High-Quality Development of Top-Level University Sports Teams in China's Education Powerhouse Strategy: Era Features, Practical Difficulties and Paths to Improve

Ruowei Li *

Department of physical education, Shaanxi Normal University, Xian, China

* Corresponding Author Email: Lrw200681@163.com

Abstract. High-level university sports teams are an important component of China's strategy to become a leading country in education. The high-quality development of these teams is analyzed in this article based on the review of relevant literature and logical analysis. Contemporary features, existing problems and potential paths for improvement are discussed. The purpose of this analysis is to provide suggestions for deepening the integration of sports and education and promoting the development of university sports teams. It is argued that the characteristics of the current development of high-level university sports teams in China are becoming more systematic in talent training, more strategic in institutional positioning and more educational in terms of comprehensive education. However, the implementation of these characteristics seems to be uneven. Narrow functional scope, unbalanced resource supply, fragmented management and misplaced educational priorities may hinder the quality of team development. It is suggested that the functional scope of high-level university sports teams should be expanded and their role in national development strengthened. In addition, a more balanced allocation of resources should be promoted through diversified sources of supply.The cooperation between the institutions can be enhanced through the introduction of collaborative governance and the education focus should also change to put students in the centre of the team activities. The above-mentioned inter-related paths are the ones that can help to develop the university sports teams. They can also assist China to become a country that is leading in terms of both sport and education. These channels have been based on literature, which means that they need to be studied further with regard to their effectiveness in various universities.

Keywords: Building China into a leading country in education; integration of sport and education; high-level sports teams; high-quality development.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, China started to have the top-level sports teams in its universities. It has been over 40 years since it has been created and these teams are now a key institutional area of sport and education. The Outline on Construction of an Educated Nation (2024-2035) was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in January 2025. The document requires increased capacity in the overall higher education and more participation in the strategic leadership [1]. Such priorities increase the demand of the role of the university in the national growth. The Opinions on the Implementation of Student Physical Fitness Enhancement Plan was published in November of that year by the Ministry of Education and four other ministries. The policy is one which gives the top-level sports team a leading position in experimenting with the combination of sport and learning and increasing the involvement of individual sports. It also focuses on their role in the spirit of the university as well as physical fitness among students and development of the university sport [2].

The emergence of these groups has also led to the problems of the institution. The previous studies have determined the lack of cooperation between educational and sport authorities, vague goals in

the training of athletes, absence of the system of training and competition [3]. These challenges can limit the high-quality growth and make the teams not be able to offer a significant contribution towards the national agenda. A large portion of the debate is about the combination of education and sport. It is comparatively less systematic that can be put in the context of the strategy of creating the best country in the field of education. Based on literature review and reasoning, this paper focuses on the modern features of the sports team of the university. It looks at their structural obstacles as well as how they might enhance the development of them. This analysis aims at offering theoretical knowledge and practical application in terms of integrating sport and education further and developing the sports teams of universities.

2. Current Features of High Quality Development

2.1. A More Systematic Approach to Talent Development

In 1987, the pilot programmes of the high-level sports teams in universities were introduced in China and they are becoming more systematic. The Ministry of Education published Opinions on Further Development and Management of High-Level Sports Teams at Ordinary Higher Educational Institutions in February 2022. This policy is also a part of the national system of producing sporting talent through university sports teams. It is necessary to make substantive changes in the programme development process, competition organisation and management and evaluation [4]. These demands can be seen as strategic values that the university sports teams have in the overall country setting.

During the admissions phase, testing procedures and scoring criteria are used by universities which are approved by the General Administration of Sport of China. This standardized framework is aimed at ensuring that athlete selection becomes more consistent and evidence based [5]. Training arrangements link primary and secondary schools to universities via an integrated route of creating promising athletes. This continuity can assist students in advancing through subsequent levels of competitive sport. The evaluation of sports team involvement is included in mandatory coursework and adds to the overall credits of students. Academic standards are also a central requirement where high-level athletes are required to meet the same academic standards as other students. These arrangements aim at making academic study and athletic training closer. Institutional support to enhance the quality of sporting talent can be offered through a development pathway that includes admission, training and assessment. It also addresses the priorities of talent development of the national education strategy and can be the basis of sustainable development of university sports teams.

2.2. A More Strategic Role for College Athletic Departments

The plan to become a country of the top in education is changing the purpose of the university sports teams. Their scope has been expanding in such a way that they have not only taken on the role of providing unique programmes of sports at universities but also making a more significant impact on the strategic growth of the nation. The sporting talent has also been increasingly being recruited and trained by the universities. They have moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic upbringing as well as labour education. There are also expectations that the team will be able to meet the demands of big sporting events and train athletes who can be promoted to national level competition programmes. Such duties would mean that the focus of their work is no longer on campus development but rather on the provision of services to the country sporting needs [4].

The new position can be seen in the development of the athletes and the example that these teams give in the universities. Nanjing Tech University has provincial team as a university, and it also provides players to national teams with baseball and softball. There are other institutions which utilize their sports clubs to enhance sporting life at the campus and promote the holistic growth of students. It is possible to assume that such activities indicate that the process of team building will be more integrated with the concept of the state educational policy, including sport and education. The university level sports teams should have high-level talents in sports, and they should help the country

win in the international arena. They too must not be incompatible with the overall aims of the university sport [6]. This is because the need to compete against other countries is accompanied by the need to educate the student in the process of competition. The increased strategic role is the modern characteristic of good quality development, and it might lead to an opportunity to develop a greater contribution of the teams towards the educational processes.

2.3. A More Committed Holistic Education

The goal of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China is to make it a country with an education system by 2035. The competition in sport in the universities can be viewed as a part of the educational process and its contribution towards this goal [7]. In such a way, sports teams in the university are more focused on the production of multi-purposed graduates, which they do through the development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour training. This will entail enhancing sporting skills together with scholarly knowledge by educating students in both study and sports activities.

Universities have incorporated the role of education in training, playing and management of sports teams. In this case, individualised plans can be used to balance the competition demands with the learning activities of students where student-athletes are required to meet the same level of academic performance as other students. The extra classes and personal teaching arrangements might also assist in achieving those requirements. All these strategies should be aimed at enhancing the overall quality of education of the student-athletes and protecting their studies [8]. It is possible that there will be a simultaneous study and training process that will enhance the development of athletic ability and educational progress and more general skills. This would give better foundation on lifelong growth and the talent requirement in the national education and sport policy. The focus on the comprehensive approach to education is one of the features of successful team building. It also demonstrates that universities do not only train people in order to compete against each other, but they also educate them.

3. Practical Challenges to High Quality

3.1. Restricted Team Functions

The construction of China into a top country in education increases the expectations of the model role played by high-level university sports teams. It is anticipated that these teams will be able to actualise the educational potential of university competitive sport more completely. They should contribute towards training a new generation which can meet the requirements of a dynamic society. Their roles, however, are quite limited and there exists a gap between practice and policy objectives.

Some universities pursue institutional prestige by investing more in athletic training and increasing the number of competitions that athletes participate in. Academic assessment and graduation requirements are also relaxed, which seems to dilute the educational function of top level university sports teams [6]. The majority of universities mainly hope that their teams will promote mass participation in campus sport and improve institutional reputation; their commitment to cultivating reserve talent for national competitive sport is relatively weak, which may reduce the contribution of teams to national strategies [8]. University competitive sport currently offers very limited support for turning China into an education powerhouse. Teams have yet to be deeply integrated into national development, competitive sport, mass participation sport and the sports industry; their contributions via exemplary leadership, social service and cultural dissemination are therefore also underdeveloped [7].

It seems that the scope of these activities is rather limited, and it can be explained by a distortion in the criteria of evaluation as well as the system of management. The teams are usually evaluated on the basis of competition results at the universities, but there is also an administrative gap between the sports and education bodies. This could limit the growth of the team to only those organisations and

individuals who are not part of government or university institutions. Others have considered the high-level sports team as a means of expanding their influence and reputation in the community. It will make such priorities promote the same functionality among the different organizations resulting in a significant homogeneity which would deviate from the initial objectives of forming the teams [6]. Such convergence might lead to the current focus on small number of operations. It may even hinder the role played by the teams towards making China a country with a good educational system. One of the challenges facing them is to expand their functional area in order to achieve quality development.

3.2. Inadequate Resource Support

The institutional system of university talent development is highly developed, and this will enable the high quality growth of the high-level sports teams. The implementation of that model demands resources that are stable, enough, and specialisation. The funding, training centre, coaches as well as rehabilitation centers are what makes the success of athletic training and education possible. The current sources of funding used by the top level of the university sports teams in China are rather limited. Most of the funds are allocated to the administration of the universities and the amount dedicated to the team is not high. This leads to a slow replacement of training equipment and also a low availability of money to take part in competitions. In certain schools, they invest very little in their teams and thus there are no enough training facilities, food and even recovery facilities. These institutions do not have modern technology to assist them in training.

The facilities of the universities are not as much the same, and the lack of sports training facilities in some institutions hinders the enhancement of the quality of the training. The quality of coaching is also not uniform, and the majority of coaches work within the school with their normal teaching activities. These employees have to teach, conduct research and training, which would be hard to maintain their focus on the team training [9]. There is still no good scientific and technological assistance provided to the high-level university sport teams. The scientific training is multidisciplinary and it does not exist; the positions of specialists in physical conditioning, rehabilitation and psychology are left vacant. It is common that student-athletes have constant demands of studying at school and participating in sports and rarely get professional counselling and proper care. This can result in a cycle of retiring due to injuries, leaving the team and dropping out of the university.

These resource gaps seem to indicate the disparities in institutional commitment, lack of diversified funding mechanisms and inadequate involvement by the larger society. When there is a buildup of resource shortages, it can lead to an increase in differences between institutions and greatly limit the quality development of university sports teams. Strength of the resource base is essential in tackling these challenges of development. It also helps universities to meet their obligation to cultivate competitive sports talent and maintain their teams in the long run.

3.3. ncomplete management mechanisms

The organization of the university talent development in a systematic manner needs to be scientifically based and well managed, so that the system can run effectively. The existing management systems within the high level sports teams in universities are not centralized and they do not have an internal structure as well as external coordination. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to manage the whole talent development models at the university. There is poor coordination between sport, education, student affairs and finance departments in the universities. The responsibility of creating the team lies on the shoulders of the sports department only. Management of registration of students, training and competition, and payment will therefore not be properly coordinated. It is hard to reconcile the study of academic discipline with the training of the athletes.

Fragmentation in universities also manifests itself in terms of coordination with organisations outside their institutional boundaries. Authorities of education and sports have jointly released a number of supportive policies that form the policy basis for developing university sports teams. In

implementation, overlapping responsibilities and different institutional interests may lead to incomplete delivery and lack of coordination. A joint working arrangement whereby the two authorities work together is still missing [3].

The assessment of the university coaches is also rather limited. The academic promotion is too focused on the number of publications in the research area and the performance of the competition. There are still no specific measures to regulate the study, training and participation of student-athletes in competitions as well as the daily training work of the coaches. There are no long term incentives that would be appropriate to the two groups. All these shortcomings in the management systems of the universities can be a serious threat to the quality of the governance. Fragmentation of resources within the organization limits the ability to effectively distribute resources and lack of coordination with external agencies makes it ineffective. It will not be possible to motivate all the parties through such narrow evaluation and remuneration arrangements. The development challenges of the high-quality development of the sports teams of the universities should be solved by the coordinated efficient management of the internal processes and cooperation with the external environment.

3.4. Misplaced Educational Priorities

The increasing focus on the educational worth of the university sports teams is one of the characteristics of the present time. Practically, nevertheless, there is a significant inclination to give priority to competitive success rather than education. This misalignment of priorities in education can be already seen at recruitment stage. The majority of universities put more emphasis on athletic performance as compared to academic background, moral character and personal values when choosing student-athletes. This method could take in students who are not academically prepared and have little desire to study academic subjects on their own. These challenges may be exacerbated by institutional priorities during further training and thus the demands of all-around development become more difficult to achieve. These practices contradict the dedication to holistic education in Chinese universities and the quest to achieve sustainable development in sport.

The student-athletes in the university spend most of their time on training and games at the expense of academic subjects. This can also result in the introduction of too lax standards in terms of academics as a result of the introduction of academic credit incentive programs. It is supported by assessment practices, because usually, the competition outcomes are given the highest priority at universities. Such misdirected educational objectives seem to be based on the utilitarian nature of forming and controlling the sports teams of the universities. There are certain universities that focus more on the formation of high-level teams with the aim of achieving prestige and fame of the institution in terms of excellent performance in sports. The goal is aimed at short term success in competing but the long term development of the students who are athletes is not properly taken into account.

The distortion of education is one of the issues that universities should deal with. It has an effect on the direction of the development as well as the worth of the high-level sports teams in the university. The only way to get good quality development is through the reconsideration of these priorities and making the whole purpose of the team the main focus of the university.

4. Paths to high-quality Development

4.1. Expand functions of teams and enhance their integration into national development

The pressure to speed up the process of making China a powerful nation in terms of education is also affecting the sports teams that are at the top of the universities. They must not only be successful in their sport, but they should also be able to build talents, culture and serve people. These aspects have been poorly addressed in the current practice, hence there is need to rethink the philosophy on how these teams can be developed. The competition based priority system should be replaced by the one that will integrate the various types of values which such teams offer into the overall priorities of

the universities. They ought to also re-define the teams as the national sporting strategy and the role of the team goes beyond the unique university sports programmes. It would be possible to transform the teams into platforms where both competitive training and mass participation can be achieved, the promotion of the industry of sports and the communication of the culture of sports.

The development of the team in the universities must be focused on the needs of the domestic and international competitions. The long-term partnership with the provincial sports bodies and national training teams of a particular sport can provide an unambiguous talent path to the top level. It should also connect the university education, the advancement of the students to the provincial level and selection to the national level. These conditions may enable the universities to establish themselves as the training centers of the competitive sports talents in the country.

The model of high-level student-athletes must also be integrated into the everyday campus provision. Universities may organize routine instruction in student sports clubs where student-athletes would promote more students to exercise. Outside the campuses, teams might engage in voluntary sports education in rural areas and community outreach on sports science. Such activities can contribute to the national fitness strategy as well as provide student-athletes with chances to interact with society and enhance their practical skills.

The knowledge of the university researchers can be applied to sports technologies in the form of testing protective gear, as well as the training data on equipment. The interrelation between these processes would allow forming a cycle of activities between training and research, as well as product development. It is also possible that universities can offer event operations and training services in sport. The revenue generated by the commissioning of the services may then be used in team development. Additional chances will be given by holding sporting exchanges with China and other nations, where the spirit of Chinese sports could be passed to the students through the university teams. These interactions might contribute to enhancing the global influence of the Chinese sport.

The support of these other functions is required to be institutionalised. Universities need to have evaluation systems that incorporate the aspects of participation of the people, the sports business and the cultural communication. Competitive outcomes ought to be part of this larger consideration as well, and the rest of the activities teams are supposed to perform would be more apparent. There must be coordination between the universities, government, businesses and community organisations with a given system of coordination and collaboration. Such agreements may assist the teams in becoming all-round sports service providers and their role should not be limited to the competition. They might also facilitate the shift of university-based teams to national strategic goals based on teams.

4.2. Resource Management and Diversified Support Systems

The university sports teams are well equipped with the necessary material to perform their duties and make China a strong nation in education. The existing funding, facilities, staffing, medical services and rehabilitation are not balanced enough to develop the multiplicity of their activities. Such inequalities can also be the cause of restricting the number of reactions that the teams will be able to react to the educational agenda on the broader scale. The allocation of resources ought to provide equal access to the basic provision and availability of various good quality resources and support during the course of development. The universities must incorporate both internal and external resources into their institutions as well as attract other participants such as community organisations and market players. This would aid in the transformation of the reliance on the government appropriations to the system that could be able to raise money through multiple long-term streams.

A diversified support system ought to cover funding, facilities, staffing and technology in a coordinated manner. The government, universities, community organisations and market participants should be brought together by the funding arrangements. Taekwondo, table tennis and badminton are sports with limited budgets which can complement their resources using event naming rights, brand sponsorship and commercial partnerships. The requirements of high-level training must be met by facility improvement and existing venues improved as per such requirements. These improvements must be accompanied by sports research laboratories and fitness and rehabilitation centres. Combined

these facilities would offer more comprehensive assistance in terms of training, preparation for competition, injury prevention and other research activities.

The staffing should be in the form of a team based on training, sports and medical sciences. It is recommended that universities have multidisciplinary groups where coaches, scientists, and rehabilitationists are working together. They would require proper evaluation and rewards to work together with them as they proceed. These can also make the staff members more active in the process of teaching and training students-athletes but not only this but also help in providing support to their education and development.

Intelligent platforms of training management may include artificial intelligence and wearable devices. These platforms would allow the close monitoring and control of training loads, technical movements and physical state during the training process. Their application can be helpful in making a shift to more scientifically based training instead of mainly experience-based practice.

It would be possible to alleviate the problem of resources and then have a more powerful support system in which teams can participate in national educational activities. It is also capable of increasing the avenues that competitive athletes are able to emerge. The talent development in sports has to be tied with moral development and the overall education purpose as well.

4.3. Enhancing Coordination Mechanisms and Enhancing Governance Effectiveness

The lack of unity in the management, the lack of consistency in the policy application and the scattered nature of responsibilities is an indication that there is a necessity to coordinate the high-level sports teams in universities. The collaboration between the internal governance of the university and the external organizations should be developed to enhance the quality of the team governance and link the internal governance with the external ones. Such teams are educational, competitive as well as managerial within various institutional areas. It has been governed by education and sport officials, the university and sports associations, which includes the process of admission and development, competition and employment. It is hard to balance such interests using a single actor based governance system and meet the demands of comprehensive education. There must be more coordination among the institutions involved in this case to make governance reform.

The universities must be able to establish an organisational structure of the education and sports authorities at the administrative level, which would unite the university departments and connect the universities with other organisations. The coordination of the university party committee will be provided by the overall management of the actors involved in the activity. Talent development and student registration and examination should be controlled by the authorities of the education system. The competition systems, selection of athletes and provision of training facilities are the responsibility of the sport authorities. These arrangements will be centralised within the universities, and the powers and responsibilities of the internal units need to be outlined. Such as physical education, academic affairs and student affairs. There is a need to organize joint sessions and define the list of duties of the parties involved so that there can be no duplication of functions or gaps in the organization.

A comprehensive development plan is needed to make the selection, training and education process and competition and work interrelated. The universities need to ensure that the standards of admission and development are on par and also be able to study with flexible arrangements so as to balance the academic work with the training. The evaluation should take into account both the level of achievement in academics and the competitive performance. Talent development must be connected to employment opportunities and further education through a series of progression pathways.

The cycle of governance, the control and identification of problems should be followed by feedback and correction and improvement of the institutions. The critical work is to review the management of the study and training, organisation of competition, as well as use of funds. It would be possible to detect any shortcomings in these aspects which could lead to further modifications of the rules of management. This kind of coordination can assist in minimizing the barriers of institutionalization between sport and education. It may also aid in the transition between the

decentralised supervision and the centralised one and the passive running of the affairs to the active ones aimed at enhancing quality. In such a way, a better system of the institution would be able to make the contribution of the university sports teams towards the national educational goals more effective.

4.4. Reorienting Team Development towards Its Core Purpose of Holistic Education

High-level university sports teams form an important component of talent development in building China into a leading country in education. Their responsibilities encompass both educational development and sporting competition within the university setting. Some universities nevertheless continue to treat medal totals as the principal measure of success. Academic attainment, progress through study and career development consequently receive insufficient attention, indicating a misalignment in educational priorities.

Universities should adopt a model of common academic standards supported by differentiated pathways. Within those shared standards, academic support should reflect the particular demands of student-athletes' training and competition schedules. Academic tutors, individual learning plans and flexible assessment arrangements during competitions could help prevent interruptions to their education. Training and competition should themselves be recognised as distinctive settings for university education. Training should incorporate character formation alongside the development of sporting skills. Competition should likewise provide opportunities for comprehensive education as well as the assessment of athletic performance.

Coaches should develop their roles as technical instructors, guides to values, contributors to character development and supporters of students' wider growth. Moral and political education should be incorporated throughout training and competition. Education before competition should strengthen understanding of rules, while conduct during competition should emphasise discipline and respect. Reflection after competition should help students consolidate their sporting understanding and develop positive personal qualities.

Student-athletes frequently encounter pressures arising from study and training, together with setbacks in competition. Universities should incorporate psychological support into routine management, maintain individual psychological records and conduct regular psychological screening. Students identified as experiencing psychological difficulties should receive individual counselling and appropriate support. Career planning should extend across the full cycle of student-athlete development. Universities should provide practical opportunities suited to students' different career intentions. Students whose sporting careers end prematurely because of injury or illness should receive compensatory academic support and assistance in changing pathways.

Evaluation should encompass moral character, academic development, sporting performance and both physical and mental health. The educational outcomes achieved by coaches should also form part of their performance assessment. These measures could help restore holistic education as the central purpose of university sports teams. An education-centred approach should guide their operation throughout the development process. With this orientation, teams may provide a firmer institutional foundation for developing sporting talent within the national agenda for educational advancement.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of building a strong education nation, high-level sports teams in universities are going through a historic shift from 'combining sports and education' to 'integrating sports and education.' This study outlines three major characteristics of the current era: systematized training systems, strategic functional positioning, and comprehensive educational value. It also analyzes practical challenges such as single-function focus, insufficient resource support, fragmented management mechanisms, and misaligned educational guidance, and proposes corresponding optimization paths. The research shows that university high-level sports teams can only truly become

an important force in supporting national strategies and the construction of a strong education nation by moving beyond the logic of 'focusing only on competitive results' and returning to the fundamental goal of 'educating people with virtue.'

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