

New insights in the nature of best practice in elite sport system management – exemplified with the organisation of coach education

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One of the key results of the existing research into the organisational design of elite sport systems is the identification of a certain convergence in the service portfolios the different systems offer. There is, however, a lack of studies that focus on the actual practices successful systems apply on the operational level; that investigate in how far these practices are related to the success of the systems; that determine if support services and service delivery look similar across different systems; and that evaluate if these practices provide useful lessons from which other systems can learn. Using Swedish athletics and the Norwegian cross-country skiing as examples of particularly successful elite sport systems, this article investigates the open questions with a specific focus on the provision of coach education. It shows that the practices applied in the two systems contradict, at times, the expectations concerning the nature of best practice in elite sport management that can be derived from the existing literature.

ABSTRACT

Nikolai Böhlke PhD studied management at the University of Cologne (Germany) and the Pennsylvania State University (USA) as well as sport science at the German Sport University in Cologne, where he also worked as a research and teaching assistant. This paper is based on the research he conducted between 2003 and 2006 at the Institute for Sport and Leisure Policy at Loughborough University in England. In February 2007, Dr. Böhlke started working as Research and Innovation Coordinator for UK Sport.

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Introduction

The organisational design of elite sport systems has been the focus of much investigation in recent years^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25}. It remains difficult to evaluate if the literature only describe a phenomenon that occurred in the management practice of elite sport or if the respective authors have actually caused developments with their research, but it can be concluded, as one of the key findings from the existing literature, that the design of contemporary elite sport systems is characterised by a homogenisation of the service portfolio that the different organisations offer²⁴. Of course,

elite sport systems still differ in their organisational-structural design as well as in the political, legal, social, etc. environments in which they are embedded^{8, 19}. However, most institutions provide their athletes and coaches with a more or less identical set of support services: no matter if it is the Australian Institute of Sport, the Olympiastützpunkte in Germany, the English Institute of Sport, or Olympiatoppen in Norway, all these organisations offer, for example, education for coaches, lifestyle support for athletes and scientific advice for training design.

Despite this convergence, some nations still appear to perform systematically better in specific sports than their competitors: Australia in swimming, Great Britain in sailing or track cycling, and Norway in cross-country skiing, just to name a few examples. As athletes and coaches in these systems are, arguably, provided with a support portfolio that is similar to what other systems offer it suggests that the portfolio alone cannot explain superiority. On the other hand, it can be concluded that it is the way the service provision is organised and now the interaction between athletes, coaches and support staff members is managed that constitute the decisive factors for the overall results of an elite sport system.

The existing literature on elite sport management focuses mainly on investigation of the strategic-structural design of different systems and, hence, it applies a methodology that is predominately based on the analysis of documents, interviewing representatives from the strategic-tactical management level of sport systems, or questionnaires eliciting quantitative data from athletes and coaches^{3, 10, 11, 12, 17}. These approaches are suitable for identifying the specific stakeholder environment of a sport system; for describing its internal organisational design; for categorising the portfolio of the different elite sport support services; and for portraying the general support policy based on which the different services are (officially) delivered to athletes and coaches. These approaches are however not always able to help the researcher

unravel and understand the actual nature of the interaction between top-level athletes, their coaches and the support staff members.

Despite this methodological weakness, a rather clear picture of what best practice on this operational level is expected to look like in successful sport systems can be found in many publications. DIGEL (2005), GREEN and OAKLEY (2001), OAKLEY and GREEN (June 2001), SHIBLI and BINGHAM (March 2006) or SIRC (2003) suggest, more or less explicitly, that the most successful systems are going to be those that have the more sophisticated sport science support programme; that offer the more rigorous coach education scheme; that provide the more comprehensive long-term athlete development pathway; that have the more specialised and professional support staff; or, simply, that have the bigger support budget^{8, 18, 22, 24, 26}. This "the more – the better" hypothesis seems to be widely accepted and rarely challenged in the contemporary academic literature or in elite sport policy and management practice, even though knowledge of the actual processes based on which successful sport nations provide their support services remains limited.

This article describes some of the results of a research project that systematically investigated, analysed, and compared the operational communication and management processes that are applied in two successful elite sport systems for the provision of five selected support services. The aim of the project was to determine what the service provision looks like in practice, i.e. in the daily interaction between athletes, coaches, and support staff; in how far the support services and the specific way they are provided can explain the success of the respective systems; if these practices look similar between successful systems; and if these practices provide useful lessons from which other systems can learn. The Swedish national athletics team and the Norwegian national cross-country skiing team were selected as examples of successful elite sport systems. The support services studied in the project were the design of the squad system, the hierarchy of coaches

within the squad system, the organisation of the coach education, and the provision of sport science and lifestyle support. The organisation of coach education will be the specific focus of this article.

Key definitions, selection process, applied research design and methods

For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to consider an elite sport system as the cooperation between a specific sport federation and an institution that provides support services for elite athletes and coaches from different sports. This refers, for example, to the cooperation between the Australian Institute of Sport and the Australian Swimming Association. It is necessary to consider an elite sport system in this way as the elite sport support services investigated in this research can either be provided through a specific sport federation, a sport-unspecific support organisation, or a cooperative arrangement between the two. The latter two cases can be expected to hold the most challenges for management and coordination.

The Swedish athletics team and the Norwegian cross-country team were chosen as the comparison partners for this investigation based on a differentiated selection process. While this process is not the focus of this article, it should be summarised at this point that the two systems were chosen primarily because of their efficiency. This assessment was based on their relative success, i.e. on the numbers of gold medals the two teams have won over the past years relative to the resources their respective federations had available. For the Swedish case information was gathered from the Swedish Athletics Association (SAA), the Swedish Olympic Committee and the Swedish National Sport Centre at Bosön. For the Norwegian case, cooperation with the cross-country skiing section of the Norwegian Skiing Federation (NSF) and Olympiatoppen, the Norwegian elite sport support centre, was required.

The methodology that underpinned this research and the methods that were applied

to collect the required information derived directly from the chosen research question¹⁶ and the consideration of the identified gaps in the existing publications (see above). The aim of this research can be summarised as: to investigate the actual nature of the communication and management processes in the provision of specific elite sport support services in the daily interaction between coaches, athletes, and support staff members. This general objective suggested an intensive²³ or case study²⁷ research design as it implied not only investigating the (inter-) action of the key individuals in a system but also considering the general social-cultural context of the two systems and the relationship between the observed behaviour and this environment. Consequently, a series of semi-structured interviews with key position holders were conducted during two study visits to Norway and Sweden. In total, about 50 individuals were interviewed and over 65 hours of interview material was collected. The interviewees included the national team managers, coach education officers, national team coaches and athletes, club coaches, performance diagnosticians, as well as lifestyle support managers. Only individuals who work on such an operational level in and with an elite sport system were considered able to provide accurate accounts of the actual nature of the provision of the different support services. The interview material was transcribed and analysed with the help of the software tool NUDIST®. The different interviews were triangulated with each other as well as with available policy papers, journal articles, and other documents from and about the two investigated systems. Additionally, to further increase the quality of this research by respondent validation, two individual case study reports were written and sent to the sport federations before the actual comparison of the observed practices was made.

The general organisation of sport and elite sport in the investigated systems

The organisation of cross-country skiing in Norway and athletics in Sweden shows substantial similarities at the structural level:

both sports are considered as *Folkssport* in their respective countries; both have high participation numbers; both are based on an extensive club infrastructure; and both depend heavily on the volunteer work of the members in these clubs. Several differences concerning the organisational details of the two systems became apparent during this investigation. The "cross-country skiing market" in Norway appears, for example, to have a much stronger economic foundation than the "athletics market" in Sweden as the Swedish national team captain managed his team with only 40% of the budget his Norwegian counterpart had available (2004/2005). However, these and other differences between the two investigated sport systems lose their significance if they are compared with the situation in other countries. For example, UK Athletics had, at the time this research was carried out, an annual budget of about £7.6 million available for its performance and elite sport programmes (www.ukathletics.net). The Swedish national team captain had less than 20% of this budget at his disposal and the Norwegian cross-country skiing national team manager less than 1/3 (season 2004/5). Thus, for the purpose of this study, it can be concluded that the two Scandinavian federations organise their sport movements in general and their elite programmes in particular in a comparable way and with similar financial resources.

One of the most striking, and at the same time most unexpected, similarities concerning the general organisation of the two systems was the role of the voluntary coaches. While volunteers form the foundation of most sport systems, the degree to which they cooperate with elite athletes and (professional) coaches from the highest performance levels was unexpected by the external observer. Based on the research, it appears that the voluntary coaches do not only form the general foundation of the two sport systems. It seems as if they constitute much more the backbones of the systems and affect their sport for all, national performance, as well as top elite sport programmes. This was especially obvious in Sweden where most of the national team athletes are trained

and supported throughout their sporting careers by the (voluntary) coaches from their home clubs and not by specifically trained, professional national team coaches. In fact, the Swedish Athletics Association (SAA) employs in total only two official elite coaches – and this is only since 2005. While this situation derived from the troubled economic history of the SAA, the coach education officer in Sweden, Anders Rydén, summarised the current philosophy of the SAA as follows:

The home coach always has the greatest responsibility [...] – the athlete and the home coach, because they see each other every day. [...] the home coach and the athlete, they are one team [...] – athletes and home coaches always go together.

While there are today only two professional elite coaches, the SAA has over 50 "national team coaches". Most of these are volunteers who come from the different clubs and have one or two athletes in the squad. In contrast to the situation in Sweden, the Norwegian case looked, on first glance, much more conventional. Here, as in many other sport systems, the national team manager selects a team of six official national team coaches who are employed and paid full-time by the Norwegian Skiing Federation (NSF). However, several interviewees indicated that the NSF and many of the national team coaches are, like in Sweden, very sensitive concerning the importance of the relationship between an athlete and, as one interviewee put it, "*the one coach who made the difference – [as every athlete] can tell you about this one coach that made the difference at some point in the career.*" In this context, it was frequently indicated in the interviews that many skiers on the national team keep in close contact with their former club coaches and that many national team coaches try to find individual solutions if athletes on the team would like to keep an active relationship with their home coaches.

It can be concluded that the two systems investigated appear to be rather homogeneously structured organisations. The systems

in general and their coaching communities in particular seemed to be characterised by blurred transitions and flat hierarchies between the different individuals (i.e. the different coaches) and institutions (i.e. clubs, national team, and administrators in the head office of the federation). This constitutes a rather unexpected finding if the “the more – the better” hypothesis, which has been introduced above, is considered. Based on the reviewed literature, it could have been assumed that the best strategy for increasing international sporting success is to raise the level of professionalism and the degree of specialisation by, for example, introducing clear hierarchical orders between the responsibilities of different types of coaches or by clearly specifying the roles of the different organisations (local clubs, national team, etc.) in a sport system. This assumption has not been confirmed by the two investigated cases.

But the Norwegian cross-country skiing and the Swedish athletics environments do not only appear to be more homogeneously organised than the contemporary literature suggests a best practice elite sport system to look like. Related to the homogeneous nature of the two systems is the open, liberal, and laissez-faire policy that underpins the provision of elite sport support services. In neither system it is compulsory for the athletes and coaches to use the available elite sport support services, such as coach education or performance diagnostic measures. All support is provided as an offer and each athlete or coach can decide for him- or herself to make use of it. Interviewees in both countries indicated that the introduction of a more rigorous support policy with, for example, compulsory education seminars for coaches or obligatory performance diagnostic schedules for athletes would not be an appropriate strategy for their systems. Due to the specific organisational context with mainly voluntary coaches and amateur athletes, the argumentation in Norway and Sweden was similar as well as simple: if coaches or athletes feel too much pressure, they will quit the sport. Instead, the different support services appear in both systems to be provided based on a support phi-

losophy, which Peter Reinebo, from the Swedish Olympic Committee, summarised as “to add and offer support from the side”.

The organisation of coach education

A strong example for this *offering support from the side* philosophy is the provision of coach education. Despite specific financial and structural differences, the general designs of the coach education programmes of the two Scandinavian sport systems show strong similarities – similarities which might stand in contrast to the situation in other sport systems.

Firstly, taking part in the coach education programmes offered by the Swedish Athletics Association (SAA) and the Norwegian Skiing Federation (NSF), gaining formal coach education certificates, or taking part in annual coach education seminars is not compulsory, either in Norway or Sweden. In contrast to the “coach certificate fetish” that seems to exist in other sport systems, formal coach education qualifications do not appear to play an important role in either system. It is, for example, not unusual for coaches on the highest performance level in Norway or Sweden not to have completed the basic coach education modules the federations offer.

The fact that taking part in the coach education is not compulsory has, of course, direct implications on the way that coach education officers in the two federations communicate, design and provide the curriculum, and organise the seminars they offer. Per Nymoen from the NSF argued for example that:

We cannot force anyone to take a course. So we actually think the other way around: [the courses we offer] should be so interesting for the people to take part [...] so that they themselves think they have to be there. I think that most of the trainers in the club they feel that they have to take this course. And when you are in a club training with junior athletes, I think most of the coaches have taken the courses because they feel that they need it.

In sport systems where participation in coach education is compulsory, the work of the coach education officers might look a bit easier. However, such systems might see themselves confronted with the situation that coaches attend the seminars but fail to further develop their knowledge and coaching practice. Here, it must be noted that forcing coaches twice a year into a seminar room to listen to lectures by sport scientists does not automatically change the coaches' behaviour.

However, it is not only the general design of the education curriculum that is similar in the two systems. In the course of the investigation, it became apparent that the coach education seminars in both countries are much more than just a medium to improve the technical knowledge of the participating coaches. Thanks to the design of and atmosphere in the education sessions as well as the general approachability of the respective coach education officers, the coach education can also be considered as a tool for bringing together more closely the coaches from the local clubs, the national elite coaches, and the staff in the federations' head offices. Nymoen made this very explicit when he stated:

And as a personal slogan, I feel that my role is to be the link between the federations, the national coaches, and the clubs and the people. A club coach should not feel that the federation is something far away. It is important that if a club coach has a question, he or she should dare to ask and somebody will answer him and we will have a communication.

Thus, coach education seems to be a strong factor in the development of the homogeneous design that has been observed in the two systems. And, while this homogeneity has already been introduced as an unexpected but similar characteristic of both systems, the detailed investigation of the coach education programmes revealed rather specific practices and consciously introduced interventions that have, at least, supported the development of this specific atmosphere (see below).

Considering these practices, several similarities in the organisation of the actual coach education sessions were identified between the Norwegian and Swedish cases. While other sport systems might use university staff members as coach education lecturers, the two interviewed coach education officers indicated that successful coaches from their own coaching community are the backbone of their lecturing staff. Both stated that using top coaches as lecturers for the other coaches serves several purposes: firstly, this strategy is considered to guarantee that the education provided and the topics discussed in the seminars are relevant for the training practice; secondly, it ensures that topics are presented in a relevant and understandable way for practical working coaches; thirdly, due to their own success, the lecturing coaches and their information enjoy a certain credibility; and, last but not least, the lecturing coaches further develop their own knowledge and understanding of their training by preparing the seminars and through the discussion with their "students" during the sessions. An additional effect of using coaches as lecturers appears to be the development of a knowledge sharing culture in the coaching communities as interviewees from both countries stated that the coach education seminars facilitate networking between learning club coaches and lecturing top-level coaches. It was argued that this, in turn, enables the exchange of experiences and the discussion of problems outside the actual coach education sessions. It might be a subject of further investigation to determine how inclusive and active these knowledge sharing mechanisms actually are. However, for the external observer, this knowledge sharing culture seems, once more, to be an equally unexpected as well as specific and decisive characteristic for the two coach education programmes investigated.

Discussion

Two main questions underpin the discussion of the findings presented here: Firstly, are the observed elite sport support practices actually responsible for the success that the

two systems enjoy today? Secondly, to what extent do these practices constitute useful lessons from which other elite sport systems can learn? Answers to these interdependent questions will be provided in the remaining part of this article.

A fundamental criticism that can confront any research that investigates the management of successful organisations in order to try to explain their superior performance is that the management might not be the reason for an achieved performance but that other factors may have been much more important. Considering the investigation of elite sport systems, this might refer to the discussion of specific environmental conditions that favour the training for a specific sport (i.e. natural access to specific training conditions) or the favourable genetic preposition of individuals from specific geographic regions for selected disciplines. Similarly, it could be argued that it is not so much the design of an elite sport programme that is decisive for the performance of a national team in a specific sport but that the real key to the achieved performance is the fact that the respective sport is a mass, national, or *Folkssport* in the respective country. While the latter argument obviously fits the situation of cross-country skiing in Norway and athletics in Sweden, using such considerations as the single explanation for success would disregard the fact that the two systems, despite having a long tradition of being *Folkssports* in their respective countries, have not always been as successful on the international level as they have been over the past five or ten years. This is illustrated by the following quote from one of the staff members from the NSF for the Norwegian case:

I think in the 70s and 80s we had a good training system [for cross country skiing in Norway]. But our problem was that we were lacking the last details, which made the top results. We had a good organisation and grass root sport – that has always been very good in Norway. The problem was to reach the limits when it came to the World Championships or the Olympic

Games. Year after year we saw that we had good results in the World Cup but in the major championships, the Italians, Russians, and Swedes, they took the gold medals. Why? I think the reason was that we did not do the detail work well enough.

While similar arguments will be presented later in this discussion for the Swedish case, it can be summarised that the explanation for the success of the two systems studied here seems indeed to be linked to consciously made decisions and deliberately introduced changes in the management of *the detail work*. Thus, it can be concluded that the simple hypothesis “strong mass sport foundation = guarantee for international sporting success” should not be considered as the sole explanation for the performance of Swedish athletes and Norwegian skiers. The strong national status and the extensive mass sport bases that cross-country skiing in Norway and athletics in Sweden enjoy constitute, of course, a strong foundation for their current international success. This research suggests however that the key factor of the success of the systems is the effective integration of the elite and mass sport environment. This has been achieved through consciously developed initiatives that have been deliberately introduced to actively blur the transition between club, national performance, and international top sport environment – initiatives which can, thus, be held responsible for positively influencing performance.

Considering the general atmosphere in the two systems, as well as the specific way the coach education is delivered, it has already been indicated that the observed situation does not support the “the more – the better” hypothesis the contemporary elite sport literature suggests. The unique characteristic and, arguably, the strength of the Norwegian cross-country skiing and the Swedish athletics movements appear to be much more that the two systems comprise very homogenous organisations in which the coaches seem to form a strong community rather than a clearly defined hierarchy. This appears to enable a continuous flow of knowledge and experi-

ences between the different performance levels. While this situation seems to constitute a significant similarity between the two investigated cases, it is necessary to explore in more detail the practices that created this situation in order to be able to evaluate their transferability to other sport systems.

The discussion concerning the origin of the observed situation must, first of all, (re-) consider that it would be too easy to explain the observed sporting successes as pure coincidence or exclusively based on environmental factors (see above). In a similar way, it would also not do justice to the management of the two sport systems if the observed atmosphere would only be considered as an automatic result of the socio-liberal nature of the Scandinavian societies in which the two sport systems are embedded. As the following two quotes indicate, the situation and atmosphere that can currently be observed in Norway and Sweden (i.e. team spirit among athletes, knowledge sharing culture among coaches, and general homogeneous design of the sport system as such) developed only in the past decade:

[The team spirit among the athletes] started when Ulf Karlsson [the national team captain from 2000 to 2004] took over. When I started in the national team when I was 17, the atmosphere was totally different. And it is so much better now. And that is I think almost due to Ulf and his programme (National Team Athlete)

One thing which became obvious in the middle of the 90s was that the attitude of athletes and coaches on the junior level was not good enough to make the step from being a good junior to being a good senior athlete. So the SAA started a programme in the middle of the 90s to educate both coaches and athletes. That was very important. [...] Before this programme was initiated, all the coaches were for example very much afraid of sharing their own knowledge about training as they did not know each other – there were a lot of secrets. [...] But this

programme opened doors. (Senior staff member of the Swedish Olympic Committee)

These quotes suggest that consciously introduced interventions created the observed atmosphere in Sweden as well as in Norway. Key interventions were, for example, the *Elitidrottsskolan* or elite sport school programme that the SAA introduced in the middle of the 1990s (see quote above) and the Competence Programme of the NSF.

The *Elitidrottsskolan* is an education programme that includes the best Swedish U23 athletes and their club coaches. Athletes (and their home coaches) are considered for this programme only if they have already proven their potential to succeed on the international top sport stage by making the finals in their disciplines at the European or World Junior Championships. The curriculum of the programme explicitly has no sport-practical elements but focuses on the discussion of training theoretical matters like injury prevention and rehabilitation. The programme is also meant to develop an elite athlete appropriate lifestyle among the participants and includes the discussion of topics like appropriate nutrition as well as more general questions such as: *What does it take and mean to be a top athlete?* It appears however to be of even greater importance that the *Elitidrottsskolan* does not only seem to focus on the education of the individual athlete and coach. The curriculum is consciously provided in a way that promotes the formation of a strong team out of its participants (e.g. regular meetings which last whole weekends, team building exercises, educating athletes and their coaches together, etc.). And this close team of young athletes and their coaches forms the core of the future senior national team when it leaves the *Elitidrottsskolan* after two years.

The main element of the Competence Programme that the NSF introduced is a series of several weekend meetings each year that are open to all interested club coaches. In the seminars, coaches and athletes from the

national team, support specialists from Olympiatoppen, or invited guests present their training concepts, discuss their support techniques, and run exemplary training sessions with the participating club coaches. As such, the Competence Programme of the NSF has a much clearer sport-related focus than the *Elitidrottsskolan*. However, as a participating club coach as well as the organiser of the seminars from the NSF head office indicated, the most important effect of the Competence Programme is actually not considered to be the provision of fact-knowledge but that the top level athletes and coaches interact with the people from the base: national team coaches are there to educate the club coaches; they openly discuss their own training concepts with the club coaches and vice versa; and the top-level coaches are also available for questions outside the seminar.

It might be necessary to investigate the nature of the curriculum of these and other interventions in more detail in the future. However, it can already be concluded that they have had a clear impact on the development of the culture in the systems investigated. We can also conclude that the curricula, as well as the way these affected the situation in the two systems, can be described in great detail. This suggests, on the one hand, that there are no technical barriers for other sport systems to develop similar interventions to aspire comparable goals. However, it remains difficult to assess if other sport systems will achieve similar effects with these practices as the socio-economic context in the respective societies might not support the introduction of the programmes described here. Using the organisation of the coach education as an example, it can for example be argued that the intrinsic motivation to learn, the willingness to cooperate with others, and the openness to share knowledge, etc. are not only characteristics for the two coach education systems but that these features are also to be found within the general cultural context in Norway and Sweden. Especially in the latter case, many parallels were indicated during the interviews between the current design of the education for

Swedish athletics coaches and the Swedish study circle tradition. Thus, it has to be carefully evaluated if such a self-responsible and collective-orientated education strategy can be successfully transferred to another cultural context before lessons are drawn from the coach education programmes the NSF and the SAA offer. However, the two quotes provided above indicate that the cooperative and knowledge sharing culture has not always been characteristic for the SAA. Moreover, it was possible to identify in the course of this investigation clear turning points in this culture as well as the interventions that initiated this change.

Thus, it shall be concluded that it remains a question for future research and a matter of practical experiments to evaluate for the individual case if a programme like the *Elitidrottsskolan* constitutes a general best practice other sport systems can learn from or if this scheme requires the specific socio-liberal context of the Swedish society - maybe even the presence of such specific individuals like Kajsa Berquist, Yannick Tregaro, Agne Bergvall, or Anders Rydén - to achieve the observed effects.

It must, however, also be considered that a third sport system's manager might conclude that the *Elitidrottsskolan* is too reliant on the Swedish cultural context and, thus, not transferable due to his or her own resistance to change rather than due to an objective evaluation of the programme and its potential. The two cases suggest that the success of an elite sport programme might not depend as much on the level of resources or the sophistication of the support services as the contemporary literature suggests. Considering the practices presented here as useful lessons for their own systems, managers, scientists, consultants, academics, and politicians in other sport systems would, to a certain extent, have to question their own political relevance and threaten their economic status if they would accept the Scandinavian practices as targets for their own organisations. Deeming the observed practices as non-transferable due to their high context

dependency would constitute an understandable strategy.

Conclusion

The situation in the two investigated elite sport systems is, of course, not perfect. The general organisational design of sport in Norway and Sweden creates, for example, a high dependency on voluntarism. A second problem that both sport systems share is that the strategy just to *offer support from the side* instead of introducing compulsory support schemes holds the risk that individual coaches will not use the offered services, that some coaches will decide not to take part at the offered coach education, or that some athletes will not gain access to the available sport science support services. However, it can be argued that it is rather unlikely that such individuals would use the offered support in a more rigorously organised sport system either. As argued before: simply exposing coaches to a series of lectures does not guarantee that they will change their behaviour. Thus, it can be concluded that some sport systems might benefit from considering (self-) critically if they could learn from the socio-liberal, open, *lais-*

sez-faire, and cooperation-orientated elite sport management approach the Scandinavians have developed rather than following blindly “the more – the better” rhetoric in the elite sport management literature.

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