

Developing a selection policy for national teams.

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Some time ago one of our Federations sought from the office, assistance with the selection of their national team. In reality they were looking for a “magic pill”, a document or process which would objectively allow the national team to be selected and avoid any questions of bias and eliminate controversy from the selection process and the result.

We could not provide them with the “magic pill” and I suspect the pill does not exist.

However our research has shown that there are some useful documents which might guide the federation through the selection process.

With several Oceania events such as our Youth Tournament and the Pacific Games on the horizon, this summary document might prove useful to some national federations.

The ***FIBA National Federations Manual*** contains useful information about preparation of the senior and junior national teams, including team selections. This is available in hard copy format from your federation, has been made available in CD format and is also available on the FIBA website www.fiba.com under the *Inside FIBA* tab under *Basketball programs* – download the whole publication or each section as a ‘pdf’ file. Oceania federations are reminded that *OSIC* at the *University of the South Pacific* in Suva, Fiji has a copy of this resource for loan. The ZDO usually carries a copy of the ***FIBA National Federations Manual*** on his data disk and laptop and would be happy to provide you with a copy while in your country.

The ***Australian Sports Commission*** (ASC) has produced a publication *Getting It Right: Guidelines for Selection* and this is available for download from their website www.ausport.gov.au then type in “Getting it Right” into the website search tool. This document is some 70 pages long and this probably requires more commitment than most administrators have available, but there is some useful information even in the summary pages.

The ***Australian Olympic Committee*** (AOC) has allowed me access to the *2008 Australian Olympic Team Basketball Australia (BA) Nomination Criteria* – a six page document which outlines the AOC’s requirements for the selection of the Olympic Basketball Teams for the Beijing Olympics. I have this available as a ‘pdf’ if you think it will be useful to you.

It is important to remember in this context, that the AOC had the final say on whether and if Australian Basketball teams would play in the Olympics. There will be cases in your country, where someone else, such as the NOC or the PGA will make the decision about whether your teams will participate in some competitions. They may have selection criteria which override yours. I believe in all cases they will appreciate you being able to demonstrate that you have a clearly thought out process for selecting your national teams.

This document aims to pull together some useful pieces of information to help you establish a selection policy, or if you do not think you need a policy, then at least a system which will ensure you select the best team to represent your federation and your country at international events.

Back to the Magic Pill ...

Objective v/s Subjective selection criteria

An example of **an objective selection criteria** would be:

The athletes who finish first and second in the 100 metre race at the national selection trials will be automatically selected for the national team.

In a basketball context:

The player who finishes the National Basketball League season with the highest rebound total will automatically be selected for the national team.

An example of **a subjective selection criteria** would be:

The selectors will choose a team, that in their opinion, will stand the best chance of gaining a medal at the Oceania Tournament.

Here is what the ASC publication *Getting it Right* has to say about the selection criteria for team sports;

Team sports — clearly the very nature of most team sports makes subjectively based criteria generally appropriate. The selection philosophy will almost always be to select the team that is most capable of representing the organisation and therefore subjective elements such as *team harmony* and *balance* must come into consideration. These matters are generally not capable of being determined satisfactorily on an objective basis. Many team sports first use objective criteria to select a squad from which the team is ultimately picked on a subjective basis.

Within the AOC's nomination criteria the following selection criteria are listed (among several others):

- The positional balance of the team (for example, a team consisting of solely guards would lack balance).
- Demonstrated ability to work with the other Athletes nominated for the team.
- Specific positional skills as well as versatility to play alternative positions.
- Demonstrated attitude and commitment to Basketball Australia and previous Basketball Australia teams/squads.

So it is clear that the AOC understands that many subjective factors have a bearing on the selection of a successful basketball team.

Useful extracts from the Publications.

From my reading of the abovementioned publications, the following are some useful summaries which I hope may help you in your work.

Selecting the Squad from which the team will be selected (from the AOC publication *2008 Australian Olympic Team Basketball Australia Nomination Criteria*.)

The AOC has established a practice of requiring Basketball Australia to select a squad of players from among whom they may then nominate to the AOC the players they would like to represent them at the Olympic Games. The AOC's criteria for selection into the squad (obviously created in consultation with Basketball Australia) is:

(a) the performance of the athlete and the performances that will be most highly regarded, in order of performance are:

- (i) Performances in playing for the national team during the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2008;
- (ii) Performances in training with the national squad during the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2008;

- (iii) Men - Performances in NBL, NBA (USA), and club competition in Europe or other major leagues overseas during the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2008; Women – performances in WNBL, WNBA (USA) and club competition in Europe or other major leagues overseas during the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2008.
- (iv) Consideration may also be given to performances in i to iii above in the period from the completion of the 2004 Olympic Games to 31 December 2006;
- (b) the positional balance of the team (for example, a team consisting of solely guards would lack balance);
- (c) the possession by an athlete of outstanding statistics in club competition, however this alone is not a determinative factor;
- (d) demonstrated ability to work with the other Athletes nominated for the team;
- (e) fitness, health and wellbeing including state of injury/ illness;
- (f) specific positional skills as well as versatility to play alternative positions;
- (g) demonstrated attitude and commitment to Basketball Australia and previous Basketball Australia teams/squads; and
- (h) commitment and availability for the program for the two year period from 1 June 2007 to 30 June 2008 which includes training camps and international competition.

What really happens:

It sends a very bad signal to the sporting community and to the public when the coach of the national team is Steve Smith and there are three players in the team named Smith, all related to the coach. The selectors need to be able to show that they have selected the team through a process which was open and transparent. Furthermore they need to be able to justify that the selected players were the best for the competition under consideration.

Extenuating Circumstances.

It is not unusual for players to miss out on some part of the selection process or for them not to perform to their recognised potential during the selection/trial period. The AOC selection document allows the Basketball Australia Selection Panel in their absolute discretion to give weight to extenuating circumstances such as:

- (a) injury or illness;
- (b) travel delays;
- (c) bereavement; and/or
- (d) any other factors reasonably considered by Basketball Australia to constitute extenuating circumstances.

But in its agreement with Basketball Australia, the AOC has noted in writing:

A decision in each case of extenuating circumstances will be made by the Basketball Australia Selection Panel on an individual basis. Any such decision will not be binding on the AOC.

Selectors (from the ASC *Getting it Right* document)

The types of people that a sporting organisation might draw from to appoint selectors include:

- recently or previously retired athletes,
- prior coaches, or coaches who are not currently coaching any athletes in contention for selection (or if this is not possible, coaches who all coach athletes in contention, so that bias is neutralised by an even spread, for example, the four coaches of the sport's four national training centres, where all of the athletes in the team will come from),
- technical officials with a broad knowledge base in the relevant sport,
- masters-level athletes — these people are involved in and passionate about the sport, usually without a conflict of interest at the elite level and often have a broad base of other skills to bring to the panel,
- others with specialist knowledge of the sport and how athletes perform, for example sport scientists, prior team managers, even journalists in the area as long as they have no current role that creates a conflict of interest.

Summary on Selectors (from the ASC *Getting it Right* document)

- Selectors should be appointed in accordance with the constitution of the organisation, usually by the Board.
- Selectors must have good knowledge of the specific requirements for success in the sport, including the functioning and needs of representative teams.
- It is generally good practice for the leader of the program (high performance, elite, junior, etc.) to be involved in the selection process. Coordinate and/or recommend the appointment of selectors, be a selector, or at least be available to provide information to the selectors.
- The chair person of the selectors can be voting or non-voting. They must have good communication and organisational skills as well as a thorough knowledge of the policy and process of selection. It may be useful for this person to have legal qualifications.
- Selectors need to have a range of appropriate qualities.
- Sporting organisations should have a conflict of interest policy in place.
- Selectors should be well educated on their role and responsibilities.

Refer to the ASC document if you want to find out the qualities required of a good selector.

Selection Policy (from the ASC *Getting it Right* document)

- Think about what you are trying to achieve and set your goals (selection philosophy). *This first bullet point may seem simple but have you considered if your single and sole objective is to achieve the best possible result in international competition? For other teams and other events the objective might be to provide players who have the potential to represent the federation at a senior level with an international competition experience. Others may adopt as a selection criteria a desire to reward the players who have consistently supported the federation through participation in domestic championships. You can see that with different philosophies, different team selections result.*
- Consult stakeholders and consider their input.
- Have your best-qualified individuals develop the policy.
- Determine criteria with reference to the philosophy:
 - consider all possible scenarios, consequences and options
 - consider the use of flexibility/discretion versus pure objective criteria according to what is best for your sport to ensure the best possible team is selected.
- Draft the policy in clear, unambiguous language and consider all contingencies.
- Make sure each stage of the process is compliant with the organisation's rules and regulations.
- Allow plenty of time to settle the policy and have it published early — do not allow time pressure to influence the process.

Legal Aspects (from the ASC *Getting it Right* document)

- In modern sport the selection process has increasingly come under legal scrutiny, which sports should be aware of when drafting selection policies.
- There are three possible appeals forums:
 - internal appeals tribunal
 - Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)
 - domestic courts
- An appeal can only be lodged with CAS when CAS is the appeals body specified in the relevant selection policy or if it is agreed between the parties to present to CAS.
- Domestic courts are reluctant to become involved in the internal affairs of sporting organisations. Any appeals through domestic courts can be a long process.
- If an internal appeals tribunal is the only appeals body specified, the possibility is left open for appeals to the domestic courts.
- The best policies specify CAS in the first instance or after an internal appeals tribunal (depending on the sport and situation) and as the final appeals body.
- The main legal issues include:
 - breach of natural justice
 - breach of contract
 - unreasonable restraint of trade
 - unlawful discrimination

- eligibility
- the process of conducting selection not being correctly followed.
- The sport should be aware of its obligations and the rights of the athletes.

I hope these few extracts may give you some issues to think about and some guidance when selecting your national teams. Please let our office know if you would like us to send you electronically, any of the documents referred to in this publication.

I have not provided you with a national team selection policy and it is not our task to do so. I hope this brief paper and the reference documents, may help you create such a document suited to your circumstances, if you are at a level of basketball development where such a document or policy is needed.

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