

Talent ID for Namibian Sport

Long-term athlete development is a key component of Proactive's athlete management and starts with talent identification at young age. Proactive Talent ID (PTID) is a tool which collects physiological and psychological data of athletes, which can be used by sports organisations for identifying young athletes who have what it takes to become a top athlete.

In the past and even today a youngsters involvement in sports is based mostly on tradition, ideals, desire to participate in a sport because its popularity, parental pressure, a high school teachers speciality or the availability of sports facilities. It therefore comes down to coincidence whether children participate in a sport for which they are talented. In this natural selection of athletes an individuals performance evolution is often slow and the athletes talent is not fully utilised.

The pioneers in a more scientific talent identification approach were mostly East European countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the results where evident at Olympics in the 1970s and 1980s.

Scientific selection is the method by which a coach selects prospective youngsters who have proven natural abilities for a sport. Thus the time to reach high performance is much shorter and talent is utilised more effectively. For sports such as basketball, volleyball, football, rowing and throwing events height or weight is a requirement. In sports such as sprinting, judo, hockey and jumping events in athletics, speed, reaction time, coordination and power are dominant. As a result of scientific testing, with tools such as PTID, the most talented individuals are scientifically selected or directed to an appropriate sport.

Bompa (1999) summarises the advantages of using scientific criteria in the process of talent identification as follows:

- It substantially reduces the time required to reach high performance by selecting individuals who are gifted in a sport.
- It eliminates a high volume of work, energy, and talent on the part of the coach. The coach's training effectiveness is enhanced by training primarily those athletes with superior abilities.
- It increases the competitiveness and the number of athletes aiming at and reaching high-performance levels. As a result, there is a stronger and more homogenous national team capable of better international performance.
- It increases an athlete's self confidence, because his or her performance dynamics are known to be more dramatic than other athletes of the same age who did not go through the selection process.
- It indirectly facilitates applying scientific training, because sport scientists who assist in talent identification can be motivated to continue to monitor the athlete's training.

Height, weight or length of the limbs play dominant roles in certain sports. It is however difficult to predict the dynamics of an individuals growth at young age before their growth spurt. Hand radiography (X-ray) techniques are the most accurate to test growth of a child. The age at which the growth spurt, also referred to as Peak

Height Velocity (PHV), occurs and predictions on body dynamics after PHV can however also be predicted with the use of statistical tools. These tools, as used by **PTID**, are based on the fact that children tend to inherit their parents' biological characteristics.

Proactive Talent Identification is focussed mainly at teens during and after puberty, in other words the ages 10 to 17. It measures and assesses athletes' talent in three categories, motor capacity, biometric qualities and psychological capacity.

Talented athletes are everywhere. **PTID** assists to develop the means to identify them, recruit them to the most suitable sport and then expose them to well-planned and methodical training. The final outcome will be better results.