

DELINEATING STRUCTURAL AND ETHICAL SHADES OF  
SPORTS ADMINISTRATION IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE  
STUDY OF MASHONALAND CENTRAL'S RURAL  
SCHOOLS.

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*Abstract*

*In this article I investigate the role of sports administration in the development of talent in rural Zimbabwe and the ethical challenges therein. I defend the thesis that sports administration is a key component of sport development in any country as sport is a source of livelihood for many people in both developing and developed economies. Sport also unifies people by breaking social (artificial) barriers caused by race, gender ethnicity and class which continue to divide people especially in contemporary Africa. This topic is important in that it advances new knowledge about the nature of sport administration among disadvantaged groups in third world countries. I concentrate on football and athletics as these appear to me, to be easier to administer especially in poor rural areas and I chose Mashonaland Central Province as a case study based on my personal experiences as a former high school teacher and sports master in the province.*

**Introduction** Sports Administration is a vital component of sport development in any country. In this article, the writer will discuss the role of sport administration at grassroots level, focusing particularly on rural schools in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe. As this study will show, rural areas are awash with untapped sporting talent but because of poor administration, this talent dies a natural death. It is the contention of this writer that sport administration has a big role to play in the identification and development of individual sporting talent especially among disadvantaged groups. For this reason, the writer will look at the administrative structures that are in place in Mashonaland Central Province and show how these feed into the national administrative structures. But before considering these intricate issues the writer will give an outline of some of the benefits, of good sport administration and development

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especially in third world countries. In the final analysis, It will be argued that talent development in rural areas is hampered by lack of goodwill on the part of the sports administrators themselves and this includes the abuse of government funds and lack of accountability on the part of those mandated to administer the funds. It is in the light of these challenges that this writer proposes the setting up of an ethics commission to look into these problems.

### **Research Questions and Methodological Issues**

*What role do sports administrators play in the nurturing and development of rural talent in schools? What, if any, are the ethical challenges that retard this process in Zimbabwe's rural schools?*

This case study feeds into a general study that explored and lamented the slow pace at which Zimbabwean sport and the arts have developed since independence in 1980 (Gutu, 2009). While it is important to look at sports administration at national level given the ethical challenges that have confronted Zimbabwean sport administration since independence, there is need to acknowledge the point that bad sports administration at grassroots level leads to objectionable moral standards at national level and this explains why the focus of this writer is Mashonaland Central Province. It is important to note from the onset that since this article is in the field of Philosophy which does not normally use social sciences research methods and techniques which include field work, most of the data for this article were obtained from the Principal Administration Officer for Sport in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, Jonathan James Pandehuni. During the question-answer session with Pandehuni, the following research questions were critical as they set the moral tone for this study:

1. What is the state of football and athletics in rural Zimbabwe in general?
2. What is the role of the Zimbabwe government in the administration of rural sport?
3. What are the administrative structures at grassroots level and how do they feed into the national administration of sport?
4. Is there any stable funding for football and athletics in rural Zimbabwe, in general and in Mashonaland Central Province in particular?
5. Who are the sponsors of both football and athletics in rural schools of Zimbabwe?
6. How many pupils from Mashonaland Central Province have participated at national level both in football and athletics?

7. How have funds allocated to sport been utilised?

The above questions were carefully selected as moral implications can be drawn from them such as issues surrounding the selection of pupils whose sporting talents should be nurtured, corporate governance issues such as whether sponsors from the business community are willing to be part of the development of rural sport (especially football and athletics) given the rot that is normally associated with the administration of rural sport. This rot includes the misappropriation of funds meant to develop rural sport and the measures taken (if any) to deal with culprits. Information on sports administration structures in rural areas will help us understand issues related to accountability of these government funds, that is, whether or not the funds are not being misappropriated.

In framing the above questions, the writer was guided by the work of Erik Hofstee (2006: 135). For Hofstee, background type questions are important when using the question-answer approach (also known as the Socratic Method) as they bring about a relaxed atmosphere... and it is also important to keep the research subject to the topic being discussed, but it can also pay not to be too rigid: sometimes drifting off the point a little can reveal useful information (2006: 136). One of the advantages of the Socratic Method is that the research subject may even reveal more than what the researcher would have anticipated. With in-depth interviews one gets first-hand and undiluted data which have a positive impact on one's findings.

The other advantage of research questions, as Hofstee (2006: 136) puts it, is that one is able to get facts or figures by asking for them directly from the relevant source; this is how data about schools of sporting excellence in Zimbabwe which shall be useful in later sections of this work were obtained. But it is fundamental to observe that if not carefully administered, the question-answer approach can produce misleading responses, thereby negatively affecting results. The respondent may decide to give false information which may negatively affect one's conclusions. It is always good for the questioner to frame questions well and to create a good atmosphere in order to get the best out of the question-answer session. Apart from the data obtained from the ministry and the writer's own personal experiences as a teacher in Mashonaland Central Province for close to seven years, the writer also relied on literature studies which included books, book chapters, selected journal articles and internet resources to gather the data for this article. It must be admitted that literature on the ethical issues surrounding sport administration in Zimbabwe is hard to come by given that very little (if any) is available and this is why there was so much reliance on Western literature.

### **Sport Administration, Development and its Benefits: A Review of Literature**

In practical sporting situations, sports administration is a hands-on delivery of sound procedures and systems to ensure that sport in all its aspects happens as it should (Watt, 2003: 154). Sports administration focuses on the organisational practices and procedures which ensure that the day to day competitions, tournaments and events happen as they should, as well as making the overall organisation function as it should. The list of duties involved in sports administration include but are not be limited to; bookkeeping, arranging fixtures, handling entries, organising meetings, applying for grants, organizing international events, liaising with the media, preparing development plans, selling programmes, keeping records, selling tickets and arranging team uniforms (2003: 154). Top class arrangements are needed for top class sport and poor administration would tend towards poor sport in terms of performance and development (2003:154). All too often, the sport administrator is seen as the poor relation in the 'sports organisation triangle' which is made up of the management, administration and coaches but this is quite wrong. To avoid over-generalising concepts, it may be good to distinguish between sports administration which has to do with co-ordination of sporting events and management which goes beyond basic sports administration. But a good argument could be put that sport administrators are in fact THE most important because sound administration is the basis for all top performing sports organisations (2003: 154). Turning to the benefits of sport in general, there is no doubt that football, is part of the daily lives of millions of people in third world countries.

An instructor from the Dutch National Football Association (KNVB) who had visited Zambia and South Africa confirmed this when he said: "I learned that what is important in Africa: absolutely first is football, then eating and then sleeping and last of all work. Football is inconceivably important there; unbelievable!" (Van Eekeren, 1997: 49). It is important to acknowledge that this statement is loaded with subjectivity and that it seems to have some racial innuendos. But what perhaps cannot be disputed about this statement is the fact that football has become a source of livelihood for many African families and engagement in youth sport is perceived to be so worthwhile that governments around the world invest large sums of public money in its promotion. What, then, are the goals of sport administration and development in the promotion of such sports? Sports participation may perhaps be conceptualised in terms of three different goals: public health goals; educational goals and elite-development goals. Siedentop (2002)

argues that there is an inevitable tension between these goals:

One can legitimately question the degree to which elite-development goals of a junior sport system can be served as part of a comprehensive system and still direct sufficient resources to achieve the educative and public health goals that are more fundamental to the system as a whole.

Despite the inevitable tension between these goals as put by Siedentop, it is important to observe that through sport, the economies of most third world countries have been sustained and improved. Sport has also been used as a vehicle to fight the AIDS pandemic as the funds that it generates are channeled towards the well-being of AIDS sufferers through charity donations and sponsorships. In the next section, the writer makes an assessment of the structural issues in the administration and development of Zimbabwean sport, focusing on football and athletics.

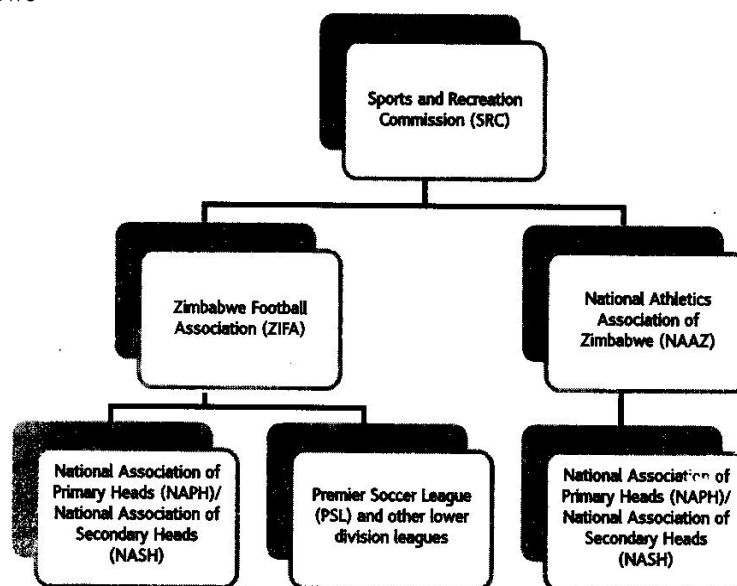
### **Sports Administration and Development in Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the government, through its arm, the Sports and Recreation Commission (SRC), plays an overseeing role in the administration of sport in schools. Since this article deals with sports administration in football and athletics, administrative issues will only be confined to these two disciplines meaning that no attempt shall be made to consider other sporting disciplines, such as cricket, tennis, rugby and basketball. Some people may ask why we have concentrated on football and athletics. The reason is that, in rural areas of Zimbabwe, football and athletics dominate as they do not require expensive itinerary or equipment.

Most rural schools are poor and they do not have tennis courts or basketball equipment for cricket and other elitist sports. Football and athletics also rank among the most popular sporting disciplines in Zimbabwe, Africa and the world at large as they invoke a sense of cultural identity, nationalism and patriotism among the fans. In terms of football; the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) is responsible for administering both junior and senior national teams in both boys and girls categories. Principal Officers at ZIFA include the patron who is one of the two Vice-Presidents in government, the President, two Vice Presidents, board member (finance), board member (development), board member (competitions), board member (marketing), and the Chief Executive Officer and the councilors who all have veto powers. ZIFA works hand in hand with its affiliates such as the Premier Soccer League (PSL) whose chairperson also sits on the ZIFA board as a member.

While the PSL administers the premiership which has sixteen teams, ZIFA takes care of lower division soccer associations up to the aerial zone as well as the National Association of Primary Heads (NAPH), the National Association of Secondary Heads (NASH) and the Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union (ZTISU) which are responsible for running sport in primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions respectively. In athletics, the National Athletics Association of Zimbabwe is responsible for administering both field and track events at national level. With regard to athletics at both provincial and national level, NAPH, NASH and ZTISU report to the National Athletics Association of Zimbabwe (NAAZ). In fact, just as in football, there is a NAPH and NASH representative at both provincial and district levels and these representatives report to ZIFA and NAAZ respectively. However, this paper will not discuss ZTISU in this paper for lack of time and space and so ZTISU will not be included in the diagram below:

**Fig. I A graphic Illustration of Football and Athletics Administration in Zimbabwe**



In its endeavour to develop sport in both urban and rural areas, the government through the SRC, has identified a national school of sporting

excellence and provincial schools of sporting excellence in each of Zimbabwe's ten provinces. In these schools, the best performing pupils in both football and athletics are exposed to better facilities and training expertise in order to prepare them for national and international competitions. These schools are well funded by annual grants from the government and other well wishers. Best performers are first taken to the provincial school of sporting excellence before being taken to Guinea Fowl (in Gweru) which is the national school of sporting excellence. It is from here that they are recommended for national and international competitions. The table below shows these schools of sporting excellence:

**Fig.2 Provincial Schools of Sporting Excellence**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>City/ Town</b>	<b>Province</b>
1. Marlborough High School	Harare	Harare
2. Chipindura High School	Bindura	Mashonaland Central
3. Marondera High School	Marondera	Mashonaland East
4. Mutare Boys High	Mutare	Manicaland
5. Chaplin High School	Gweru	Midlands
6. Victoria High School	Masvingo	Masvingo
7. Northlea High School	Bulawayo	Bulawayo
8. JZ Moyo High School		Matabeleland South
9. Fatima High School		Matabeleland North
10. Jameson High School	Kadoma	Mashonaland West

#### **Sports Administration in Mashonaland Central Province**

Mashonaland central province is made up of seven districts, namely Mazowe, Bindura, Shamva, Mt. Darwin, Rushinga, Centenary and Guruve. Each district is divided into zones and clusters for purposes of easier administration. In each district there is both a NAPH and NASH representative who is the head in charge of football and another one who is in charge of Athletics. These representatives report to the provincial NAPH and NASH officers in Bindura whose mandate is to co-ordinate sport at provincial level and communicating this to the national office in Harare. The district NAPH and NASH representatives rely on sports masters at school level as well as Physical Education and Sport Resource Teachers (PESRTs) in charge of zones. Thus, there is a chain of command here, starting from zonal to national level. The question becomes what role these representatives play in the development of rural talent in Mashonaland

central province. To get the answer to this question, perhaps we need to, first of all, define 'talent' and 'talent development.' Many people believe that talent in sport is innate, fixed and affected only modestly by effort (Dweck, 1999). Sigmund Loland offers a clear statement of this position when he writes:

I have understood talent as genetic predispositions to develop performance. Talent in sport ... is an individual's genetic predisposition to develop phenotypes (an observable characteristic) of relevance to performance in the sport in question. The distribution of talent in the natural lottery is a random process. Moreover, we know that talent has significant and systematic influence on athletic performance, and that different sports require different talents (Loland, 2002: 68-69).

From the above premise, Loland concludes that talent is a matter of luck: "abilities develop to a certain extent according to genetic programming in all normal human beings." This genetic programming can be 'read' from the genome... Consequently, talent is to some extent a matter of luck" (2002: 68-69). But other sports scientists believe that hard work, commitment and good nurturing can produce talent which means that talent is to some extent achieved and not ascribed. For in this article, it does not matter which of the two perspectives above best describes talent. We should be interested in how talent (ascribed or achieved) can be identified and developed in rural schools of Zimbabwe. This writer argues that at the level of 'Identification,' parents and coaches play a pivotal role while at the level of 'development,' sports administrators take over.

In Mashonaland Central Province, sports masters and coaches, for instance, are custodians of talent identification as it unfolds in the schools they represent. In both football and athletics, talent is first identified during inter-house competitions, then during cluster competitions, zonal competitions and finally during district competitions. From the inter-house to zonal competitions, sports masters and coaches take charge and once they have identified certain pupils as talented in their different disciplines, they liaise with the PESRTs during zonal competitions in order to recommend them to the district NAPH/NASH representatives who would then send the recommended names to the provincial school of sporting excellence through the provincial NAPH/NASH office.

This process involves NAPH/NASH representatives calling for a special meeting with, sports masters and PESRTs on the eve of any district



competition in order to make submissions. NAPH/NASH representatives verify the authenticity of the submissions during district competitions and once they are satisfied with the performance, they submit the names to the provincial NAPH/NASH office. After the district competitions, the identified pupils are then taken to Chipindura High School, which is the provincial school of sporting excellence, for further development. As can be seen here, sports administrators have a central role to play in the nurturing of rural talent and the development of national sport in general. However, this role has its fair share of ethical challenges.

### **Ethical Insights and Challenges**

Based on personal experience and participant observations, it is critical to observe that sports administration in Mashonaland Central Province, as in other provinces of Zimbabwe, is beset with serious ethical problems mostly of an ethical nature. Perhaps before identifying and discussing these ethical problems, it may be good to define terms briefly here. The word 'ethical' comes from the word 'ethics' which is briefly the scientific analysis of moral concepts such as 'right,' 'wrong,' 'good' and 'bad' among others. By 'moral' is meant a behaviour or act which is in conformity with an agreed set of normative and prescriptive beliefs about how people ought to live (Mangena, 2010: 3). Using the method of participant observation and the question-answer session but at the more general level, this writer has observed that age-cheating is rampant during zonal and district competitions as sports masters and coaches want to outdo each other in order to get financial rewards for being the school, zone or district with the best performers in both football and athletics (Ziriro, 2003). The district that produces the best football team and talented athletes is financially rewarded by NAPH/NASH. This prize is also shared with zones and schools which will have identified and recommended the talented performers to the district NAPH/NASH representatives (Ziriro, 2003).

It is because of this dangled carrot that schools resort to unorthodox tactics in order to reap those financial rewards. Sometimes district NAPH/NASH representatives become guilty of complicity when they do not act, upon receiving information about age-cheating from 'losing' districts. This happens in two ways. First, if the accused schools fall under their administrative jurisdiction, they try to sweep the matter under the carpet. There is need, perhaps, to explain the phrase 'administrative jurisdiction' for clarity's sake. NAPH/NASH representatives are school heads who are chosen to represent particular districts. So, if the NAPH/NASH representative happens to be the head of the school accused of cheating, he

or she may decide to conceal information or ignore the pleas in order to create a good name for his or her school (Ziriro, 2003).

Based on this researcher's experiences and observations during the time he was teaching in Mashonaland Central Province about a decade ago it is reasonable to make the claim that cases of age-cheating are evident at secondary school level although empirical evidence based on existing literature may be hard to come by. This writer takes comfort from the fact that this is a philosophical exposition which does not rely so much on empirical claims or evidence but on rational interpretation of events as they unfold. To buttress the foregoing, a good example of age-cheating is when a 19 year old pupil's birth certificate is forged to enable him or her to participate in the under 17 category.

The other 'option' is for a 20 year old pupil to participate in the under 17 category using someone's birth certificate and name details. This researcher's first encounter with age-cheating in schools was in 2003 during football zonal competitions at Tsakare secondary school in Mt Darwin. On this day, about half the players who were masquerading as under 17 for one secondary school which this writer will not name were disqualified after it was discovered that they were trying to use birth certificates belonging to their young brothers and the school had to resort to a make-shift team which lost to other teams dismally. There is no doubt that this impacts negatively on talent identification and development as resources are, more often, wasted on undeserving pupils at the expense of deserving ones. By, the way, it has been proved scientifically that age has an effect on performance because of the element of experience and maturity. A 19 year old pupil will obviously have a bigger advantage when competing with a 15 year old in terms of mental strength, experience and maturity. The problem of agecheating, which starts at grassroots level, also continues even at national team level when over-aged players want to gate crash and play or participate in junior national teams. This has become a serious problem which has retarded sport development in Africa. As Limukani Ncube, a Senior Zimbabwean Sports Journalist writes:

The run-up to the Nigeria Under-17 tournament has already been marred by age cheating claims as some countries like Niger were disqualified for using over-aged players in the qualifiers. Niger was replaced by Malawi. Gambia have also confirmed that they used over aged players in recent tournaments and offered an apology to Fifa and the Confederation of African Football. In addition, the hosts, Nigeria, have reportedly dropped 15 players from their squad who were suspected to be over the cut off date of birth of eligible players after

getting news that players will be subjected to laboratory tests. In the same token, Zimbabwe was last year hit by an age cheating scandal after more than 20 players unceremoniously left the Under- 17 camp after news filtered through that laboratory tests will be held and the coach of the team, Rodwell Dhlakama was dropped in unclear circumstances and was replaced by Lloyd Mutasa (The Chronicle, Monday 28 September 2009).

It can be observed that, the development of football and Athletics in rural Zimbabwe has also been hampered by alleged misappropriation of funds by those mandated to administer, especially school heads and NAPH/NASH officials. It is critical to note from the onset that claims about misappropriation of funds remain at the level of allegations as there is no empirical evidence to prove their authenticity as there is no available literature to backup these claims. Efforts by this writer to verify the truth or falsity of these claims were in vain as some respondents did not want to commit themselves for fear of victimisation. The reason is probably that because of distance from the administrative capital (Harare) and the poor state of roads in rural Zimbabwe it has become difficult for auditors to balance the books and sniff out fraudsters. Funds meant to develop rural sports facilities and to train coaches have allegedly been converted to personal use as there seems to be no accountability. In some cases the sports funds are diverted to some other priority areas such as building school libraries or staff houses (Ziriro, 2003).

Based on his experiences as a teacher, this writer has also observed the prevalence of gender discrimination in talent development. Using the method of participatory observation, the writer has observed that talent identification and development (in football) has over the years been restricted to the boy child. Whatever it is, the explanation has always been given that it is difficult to assign male teachers to train girls because of issues of sexual abuse which have raised the ire of politicians and human rights organisations such as the Girl Child Network (GCN). Very few female teachers were capable of handling soccer training sessions in rural Zimbabwe in 2003. Tied to this point is the fact that rural pupils including the girl child, have no access to modern sports equipment, qualified coaching personnel as well as a good diet that can enhance their performances and take their talents to greater heights.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the above ethical challenges which have inhibited sports development in rural Zimbabwe, this article recommends the setting up of an ethics commission by the SRC to monitor the behaviour of sport administrators not only in Mashonaland Central Province but also in other rural provinces of Zimbabwe. This commission must be independent and must comprise people from government, anti-corruption organisations such as Transparency International as well as members of the academia. This committee would write annual evaluation reports which must be submitted to the SRC addressing the state of sport administration in rural Zimbabwe. These reports would then be used to flush out corrupt administrators, if found, by punishing them. One way of punishing them could be to suspend them pending dismissal from employment when found guilty, and also to ask them to pay heavy fines.

At every sporting event, there should be at least a member of this commission. The commission must also work hand in hand with an audit commission which must frequently visit district sporting offices to audit books. This commission must also be set up by the SRC. To ensure timely interventions, in every district, there must be an audit and ethics commission office.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has outlined the benefits of sports administration and development especially in third world countries like Zimbabwe and the argument is that sports development in rural Zimbabwe has been slowed down by the lack of goodwill on the part of administrators and other key stakeholders. Age-cheating and abuse of sport funds by administrators have been cited as the main obstacles bedeviling talent identification and development especially in Mashonaland Central Province. I therefore propose that in order to address these problems, there is need to set up two commissions, the ethics commission to deal with issues of age-cheating and the audit commission to deal with unethical behavior in the handling of sports funds by sports administrators.

### **End notes**

**i** These terms have been adopted from the works of Lene Bull-Christiansen, (2004) *Tales of the Nation: Feminist Nationalism or Patriotic History? Defining National History and Identity in Zimbabwe*, Uppsala, Nordiska

Ranger, T. (2004) "Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle for the past in Zimbabwe" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, Number 2, June and Bhebe, N., "The Golden Age of Zimbabwe's Historiography and its Decline from 1967 to the Present," Unpublished paper presented in Japan, June 2004.

- ii See Raftopoulos, B., "Crisis in Zimbabwe" in Raftopoulos, B and Mlambo, A.S. (eds.) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*, Harare, Weaver Press, 2009, pp. 201-02 for a nuanced discussion of the circumstances that gave rise to this contest over "the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship" and Ranger T. (2004) "Nationalist historiography" for details on the emergence of Patriotic History.
- iii See Mtisi, J., Nyakudya, M. and Barnes, T., "War in Rhodesia, 1965-1980" in Raftopoulos, B and Mlambo, A.S. (eds.) *Becoming Zimbabwe* for a discussion of the pluralistic nature of the Zimbabwe struggle for liberation.
- iv See Greenberg, K. E. (1996) on the importance of empathy.
- v See, for instance, Kurebwa, J. (2000) "The Politics of Multilateral Economic Sanctions on Rhodesia during the Unilateral Declaration of Independence period, 1965-1979" (DPhil. Thesis, University of Zimbabwe and Strack, H. R. *Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press on 'sanctions busting' by the RF government.

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