



Managing a confederation of rivals

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ABSTRACT

This case highlights sport development issues within a free market environment where natural rivals compete for scarce resources (i.e., athletes). Set in a fictional environment of sport clubs grappling with the development of a network of clubs and coaches to support the growth of youth sport in the area, the case explores the challenges of two independent levels of policy-making – national and grassroots levels – for increased participation and elite development. At the national level, policy strategies and participation proliferation are best served when organizations work together; however, this becomes a challenge when organizations that implement these policies at the grassroots level compete for scarce resources. The resulting natural rivalries must be properly managed to meet larger objectives for growth. The case encourages students to consider the theoretical and practical issues for sport development at the grassroots and national level.

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Teaching note

1. Managing a confederation of rivals teaching note and overview in class

The case purposely uses ambiguous sport clubs in a regional area in the United States to help students consider sport development challenges directly related to the participation and growth of the sport. Jen, a young sport manager trying to set up an inter-organizational network among the clubs in her region, grapples with the challenges of sport development due to conflict. In the case, Jen introduces a number of challenges due to the conflict that directly relate to the sport development issues. Therefore, students must consider both issues and think about creative solutions for managing that conflict while developing youth sport.

The case presents Jen's analysis of the problem based on her phone calls to the club and sport representatives in her region. The case is based on real data; however, the names given to the representatives are all pseudonyms. Although the specific sport setting for this case was Triathlon in the US, the issues faced by Jen are general enough that any sport struggling with youth development issues would find relevance. Therefore, students can be directed to the Internet to explore the sport development policy and programs specifically related to their sport of interest. If this is not ideal for the instructor, we have provided additional background information on Triathlon at the end of this teaching note.

1.1. Sport development

Sport development has long been a concern of policymakers in national and international federations (Chalip, Johnson, & Stachura, 1996; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Hylton & Bramham, 2008). There are two compelling issues that are revealed when

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national governing bodies (NGBs) and/or national sport organizations (NSOs) consider development: (1) growing participation, and (2) enhancing competitive standards (Green, 2005). This association has been depicted as the Sport Development Metaphor, or the participation pyramid, where a wide base of participation supports the high performance peak (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008).

These two concepts are intertwined, as the objective of policy is to create a deep pool of athletes from which elite competitors can be drawn (Broom, 1991; Green & Oakley, 2001). In the interest of continued growth and participation, governing bodies develop policy and programs for youth participation as an overarching national strategy. In order to meet these strategic objectives, governing bodies rely on regional and local volunteer associations to implement them.

The challenge in sport settings is that there are two interdependent levels of policy-making: a national (or league) level and a club (or team) level. Although both seek to develop participation in their sport, clubs compete with one another for members and compete to become excellent. Thus, they are natural rivals. On the other hand, at the aggregate (league or national) level the overall development of a sport, particularly the formulation of policies pursuant to the sport's growth, is best served by the proliferation of clubs and cooperation among them. The resulting confederation of rivals must consequently be managed to mitigate the effects of the natural competition among clubs (Chalip & Scott, 2005; Szymanski & Ross, 2007).

In the US, sport clubs offer one option (of many) for sport delivery for youth among recreation leagues, interscholastic leagues, church leagues, and private clubs. Decisions to continue within the sport are often based directly on that participant's sport club experience. Therefore, clubs provide the foundation of sport development, and as a result, are at the core of a sport's sustainability (Green, 2005). There has been substantial work demonstrating how organizations, such as clubs, have played a significant role in providing sport opportunities for youth (Beamish, 1985; Chalip & Scott, 2005; MacPhail, Kirk, & Eley, 2003; Siedentop, 2002). In the interest of continued growth and participation, governing bodies develop policy and programs for youth participation and rely on these organizations to implement them. However, the models for such programs at the grassroots level are often insufficiently developed to optimize effectiveness. Further, the quality of experience by the youth participants, especially in the US, is hindered by an over-valued focus on competition rather than participation and skill development (Green & Chalip, 1997). The value of such youth sport programs has, in turn, been questioned (Beamish, 1985; Berryman, 1975; Chalip & Scott, 2005; Siedentop, 2002), especially when youth programs reflect an adult model for sport programming and do not take into account that youths' sport needs may be different. This point is highlighted in the case as the coaches struggle with program vision and proper coaching techniques for youth. This is an important point to make to students. Are current policies and programs for development the best option for youth? Are there better models for sport delivery that could be considered? There has been a paucity of scholarly research that examines how grass roots level youth development programs integrates with national strategic planning. Additionally, there has been even less discussion in the classroom.

1.2. *Managing a confederation of rivals*

Governing bodies must develop strategies that not only meet the objectives for advancing participation and enhancing competition nationally, but they must also understand why and how the entrepreneurial model in many local sport organizations can foster a climate that hinders growth and cooperation. In the US, professional and collegiate leagues have managed conflict by empowering a commissioner and commissioner's (or conference) office. However, no such position exists for sports outside this sport system. In Olympic sports, for example, governing bodies exist for these sports, but do not function in the same capacity as a league or conference.

As such, Stern, Sternthal, and Craig (1975) suggest that the presence of a superordinate goal may serve as a means to mitigate conflict. Superordinate goals are those that are desired by parties in conflict but which cannot be attained by the resources of the parties separately and require a concerted effort together (Hunger & Stern, 1976; Stern et al., 1975). Thus, competing organizations resist an external threat to the inter-organizational group through cooperation. If that were to be attempted in this case, strategic planning should endeavor to identify projects that would require cooperative effort among the clubs. To date that objective has not been incorporated into strategic planning.

Additionally, Stern et al. (1975) suggest that an exchange of personnel for a specified time period could provide a better understanding of a party's position by 'walking in their shoes', rather than merely verbally presenting a side of an issue. Member exchange has been shown to enable understanding pursuant to reducing conflict. This exchange tended to mitigate conflict when a less influential member was exchanged for a brief exchange period. This provided an opportunity to observe and interact, but disallowed full comprehension of the other organization's inner-workings (Stern et al., 1975).

1.3. *The case setting: Triathlon*

While the sport of Triathlon was the focus of data collection for this case, as mentioned above, any sport grappling with youth development challenges would be appropriate for this case. However, the sport of Triathlon offers a compelling setting to examine this issue. As a rapidly emerging sport among adults and children in the United States, Triathlon has just begun its youth development process. While there are growing opportunities for youth in Triathlon, USA Triathlon (USAT) and the regional and local associations are still grappling with systematic development programs for school-aged children to increase overall participation as well as enhance competitive development. Children can enter the sport at 7 years of age and

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