

The Role of Television in Sports Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Sports as a collected term, represents one important area of national life which most nations of the world continue to emphasize. Such countries use it to project their image. Flowing from this fact, there is, therefore, the need to develop the area as a way of integrating a country into the global nexus. Sports development involves the mass media which contribute to this development in a number of ways. This paper focuses, particularly on Nigerian television and its role in sports development in Nigeria. The paper finds that the medium has failed to adequately perform its role in this regard. The paper thus suggests a new role for Nigerian television and suggests ways of performing this role.

Keywords: sports, development, television.

1. Introduction

Sports has become one important area of national life worldwide. Every country usually attempts to be recognized as a force in one sport or another. The involvement of every country in sports emphasizes the indubitable fact that sports occupies a prime place in world affairs. Hence different countries struggle to dominate others in different sporting activities. Thus Brazil is well known in football; the United States of America dominates in athletics; China and Japan are leaders in table tennis; just as India, Sri Lanka and South Africa are well known in cricket. The Olympics and football World Cup are the two biggest sporting events in the world. Every country strives to be represented at these events.

Sports can be said to be the second most important aspect of global interaction, next only to politics. During the days of apartheid in South Africa, sports was used as a weapon to fight for the freedom of the people, as the country was banned from all sporting activities including the Olympics and World Cup. Sports has therefore become intertwined with politics, Ukpai (2009:36) corroborates this assertion, pointing out that "National Sport Festivals have long been little more than political forums to buttress the point that sport and politics do mix". The point was further amplified when it was revealed that an Iranian football club cancelled a football match it had arranged with a Yugoslavian team (Partisan Belgrade) because the Yugoslavian team's coach is an Israeli (see Vanguard, February 21, 2012; page 54). Israel is a known arch enemy of Iran.

Despite the politicization of sports, it is equally used as an instrument of globalization. Sporting events, such as a boxing bout involving heavy weight contenders, attract spectators world wide with focus on either the pugilists or their countries, or the country where the bout is taking place. Any country that wants to place itself under global glare may resort to sports. The essence of this can be gleaned from the move by India to develop its football in order to get global attention. In January 2012, India was reported to have inaugurated a new football league which they hoped would attract huge crowds like the game of cricket for which they are well known. To achieve this vision, several retired and semi — retired but well known stars of the game were recruited such star includes Nigeria's Austine Jay Jay Okocha who was "to earn 550,000 dollars, while Samson Siasia (as coach) will take home 210,000 dollars"(Vanguard, January 2012, 31:back page). Today, the Indian football league is now broadcast in several countries like Nigeria, with notable former world cup heroes such as Alessarcho Del Piero of Italy featuring prominently.

It is therefore very important for sports to be developed. This development requires adequate focus on every aspect connected to it. This includes finance, man power (or personnel), as well as the mass media. It is regrettable, however, to note that Nigerian sports has suffered from stunted development. In some cases, it has been an avoidable retrogression. For example; the year 2011 has been the very worst for the country in sports. The country which had hitherto been classified as the number one football nation in Africa failed to qualify for the 2012 Africa cup of nations and fell from number 22 to 56 in world rankings as at January 2012. It is yet to recover from this fall. This calls for a serious action to revitalize the nation's sports. It must be noted that one of the causes of this lamentable slide into the doldrums can be traced to media apathy particularly, television.

It is therefore the focus of this paper to expose how television can aid sports development in order for Nigeria to regain its pride as a force in global sports. It should be noted that sports in the context of this paper is regarded as a collective term representing all such activities that could be referred to as game or sport. Hence it is being used in its singular sense.

2. Sports and sports development

Although the term sports is clear as regards what it entails, a precise definition can be quite elusive. It is in this

regard that Olajide describes sports as “a highly organized physical activity, regulated by accepted rules, which sometimes requires maximum physical and mental exertion” (2007: 13). In the same vein, Aminu and Tanglang refer to sports as “an activity or experience that gives enjoyment of recreation, past time diversion which requires rigorous bodily exertion and is carried on according to some traditional forms or set of rules, whether outdoor or indoor” (Cited in Olajide, 2007:13). Also Wikipedia defines sport as:

“all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organized participation aim to use, maintain or improve physical fitness and provide entertainment to participants. Sport may be competitive, where a winner or winners can be identified by objective means and may require a degree of skill, especially at higher levels... Some non-physical activities, such as board games and card games are sometimes referred to as sports” (accessed on 2nd February, 2012).

From the explanation by wikipedia, it is clear that some of our traditional sports which do not involve physical exertion, but provide entertainment, such as Ayo and Draughts are de-facto sports and there is the need to develop and promote them to international standards and recognition.

It is obvious, from the foregoing that sports is a social activity involving interaction. This is why it is used to showcase the disposition of a particular country or group of people. Agbonlahor et al. (2009:88) realize this point and posit that, “sport is a reflection of society”. According to them, sports though encompasses and reflects negative aspects of society, such as violence, corruption, cheating, discrimination and drug abuse, the positive benefits outweigh them (88).

The essence of sports development can therefore never be overemphasized. By development, is meant not just the improvement of facilities of one sport or the winning of more laurels in particular sporting activities. Development involves improvement of facilities, adoption of better policies that would enhance participants’ improvement in their chosen activities, creation of awareness and generation of interest in sports as well as diversification of focus to include other sports that have been neglected in order to improve them in all ramifications.

It is pertinent to state here that evaluating sports development in Nigeria, using the above stated indices would reveal a lamentable indolence on the part of those saddled with the task of overseeing sports. Thus the task of sports development to international standards remains a pipe dream with only lip service being paid to it.

Uyah (2009:2) traces the history of organized sports development in Nigeria to secondary school sports with the emergence of the Grier Cup and Hussey shield in 1933. According to him, nine sports associations existed by 1960. These were Cricket, Athletics, Football, Boxing, Tennis, Table Tennis, Swimming, Hockey and Netball (2-3). By 1962, the National Sports Commission was established to cater for all sports. Between then and now, the commission has undergone several changes including being merged with the ministry of sports and separate& with personnel being fired and reappointed at the convenience of government. This goes to show the importance government attaches to sports — depending on what government wants to use sports to achieve. Individuals and corporate bodies have also been involved through their sponsorship of many events. Even national teams usually get sponsored to international competitions. The annual African Football Awards that produce such stars as footballer of the year is sponsored by Globacom, a telecommunications company. Thus no event in sports that craves recognition goes without sponsorship. This testifies to the fact that sports occupy a significant place in the life of an individual, community and country. There is therefore the need for constant development, to add value in all spheres, ranging from finance to even the entertainment it provides.

To realize an appropriate level of development, the relevant organs must be involved. These are individuals, corporate bodies, government as well as the mass media (and television in particular). What role can television play in this configuration and what has television done in this regard so far? A critical analysis of these questions and an attempt to answer them would reveal whether Nigerian television has performed creditably or abysmally in the area of sports development.

3. Sports development and Nigerian television

It has already been stated that sports development involves the improvement of facilities, creation of awareness, encouragement of participation, formulation of policies that should create the conducive atmosphere needed for sports to thrive in the society and so on. When such development takes place, the sportsmen and women who eventually represent the country in sporting events would be better placed to win laurels and the country would be placed on the appropriate pedestal. Besides, at the individual level, the generality of the country’s citizens would reap the benefits of their involvement in sports. Such benefits include financial enhancement, employment, therapeutic benefits and so on. Of course, when the citizens of a country are developed mentally and financially, such a country is equally developed. Internationally, the country’s benefit includes the attainment of a better image among the comity of nations. It may also improve relations with other countries who may want to visit the country in view of the peaceful atmosphere which sports would enhance, and this can boost the tourism

potentials of the country.

Morakinyo and Agu (2009) have contended that the “the most important change that has taken place in the sports industry is the significant role the media is (sic) playing in the development of sports all over the world”. In terms of facilities, it is clear that the generality of the people do not have access to facilities that may enable them improve their participation as well as their performance. The state of affairs in this regard is appalling. Apart from the Abuja stadium as well as the Uyo stadium commissioned in 2014 and a few others in the various state capitals, one can hardly find a standard stadium having facilities of international standard. Besides, most of these stadia were constructed mainly for football and athletics. Other games are not provided for. Entrances and exits are not enough to cater for the number of people who would want to go in and watch the events. Rural areas seem to be forgotten in the provision of facilities. Delta State is the only state that made a meaningful effort in this regard. This was during the era of James Ibori, who as governor between 1999 and 2007 constructed several mini — stadia in the local government areas. These are at Oleh, Ogwashi —Uku, Oghara and Ughelli, with fairly large ones at Sapele, Asaba and Warn. Neighbouring Edo State still has only one stadium (the Samuel Oghemudia Stadium in Benin City). Oyo State makes do with the three it has had over the years. These are the Lekan Salami Stadium, Adamasingba, Olubadan stadium and the Obafemi Awolowo Stadium (formerly, Liberty Stadium), all in Ibadan. The story is the same in the other states of the federation. Because these Stadia play host to mainly football as there is hardly any competition in other areas, it depends on the individual skills and a measure of encouragement from government or corporate bodies for competitors to excel to international lime light in such sports.

The lack of proper focus in sports has led to an avoidable retrogression. In the past, the country excelled in various sports. In Boxing, for instance, Nigeria won its first medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 through Nojeem Maiyegun, followed by another bronze by Isaac Ikhuoria at the Munich Olympics in 1972. Then Peter Konyegwachie won a silver in 1984 which has been the last in the sport. In Table — Tennis, the country produced the likes of Yomi “the hawk” Bankole (who died in January, 2012), Sule Olaleye, Olawunmi Majekodunmi and Bose Kaffo, who ruled Africa for a long time. In Athletics, Chioma Ajunwa won Nigeria’s first gold medal at the Olympics in the 1996 Atlanta games in Long Jump.

Despite the glorious picture painted above, the country plummeted down to unfathomable depths by the year 2011. It was then that even football on which all attention has been focused failed to assuage the feeling of despondency that pervaded the entire country. It was in that year that Nigeria failed to qualify for the final stage of all categories of championships, ranging from the under 17 World Cup to under - 21 as well as the Olympics of 2012 in both male and female categories. For the first time since 1986, the country failed to qualify for the 2012 African cup of nations hosted by Equatorial Guinea and Gabon and won for the first time by Zambia. It should be noted that qualification for the final stages of these competitions was, hitherto, Nigeria’s “birthright”.

The country’s regression into sporting doldrums stems from a number of factors. First is government’s apathy which continues to engage in projects of self glorification rather than those that will contribute to human capital development. This apathy has culminated in the exodus of our citizens who now adopt other countries because of lack of encouragement here at home. Thus we have had our own Emmanuel Olisadebe playing for Poland at the world cup in Germany in 2006, Daniel Igali and David Dafiagbon winning medals in Wrestling and Boxing respectively for Canada at the 2008 Olympics, just as Francis Obikwelu and Gloria Anozie won medals, for Portugal in Athletics at the same Olympics at our expense.

Thus, there is no encouragement as the focus remains politics which has become the most lucrative profession. It is only in Nigeria young men introduce themselves as professional politicians because of its elevation to the highest pedestal in the country’s ethos. So, rather than getting involved in sports, young men and women become political thugs for quick money.

Again, by virtue of this all pervading apathy, the organs that should generate and focus attention on sports for the purpose of creating awareness and enhancing participation have all failed in this role. Television, in particular has failed in its duty to foster the motivation of people to be part of sports development. For any meaningful development to take place, television must not only be involved. It must be in the vanguard. Ordinarily, sports is one of the programme types on television. But how has this programme type been handled on the Nigerian television landscape?

Enumerating ten ways television has changed sports, Garth Sundem, among others states that through television, there is increased participation in sports. According to him:

People report that interest in sports is heightened by watching great athletes perform and young people report wanting to emulate their sports heroes on the playground.
(<http://people.wowstuffworks.com/.../10ways>)

This heightened interest includes the fact that amateurs go professional through watching their preferred sports on television as the professionals they see would equally make them want to become professionals. This interest equally relates to how sporting events are presented. This point is well noted by

Ugochukwu who submits that:

Through the media, sports today are presented with electrifying beauty. This makes sports attractive and lucrative. This media encourages (sic) people to develop reasonable interests in engaging in sports as well as opportunity to invest and advertise using athletes. ([http://academic bag.blogspot.com/.../ role of media](http://academicbag.blogspot.com/.../roleofmedia))

It is clear from the submission of the two writers above that television should generate interest in both intending sports men and sponsors of sporting events who should sponsor such events through advertising. This has to do with adequate focus on sports in a way that should elicit this interest.

In the past, television performed creditably through television people got interested in several sports. However, with the economic downturn which commenced in the 1980s, Nigerian television found it difficult to focus on sports adequately. Consequently, emphasis shifted to the most popular sport - football. This, perhaps is why Bisi Adanri (2005:120) notes that, "it is however clear that when we talk about sports on television, what readily comes to mind is football". According to her, "football has outshined (sic) other sports, especially on television. It attracts sponsorship and demands audience loyalty" (120).

From Adanri's submission, the fact could be gleaned that television sports in Nigeria concentrates on football because it can attract sponsorship. But even the football that has become the main focus has not been placed on the proper pedestal that can enhance actual development. The manner of focus has only enhanced the perpetration and perpetuation of the phenomenon known as media imperialism, whereby our television system is subjected to serious pressure from the television structures of other countries without a commensurate pressure from our own.

The football we see on our screens is not that played by Nigerian clubs such as Warn Wolves, Kano Pillars or Sunshine of Akure. Rather, we see the games of Liverpool, Arsenal Manchester United (all in England) Barcelona, Real Madrid (in Spain) and Ac Milan, Inter Milan, Juventus (all in Italy) as well as those of clubs in France, Germany, Argentina, Brazil and even South Africa. Thus, through Television, the average Nigerian football fan knows everything about foreign football ranging from the minutest details of players' private lives, to scores of matches and crowd behaviour. But virtually nothing is known about our own teams and football. Lamenting this state of affairs, a few years ago, Ibagere (2009:124) submits thus:

...while we enjoy European matches weekly, we know nothing about our own. We can therefore give a vivid account of how a club like Manchester United Football Club of England won the football Association Premier League in 2008 from the beginning. But we cannot do the same about Kano Pillars because the scanty news we get about the club are scraps from daily newspapers which are not even enough to make any statement about the team.

Today, the situation is worse. Youths now wear T-shirts and caps bearing the names of their favorite teams and players such as Chelsea, Arsenal, Messi, Ronaldo, Lampard and so on. Omoera and Ibagere (2010:9-10) submit that "the average Nigerian football fan knows more about football players and their activities in the Spanish league, German League, Italian League, French League, among others than the Nigerian sporting scene". This Knowledge is via television.

But the actual Nigerian television comprising the local stations must be distinguished from the others that are involved in satellite transmission or cable. The local stations' signals can hardly be received fifty kilometres from such stations. And these stations are not well -equipped to engage in the type of broadcast needed to develop Sports. They are financially handicapped. So, it is the satellite broadcasting stations that are the protagonists in this regard. DSTV, owned by Multi-Choice- a foreign company, is the major culprit of media imperialism in terms of the phenomenon's perpetration. It has a plethora of stations ranging from supersports 1 to supersports 9 with only one of them devoted to African football.

The point being made here is that television has failed to perform its role in sports development. This is in all ramifications, as television in Nigeria has completely deviated from focusing on local sports. Thus, the much needed awareness and interest in local sports have been lost in the frenzy of the moment whereby emphasis is fully on foreign sports. There is therefore, a lamentable lack of interest in sports development since television has failed to create awareness in the first place. The conclusion then is that television has not contributed to human development in this regard. This could have impacted on general national development. We are therefore unable to harness all the benefits sports can bring to the individual, the community and the nation in general.

4. Towards a new role for television in Nigerian sports

For television to play a meaningful role in sports development, several steps must begin from the realization that sports does not connote football, but a conglomeration of several activities of which football is just one. Adanri (2005:121) has rightly noted that:

There are other sports which are crying for exposure, if not as much as is given to football-like basketball, lawn tennis, baseball, table tennis etc. if television gives the necessary exposure, these other sports can flourish well, so television can grow interest and participation in these other sports.

So, these other sports, especially those in which Nigerian sportsmen and women had excelled in the past must be refocused upon to improve them through awareness and participation. Nigerian television experiences a kind of lethargy in this regard as has been aptly noted. The medium does not seem to realize the essence of focusing on sports. But as Duyile (2005:145) observes:

Today, any station which refuses to cover any world cup series or any international football match stands to lose its viewers. Many stations regain their popularity only when they do live telecasts or relay sports events that other high-class stations do not.

Television must therefore seek participation in sports for the purpose of development. Through this it creates awareness and fosters other individuals' participation. This can be done when television directs attention to the various sports. By this more people would become aware and be interested in participation, either as competitors or sponsors. This will foster human capital development as some participants would begin to earn their livelihood from such participation. This can only be achieved when television becomes people-oriented, because as Ibagere (2011:205) opines "...it is necessary for the mass media to be participatory and equally be people-oriented for them to be able to play any meaningful role in the process of human capital development". Perhaps it is because Nigerian television is not seen as a people-oriented medium that majority of people get alienated from it, thereby compelling them to subscribe to foreign stations. The medium must therefore be at the service of the people.

One way of being at the service of the people is to expose the state of facilities. Today many of our arenas are dilapidated and derelict. Football playing turfs in most of our stadia look like farmlands from which crops like yam and cassava had just been harvested. This is why watching Nigerian football on television is a total bore as it is devoid of the free flowing and highly entertaining characteristics reminiscent of that from Spain, England, Italy and other countries having standard pitches. Nothing gets done about the dilapidation, perhaps, because television has consistently failed to focus on the facilities. Yet television's focus on such an issue can turn the situation around as those concerned can then be compelled to renovate the facilities.

Television must equally enhance the integration of the rural areas with the urban centres. This is the essence of rural broadcasting. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has made tremendous effort and taken giant strides in rural broadcasting by establishing rural stations. But these stations merely exist physically. They have all failed to integrate the rural areas with the urban centres as their content does not relate to the rural dwellers they are expected to serve. Television must, thus, endeavour to purvey information about the rural areas and reveal sporting potentials that are hidden in such areas at both human and infrastructural levels for the purpose of their development. Ibagere (2009:120) has noted that in the world information order today, "information passes from the developed countries to the developing countries without a corresponding flow from the developing countries, to the developed ones". Having noted this assertion, Ibagere and Anyanwu (2012:52) have rightly submitted that:

The same situation appears to be replicated in the local Nigerian environment. Here, information flows from the urban centre to the rural and suburban dwellers without a corresponding flow from the rural and suburban areas to the urban centre....

The information order must therefore be reversed by television so that rural dwellers with a lot of sporting potentials can be integrated and utilized for national development. It has already been noted that traditional sports can be developed to international standards. Television must foster this development by promoting such sports through adequate focus on them. It is imperative for television to commence urgently, the promotion of our traditional sports. In time they could be recognized and included in global events like the Olympics.

Television must equally embark on an active indepth and objective analysis of our status vis-à-vis the sporting world, as well as our potentials in global competitions to enable the country plan strategy that would enable us regain our place in world sporting events. Such analysis must be with the view to repositioning our sports to enable further awareness and participation for ultimate development.

Above all, television must engage in the persuasion of every citizen to be part of sports and contribute to its development by adopting at least one game. Government, corporate bodies and individuals must be made to realize the essence of their involvement. They must not see their participation and financial commitment as donation to charity, but an investment that would yield some dividends to the nation. This again, can be achieved by objective and indepth analysis.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The foregoing has revealed that sports is a very important area of national life which the country should explore and develop for the benefit of the nation. It has also been established that there has been a serious neglect of the area and that part of the neglect is perpetrated by television which has not focused adequately on it. Television's focus has, rather, been towards the further entrenchment of media imperialism whereby we are buffeted with sporting activities of foreign countries. We are therefore confronted with complete obscurity of our traditional sports some of which can be promoted to international levels.

Based on the above findings the medium is being hereby charged with a new role. Television should focus more on sports and engender increased participation by government, corporate bodies and individuals. Flowing from the above, it is hereby recommended as follows:

- Nigerian television should endeavour to adequately broadcast our football league matches to show our own style of football to the world.
- Other sports should be equally focused upon. In this regard, our traditional sports should be given adequate attention. This refers to the grassroots which must be integrated into the national sports scene.
- For the purpose of creating awareness and generating more interest, television personnel concerned with sports should be given adequate training in sports to enable them carry out their analysis effectively. An armchair analyst who is unable to use appropriate terms or is ignorant of the rules can only engender alienation from such sports.
- Television should engage in serious marketing to get corporate bodies and rich individuals to be interested in sponsorship, so that the medium can cover and broadcast different sporting activities.

These recommendations, if implemented will go a long way in enhancing television's performance of its role in sports development.

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Biography

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