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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING THE KNOW-HOW OF GAMES AND SPORTS OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION (GASOA) OFFICIALS IN OFFICIATING TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETICS COMPETITIONS IN NJALA TOWN, MOYAMBA DISTRICT, SOUTHERN SIERRA LEONE.

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Abstract

This study assessed the officiating know-how of sports officials from the Games and Sports Officials Association (GASOA) in Njala Town, southern Sierra Leone. The study targeted 50 sports officials, 30 males and 20 females. They were drawn at random from both track and field events. It was reported that officiating associations were not doing enough towards free, fair, impartial and efficient judgment in Inter-House, Inter-Hall, and Inter –Area track and field athletics competitions in the township. The study of Games and Sports Officials Association (GASOA) proved this hypothesis to be null, as it was observed from data collected after descriptive statistical analysis with SPSS that indeed the officials were up to the task, giving the data collected from questionnaires, interviews conducted and independent observation during inter-house and inter-hall track and field athletics competitions. Notwithstanding the gains made in officiating, there were cracks for which recommendations were made on how the officials can continually build their capacity.

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Introduction:-

Sport officiating over the years in Njala Township and its environs had been critiqued by sports personnel, parents and athletes on the basis of officials not up to the task of the job as track and field athletics competitions most often culminate in violence due to unsatisfactory officiating. Officials at some point in time in the officiating process would be embroiled in bitter arguments with each other about poor judgment or rather wrong implementation of the rules. It was like officials coming from different schools of thought with divergent views about the rules; which should not be the case in officiating. Officials are expected to judge actions of athletes from a single rule book and talk with one voice as enshrined in the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) rule book in existence at the time. This is applicable especially for secondary schools and colleges. Kindergarten sports however have their own designed rules as deemed necessary by the organizers considering the nature of their sports.

Officiating single round competition isn't that much difficult as heats where there are more athletes participating. GASOA officials had been used to officiating single round competitions. Officials therefore have to be au fait in

officiating competitions that have to do with heats. The skills of reading horizontal and vertical measurements and recording jumps, throws and failures in field events have to be completely mastered by officials.

Over the years in Njala town, heads of educational institutions have course to import officials to officiate their schools' and universities' track and field athletics competitions. This had taken a huge toll on the meager financial resources of the institutions as the officials were provided with hotel accommodation, feeding and given honorarium with transportation to and from their respective residents.

The above concern gave rise to the establishment of Games and Sport Officials Association (GASOA) on the 13th, March, 2013 comprising lecturers, teachers, medical practitioners and other professional with passion in sport officiating. With the establishment of (GASOA), it was expected that there would be a paradigm shift which would be welcomed by school administrators. The training opportunities for the officials helped tremendously to stand up to the test of modern day officiating. It did not only help them know the rules and how to implement them but also enhanced their psychological toughness.

This study is therefore geared towards assessing the know-how of GASOA officials in track and field athletics officiating within their five years of existence.

Literature Review:-

The National Association of Sports Officials (NASO)" believes the duty of sports officials is to act as impartial judges of sports competitions. We believe this duty carries with it an obligation to perform with accuracy, fairness, and objectivity through an overriding sense of integrity". [2]

With the emotions surrounding sports, it's impossible to prevent every bad action from happening. But efforts should be made by all stakeholders in the game to keep sports officials as safe and secure as possible. Officials have a tough job on the court and field. They deserve to arrive at the game, work it and leave the venue feeling confident their well-being is important to game administrators, participants and fans. In order to achieve a safe officiating environment, schools, officiating crews and individual officials need to work together. A strong safety plan is important. [2]

Communication in officiating is crucial and complex. Communication either verbal or non-verbal is like a bullet that has left the barrel of the gun.it cannot be retrieved. Officials should think carefully before they make a call or rather as put by Kelly ,ask yourself a few quick questions before responding emotionally to a message for example Do I need to show my emotions here? Is that display relevant to this communication? [4]

Considering the nature of the job, when psychology of officiating is mastered by officials according to Weinberg they will learn how to manage stress, improve their concentration, use imagery to improve performance, build self-confidence, communicate better with coaches and players, enhance their mental abilities using five self-examination tests, and more. They'll also learn to focus their attention to help eliminate guesswork in making calls. [7] .As officials, "You make the difference. Be courteous, approachable and confident. "[5]

From the early years to present day, officiating has seen tremendous metamorphosis in its evolution. Today's meet officials look much different from their predecessors; especially when one considers their responsibilities, mechanics, technological development and appearance; but their development is far from over as it is with GASOA. From changing demands in athletics to an increasing need for transparency, officials will have to continue adapting their skills and practices to be successful. An important change to officiating is occurring today with the inclusion of females to the profession [6]. Until recently, female engagement in sports officiating in Njala town and its environs has been limited and minimal. Because of legislation and changing perspectives, women are becoming an integral part of officiating. Their continued inclusion will only help the officiating world continue its growth. Finally, a shortage of properly trained officials is perhaps the most pressing issue facing amateur officials. [6].

Mike Pereira, former NFL vice president of officiating, offered this view of the zoom-lens spotlight: "Officials have gotten to the point that they realize they are in a transparent business. They know when they are right or wrong. . . . [They] have gotten to . . . where they understand criticism and that the criticism can lead to a better understanding of the job". (*Referee*, September, 2010, p. 34).[6].

Starting to officiate sports involves making connections with organizations that train and assign officials, register them and supply them with instructional materials. The purpose of sports officiating is customarily thought of as helping opponents play a game, monitoring the action, and enforcing the rules. Some sporting events are team sports, whereas others are individual events. [6].

In field events in particular, measurements are done in the throwing, putting, and horizontal/ vertical jump events. It is thus crucial for an official to avail him/herself with the skills in taking measurements and readings of the mentioned events. In high jump for instance, all measurements shall be made, in whole centimeters, perpendicularly from the ground to the lowest part of the upper side of the bar. The measurement of each jump shall be made immediately after each valid trial (or after an immediate oral protest made under Rule 146.5). [3]

In the case of long and triple jumps, all jumps shall be measured from the nearest break in the landing area made by any part of the body, or anything that was attached to the body at the time it made a mark, to the take-off line, or take-off line extended. The measurement shall be taken perpendicular to the take-off line or its extension.[3]

Starters in track events need to have training; time keepers who use stopwatches and field judges who measure distances or jumping heights all require basic instruction before track and field athletics meet begins. Someone who conducts the high jump, for instance, need only be aware of what a foot fault is or how many failures in approaches to the bar are permitted before disqualification.

The Chief Judge for track events and the Chief Judge for each field event shall co-ordinate the work of the judges in their respective events. When the relevant body has not already allocated the duties of the Judges, they shall allocate the duties.[3]

The Judges, who must all operate from the same side of the track or course, shall decide the order in which the athletes have finished and, in any case where they cannot arrive at a decision, shall refer the matter to the Referee, who shall decide. Note: The Judges should be placed at least 5m from, and in line with, the finish and should be provided with an elevated platform.[3]

Rule 126 of the states that Judges shall judge and record each trial and measure each valid trial of athletes in all Field events. In the High Jump and Pole vault, precise measurements should be made when the bar is raised, particularly if Records are being attempted. At least two Judges should keep a record of all trials, checking their recordings at the end of each round of trials. The appropriate Judge shall indicate the validity or non-validity of a trial by raising a white or red flag, as appropriate.[3]

The Starter shall position himself so that he has full visual control over all athletes during the start procedure. It is recommended, especially for staggered starts, that loudspeakers in the individual lanes be used for relaying the commands and the start and any recall signals to all athletes at the same time. "Note: The Starter shall place himself so that the whole field of athletes falls into a narrow visual angle. For races using crouch starts it is necessary that he is so placed that he can ascertain that all athletes are currently steady in their set positions before the gun is fired or approved starting apparatus is activated. (All such starting apparatus is termed "gun" for the purpose of the Rules.).Where loudspeakers are not used in races with a staggered start, the Starter shall so place himself that the distance between him and each of the athletes is approximately the same. Where, however, the Starter cannot place himself in such a position, the gun shall be placed there and discharged by electric contact... One or more Recalls shall be assigned to assist the Starter. Note: For events of 200m, 400m, 400m Hurdles, 4 × 100m, 4 × 200m, the Medley Relay and 4 × 400m Relays, there shall be at least two Recalls."[3]

Procedure in officiating heats is spelt out in Rule166, the IAAF rule book. Preliminary rounds shall be held in track events in which the number of athletes is too large to allow the competition to be conducted satisfactorily in a single round (final). Where preliminary rounds are held, all athletes must compete in, and qualify through, all such rounds except that at the discretion of the body having the control over a competition, under Rules 1.1 (a), (b), (c) and (f), there may be a preliminary qualification round that is limited to athletes who have not met the entry standard(s) for the competition. The preliminary rounds shall be arranged by the appointed technical Delegates. If no technical Delegates have been appointed they shall be arranged by the Organizing Committee. [3]

Method:-

The study is a descriptive survey that was conducted in Njala Town, Southern Sierra Leone with the Games and Sports Officials Association (GASOA) officials being respondents. Fifty respondents were targeted 30 were male officials (n=30) and 20 female officials (n=20). The study assessed the officiating capability of GASOA officials in the various track and field athletics competitions in the township. In doing so both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been used. Independent observers were recruited to observe the officiating ability of the participants. These observers were recruited on the basis of qualification as IAAF accredited officials in Sierra Leone with levels one and two certificates.

Population and Sample:-

The study selected fifty participants (30 males and 20 females) as the sample which was drawn randomly from the GASOA membership. They were selected on the basis of total representation as all track and field athletics events including announcers and recorders were targeted.

Instrumentation:-

The instruments used in this investigation included: questionnaire, interview guide, and observation check list

Data Collection:-

Data was collected using questionnaires that were completed and returned to the researcher; data from observation was collected during officiating in schools' Inter-House track and field athletics competitions and University Inter-Hall track and field athletics competitions. The researchers with the help of qualified independent observers drawn from within the country collected data during their observations using a checklist. The researchers interviewed officials in and out of the athletics arena.

Data Analysis:-**Table 1:-Shows occupational demography of respondents.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Teacher	32	64.0	64.0	64.0
	Lecturer	6	12.0	12.0	76.0
	Medical Practionner	2	4.0	4.0	80.0
	Others	10	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

From table 1, teachers form the highest number of members of GASOA with 64%, followed by members of other professions with 20%, lecturers with 12% and 4% of members from the medical profession.

Table2:-Shows the relationship between length of experience of respondents and their knowledge of track and field athletics rules.

		Length of experience in officiating	Knowledge of track and field athletics rules
Length of experience in officiating	Pearson Correlation	1	-.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Knowledge of track and field athletics rules	Pearson Correlation	-.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 clearly indicates that there is a significant negative correlation between the length of experience in officiating and knowledge of athletics rules at $-.477^{**}$, 0.01 level; 2-tailed. The P value is at .000 indicating a significant correlation at 0.01% level.

Table3:-Shows the correlation between length of experience in officiating and efficiency in communication skills.

		Length of experience in officiating	How efficient is your communication skills?
Length of experience in officiating	Pearson Correlation	1	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	50	50
How efficient is your communication skills?	Pearson Correlation	.372**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	50	50
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 3 shows there is a significant positive correlation between officiating experience and efficiency in communication skills at .372** in the 0.01 level 2-tailed.

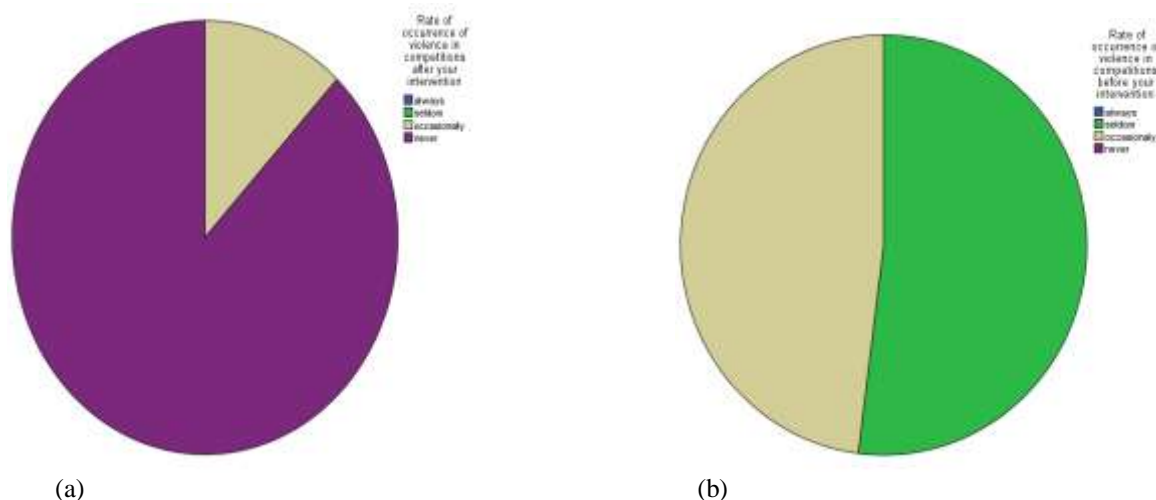
Table 4:-Shows Cross tabulation of the responses to rate of occurrence of violence in athletics competitions before and after the establishment of GASOA.

			Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions after your intervention		Total
			occasionally	never	
Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions before your intervention	seldom	% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions before your intervention	15.4%	84.6%	100.0%
		% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions after your intervention	66.7%	50.0%	52.0%
	occasionally	% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions before your intervention	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%
		% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions after your intervention	33.3%	50.0%	48.0%
		Total		% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions before your intervention	12.0%
		% within Rate of occurrence of violence in competitions after your intervention	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4 shows that seldom were violence reported in athletics before the establishment of GASOA at 52% and occasionally is violence reported with 48%. After the establishment of GASOA, 12% respondents reported that there is occasional violence reported and 88% reported that violence never occurred.

Below is a pie-chart showing responses of participants to: (a) occurrence of violence before and (b) occurrence of violence after the intervention of GASOA.

Figure1:-Pie-chart showing responses to rate of violence in competitions before and after the intervention of GASOA.



Results:-

The study found out that the Games and sports officials association was a nascent one established on the 13th March, 2013. It was found out that the association is heterogeneous with a bulk of its membership being teachers. It also had lecturers and other professionals in the community.

The composition of officials in GASOA cuts across all works of life. This is shown in the occupational demography. This is a manifestation that individuals want to relate to officiating profession.

There was a significant correlation between officiating experience and communication skills of officials. This stems from the fact that with a wide range of experience, the officials were conversant with the rules and communicated fluently in interpreting them. This was the contrary for less experienced officials who find time to read the rules over and over before mastery.

Result indicated that there has been a dramatic drop in acts of violence during track and field athletics competitions in and around Njala due specifically to the impartial officiating displayed by officials.

There were abysmal performances however on the part of officials in the discharge of their duties before the establishment of GASOA, which lead to most school and university authorities seeking the service of more qualified officials to officiate in their schools' and university's athletics competitions.

While some officials were adequately knowledgeable in officiating others had moderate knowledge. It was observed that those knowledgeable had a long standing experience in officiating; between 10 and 15 years while moderately knowledgeable officials had less experience ranging from 0-5 years.

20%, 48%, 32% of officials with experience ranging from 0-5, 6-10 and 11-15 respectively have a total of 80% of officials who are well experienced and it matched their knowledge in athletics rules. New recruits were however experiencing some difficulties in the correct position of the tape measure in measuring distances and heights, due primarily to non-orientation and in-service training.

Interview and observation data collected revealed that officials of GASOA were up to the task. They were reported to have made tremendous progress and have created positive impact in the area of officiating track and field athletics since their establishment in their community. Officials were time conscious, well-dressed and exhibited exemplary fitness during competitions. Their physical preparedness before competitions was unquestionable. Officials also displayed proper positioning in their respective domains.

Regular training and briefing provided by lecturers of Physical Education were observed as key factors in the improvement of officiating skills for their colleagues. Officials were observed officiating heats in the annual Inter-hall track and field athletics competition of Njala University in their community. The very first time to officiate in heats was a pacesetting moment for GASOA and it was rated as successful.

Inadequate officiating materials posed a very big challenge for the officials. However, improvisations were made in certain areas to get things going. Another challenge was getting the meet to start on time as stipulated on the programme by the organizers.

On the whole, the five year period in review of GASOA showed marked improvement and their establishment in the township was a welcome idea by schools and sports authorities. However, certain areas that needed to be looked into are highlighted in the recommendations below.

Recommendations:-

Sequel to the results of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the capacity of officials of GASOA and those intending to make officiating track and field athletics a profession.

Firstly, officiating is interpreting rules that have been laid down. Officials should endeavor to read the rule book most often and be familiar with the current rules of track and field athletics as set by the international governing body which is the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

Officials should be warned against taking hasty decisions as they may sometimes be counter-productive. Most times the action unfolds so quickly that officials have trouble following the entire sequence. Thus vigilance has to be the watch word.

Officiating is team work, thus officials should watch other experienced officials perform; seek out mentoring by asking questions on areas they don't understand.

Some spectators are in the habit of distracting officials in the course of their duties, such spectators must be ignored for full concentration while officiating,

Officials must be good listeners to coaches' questions and queries. They should be diplomatic in dealing with conflict situations and try as much as possible to suppress their heightened emotions.

An official is seen as a legal minded person in his sporting discipline hence should command honor, respect and someone worth emulating. Officials must be seen carrying themselves with integrity and should avoid being arrogant.

Laws of sporting disciplines keep changing, it is crucial that official avail themselves with the current rules. Therefore officials are encouraged to have the zest to learn by attending workshops, clinics and seminars for regular updates.

Officials are expected to be masters in the language of their sporting discipline. Registered terms govern each sport; officials are obliged to memorize these terms to officiate a competition fairly. With the knowledge in the language/vocabulary of athletics, officials have a better chance of getting rulings correct and can be able to disseminate rulings appropriately to players and coaches.

As an official, if your explanations were unsatisfactory, recall what was said and immediately coin an alternate way of responding in a manner that is more appropriate.

When a situation involving hostile fans or players escalate to the point at which the game officials and the game administrator can't control, the meet organizers have to be informed to call the police to restore order.

Most track and field athletics meet end without serious conflict. However, conflict management does not stop when the game ends. Sports are competitive, and sometimes competition brings out hostile emotions against officials. Officials should therefore always leave the Athletics arena together with colleagues and where possible hold a

postmortem discussion in a locker room. Don't let anyone else order than your colleague officials to discuss your officiating of the track and field athletics meet.

Physical Education teachers should endeavor to teach and train their pupils to run strictly in their lanes to avoid disqualification. The pupils are future professionals they should be trained using the rules so that when they grow to professionalism they would not depart from it.

Educational institutions should procure track and field athletics equipment like batons, shot putt, landing foams, discus and javelin to name but few. Meet organizers should also make sure they get their athletes ready to start the competition on time and end on time to avert mischief by detractors.

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