

Youth Sport – Crowd-sourcing and Talentsourcing



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Introduction

Long a fundamental activity for sports organisations from clubs to national federations, the identification, confirmation and development of talented athletes has recently become increasingly sophisticated and a strategic ‘hot topic’ in sport.

With many nations having relatively small talent pools and a ever-growing number of sports demanding attention and participants, there is an increasing need to make the best of exiting talent across sports through strategic talent ‘transfer’ initiatives or by adopting wider, broader and smarter ways of finding talent that may not reside in the various sports’ natural development or competition pathways.

Technology developments through social media crowdsourcing have the potential of providing novel ways that help identify individuals with the physical prerequisites and basic abilities for high-level performances in the future.

What is Crowdsourcing?

Crowdsourcing is a method of distributed problem solving. By distributing tasks to a large group of people you are able to mine collective intelligence. It is similar to the concepts introduced in the TV series known as ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?’, where contestants have the opportunity to ask the audience on mass for the answer to a question (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_Wants_to_Be_a_Millionaire%3F) they are unsure of. It is esti-

mated that success rates when a question is posed to an audience exceed 90%.

Crowdsourcing is not a new concept – James Surowiecki wrote about the ideas in 2004 in a book called *The Wisdom of Crowds*. What has changed in the past five years has been the development of social media and technology platforms that make it possible to apply the concept on a national or international scale.

The technology has extended to business and industry where it is often used to raise funds to support new designs and products, e.g. www.kickstarter.com and numerous other applications (see <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/>). Big brands have used the concept to help canvass opinion and insight on their core products – recent examples include:

- Google used it to come up with a globally recognizable and famous Google Chrome icon.
- IBM’s 2006 “Innovation Jam” was attended by over 140,000 international participants and yielded around 46,000 ideas.

Crowdsourcing Sporting Talent

In sport, the St Louis Cardinals baseball club in the USA has successfully used its fans and network for some time to help with its recruitment campaigns (http://online.wsj.com/article_email/SB120485693123318577-1MYQ-jAxMDI4MDE0MzgXNTM2Wj.html).

The bringing together of talent concepts and crowdsourcing has recently come to the world of sport through a concept called 'Create.it' (www.create.it). It is described as talent identification content management software for the social enterprise and is increasingly being used for talent sourcing in sport. By putting out calls to the community in search of specific talent, the aim is that the community identifies and sources unearthed talent through extended networks.

The most recent examples are from the Canadian Ski Team, which sourced acrobats for some of its winter sports events; the USA ski team, which sourced tumblers for its aerial ski team; and Red Bull's future surf camp, which unearthed talented individuals as part its extreme academy.

Within each of these campaigns, individuals can upload videos of various performers or their own performances and skills – the community can then vote and report on various videos based on skills they see. Collectively, the software tools behind the uploaded videos help to rate and rank the performers and prioritise those based on a collective view and expert opinion. It enables talent to be discovered based on the wisdom of the crowds.

Would it Work for Athletics?

With the ever-increasing focus of youth on technology it is essential for the sport of athletics to find more effective ways to reach out and use the international, national and local communities to find, source and attract talent. The concept of talentsourcing through a platform like Create.it could have value in this way. And it could help engage new fans by meeting the behaviours of Generation Y in a simple but interactive way.

Create.it gives federations the potential to work at local and national levels through schools and clubs across all sports with a fo-

cus on unearthing athletic talent. A federation could conduct a campaign in which kids themselves (or teachers, parents and friends) could be invited upload videos that demonstrate their ability or potential. These videos could be evaluated by experts who then advise on the best course of action for the sport to make contact and recruit those of particular interest.

Of course, such a campaign would have to be carefully planned. The required experts would have to be in place, and the arrangements to make contact, receive and develop the identified individuals would have to be made. But if these things can be organised, young athletic talent that would otherwise not be selected for the sport has a greater opportunity of coming into athletics before the attraction of other more easily accessible sports becomes a possibility.

The simplicity of integrating technology we use on an everyday basis could be appealing for national federations looking to expand their own scouting network beyond its traditional club and competition pathways.

There is an expectation that Create.it and other crowdsourcing concepts will grow and develop in the next decade and provide a low cost, rapidly accessible method for talent identification.

Be ready for it, keep it simple and grasp it before your competitors do!

Please note: the author has no involvement with any of the commercial companies or products mentioned in this report.

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