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Current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with specific reference to tenta athletics training center, South Wollo, Tenta, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with specific reference to Tenta Athletics Training Center at Tenta-Ajibar Town. The subjects were 28 short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes and 3 coaches were taken as a whole while 5 administrative heads were selected using purposive sampling method. Questionnaires, interviews, and observation check list were used to collect data. To analyze the collected data quantitative and qualitative methods have been made applicable. The study revealed that event training is classified in to short, middle and long distance according to ability, age and experience. It was stated by short, middle and long distance event trainee that the training program is linked with specific Athletics event, 50% "very high", 21.43% "high", 14.29% "medium", 7.14% "Low" and 7.14% "very low" respectively. On the other hand, a high percentage 66.67 "high", and 33.33% "Medium" is rated by coaches. Regarding the benefit, trainee Athletes' have obtained from the training center, 57.14% of the athlete respondents ranked their agreement between excellent and good. Similarly, 66.66% coach respondents rated good and 33.33% fair. it was found out that Library, well equipped gymnasium, Showers, Medical service and well prepared training field/track respectively are found not in abundant as asserted by both groups of respondents. On the other hand, there are several problems that affect short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes' performance. Lack of adequate and balanced diet, lack of well prepared and conducive training track and lack of adequate facilities...etc. are the major constraints obtained from the collected data disclosed that training offered to short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes were inadequate despite, it had a good future prospective. The study also suggested the possible solutions that are believed to alleviate the problems. Tenta athletics training center should adjust the training days, sessions and time spent in each training session. The concerned bodies are expected to allocate enough budgets. The training center should have well qualified coaches, manager, sport medicine and professionals and administrative workers. Additionally it is suggested that the training center should have to work jointly with different stake holders in order to achieve its goal.

Keywords: Athlete, athletics, competition, performance, training

Introduction

Athletics is a competitive physical activity made up of several separate events, based on the natural movements of running, jumping and throwing. The earliest form of athletics on an organized basis is generally recognized as taking place during the years of classical antiquity, notably in the ancient Olympic Games. Athletics, as we know it, really dates from the first of the modern Olympic Games held at Athens in 1896 and the foundation of the international amateur athletic federation in 1912. Since those days, the athletic program has been continually modified and extended.

In conformity with this, Jose (1992) ^[11] stated, Athletics then, is a multiple sport which embraces many events quite different from one another in their method of execution and in the physical characteristics of the participants. In addition, athletics constitutes the most important element of the modern Olympic Games. It is practiced in all countries for its educational value and its role in the improvement of physical condition. Often providing the necessary foundation for optimum performance in other sports, it is frequently regarded as an example of a country's development.

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Apart from helping to maintain a state of physical well-being and to improve personal performance, athletics also offers a field of research in to human movement, which has the advantage of exact means of measurement (time or distance).

The primary objective of athletics training center is to help athletes improve their athletic performance by developing components of physical fitness for instance: endurance, strength, speed, sport specific power, agility, balance, coordination, flexibility, injury prevention strategies, Athlete nutrition and confidence. In relation to this Jackson (2001) [8] stated, “world class athlete have a chance to generate income and share to the world their countries’ culture.” The same is true for Ethiopian distance runners, if and only if, they could be world class athlete,

In view of that, Ethiopian athletics federation has the mission in general to work on all athletics disciplines in particular focusing on the events which the country has not been well known, that is, short and middle distance, jumping and throwing events to represent Ethiopia in international competition and to share the culture of Ethiopia over the world.

In relation to this, in 2014, South Wollo Sport office has established Tenta Athletics training center. This athletics training center is the second in Amhara region athletics training center which run by in collaboration with South Wollo Sport office, Tenta woreda sport office and Wollo University. The training center has the objective of producing world first class athletes and injects trained athletes to top athletics clubs and training center, such as: Ethiopian Athletics National Team, Ethiopian Youth Sport Academy, Tirunesh Dibaba National Athletics Training Center, Defence Athletics Sport Club and other national and regional Training centers...etc., in different discipline of short, middle and long distance event athletics. Hence, improving the performance and fitness level of runners will lead them to be world class athlete that represents the country in many aspects.

The rationale behind this investigation is that the training center is regional athletics training center which invites all talented athletes to join it. Its altitude is above 2400meter above sea level. The training center incorporates 40 athletes from Amhara Regional State particularly in South Wollo Zone, Tenta woreda, 1 sport manager, 3coaches and other administrative staffs. The training center is allocated with a budget above of 1,500,000 ETB. It also mainly emphasizes on short, middle and long distance event only and to add more track races on the international competitions. Thus, we particularly focused on current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, regarding the Athletics Training Center related issues.

The aim of this study was to assess the current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with specific reference to Tenta Athletics Training Center. This study does have numerous important findings to investigate the current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with specific reference to Tenta Athletics Training Center. So the result of this study could support and enrich the performance of the current practices, identify the challenges and forecast the prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with specific reference to Tenta Athletics Training Center.

Material and Methods

Study area

This research was conducted at Amhara Regional State particularly in South Wollo Zone, Tenta woreda. The study focused on current practices, challenges and prospects of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes, with special reference to Tenta Athletics Training Center.

Research Design

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The qualitative part is used to analyze open-ended questionnaires, structured interview, and observational checklist, whereas, quantitative was used for close ended questions.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Based on the relevance of the research topic, the study participants were athletes in Tenta Athletics Training Center, coaches, administrative heads, Tenta woreda sport office, South Wollo sport office and South Wollo Athletics Federation Leaders who have been selected purposively. These participants were taken to be representatives of a population, in order to obtain appropriate, rich and profound information in a wide perspective. As a result, 28 short, middle and long distance runners, 3 coaches, and 5 administrative heads were selected as a sample of the study.

Data Gathering Instruments

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches together with multiple data collection methods to sustain triangulation; the researchers utilized questionnaires, structured interview, and observation checklist.

Method of Data Analysis

In this study both qualitative and quantitative procedures have been employed. The data obtained from quantitative tools have been analyzed using SPSS version 16 The data obtained through questionnaire, structured interview and observation checklist have been analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statement, summary of statistical interpretation and percentage values are presented in Tables so as to establish a conclusion portion.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted after obtaining ethical approval from the ethics committee of Wollo University. Written informed consent was obtained from the study subjects before collecting the data. Participants were informed the objectives of the study and all personal data were treated confidentially by omitting the name of participants from the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1: How often do you go to training per day

Subject	Responses and No of respondents with percentage				
	Once	Twice	Three times	If any other	Total
Athletes	28 (100%)	-	-	-	28 (100%)
Coaches	3 (100%)	-	-	-	3 (100%)

From the informants, all athletes that is 28 (100%) and coaches 3 (100%) admitted that they often go to training once per day.

Table 2: Response on the minutes spent in training per session

Subject	Responses and No. of respondents with percentage					Total
	30 min	60 min	90 min	120 min	If any other	
Athletes	-	8 (28.57%)	20 (71.43%)	-	-	28 (100%)
Coaches	-	-	3 (100%)	-	-	3 (100%)

The above table shows responses on the question: on average for how long you do the exercises per session? From the table, it can be observed that the number of responses for 90min. is 20 (71.43%) and 3 (100%) for athletes and coaches respectively. Similarly, 8 (28.57%) of athletes selected to say 60 min. On the whole, it could be seen that the vast majority of athletes and all coaches' respondents training session is between 60min -90 min. It could be then deduced that on the average most of the subjects are engaged in training activities 75 min. per session.

Table 3: The training program is classified according to ability, age and experience within competitive units

Subjects	Responses			Total
	Yes	No	I don't know	
Athletes	18 (64.29%)	10 (35.71%)	-	28 (100%)
Coaches	3 (100%)	-	-	3 (100%)

Regarding the classification of athletes based on their ability, age and experience within competitive units, it shows that 18 (64.29%) of athletes and 3 (100%) all coaches respondents said that it is classified and the remaining 10 (35.71%) athletes said, it is Not. This implies that the training is classified according to ability, age, and experience within competitive units.

Table 4: Records of athletes are kept carefully and progressively

Subjects	Responses			Total
	Yes	No	I don't know	
Athletes	20 (71.43%)	6 (21.43%)	2 (7.14%)	28 (100%)
Coaches	3 (100%)	-	-	3 (100%)

As can be observed from the above table, 20 (71.43%) and 3 (100%) of athletes and their coaches affirmed respectively that records of athletes are kept carefully. However, 6 (21.43%) and 2 (7.14%) of athletes selected "NO" and I don't know to respond to this item respectively. Therefore, it can be argued that the records of athletes are kept in the training center carefully and progressively.

Table 5: To what extent the Training program is linked with specific athletics' event.

Responses	No. of respondents with percentage			
	Athletes		Coaches	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very high	14	50%	-	-
High	6	21.43%	2	66.67%
Medium	4	14.29%	1	33.33%
Low	2	7.14%	-	-
Very low	2	7.14%	-	-
Total	28	100%	3	100%

In the aforementioned tables asking about short, middle and

long distance event trainee athletes' and their respective coaches' to what extent the training program is linked with specific athletics' event, the following results were obtained: of the total 28 short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes who responded to the item, 14 (50%), 6 (21.43%) and 4 (14.29%) said that it was "Very high", "High" and "Medium" respectively. The remaining 2 (7.14%) and 2 (7.14%) respondents were, however, in the position of "Low" and "Very low" respectively. On the coaches part, 2 (66.67%) and 1 (33.33%) responded "high" and "Medium". This response clearly implies that the training program is done in the specific qualities which the event training requires. As a result, at this stage one can be safe to say that all coaches are in close proximity of 'high' agreement as the training program is linked with specific short, middle and long distance event training requirements.

Table 6: Athletes' have obtained benefit from training center Trainee athletes' and their respective coaches' responses

Subjects	Responses				Total
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	
Athletes	10 (35.71%)	2 (7.14%)	14 (50%)	2 (7.14%)	28 (100%)
Coaches	-	1 (33.33%)	2 (66.67%)	-	3 (100%)

As can be seen from item 6, table 7, 16 (57.14%) of the athlete respondents ranked their agreement between excellent and good, that is, (7.14% excellent and 50% Good) and the remaining 12 (42.85 %) ranked their agreement between poor and fair, that is, (35.71% poor and (7.14% fair) to what extent they have benefited from the training center.

In the same way, 3(100%) coach respondents rated (66.67% good and 33.33% fair) to show their agreement to what extent athletes have benefited from athletics training center. In a broader sense, we can assume from these two statistical analyses that athletes have benefited from the training center vastly but still have a few reservations.

Table 7: The effectiveness of the training program evaluated periodically

Subjects	Responses			Total
	Yes	No	I don't know	
Athletes	24 (85.72%)	2 (7.14%)	2 (7.14%)	28 (100%)
Coaches	3 (100%)	-	-	3 (100%)

The above Table clearly shows the training center records of athletes are kept a little bit more than half 24((85.72%)) and 3 (100%) of athletes and their coaches affirmed respectively that records of athletes are kept carefully. However, 2((7.14%)) did not kept the record carefully and progressively and 2((7.14%)) of athletes selected do not know whether they kept records carefully and progressively or not.

Therefore, it can be argued that the records of athletes are kept in the training center carefully and progressively but still have a few reservations.

Major Hindering Factors

Short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes' and their respective trainers' ranked in an ascending order on identifying factors that are thought to be affecting their training. (One for the most hindering to eleven for the least one)

Major Problems that Affect Training

Table 8: The result, ranked in descending order

No	Possible factors	Athletes=28	Coaches=3
		Rank	Rank
1	Lack of adequate facilities	3 rd	2 nd
2	Lack of qualified and competent coaches	11 th	6 th
3	Lack of well prepared and conducive training track	2 nd	1 st
4	Lack of well-designed training program	7 th	9 th
5	Lack of adequate and balanced diet	1 st	3 rd
6	Personal factors relationship, living conduction, change in residence ...etc.	9 th	5 th
7	Lack of proper supervision	10 th	10 th
8	Lack of communication among staff members	4 th	11 th
9	Lack of sufficient incentives and motivation	5 th	7 th
10	Lack of individualized training for different events	8 th	8 th
11	Environment factors	6 th	4 th

N.B. Rank, one for the most hindering to eleven for the least.

The above table clearly indicates that as athletes ranked the most hindering factors in ascending orders from the 1st most hindering factor to the least one 11th, that is, lack of adequate and balanced diet, lack of well prepared and conducive training track and lack of adequate facilities ...etc. In the same manner, coaches ranked and found that lack of well prepared and conducive training track, lack of adequate facilities and lack of adequate and balanced diet ...etc. are the most hindering factors accordingly. From this affirmation without going into greater detail, one can easily deduce that two of the top most ranked hindering factors are in the first three front lists of both groups, i.e., lack of adequate and balanced diet and lack of well prepared and conducive training track.

Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire indicates that to practice with large number of athletes is a big challenge besides, improved nutrition and health care, better equipment and more systematic and scientific approaches to athletic training contribute to superior performance.

In any athletics training centers an effective and efficient sport training path should include as a bench mark: opportunities of participation, talent identification, individualized training, nutrition, health service, availability of training equipments, and having competent coaches of the respective event

Short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes' and their respective coaches' revealed that they are engaged in training once a day on the average most of the subjects are engaged in training activities 75 min. per session.(see table 3 and 4).

So, it is evident from the above description that unless the training intensity is moderate, the training allotted per day requires reconsideration.

To strength the above point, I think quoting Faye's, *et al.*, (2005) affirmation is appropriate that if you train too much or too intensely you are more likely to suffer injuries or become over trained, a condition characterized by lack of energy, aching muscles and joints, and decreased physical performance.

As indicated in table 10 the respondents were asked to rank the possible hindering factors that trainee athletes' face in training center from the most serious to the least ones. As the result, trainee athletes ranked the most top three serious problems as Lack of adequate and balanced diet followed by Lack of well prepared and conducive training track and Lack of adequate facilities. On the contrary to this, respondent coaches' ranked Lack of well prepared and conducive training track, followed by Lack of adequate facilities and Lack of adequate and balanced diet. Yet, quite many respondents in one way or another expressed their idea in open-ended and interview in favor of the above views. On the same issue, one respondent argued but forward his opinion a bit in different way as follows: From practical point of view, it is difficult to change the training track particularly for short, middle and long distance event athletes. To this effect, doing intensive training load is very difficult.

The other major possible factor which has got quite a significance number of respondents' attention was, "lack of adequate and balanced diet". Related to this, Jackson (1986) underscored that energy intakes peaked between age 16 and 29 years and then decline for succeeding age groups. A similar pattern occurred for males and females, although males reported higher daily energy intakes then female at all ages between age 20 and 29 years, the women consumed on average 35% fewer kcal then men on a daily basis, ... Individuals who engage regularly in moderate-to- intense physical activity eventually increase daily energy intake to match their higher energy expenditure level.

Among various factors that impede the performance of short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes', the availability of Library and well equipped gymnasium is identified by many respondents as the major attribute.

The above idea, though expressed by majority of athletes it was shared by almost all coaches and administrative heads. When we look in to the above responses in depth, it is very hard to understand that there is absence or shortage of library, gymnasium Showers and Equipment in terms of number and qualities. This is also confirmed by researchers during the time of observation. These all explanations at least gives us a bird's eye view to what extent the availability of facilities and equipments have affected short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes that found in Tenta Athletics Training Center.

In the training center, the training is somehow sport specific the demand of short, middle and long distance event at large. Similarly, trainee athletes by improving their performance from day to day through taking scientific training and scheme of training from their coach, they could be stood in world class athletes. Basic Materials and equipments necessary to carry out daily short, middle and long distance event training session successful are established in short supply.

In the training center, to make the training activities more effective, it is necessary to have an appropriate physical environment with infrastructures and equipments, which facilitate the training program at large

Conclusion

Short, middle and long distance event trainee athletes' are engaged in training once per day. Besides, most of them are found to be regular students either in elementary, high school and vocational school. Trainee athletes have not undergone through medical examination test before entraining into the training center.

Trainee athletes have a good future prospective, and also they strive to enhance their performance level. The major constraints associate with the short, middle and long distance event training are lack of adequate and balanced diet, well prepared and conducive training track and adequate facilities ...etc. In this regard, trainee athletes indicated that in order to effectively perform short, middle and long distance event training in the training center, collaborating with South Wollo Youth and Sport Office, Tenta Woreda and concerned bodies are found to be compulsory.

Generally in the training center, well equipped gymnasium, transportation, recreational center and medical service were found to be the limited ones.

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