Influence of Secondary School Rugby Playing Experience on Talent Identification for Players in Rugby Clubs in Kenya

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Abstract:- **Turnbull (2011) statement that the direction an individual's profession takes is influenced by kind of school attended mirrors the importance of secondary schools in talent identification.**

The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the influence of rugby players' secondary schools rugby playing experience on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The following null hypothesis was formulated and tested: that there is no significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the influence of the players' rugby secondary school rugby playing experience is classified as high or low. Data were collected using Questionnaires and interviews from rugby players (n= 125) and coaches (n=15) during the 2016/2017 Kenya Rugby Union league competition. Data were analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistics of Chi- square test of independent measures.

Results indicate that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the influence of the rugby players' secondary schools' rugby playing experience is classified as high or low, accepted. The findings consequently reveal that there is no evidence that the rugby secondary school playing experience has a significant influence in talent identification of rugby players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The study however recommends that the school teams should still be used as a pathway for talent identification. There is also need to look into the intra-murals in order to capture those who might not play in the school teams for various reasons. Other studies involving the rest of the socio-cultural attributes that are likely to impact on talent identification like family, coaches, peers, club infrastructure, need to be conducted

Key words: **Rugby, rugby players, secondary schools, Kenya Rugby Union**

I. INTRODUCTION

It is conceived that the type of school attended by the individual will have an impact upon the direction that their career will take (Turnbull, 2011). Bailey & Morley (2006) observed the important role that schools and extracurricular clubs and in particular physical education teachers and coaches play as providers of opportunities in sport. In terms of schooling, existing research demonstrates that elite sports performers have extremely positive feelings towards their school experiences often crediting their school physical education teachers with identifying their talent and enabling them to nurture this (Johnson, 2003). There is therefore need to investigate how the school impacts on the decision by a rugby player to join a club in Kenya.

Rugby is a very popular sport and is played from primary school to senior level in more than a hundred countries worldwide (Gent & Spammer, 2005). Certain anthropometric, physical, motor abilities and game-specific variables can distinguish between talented and less talented rugby players (Gent & Spammer, 2005). Hare (1997) however came to the conclusion, after having researched the identification of rugby talent in the senior secondary school phase, that all elite rugby players have certain anthropometric components, rugby specific skills and physical and motor components that distinguish them from average players.

Kenya has asserted her authority at playing the rugby sevens version of the game. Since 2004, Kenya has been a core member of the World Rugby sevens series and has also played in 3 successive sevens world cups and even reached the semi finals of the 2009 sevens world cup. They repeated the feat again at the 2013 sevens world cup held in Moscow where they attained fourth position. The peak of their performance was when they won the world rugby series Singapore leg in April 2016. However Kenya, like other third world countries, continues to lag light years behind the top rugby playing nations such as South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and England in the fifteens version of the game. This could be due to lack of structured youth development programs both nationally and at club level. Lack of a professional league also means that several of the country's most talented players quit playing early either immediately after high school or in their early twenties, due to lack of incentives.

The study was therefore guided by the following objective:

1) To investigate the role of secondary schools rugby playing experirnce on talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya

Based on the objective of the study, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean talent identification index when the rugby players' secondary school rugby playing experience is classified as high or low

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In South Africa, the nurturing of talent has been based on having competitive and well structured school competitions countrywide. Talented players are selected for their provincial age group teams which participate at national tournaments at the age of 13 years (Craven week), 16 years (Grant Khomo week) and 18 years (Craven and Academy weeks). There is however no specific talent identification process currently being applied in South African rugby (Parker, 2013). This view is supported by Hugo (2004) who identifies a school based model as the talent identification procedure used in South Africa and mostly in the schools within the higher socio-economic communities.

The national talent identification and development program or talent search is a program used in Australia, another tier one rugby playing nation, and developed by the Australian Institute of Sport. The program is designed to help identify talented athletes between the ages of 11 and 20 years and to prepare them for participation in local and international competitions (Australian Institute of Sport). Yet Australia is currently ranked at position six in the world in comparison to the number one position they held in 1999 when the last won the world cup competition (Retrieved from www.world rugby.org).

In New Zealand, the culture and environment of the national teams is introduced at school level as a first step towards the high performance ladder. A New Zealand schools team is formed under New Zealand Rugby Schools Council and is closely associated with the New Zealand rugby's talent identification program which is integrated with the five super rugby teams. Every year approximately 300 players under the age of 17 years, are invited to the Super Rugby region-based camps from right across the region, with players selected from within the Heartland unions. The next phase in their development of players is Under 17 and 18 camps, which involve around 250 players each year. About 100 are nominated for the New Zealand Schools and New Zealand Barbarians Schools teams, with 50 as a final selection (New Zealand Rugby). So even in New Zealand, a tier one rugby playing nation, the implication is that talent identification is based on partnership with schools with no clear inclination towards a specific process

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

A descriptive survey design was used to collect data.

Sample

Data was collected from 95 rugby players and 15 rugby coaches from 25 rugby clubs who competed in the 2016/2017 Kenya Rugby Union league competitions. The study targeted 125 players and 25 coaches but only 95 players' responded and 15 coaches were available for interviews representing response rates of 76% and 60% respectively

Research Instruments

A self administered questionnaire was used to collect date from the rugby players. Section A of the questionnaire included demographics like age, playing experience, academic qualifications and occupation. Section B addressed the issues concerning the secondary schools attended including the level of the players' participation at the Kenya Secondary Schools Sports Association competitions and the influence of this level of participation on the talent identification for the rugby clubs. The interview schedule that was used to collect data from the rugby coaches had the first part consisting of demographic information on the interviewee such as age, educational background, coaching certification level and coaching experience. The second part the focused on the influence of the players' playing experience in the secondary schools attended In both test instruments items on the influence of talent identification had a ranking response scale of very influential, influential, fairly influential and not influential. For the rest of the items both open-ended and close ended questions were used.

The instruments were validated by a team of lecturers from the school of education at the University of Nairobi who were specialists in research methodology and the draft test instruments were modified based on their recommendations. The test instruments were also piloted using 15 players and 3 coaches from 3 clubs who did not participate in the study. A test-re-test technique was subsequently used to test for reliability and the Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation (r) formula was used to correlate the pre-test and post-test results in order to determine the coefficient of reliability. The test was re-administered after 2 weeks.

The reliability coefficients were 0.78 for the questionnaires. The responses were coded and analyzed using both descriptive (percentages and frequencies) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test).

IV. RESULTS

Demographic data of players

Information that was included in the players' personal data was names of their clubs, age bracket, highest level of education and occupation. This information was to enable the researcher to establish the status of the players in relation to their being identified by their rugby clubs to play in the Kenya Rugby Union league competitions.

Representation of school in school rugby teams

The rugby players were asked to indicate whether they have ever represented their school in rugby at any competitive level. The results are presented in Figure 1
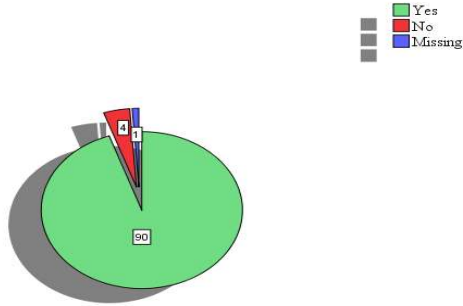
Figure 1: Players' response on representation in school rugby teams

The findings in Figure 1 show that majority 95 % of the players report that they have represented their schools at a competitive level. This is an indication that most of the players playing rugby at club level in Kenya played for their school rugby teams which suggests that the school rugby playing experience is a relevant variable of the role of the school in the talent identification process in Kenya

Player participation at Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions

The players were asked to indicate if they participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Player participation at competitions Kenya Secondary School Sports Association Competitions

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	68	71.6
No	26	27.5
No response	1	1.1
Total	**95**	**100.0**

Findings from table 1 shows that 71.6 % of the players confirm that they participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions, 27.5 % report that they did not participate while 1.1 % did not respond to that item. This is an indication that most of the rugby players in clubs in Kenya participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions and therefore had some playing experience.

Number of years players participated in Kenya Secondary School Sports Association rugby competitions

The players were also asked to indicate the number of years that they had participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association rugby national competitions during their stay in the school. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Number of years the players participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association rugby national competition

	Frequency	Percent
1year	10	10.5
2years	17	17.9
3years	17	17.9
4years	22	23.2
No participation	29	30.5
Total	**95**	**100**

Table 2 shows that majority 23.2 % of the players indicated that they participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association national competition for the four years they were in school, 17.9 % indicated both 3 and 2 years respectively while 10.5 % of the players reported a participation of 1 year. 30.5 % of the players reported that they did not participate in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association national competitions. This is an indication that as much as it has been shown the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions are being used as venues of talent identification by most coaches; there is a likelihood of missing out some players as 30.5 % of the players indicated that they did not participate in the competitions. Other institutions and other competitions in Kenya should also be identified and utilized. The researchers view is that we could be losing a number of players by merely concentrating on the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions

Talent identification at school level

The coaches were asked to indicate if they were involved in any talent identification at school level. The results are presented in Figure 2.
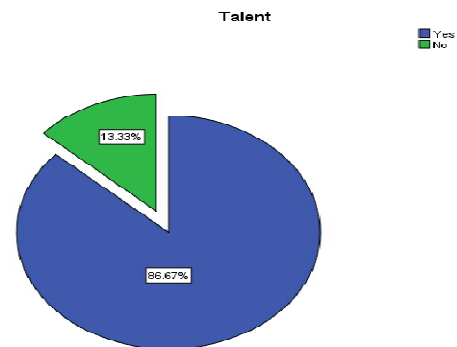

Figure 2: Coaches' responses on talent identification at school level

Figure 2 demonstrates that 86.7% of the coaches indicated that they identify rugby talent at school level while only 13.3 % of the coaches indicated that they did not identify talent at the school level. The results suggest that the majority of the coaches use the secondary schools to identify talent

School competitions' influence on talent identification

The coaches were further required to indicate how they identify talent at school level and all the 15 coaches indicated that they do this during the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association school championships where they pick the best rugby players. On the impact of this talent identification on their clubs, the coaches were asked to rank its influence on talent identification. The results are presented in Table 3

Table 3 Coaches' responses on influence of school competitions on talent identification

	Frequency	Percent
Very influential	11	73.4
Influential	2	13.3
Fairly influential	2	13.3
Not influential	0	0
Total	**15**	**100.0**

The findings in Table 3 illustrate that 73.4 % of the coaches ranked the influence of participation at secondary school level at the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions on talent identification as very influential while 13.3 % of the coaches had a ranking of both influential and fairly influential respectively. This is an indication that the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions are commonly used to identify rugby talent for clubs in Kenya.

Cross tabulation of the players secondary school playing experience and talent identification

A cross tabulation was done between the attributes of the secondary schools' rugby playing experience and their influence on the talent identification process. The cross tabulations are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Cross tabulation of the players' secondary school playing experience and talent identification

		Influence on talent identification			
		Yes		No	
		F	Percent	F	Percent
Did you represent your school in rugby at any competitive level?	yes	47	70.1	20	29.9
	no	0	0.0	1	100.0
	Total	**47**	**49.5**	**48**	**50.5**
At the time you were in school, you ever participate in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association (Kenya Secondary School Sports Association) national competition?	yes	46	71.9	18	28.1
	no	1	25.0	3	75.0
	Total	**47**	**49.5**	**48**	**50.5**
If the answer above is yes, then please indicate how many years you participated during your stay in the school	1 year	6	66.7	3	33.3
	2 years	12	70.6	5	29.4
	3 years	13	76.5	4	23.5
	4 years	15	71.4	6	28.6
	Total	**47**	**49.5**	**48**	**50.5**

Table 4 shows that 70 % of the players indicated that they had represented their schools in rugby at competitive levels and that this had influenced the talent identification process. 30 % of the players indicated that they had represented their schools at competitive levels of rugby but this had no influence on the talent identification process. When reporting on whether the schools participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions 72 % of the players indicated that their schools participated and this influenced the talent identification process, while 28 % of the players indicated that their schools participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions but this had no influence the talent identification process.

A chi-square test was done to determine whether or not there was a significant difference between the mean rugby talent identification index and when the influence of the rugby players' secondary schools' rugby playing experience was classified as high or low. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Chi-Square Tests on the influence of the secondary schools' rugby playing experience on talent identification

	Value	df	p-value
Did you represent your school in rugby at any competitive level?	2.271	1	0.132
At the time you were in school, did you ever participate in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association national competition?	3.875	1	0.049
If the answer above is yes, then please indicate how many years you participated during your stay in the school	0.314	3	0.957

P < 0.05   Reject the null hypothesis

P > 0.05   Accept the null hypothesis

From the chi-square Table 5, the p-values 0.132, 0.049 and 0.957 >0.05 give an average p-value of 0.379. The P value (0.379) is less than the level of significance (0.05).   The conclusion was therefore to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the mean rugby talent identification index when the influence of the rugby players' secondary schools' rugby playing experience is classified as high or low.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings consequently reveal that there is no evidence that the rugby secondary school playing experience has a significant influence in talent identification of rugby players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The attribute however with the highest p-value was the numbers of years the player had participated in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions which suggests that playing experience is an important variable despite the study rejecting the null hypothesis. This is an interesting result as the majority of the rugby coaches use the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions to identify rugby talent. The findings are also not in agreement with what happens in three of the top tier one rugby playing nations. In South Africa the nurturing of talent is based on having a competitive and well structured school competitions country wide while in New Zealand the rugby culture is introduced at school level with the formation of a national schools team that is integrated into their super rugby clubs (New Zealand Rugby). Despite this finding therefore the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions still remains a suitable venue for talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya but should not be the only one used. The findings have practical implications for promoting talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya through the use of school games and hence the players' school playing experience. There is however need to identify other institutions and other competitions as not all players participate in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions leading to a likelihood of a talented player missing out on being identified. The use of intramurals like inter -house competitions could also be incorporated as not all students play for the school teams and not all school teams in Kenya take part in the Kenya Secondary School Sport Competitions

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that secondary school rugby playing experience has no significant influence on talent identification for rugby players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The Kenya Secondary School Sports Association competitions are however used as venues for talent identification for rugby in Kenya. Consequently the following recommendations were made:

1. The secondary schools through the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association rugby competitions should still be used as appropriate environments for talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya. Club rugby coaches should be encouraged and facilitated to attend the school rugby competitions from the grassroots to national levels. There is however need to diversify and also use other competitions to capture players who might not have attended secondary schools or whose schools do not participate in the Kenya Secondary School Sports Association rugby competitions.

2. Although the study findings reveal that that there is no evidence that a relationship exists between the rugby players' secondary school rugby playing experience and talent identification of rugby players in rugby clubs in Kenya, the schools' teams should still be used as a pathway for talent identification. There is also need to look into the intra-murals in order to capture those who might not play in the school teams for various reasons

3. As a matter of policy, a formal partnership between the Kenya Rugby Union and Kenya Secondary School Sports Association should be put in place

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