Worksheet 9.1

Coaches’ predictions about future success

A number of approaches to identifying talent have been created, and the success of these methods is of immense importance to major sporting teams, as for example in the National Basketball Association of the United States where young players are drafted out of college. Choosing a player who will perform well at the highest level can yield significant financial rewards and influence the performance of the whole team.

One approach to identifying talent involves the use of anthropometric and physiological data such as height, reach, vertical jump and both aerobic and anaerobic fitness. Gabbett et al. (2007) carried out an investigation to determine how useful this approach is in scouting for volleyball talent.

Participants in the study were 28 junior volleyball players with an average age of 15.5 years who were part of a talent search programme and had limited experience in the sport but had been judged appropriate in terms of anthropometric and physiological characteristics. A set of skill tests were carried out for the skills of spiking, passing (also called digging), setting and serving. Accuracy was measured according to how many times participants could hit a target, and technique judged by two coaches who did not have any information about how experienced the players were. After selection for a training squad had been made, using only subjective coaching opinions, the data collected from the players were analysed to see if the measures used were able to distinguish between the selected and non-selected players.

The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the anthropometric and physiological characteristics measured between the selected and non-selected players, and only the subjective evaluations made by coaches regarding technique in passing and serving were found to be significant predictors of success.

Reference

1 How would you describe the method of this study? What typical strengths and limitations are there of this method?

2 What specific strengths and limitations does this study have? Focus particularly on validity.

3 To what extent does this study demonstrate that a self-fulfilling prophecy may occur when players selected by coaches for special attention turn out to be successful?