

Research Examines Fairness in Olympic Funding and Support for Amateur Athletics

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In the first study to examine resource allocation in Olympic sport, research led by Stephen W. Dittmore of the University of Arkansas revealed a gap between what administrators of U.S. National Governing Bodies thought was fair and how they believed funding would be distributed by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

The study also raised questions about the ongoing mission of the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Dittmore and colleagues surveyed presidents and executive directors of national governing bodies, or NGBs, the member organizations responsible for training and fielding competitors for each Olympic sport. The NGB administrators identified “need to be competitively successful” as the most fair distribution principle, but believed “equity based on medals won” was most likely to be used.

The research showed that some NGB administrators believe they do not receive adequate funding to be competitively successful and that, in a system that rewards [sports](#) for medals won, they believe “the rich get richer.” That is, “those who win medals get more resources which helps them to continue to win more medals.”

The U.S. Olympic Committee receives little direct government support outside its tax-exempt status. The United States is unusual in international sports delivery, Dittmore noted. Without a system of government support, such as through a Ministry of Sport, the United

States relies on the private sector to develop athletes.

“As physical education is cut by school systems, where do amateur athletes learn sports such as team handball or archery?” Dittmore asked.

A key finding of the study was the potential contradiction between the U.S. Olympic Committee’s practices and its congressional mandate. When Congress enacted the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act in 1978, it assigned the U.S Olympic Committee the responsibility for promoting and encouraging physical fitness and public participation in sport and for developing amateur athletic activities. An emphasis on winning medals, the researchers suggested, could mean downplaying physical fitness, participation and development goals.

“The USOC may just be doing what everyone wants them to,” Dittmore said. “Americans want to win, and we push elite performance. It may be time to rewrite the USOC mission.”

To address the development of amateur athletes, the researchers questioned whether the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act should be revisited:

“If the goals stated in the Amateur Sports Act - to promote and encourage physical fitness and public participation and develop amateur athletic activities - are still important, then assuring they are adequately resourced and receiving sufficient focus and attention is also important.”

The researchers reported on their study in “Examining Fairness Perceptions of Financial Resource Allocations in U.S. Olympic Sport,” an article in the July issue of the Journal of Sport Management.

After data was gathered for the resource allocation study, a new chief executive assumed leadership of the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Additionally, two weeks before the article was published, the White House press secretary announced the formation of a White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport.

"While the stated intent of this office was to promote the values of Olympism and encourage youth participation in sport, the USOC immediately linked it to Chicago's bid for the 2016 Olympic Games," Dittmore said. "This suggests commercial goals are a higher priority for the USOC than its congressionally mandated mission."

Dittmore is an assistant professor of recreation in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas. His colleagues in the study were Daniel Mahony of Kent State University, Mary A. Hums of the University of Louisville and Damon P.S. Andrew of Troy University, scholars he calls "pioneering researchers" in applying the study of organizational justice to sports management.

Provided by University of Arkansas ([news](#) : [web](#))

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