with them such games as football, handball, netball, hockey, cricket, tennis, badminton, table tennis etc. Non of the above mentioned sports has its origin in Africa. As had been pointed by Okeem (1982) exposure to these modern sports led to abandonment of the indigenous ones. The sports experiences in the various schools were completely new and lacked originality. The white man's sports were preferred to the detriment of the indigenous ones. Even when the new sports prove to be more expensive to administer than the indigenous ones, African countries continue to lavish their scarce resources on them just to answer participants. The white man's sports became so popular that African countries seem to have forgotten the fact that it is the number of gold and other medals a country wins in international sports meets that gives her a place in the sports performance rating and not necessarily the number of athletes they took to the competition.

Most of the sports introduced by the white men in Africa are team games and majority of those related to African culture are either individual or dual sports. It is by far more expensive to raise a team than to train one or two athletes for individual and dual sports respectively. African economy generally is not known to be buoyant for very expensive sports programmes. A win in a team game attracts a medal just as a win in individual or dual sport would also attract a medal. A gold medal in football is not greater than a gold medal in wrestling. At the end of sporting competitions the number of medals won by each of the participating country is counted and the type and number forms the basis for rating. While not asking the African countries to completely stop participating in the numerous imported team games, one could still question the justification for the continued huge material and human resources being expended in these sports over the years. Most African countries have not made significant impact in these sports despite the huge sums of money they expended in them even at the expense of other social needs. Now is the time for African countries to reexamine their sports management philosophy and try to come to terms with the reality of their cultural and environmental dispositions.

The environment of a nation could naturally predispose the inhabitants to one form of physical activity or the other. In other words the nature of a country's environment may dictate what sporting activity they play. Sports and games provide a touch stone for understanding how people live, work, and think (Cozens and stumpf, 1953). The political, social and economic nature of a nation's environment: availability of such features as hills and mountains, rivers and lakes, snow etc have implications for physical activities and sports within an area. But it is only when the occupants of the

area recognize and harness their natural endowment that they could be expected to excel in the related sporting activities.

Many nations have excelled in sports which can be related to their nature and their environment. The Americans are normally tall and so they exploit that height for such games as basketball and volleyball. Also American society can be viewed as relatively rough and perhaps this justifies their preference for rough and vibrant sports such as rugby and American style of wrestling. Since they are a buoyant economy and technologically advanced they could afford divergent and expensive sports programmes. The same can be said of such sporting nations as Germany, Canada, South Africa etc. The hilly topography of the East African Countries implies the necessity for endurance in the normal everyday engagements. The East Africans, therefore, excel in endurance activities like the long distance races. In Brazil football has become part of the culture and every child naturally grows up to play football. The environment of such countries as China, Korea, Japan made it necessary for individuals to be ready to defend themselves at any point in time. The nationals of these countries, therefore, excel in martial arts like Karate, Kong-Fu, Taekwondo etc. Even within a country people from different parts prove to be better in one form of sporting activity or the other due to the peculiar circumstances of their environments. Think-Home is also concerned with African country identifying the sporting predispositions of the different sections of each country and try to harness and encourage them.

Conclusion

The author would want to conclude this paper with the following questions for the African Nations: What were the traditional pass time activities of the people of your country? Which of them are related to the sporting activities which feature in National and International sports meets? What natural sporting facilities are obtainable in your locality? How far have you tried to harness them in your sports management plans? How buoyant is your economy and how have you tried to define the scope and depth of your sports programmes in relation to the economy of your country? Have you tried to explore all cultural aspects in your environments which are capable of enhancing your sports performance outcomes? By trying to provide answer to the above questions African Nations would be compelled to "Think-Home", which this paper believes, has potentials for moving sports management in the entire continent of Africa into new frontiers. When African countries channel their efforts and resources to development of those culturally related sporting activities they stand a good chance of making a significant mark in both National and International sports competitions.

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