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The Attraction, Retention/Transition, and Nurturing Process of Sport Development: Some Australian Evidence

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The purpose of this study was to explore and map the sport development processes in Australia. A grounded theory approach identified sport development processes by examining 74 annual reports from 35 national sporting organizations (NSOs) over a period of 4 years, before and after the Sydney Olympic Games. The 3 frameworks presented in this article representing the attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing process illustrate the generic processes and strategies described by NSOs. The results show that each sport development process requires human and financial input from various stakeholders. These stakeholders initiate or implement sport development strategies for each process and each process has different sport development outputs. These results contribute to the extant literature of sport development by demonstrating that sport development is more complex and encompassing than previously described. It is proposed that the generic frameworks derived from this study be subject to more specific testing using other sport systems, as context and case studies could lead to tailoring the frameworks to represent specific sport development processes and systems.

Sport development is "a process whereby effective opportunities, processes, systems, and structures are set up to enable people in all or particular groups and areas to take part in sport and recreation or to improve their performance to whatever level they desire" (Collins, cited in Eady, 1993, p. 8). Previous efforts to depict sport development opportunities resulted in a sport development metaphor, the participation pyramid (see Figure 1). The base of the pyramid represents mass participation and the top elite participation. The sport development pyramid is not an empirically derived model. It has shaped the thinking, conceptualizing, and planning for sport development in various countries, including Australia, however. As practices have evolved to epitomize more dynamic processes than those reflected in

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the sport development pyramid, the present investigation examined national sporting organizations' (NSOs) sport development practices and empirically devised three frameworks that illustrate existing sport development procedures: the attraction, retention/transition and nurturing processes. Therefore, this study overcomes a limitation of the participation pyramid by providing detail about the internal processes and interrelationships implied within the pyramid metaphor, but not previously described. Such a detailed representation of sport development processes adds to our existing knowledge of sport development and in our understanding of how to plan for sport development.

Internationally, some studies have focused on development *through* sport with an emphasis on the social objectives achieved through physical activity (e.g., Jones & Symon, 2001; Nichols, 2004; Skille, 2004; Tregaskis, 2003). Others have examined the development *of* sport and its applications to elite athlete development (e.g., B.C. Green, 2005; M. Green, 2005; Green & Houlihan, 2004; Green & Oakley, 2001; Thibault & Babiak, 2005). The resulting efforts "have provided significant insight but have been ad hoc insomuch as sport development has so far lacked a theoretical framework. This lack of [empirically based] theory has also impeded the progress of sport development research" (B.C. Green, 2005, p. 234). The frameworks resulting from this study can be tested in different contexts, or on a sport-by-sport basis. Such testing might reveal gaps in the way sporting organizations pursue sport development, and assist sports to understand in more depth how to build a sustainable sport system, improve their current pathways and practices, and optimize the use of government funding in sport.

In Australia, sport development research is attributed to a limited number of scholars (e.g., Farmer & Arnaudon, 1996; Houlihan, 1997; Jobling, 1991; Semotiuk, 1981, 1987; Shilbury, Deane, & Kellett, 2006; Sotiriadou, Quick, & Shilbury, 2006; Stewart, Nicholson, Smith, & Westerbeek, 2004) and covers predominately descriptive accounts of the initial expansion in the federal government's involvement with sport from the mid-1970s until the early 2000s. Yet, especially since the early 1990s, there has been a remarkable increase in government involvement in sport development. This increased involvement has not been matched by an equivalent scholarly interest, which leaves a void in the literature pertaining to sport development planning and practices in Australia. The outcomes of this study offer empirical evidence of what is involved with sport development and inform theory by critically evaluating current practices and extending the boundaries of knowledge for sport development.

The purpose of this study was to examine sport development processes. The aims of the study were to identify who is involved with sport development, in what ways, at which developmental level, and the outcome of that involvement. Even though these issues are universal and relevant to many sport systems, we used the Australian system as an exemplar to explain the sport development processes as the NSOs describe them. These processes illustrate the various stakeholders and the ways they are involved in sport development, as well as the outcomes of their involvement. The three resulting frameworks illustrate the attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing processes. Jointly, the three frameworks show sport development in Australia is more complex and more encompassing than previously described.

The Sport Development Metaphor

Traditionally, various versions of the sport development pyramid have focused on the relationship between mass and elite participation (Eady, 1993; Shilbury et al., 2006). Eady (1993) explained that the term *continuum* in diagrammatic form is an attempt to illustrate the way in which the sport development pyramid provides pathways for individuals "to progress to the level of performance which is appropriate/available to them" (p. 14). Bramham, Hylton, Jackson, and Nesti (2001) and Houlihan (2000) recognized the following four levels in the continuum:

1. *Foundation* is the base of the pyramid, and involves the vital first steps of learning basic movement skills.
2. *Participation* is one level up from the foundation, and involves exercising one's leisure option, taking part in sport for health, fitness, friends and fun.
3. *Performance* is one level higher than participation and involves the challenge of increasing proficiency by striving to improve personal standards of participation.
4. *Excellence* is reaching the top of the pyramid and involves accomplishing nationally and publicly recognized standards of performance.

Figure 1 shows the different directions individuals can take within the system. This model simply illustrates how individuals can move up and down the system whenever they choose or are ready to do so. This figure encapsulates participants'

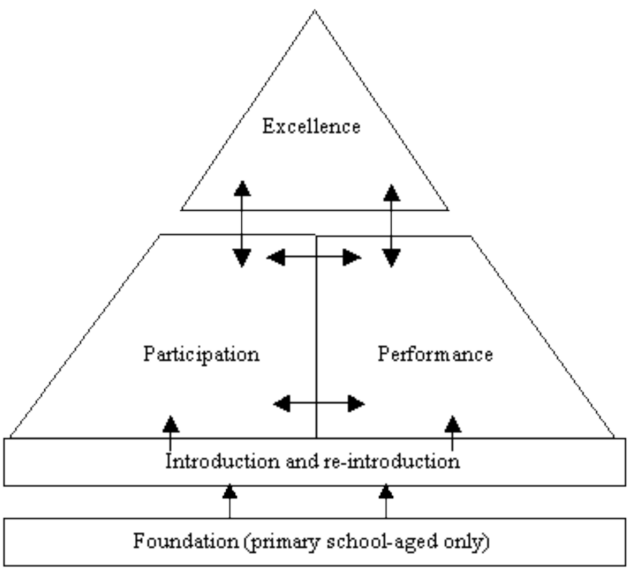

Figure 1 — The sport development pyramid source (Eady, 1993, p. 14). Reproduced from *Practical Sports Development*, with the permission of the copyright owner, Pearson Education Limited.

mobility and incorporates the concept of a "performance decision point" when "a conscious decision is made to remain at a particular level of performance for the time being" (Eady, 1993, p. 15). This model allows for the possibility of the individual leaving and reentering the sport and altering the level at which they aspire to take part over time.

In the sport pyramid, the goal is to increase the number of participants at each level so as to increase the number of potential elite athletes flowing through to the apex or top of the pyramid. Donnelly (1991) suggested, "A broadly based system of participation can form the base of a pyramid out of which the elite athletes will emerge" (p. 305). Theoretically, the wider the base the greater the number of participants at each level above in the pyramid model (Donnelly, 1991; Eady, 1993). Hence, governments inject resources at the bottom of the sport development pyramid expecting that a broad base will produce many champions (Veal, 1994). According to Hogan and Norton (2000), this is the bottom-up or trickle-up effect. B.C. Green (2005) suggested, however, that even if the athletes' skills warrant their advancement to elite success, movement up the pyramid is not automatic. In addition, she noted, "it is possible to imagine ways of building high-level competition systems without relying on a broad participation base" (p. 234). For example, sports which depend on "expensive and scarce facilities, like bobsledding, might not build their competitive excellence from a broad foundation of participation" (p. 234). The pyramid can be examined from another perspective, when government resources are allocated directly at the top of the pyramid and a top-down or trickle-down effect is expected (Australian Sports Commission, 1994). The trickle-down effect asserts that successful performances by elite athletes encourage people to take part in physical activity and lead to an increase in mass participation numbers at the base of the pyramid.

Chalip (1996) argued that the conflict between trickle-up and trickle-down is a reflection of different governments' political ideologies, which, according to Bramham et al. (2001), reflect the various practices and perceptions of sport. There are those who believe that sport development should supplement a contemporary community agenda, which responds to broader cultural, economic, political, and social needs. Then there are people who claim that "sport for its own sake" is the only legitimate motto and still others who see sport as able to defend itself on both fronts.

Shilbury et al. (2006) observed that the sport pyramid assumes that people progress logically to the next level of sport participation without any movement between recreational competitions and semi-elite or elite competitions. Hence, the sporting pyramid presents a static perspective. Moreover, B.C. Green (2005) argued that the provision of sequential levels for advancement within the sport development pyramid is insufficient to advance our knowledge of program planning, implementation, and evaluation. She contends that sport development efforts must address three key areas: athlete entrance, retention, and advancement. The results of her case study on U.S. volleyball highlight certain difficulties common to pyramid-based development systems such as the lack of linkages among organizations at each level of sport, and the presence of sequential levels in the pyramid that do not assure athlete progression up the pyramid.

The pyramid presents a simplistic approach to sport development that depicts participation opportunities. These opportunities form the basis of the sport

development pathways available to participants. Yet pyramid models neither explain the pathways nor show who is involved in them, and in what ways, to facilitate sport development opportunities. This study attempts to address these limitations by conveying the dynamic processes involved with sport development, the stakeholders involved, the sport development strategies and programs in place, and the effects of the implementation of these strategies on sport development through the creation of pathways to sport participation. The results of this study detail the internal processes and interrelationships associated with sport development through the examination of sport development practices in Australian NSOs.

Method

Data Collection and Theoretical Sampling

The study used NSO annual reports as its primary source of data generation and the coding process of a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The annual reports constitute the formal written source of information that reflects NSOs' operations with regard to sport development, and interactions with the federal government and other key stakeholders. In addition, these reports constitute the annual contributions of all state sporting organizations (SSOs), staff, and members of the board of directors collectively in a reliable publicly available form. Data of interest within the reports were SSO reports, evaluation reports of various programs from sport development officers, financial statements, CEOs' reports, and sport development objectives and goals.

Certain limitations derive from the particular choice of data. Annual reports provided interesting data that were used as an indication of NSOs stated intentions regarding sport development. It would be unwise to assume that these reports provide an accurate reflection of all of the systems and programs in place. Hence, data from annual reports could not be treated as definitive of all actual practices. Consequently, to support some of the conclusions drawn from these reports and supplement validation (Creswell, 1998), existing theoretical knowledge is used to inform this study. The inclusion of extant literature to support the results is consistent with the tenets of grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978).

Annual reports covered the years from 1999 to 2002 (inclusive) and are linked to a federal government funding cycle. The cases pertinent to this study were the Australian NSOs, which represent sports at a national level and liaise directly with the federal government's statutory authority, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), regarding sport development issues. According to the 2001 official directory of sporting organizations published by the ASC, approximately 100 sports were represented by NSOs, of which 60 were funded by the federal government (Australian Sports Commission, 2001). This research excluded sports not funded by the ASC during 2001, the financial year of reference, and therefore the population under investigation was limited to those 60 NSOs. According to information derived from ASC annual reports (Australian Sports Commission, 1999–2002), even though federal government grant allocations to NSOs varied throughout the time, the number and type of NSOs receiving ASC grants were largely consistent through those years. Seventy-four annual reports collected from 35 participating NSOs constituted documents used for data analysis, covering both Olympic and

non-Olympic sports including high- and low-profile sports. Of the participating NSOs, the number of annual reports available was influenced by timing (i.e., whether calendar or financial year), some NSOs did not produce annual reports each year and some annual reports were simply not available to the researchers.

Incoming annual reports were photocopied, clustered according to NSO, and stored. Once the 74 annual reports were collected, the first set of data (i.e., the annual reports from 1999 to 2002 for one sport) was selected at random and was analyzed. The results from this set of data were followed by the examination of another set of annual reports from a different sport. The remaining stored data (or cases) were selected as they facilitated understanding and made individual contributions toward the emerging theory and findings from each set of data were analyzed to direct the further selection of data. For example, after analyzing the annual reports from a sport with large participation numbers, another set of annual reports was chosen from a sport with small membership. The aim was to refine ideas (Charmaz, 2000) and to reach theoretical saturation, that is, the point at which new categories or variations on existing categories cease to emerge from new data (Soulliere, Britt, & Maines, 2001) and no new information is discovered (Smith & Stewart, 2001).

In this study, after analyzing 50% of the annual reports, 90% of the concepts and categories had been identified. Saturation was not reached, however, until 94.6% of the annual reports had been analyzed. The remaining 5.4% represents four annual reports that yielded no new information concerning any category and offered no additional information to this study.

Data Analysis

Figure 2 shows the outcomes the study. More specifically, it displays the fundamental questions driving this study, the *substantive* (open) and *theoretical* codes identified and their relationships.

Data analysis involved substantive (open) coding, theoretical coding, and *writing* and *theory advancement*. During open coding, the researchers analyzed data line-by-line and assigned codes (*concepts*). Then data were broken into *incidents* (i.e., groups of data/concepts examined and compared for similarities and differences; Pandit, 1996). Similar incidents were grouped together and were given the same conceptual label (*theme*). Subsequently, data were reexamined and concepts organized by recurring themes, reevaluated for their interrelationships, and they were gradually subsumed into and grouped under more abstract, higher order *categories*, and a *core* category. Hence, open coding unraveled substantive codes (categories), their properties (characteristics) and the core category. The codes (categories) were labeled as closely to the data as possible to ensure that they remain and reflect the meaning of the category (Hutchinson, 1986; Morse, 2000).

Following open coding, theoretical coding processes were used to link substantive codes and their properties, and develop *hypotheses*—or build a story that connects the categories. To facilitate the coding processes, the study used a *constant comparison* approach as suggested by Glaser (1978). This meant that throughout the coding, comparisons of incident-to-incident and concept-to-concept resulted in thematic similarities and differences that indicated patterns as part of developing a framework. As further data were incorporated into the analysis, they too were coded and categorized.

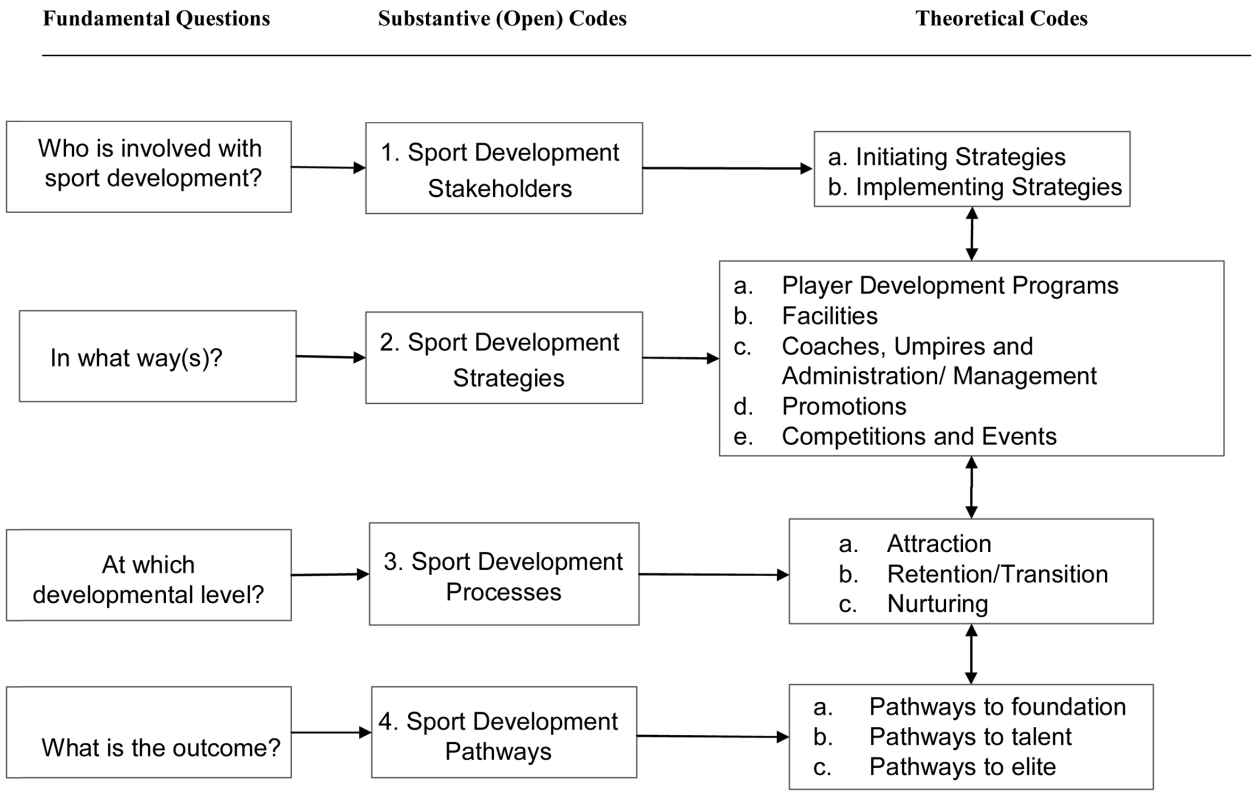

Figure 2 — Fundamental questions, substantive (open), and theoretical codes.

During the stage of writing and theory advancement, the authors went beyond the descriptive story by elaborating an analytical story. In addition, a second review of relevant literature was incorporated into the story line for similar and dissimilar theories to be integrated. The aim of this step was initially "to elaborate the core category around which the other developed categories can be grouped and by which they are integrated" (Flick, 1998, pp. 184–185) and then go beyond this descriptive level through an analytical story (Creswell, 1998; Fielding & Lee, 1998). This study offers a *substantive theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) on sport development processes. Substantive theories are readily available for further research to test their applicability and to develop a *formal theory* with wider scope.

Reliability was tested through the involvement of three research experts (Brink, 1989). One expert on qualitative research assisted with the design of the study, one expert on sport development research supported the conceptualization of the study, and a grounded theorist and N-Vivo (a qualitative data analysis software) expert made suggestions on the initial coding and grouping of categories. These three experts, collectively, were aware of the research objectives and assisted in revealing salient concepts within their area of expertise.

Results

Evidence arising from NSO annual reports enabled a description of sport development processes. Open coding revealed four categories: (a) sport development stakeholders, (b) sport development strategies, (c) sport development processes, and (d) sport development pathways. Figure 2 shows that stakeholders are involved with the sport development strategies (i.e., strategies for player development programs, facilities, coaches, umpires and administration/management, promotions, and competitions/events) through either *initiating* them or assisting with their *implementation*. Sport development stakeholders and their strategies come together to facilitate *three sport development processes* occurring within the Australian sport system: (a) *attraction*, (b) *retention/transition*, and (c) *nurturing* process. These terms match those posited by B.C. Green (2005) when formulating a normative theory for sport development. Her terminology is similar in that "athlete recruitment" is evident through the attraction process, "retention" is the equivalent of the retention/transition process described in this study, and the nurturing of athletes is consistent with "advancement" as conceived by Green.

The sport development processes cater to different sport development segments (e.g., young, indigenous, female participants), and share two important attributes: (a) they require *pathways* to allow and facilitate movement between processes, and (b) each process generates opportunities for the creation of different pathways (i.e., *pathways to the attraction process, pathways to the retention/transition process,* and *pathways to the nurturing process*). In this context, a pathway is the outcome of one process. Participants might exit from one process to enter a new development process; hence, the pathways illustrate the entry points facilitating the next process. Pathways show movement of particular segment(s) from one level to another, or the potential impact that each process might have on other facets of sport development. For example, the pathways to the attraction process show both potential tangible athlete movements from elite to grassroots after retirement, and

the intangible impact that role modeling and elite athlete success might have on attracting supporters or members.

The relationship between stakeholders, strategies, processes, and pathways is reciprocal. For instance, stakeholders formulate different strategies to target each process and each process requires different strategies. For example, competitions in the attraction process require different facilities to competitions in the nurturing process, and coaching strategies in the attraction process aim to develop skill rather than perfecting athletic performance. The use of three discrete frameworks to illustrate sport development processes facilitates the depiction of the reciprocal relationships among the categories. However, these processes work better together and the frameworks that represent them, as explained later, should not be seen in isolation due to the interrelationships between them.

Sport Development Stakeholders

The category of sport development stakeholders emerged as the core category and acts as a platform for the other categories and their properties. More specifically, sport development stakeholders, their relationships, and type of involvement in sport lead to the availability, implementation and evaluation of sport development strategies, and the provision of appropriate sport development pathways for sport development processes.

The results show a number of stakeholders involved in sport development, from governments and organizations at all levels to corporations and individuals functioning inside or outside these governments and organizations. After extensive coding and analysis of the documents, however, three central groups of stakeholders were evident. These were (a) the governments at federal, state, and local levels including the statutory authority of the Australian Sports Commission; (b) the sporting organizations at the national, state, and local levels; and (c) significant other stakeholders such as volunteers, paid staff, participants at various levels of skill including athletes, and sponsors.

These groups represent stakeholder roles that vary from initiating or shaping sport development strategies (e.g., governments and sporting organizations initiating programs) to implementing them (e.g., significant other stakeholders such as sport development officers and coaches implementing programs). For example, the ASC and state departments might initiate strategies such as player development programs to attract participants. Significant other stakeholders such as sport development officers, often implement these strategies. Others, for example coaches, might be involved across all or most of the sport development processes and coach at different levels. The sport development strategies that stakeholders initiate and/or implement may be labeled the same (e.g., player development programs) yet their context can be considerably different (e.g., programs for masters participants versus programs for junior athletes). A common characteristic across the results was that all types of stakeholders, in working closely together, aim to achieve the following sport development goals:

1. Increase membership/participation through programs for various groups of people including junior, women, people with disability, indigenous people, and the elderly, and
2. Achieve international elite athlete success through sports excellence and high performance programs.

These results support stakeholder theory assertions made by Jones (1995) that organizations that develop cooperative relationships with stakeholders are more likely to be successful in achieving their goals. NSOs share the view that intraorganizational cooperation and transparent strategies increase communication across affiliates that in turn improves relationships and levels of teamwork. This result is consistent with Huxham and Vangen's (1996) argument of stakeholder relationships that communication is an important element in successful partnerships that according to McQueen (2004) enables common understanding of terms and conditions, agreements, and decisions.

As the Australian Weightlifting Federation (AWF; 2001) noted: "A concerted effort, through more open communication and transparent policies, has been made to enhance the feeling of 'ownership' of the sport by stake holders (sic), with the result of improved relationships and cooperation between the AWF and its affiliated State and Territory Associations" (p. 6). The Bocce Federation of Australia (2002) and Squash Australia (2001) made similar statements: "It's only by working cooperatively together that bocce will triumph," (Bocce Federation of Australia, 2002, p. 6) and the "potential for success will only ever come from a collaborative and genuine contribution by all of us" (Squash Australia, 2001, p. 6).

Sustained levels of transparency and teamwork (sharing responsibilities from developing to implementing programs) throughout a sport facilitates successful results at all levels of participation. B.C. Green (2005) reinforces this point and concludes that athlete progression requires effective linkages among organizations (e.g., clubs, regional boards, national governing bodies) at each level of sport.

Sport Development Strategies

Lyle (1997), in his conceptualization of the United Kingdom's system of managing excellence in sports performance, acknowledged the importance of sport development programs, facilities, competitions, and other factors for the structural progression of athletes. He terms these factors *delivery mechanisms* or *structural strategies*. For the purposes of this study, the term *strategies* is used. *Sport development strategies* are the means and courses of action taken by the sport development stakeholders for successful sport development. These strategies consist of programs, initiatives, objectives, and tools of sport development to cater to player development, facilities, coach, umpire, and administration/management, promotions, and competitions or events. Strategies in the above areas determine who gets what, when and how. The formulation and maintenance of strategies for sport supports the establishment and sustainability of sport development. The benefits or goals these strategies deliver to all facets of sport development and participation are multiple and they are discussed in this section.

Player Development. The three types of programs present in this study include programs that are formulated for membership/participation development needs (Type I), programs that relate to talent identification and transition to elite levels (Type II), and programs that are specifically developed for elite athletes (Type III).

The major goal of Type I programs is to increase the number and the intensity of mass and junior participation (i.e., the quantity and frequency of participation), and hence establish overall growth. Those NSOs that were Active Australia (former brand representing active participation partnerships) providers argued that the aim

of these programs is "to support sport and help clubs and organisations improve their ability to attract more participants" to the sport (Australian Baseball Federation, 2000, p. 15). Women's Hockey Australia (1999) believed that the focus is to encourage "people to be more physically active" (p. 6). Tennis Australia and its member associations also explain that their many programs are designed to encourage more people to play tennis and those who do play to play more often.

Type II programs are designed for young participants of all abilities and skill levels. However, the major concern of Type II programs is talent identification and transition of junior participants to elite athletes and competitions. With a focus on participation rather than competition, 11s and 12s squads (11s and 12s denotes the age of participants) are open to all juniors, yet seek to target preteens who show "a natural aptitude" for sports and "who may play competitively at an older age" (Tennis Australia, 2000, p. 28). The Australian Gymnastic Federation (1999) also confirms that its state programs produce "the young talent for Australian teams of today and of the future" (p. 34). Swimming, through the *Tip Top* program supplies Australian Swimming with "a wealth of talented young athletes" who are "to be the future" of the sport (Australian Swimming, 2000, p. 45). The results of this study support previous investigations examining the value of talent identification programs (e.g., Balyi, 2002; Schumacher, Mroz, Mueller, Schmid, & Ruecker, 2006; Ziemainz & Gulbin, 2001) and provide evidence that junior elite athletes are significantly more successful as elite athletes when identified at a younger age.

Type III programs' major area of concern is the development of quality elite athletes who will deliver successful performances at high level competitions, such as world championships and Olympic Games. The elite development programs provide the essential skills and training for athletes to further their careers. The Australian Rugby Union (ARU; 2001) supports this view by arguing that the Brumbies Academy "continued to provide players with the appropriate skills and training to further their rugby careers" (p. 42). Women's Hockey Australia (2000) claims that with the introduction of the Australian Institute of Sport, the program "gave the players the opportunity for further development and more international competition" (p. 7). In addition, the Australian Water Polo Association (2000) claims elite players spending meaningful time training and playing with their clubs will lift standards.

Facilities. The nature of the facilities varies between recreational, training facilities (camps) and venues. The results of this study add to the extensive literature that shows recreational and training facilities assist the delivery of player development programs and, in particular, the preparation of the elite athletes to perform successfully, as well as encouraging the increase of membership/participation numbers (e.g., Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993a, 1993b; Williams & Krane, 1998). The following statement exemplifies the importance of sports venues for both players and spectators: "It is important to ensure that AFL [Australian Football League] matches are played at the best possible venues with the best possible conditions for players and spectators" (Australian Football League, 2000, p. 33). Australian Gymnastic Federation (2001) also made a similar statement: "This new facility, specifically built for traveling sporting teams was outstanding and provided all the services, support and a fantastic environment for General Gymnastic members and the International GymFest" (p. 18).

Coaches, Umpires and Administration/Management. Gould et al. (1999), in their examination of strategies affecting athlete performance, conclude that coaches are one of the most critical success factors. The Australian Cricket Board (2000) captures the essence of what NSOs describe as coaching programs arguing, "coaching programs are essential in recruiting, retaining and developing cricketers. In today's competitive and professional cricket environment, coaching resources are vital in making sure Australia continues to groom stars of the future" (p. 47). In addition, one third of NSOs suggest finding coaches and umpires (*coach/umpire talent identification*) at grassroots level. As one of these NSOs, the Australian Football League (AFL; 2000) suggests that it is essential to take advantage of the grassroots to identify and develop umpires. Women's Hockey Australia (1999) also noted that many junior umpires are "coming through to the senior level, boosting the practical support" (p. 16). Overall, there is a view that the training of coaches, umpires, trainers and club personnel is necessary to, as the AFL (2000) puts it, "ensure that the game is played in a high quality environment" (p. 64).

Sports have also intensified their search for administrative/managerial talent. Talent, the AFL (2000) says, "is not just sought at the athlete's level, but in coaching and administration. The link between the organizational structure and the coaching and playing staff is inextricable" (p. 10). The Confederation of Australian Motor Sports (CAMS; 2000) agreed, noting that the challenges ahead involve "attracting more young people to the sport [not only] as competitors but also as volunteer officials and administrators" (p. 12).

Promotions. A common objective of NSOs is to ensure they have, as the Australian Baseball Federation (2000) describes it, "a vibrant sport with a strong public profile" (p. 7). Soccer Australia (2000) saw promotion as critical to its aim to become a "progressive marketable sport with a high domestic profile" (p. 2). NSOs perceive their sports' profile as dependent upon media exposure, sporting events, or a combination of the two. The types of media used for marketing and promotional purposes by NSOs include both conventional media and the new technology media. One new technology medium used for NSOs' promotional purposes is the internet. The most common internet service is providing information through e-newsletters and sports websites with general information, results, and flashbacks on competitions. Indeed NSOs posited that new technology media offered most of the benefits received from conventional media in an instant and more effective way, but without replacing them (Nicholson, 2007). Soccer Australia (2000) is one of many NSOs to argue that the success or failure of its reach to the wider audiences primarily depends "on that audience's access to information, whether it be through the more conventional means of print and electronic media, or through newer technology via the Internet" (p. 10). Softball Australia (2001) also argued that it was able to secure a "satisfactory amount of Media exposure which went a long way to promoting Men's Softball" (p. 13), and the ARU (2001) noted that its tournaments were supported by a series of television commercials funded by the ARU "promoting high profile players and their favorite Super 12 moments" (p. 41).

Competitions and Events. One belief held by every NSO is that competitions/events are the foundation stone of Australia's international success. This result is well documented in previous studies (e.g., Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson, & Wall, 2003; Williams & Krane, 1998). In fact, competitions in many cases can act

as criteria of eligibility for athlete advancement to higher levels of competition. In addition, all NSOs agree that competitions/events are essential for promoting and boosting the profile of sport and its popularity. A recent survey on the potential impact of the 2006 Commonwealth Games on community's sporting habits (Department of Victorian Communities, 2007), shows that the games "motivated Australians to take up a new activity" (p. 16). The benefits from staging sporting events and competitions are numerous and relate to a number of stakeholders, such as participants, spectators, coaches and umpires, as well as the growth of the sport overall. Hence, sports aim to manage effectively local, state, national, or international competitions to ensure they are of benefit to their key stakeholders. NSOs' views on the key benefits derived from competitions/events are divided into two types: (a) player benefits received through competitions and (b) promotion benefits that events generate for sports. Having player development pathways in place is perceived as important for the junior, the talented and the elite athlete's successful development and performance.

According to CAMS (2001) for example, many junior participants state that in motor sport events they are "learning a great deal from the driving instructors and improving their driving skills and appreciation of vehicle capabilities" (p. 14). CAMS also claims that competitions offer potential for transition to the next competitive level and that "of the 25 who attended [the 'Come and Try Day' junior development program of CAMS foundation], three immediately joined to participate in the upcoming Motorkhana Series, with another five juniors indicating strong interest to join the Club" (p. 14). The ARU (2000) reinforced the importance of competition structures noting that the value of the Australian Rugby Shield competition could not be underestimated as it provides "a pathway for players outside Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra to higher honors" (p. 48). Other evidence on the importance of competitions to athlete development (e.g., Queensland Academy of Sport, 2004), suggest that sporting events offer a chance to participants to evaluate their performance and make a training commitment that will assist them improve their performance.

Sport marketing, exposure and opportunities to increase profile resulting from events/competitions relate to general membership/participation growth, increasing sport supporters, spectators, and sports' finances. For example, the Australian Gymnastic Federation (2001) experienced an increase in the numbers of registered gymnasts after the Sydney Olympic Games and argued that this could "be attributed to the exposure of the sport at the Sydney Olympic Games and increased media coverage" and "to the local promotion of gymnastics by clubs and coaches throughout the regions" (p. 30). For the ARU (2000), a non-Olympic sport, it was the Wallabies' World Cup victory in 1999 that "enticed newcomers to the game and motivated volunteers" (p. 9). Although sport development strategies come in many types and forms, collectively they shape sport development in Australia and result in different sport development processes. The next section examines these processes and illustrates how sport development takes place.

Sport Development Processes and Pathways

This section presents the results that emerged from the analysis of data following the discovery of the factors that affect sport development (i.e., stakeholder involvement

and implementation), the different relationships stakeholders hold and the variety of strategies they use in their efforts to develop sport. As theoretically deeper and more advanced links are formed, the synthesis of this section is based upon and uses all the previously discovered categories. Even though the results do not indicate an obvious starting or finishing point for sport development processes, the attraction process initiates the discussion for convenience. Besides, it can be argued that sports cannot retain or nurture what they have not attracted.

The Attraction Process. NSOs suggest that the attraction process involves sport members, participants, supporters, and spectators regardless of the demographic and socioeconomic factors that define them. The process has a twofold aim: to increase awareness, participation and membership of general participants, and to nourish large numbers of young participants destined to be elite sports performers (see Figure 3). The attraction process is achieved through the various strategies that sport development stakeholders create and enforce. For example, in the attraction process, the funds, programs and strategic direction offered by the ASC to NSOs focus on increasing mass participation, and place an emphasis on junior development. All NSOs consent that the state governments, through their departments for sport, along with the SSOs play a key role in the attraction process as they work toward attracting members and increase participation numbers. In addition, the numer-

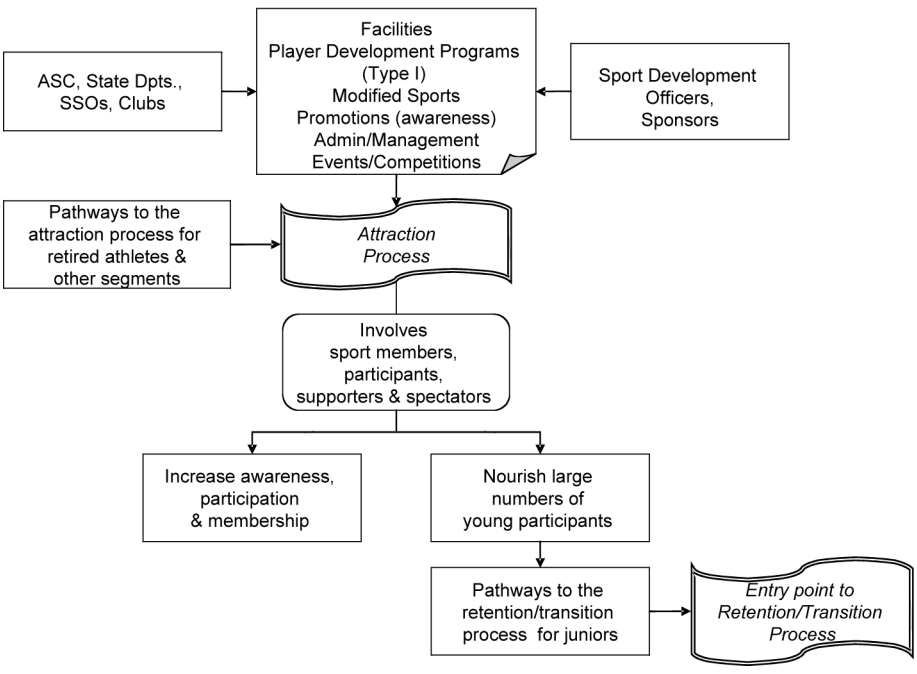

Figure 3 — The attraction process.

ous clubs/associations across the country provide participation and development opportunities to the public and assist in the attraction process at a local level. Other studies (e.g., Scheerder et al., 2006) have stressed the importance of participation opportunities offered through programs that can facilitate people's socialization into sports (Coakley, 2007). Research (e.g., Coakley, 2007; Yang, Telema, Leino, & Viikari, 1999) shows, however, that socialization agents go beyond programs to include parents, siblings, peers, and friends.

The effort of these stakeholders to increase general participation and public support and involvement with sport is supported by a number of strategies, such as sport development programs, modified sports, and competitions. Previous research (e.g., Kirk & Gorely, 2000) confirms the importance of these strategies in attracting participants and spectators/supporters in sport. These strategies reflect the requirements and needs of the public (including juniors), and they are modified/adapted to facilitate awareness, accessibility, and increased opportunities for people to become involved and stay motivated and interested in consuming sport. Sport consumption can occur at various levels, such as the support level from volunteering, the spectator level by attending games and competitions and watching or reading about sport, the consumer level by purchasing merchandise and sport products, and the participation level by taking part at a level commensurate with participants' age, gender, ability and skill.

The realization of these strategies in the attraction process is through the contribution of significant other stakeholders such as development officers who assist with the implementation of programs, and sponsors in facilitating the smooth running of theses programs and other strategies. In addition, NSOs believe that sport marketing and their promotional efforts increase awareness of program availability, and organization management assists in providing quality services. When all necessary stakeholders and strategies are in place and put into effect, a successful attraction process might be established. In addition, the pathways to the attraction create a link between the nurturing processes, which involves elite athletes (explained later), and the attraction process because these pathways offer the entry point for retired athletes and other segments to the attraction process.

According to all NSOs the intention of a well-established attraction process is to cater for large numbers of participants, spectators/supporters, and members, and develop a great pool of young individuals involved with sport. This pool of young individuals supplies/provides talented athletes to draw from and facilitate the retention/transition process. Hence, the attraction process may provide the pathways to the retention/transition process for juniors. These pathways reflect junior participant movement to the retention/transition process. Such movement could also be reflected in the progression of coaches and umpires to the retention/transition process. These segments, along with the initiation/implementation of process-specific strategies, can result in the successful retention/transition of the talented juniors. This study cannot conclude the nonexistence of pathways for other sport development segments, such as women or senior participants to the retention/transition process. Segments other than the talented individuals and their pathways to participation are under-represented in this study because these issues were not articulated or reported in the data. These limitations are recognized and discussed later in the paper.

The Retention/Transition Process. NSOs suggest that the retention/transition process involves a number of groups of participants such as volunteers or umpires, but mostly junior participants (rather than community participation as a whole). The process aims to capitalize on the identification of the most talented, retain them, and assist them to obtain the required skills to achieve high standards of performance (see Figure 4). In this sense, the emphasis of the Australian sport system on talent identification may appear to work against the retention or encouragement of other segments to continue participation. As with the attraction process, to achieve a successful retention/transition process, sport development stakeholders are involved through various strategies. However, these strategies in the retention/transition process reflect the requirements and needs of the different stage of sport development.

A condition for successful retention/transition is a successful attraction process. Once junior participants move beyond the attraction process, the pathways to retention/transition might act as an entry point for the talented juniors to move to a different level of participation. The ASC's role is to enable NSOs to foster new talent and develop career pathways for juniors. The AIS and various state institutes and academies of sport play an important role in the retention/transition process as they assist in junior athlete skill development, physical preparation, and improved

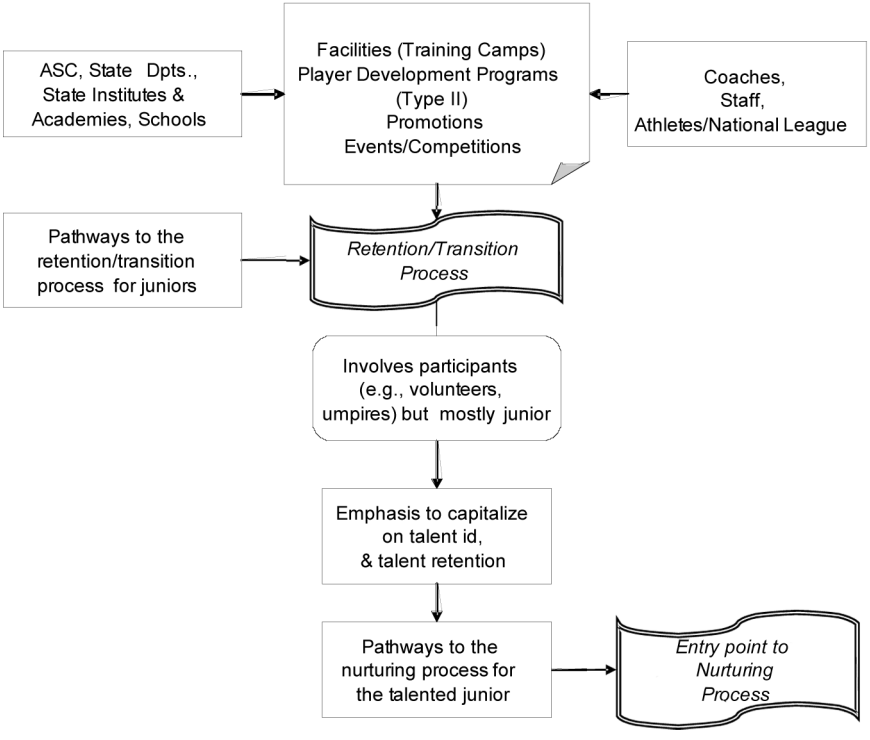

Figure 4 — The retention/transition process.

performances. In addition, coaches facilitate the process by training, motivating and assisting junior athletes in skill development with the ultimate goal to be successful at the competitions in which they participate. Competitions are also places for talent identification and operate as the platform for higher levels of participation. It should be noted, however, that research findings (e.g., Scheerder et al., 2006) recognize the important role of other stakeholders, such as schools, as a useful source for talent identification.

The intention of a well-established retention/transition process is to cater for all junior participants and provide the springboard for the pathways to the elite and successful performances at the national and international sport stage. More specifically, the outcome of a successful retention/transition process and the strategies embedded within that process is the pathways to the nurturing process, which involve talented participants who are ready to move to a higher level of competition and success in sport. Talented participants therefore progress via these pathways to the nurturing process. This segment, along with process-specific designed strategies, can assist in the successful nurturing of elite athletes.

The Nurturing Process. In the nurturing process, stakeholders coordinate their efforts to tailor sport development for specific sports and individuals or teams. The aim is to nurture the finest athletes, their success at prestigious international events and competitions, and sustain a culture of elite athletes continuing triumphant accomplishments (see Figure 5). The pathways to the nurturing process

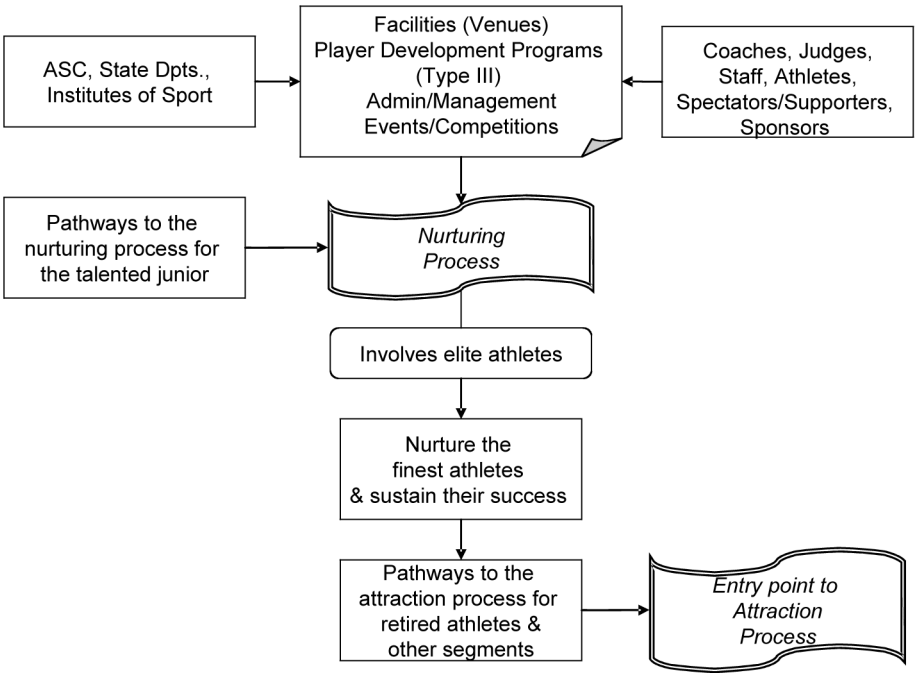

Figure 5 — The nurturing process.

are crucial to achieve this aim and obtain well-prepared and skilled athletes. The success of the elite athletes who take part in the nurturing process is a testament to their talent, abilities, commitment, and dedication to training and competition, and a tribute to a number of coordinated efforts from various stakeholders. More specifically, there is a reciprocal relationship between the ASC and elite success. ASC funding and support at the elite level contributes to elite athlete success and elite athletes' successful performances are important in maintaining this funding. In addition, state government departments as well as state institutes of sport support the nurturing process of the elite athletes in various ways that assist in maintaining the momentum of success.

Support staff such as nutritionists, physiotherapists, and psychologists influence positively elite athlete performances behind the scenes. Skilled, professional, committed, and knowledgeable coaches too play a most significant role in the nurturing of success. Spectator support can also make a difference between winning and losing, and sponsors are more likely to finance successful athletes/teams. An example of sponsor support in the nurturing process is the financial and in-kind assistance usually provided at various events/competitions.

Elite success increases the potential for sports' exposure and publicity. For example, the Australian Rugby League (ARL; 2000) claims that the success of Melbourne Storm "created interest in the print and electronic media, whereby Rugby League now 'gets its space' in the media previously dominated by Australian Rules" (p. 8). Increased revenue and potential for improvement of sports finances are other benefits. For example, the performance and style of rugby union teams in games such as the Waratahs versus the Reds in 2001 "drove a substantial increase in attendance at the Sydney Football Stadium and this has been critical to the improved financial position" (ARU, 2001, p. 43). Increased awareness, interest, and inspiration, which may boost participation and increase audiences and spectator bases, are also results of elite success. The Australian Gymnastic Federation (1999), for example, claims that seeing elite athletes of high quality competing proves "an outstanding success with our local Clubs and spectators" (p. 35) in terms of generating the interest and awareness of participants and spectators of all ages. They suggest that the athletes' achievements "inspire each and every one of us to achieve the 'personal best' that become so meaningful to an individual" (p. 33). Synchro Australia (2000/01), Australian Water Polo (2000), Australian Weightlifting Federation (2000), Women's Hockey Australia (2000) and other NSOs made similar statements. For instance, Athletics Australia (1999/2000) commented that its aim was "to build a world class [organization] that will inspire and develop personal and national pride through achieving international success" (p. 4).

Hence, the nurturing process might facilitate the pathways to the attraction process. These pathways offer opportunities for retiring athletes to remain in the sport system and participate in various ways. For instance, retiring athletes have opportunities to participate at a community level, act as coaches or umpires, and facilitate clinics for the attraction process. The following example from an elite squash athlete demonstrates the various direct outputs of elite athlete development.

Michelle Martin's retirement will have great impact on squash in NSW. Michelle's achievements as a player are well documented with her many successes gaining much-needed media coverage for the sport. As a person, she has no peer.

Her frequent nights mingling with local pennant players, attending coaching clinics, visiting country squash centers for promotion, local schools visits, and generally making herself available as required within a hectic international playing schedule, separates Michelle from all others (Squash Australia, 1999, p. 24).

These results are in line with the ASC's Healthy Active Ambassador Program, announced in July 2006, which brought together current and former champions from a variety of sports as ambassadors to motivate and educate Australian children. Successful elite performances can act as significant other socialization agents, and active elite athlete role modeling (such as active athlete involvement with clinics) can stimulate participation and support for sport. Through their active involvement, elite performers offer a great tool in retaining as well as attracting members, participants, spectators, and sport supporters.

Discussion

Houlihan (2000) and Girginou (2001) identify and recommend the use of a macro-, meso-, and microlayered analysis as a holistic approach that illuminates sport development courses of action and strategies in the most fruitful and informative way. These three levels of analysis are used to analyze the sport development processes as follows. At a macro level, the sport development stakeholders' role and involvement show that for a great number of key sport development players, the Australian government and the ASC play the most crucial part in terms of both elite and mass participation development through federal government sport policy. A distinction nevertheless is noted between the responsibilities of the NSOs and their respective SSOs, with the latter placing most of their efforts and resources into servicing the general population and in particular participation in junior sport.

At a meso level, the linkages between sport development strategies and their implementation by sport development stakeholders become clear. As we saw with the three program types, these strategies should be tailored for particular participant segments to reflect the requirements, needs, and abilities of those segments. At a micro level, sport development pathways cover both stakeholder involvement and particular strategies, as they are applicable to the different levels of sporting participation as well as sport spectatorship. Kirk and Gorely (2000) suggested that for sport development strategies to be inclusive, they need clearly articulated pathways across all levels of performance and age ranges, the use of modified sports, coach development, and the coordinated efforts of stakeholders. Sport development pathways are embedded in the sport development processes and vary from the attraction of individuals to sport, to their retention, transition, and nurturing. For sport development strategies to complete all sports development processes, all pathways need to be available. The importance of the sport development pathways lies in the aim of strengthening the traditional base and the developing areas, which can be done only with clear pathways (ARU, 1999).

Figures 3, 4, and 5 showed that sport development in Australia is much more complex and dynamic than that represented by a traditional pyramid. Of particular interest in these three figures is the indication that sport development pathways form an important part of the process. It could be suggested that for the participating NSOs, and providing that the right strategies and processes are in place,

junior participants might assist in elite success, elite athletes have the potential to improve physical activity and interest in sports by the community, mass participation (including volunteers) facilitates the regeneration of champions, and these processes are continual. We argue that the entry points depicted by the pathways link sport development processes to the extent that there would be a gap in the system if the pathways were not considered an integral part of sport development planning. Stakeholders, through the formulation and implementation of sport development strategies, should ensure that these pathways are well developed.

In his exploration of the relationship between elite versus mass participation, Buggel (1986) described two concepts. The first was that top-class sport and mass participation activities have nothing in common and reflect two different worlds, and the second contends that even though sport features some differences between the elite and mass participation, it nevertheless points to "remarkable interrelations leading to positive results for both areas" (p. 43). The results of our study illustrate that each sport development process may generate the pathways and the entry points to another developmental process. Hence, we could conclude that the results of this study strengthen the argument that elite and mass participation support do not contradict, but complement each other. The implication of this for sport development practitioners is the theoretically based recognition of the extent to which elite and mass participation coexist rather than being part of trickle-up and trickle-down effect.

These results might inform development officers who have adopted a linear approach to sport development planning. This linear approach to sport development might be inadequate, because it prevents us from conceptualizing beyond the pyramid and the trickle-up or trickle-down effect and examining sport development as a reciprocal process in which (a) supporting one process more than the other might result in fragmented outcomes, and (b) all processes need assistance and funding for a sustainable system. An essential characteristic of these pathways is that they link one development process to the following process, illustrating participant movement and the impact that each process might have on other facets of sport development.

This study refines the previous definitions of sport development as stated by Eady (1993) and Collins (cited in Eady, 1993) to show that sport development is a dynamic process, in which *sport development stakeholder* involvement provides the necessary *sport development strategies* and *pathways* to facilitate the *attraction*, *retention/transition* and *nurturing* of sporting participants. This definition advances our knowledge in this area by providing clarity as to who is responsible for sport development and how sport development is implemented.

Sport development is depicted through three different frameworks in this study that reflect the attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing of sport development segments. The three suggested frameworks can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, the frameworks arguably assert that sport development processes are not separate entities because they are interdependent. In an appraisal of sports development processes, Stevens (1993) claimed that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts but too often we see the parts failing to work together and the author believes that the process depends not on the sum of the parts but on the product of its interactions" (p. 34).

On the other hand, the frameworks encourage sport managers to see each sport development process as a separate operation. That is because each development process requires and involves a different approach to development, considerations, policies, programs, initiatives, planning, management, and ultimately resource allocation. For example, player development programs can vary from membership/participation programs to junior talent programs and elite development programs depending which processes they represent.

Therein lies an important opportunity for further research. The resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), as it is applied in the strategy literature, may have the potential for application within the three frameworks. That is, the individual components of each framework could be the focus of testing to identify the competitive advantage garnered by each of the individual resources or processes. Conceptually, Porter's (1985) value chain, in a modified form, might provide the basis from which to disaggregate resources (e.g., stakeholders, coaches, administrators, facilities) and processes (e.g., attraction, retention/transition, nurturing) to ascertain where the competitive advantage resides in terms of sport development.

Gaining a fuller understanding of sport development, using Australia as an exemplar, has *direct* benefits within the Australian context and *indirect* considerations at a macro level for other sport systems. Directly, the results of this study help sport managers in Australia reconceptualize sport development. In light of the new definition and the three processes, along with the frameworks that represent them, sport development practitioners can evaluate current sport development practices. For example, while the Australian sport system has the potential to attract a large number of individuals such as volunteers, members, participants of all ages and sport supporters/spectators, it places an emphasis on the development of junior athletes and their transition to elite. Consequently, the participation, development, and needs of the general population appear to be the least portrayed or receive less attention. This suggests that the sport system in Australia under-represents recreational, and health and fitness membership/participation pathways.

The results imply that membership/participation follows development pathways different to those of junior players, and these pathways have not yet been adequately mapped. The pathways appropriate for the other segments (e.g., recreation activities for indigenous people or general fitness and health pathways for senior participants) need to be identified, clarified, and understood. An understanding of these processes will offer a more comprehensive depiction of other aspects of sport development in Australia and might help sport stakeholders identify and implement the right strategies for membership/participation.

Similarly, the development of coaches, umpires, and managers/administrators is inseparable from successful sport development strategies, and it is essential that these segments be considered too in future sport development systems and pathways research. Finally, in examining current NSO views on sport development, the sport development processes appear to overlook athlete transitions to new roles in the sport system. This finding verifies an outcome theorized by B.C. Green (2005) in her conceptual work, concluding that this represents "a significant gap in our literature" (p. 248). The emphasis on the development of junior athletes and their transition to elite appears to misrepresent sports such as diving or aerial skiing that do not follow traditional talent identification processes. As sport development

processes might vary depending on the nature of a sport, a sport-by-sport case study would be suited to depict precise sport development systems and pathways for individual sports.

To achieve such comprehensive evaluations of the underrepresented development segments and their development processes currently not depicted in the Australian sport system, studies that are more inclusive should be considered. Specifically, the results from this study reflect sport development processes as they pertain to the views and understanding of sporting organizations at the national level. The source of the data (NSO's annual reports) privileges some stakeholders and some relationships over others. Annual reports do not identify or detail the role of all potential stakeholders outside the NSO governing system (e.g., schools, fitness centers). Yet, other organizations, individuals, and systems do affect the development of athletes and of sports. Hence, further studies should extend not only to include other types of data sources (e.g., from interviews, focus groups, surveys) but also to incorporate sport associations at a state and local level to provide a deeper and richer representation of the sport development processes.

Indirectly, aggregate sport development processes can now be tested empirically on a larger scale to reflect other sport systems and their development needs. The current results reflect a macro view of NSO practices and the way sport development processes occur in Australia. It is naïve to assume that the frameworks can be generalized to reflect other sport systems. Some countries (e.g., Canada) might do similar things to Australia, whereas others (e.g., USA) operate quite differently. This study should be replicated to generate country-specific processes. In addition, international comparative work through country-specific studies could form a useful means to advance our knowledge in this area.

Testing the three generic frameworks using representative sports or different sport systems has the potential to bolster our preliminary results; develop formal theories on sport development (Strauss & Corbin, 1994); and extend our knowledge of sport development practices, strategies, and processes. Further research would result in comprehensive frameworks tailored to reflect selected sports or sport systems.

This study explains development strategies and processes at a particular time. The sport industry changes rapidly, however, with new stakeholders entering the field. Innovative approaches to developing sport; constant evaluation; and reevaluation of sport development practices, change of governments, and of NSO governance styles (e.g., from the traditional/delegate system to the more corporate structures of today; Shilbury et al., 2006), influence the way sport development processes are designed and delivered. In addition, societies, people's needs, requirements, and expectations are ever changing. As sport development processes and the frameworks that represent them might change over time, longitudinal research would advance and update our understandings of sport development.

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