

## Motivational Factors and Sports Performance among Nigerian Universities Athletes at the 2006 West African Universities Games (WAUG)

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**Abstract:** The Study examined the effect of motivational factors on sports performance among Nigerian Universities athletes at the 2006 West African Universities Games (WAUG) The games hosted by the University of Lagos, Nigeria took care of tennis, Athletics and Table Tennis (TATT) events only. Two hundred athletes randomly selected from the twenty of Nigerian Universities that took part in the games served as subjects of the study. A structured questionnaire validated by experts in the field of physical and health education was used to collect information from subjects of the study. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and tables were used to analyse the data collected from the subjects of the study. The study revealed that Nigerian universities athletes put up comparative superlative performance to excel on the medals table over and above other countries that took part in the games. However, the quality of their performance cannot be compared with the high quality performance usually witnessed at internal championships such as the world Universities Games (FISU) by their counterparts from developed nations like Canada, United Kingdom and United States of America. The study also revealed that there is nothing like University sports scholarship put in place by any of the Universities, students-athletes who missed out on tests and examinations are totally at their mercies of the lecturers concerned and many (85%) of the Universities cannot boast of modern facilities and equipment. Most of the subjects of the study (92.5%) pointed out that inadequate funding of Universities and lack of interest in study sports sponsorship by multinationals among others are major issues confronting quality performance by Nigerian Universities athletes. The study recommended that conscious efforts should now be made by various Universities to give sports and games programme the proper recognition it rightly deserve. This could be done by attracting and awarding study scholarship to budding athletes, making special provision of the academic needs of students-athletes, they should also collaborate with other organizations and agencies including multinationals to generate funds for the development of facilities and other infrastructures for the advancement of sports programmes in the Universities.

**Key words:** WAUG, motivational factor, Questionnaire, FISU, athletes, multinationals

### INTRODUCTION

Motivation according to Ikulayo (1989) is a psychological concept which is essential to all forms of learning and performance. It is also a powerful drive for all human activities Omolabi (1987) defined motivation as a stimulation of action towards a particular objective where previously there as little or no attraction to a goal. He further pointed out that motivation is more than an explosive force but also a propelling power. These views are in agreement with that of Ajala (1987) who further emphasized that motivation helps to energies, select and direct performance.

Akinsanni (1991) looked at motivation as a very important factor that enhances performance, he suggested that coaches should use variety of techniques to keep athletes motivated. Sohi (1988) stated that since sports men and women have their own needs and interest

which may not align with others in complete socio-psychological situation, it was important to find various motives of involvement in competitive sports. He further pointed out that base on the intensity, persistence and direction, student athletes motivational level could be ascertained as a cumulative output of their behaviours. Agreed that incentives may motivate the behaviour of an organism and that incentives of all types may influence behaviour and attitude of a person to work. An individual according to them may have abilities and those abilities may be employed as a tools to fulfill his ambition, but it is the incentives that will determine to extent to which the individual gets motivated towards the work. Incentives change the capacity of a person to work, the level and amount of effort in a person will either increase or decrease according to Kundu and Tutoo (2002), on the basis of quality of incentives offered to the person.

Mshelia (1990) contended that some welfare issues affect the level of motivation of students- athletes while others serve as incentives for participation in sports away from school during national competitions. He served that in several cases, nothing is done to compensate them for missed lectures. Talented student-athletes in West African Universities require incentives lie: Money, Scholarship; modern facilities and equipment; and conducive learning atmosphere to keep them active in sports. Mshelia (1990) argued that since student-athletes are caught between two commitments, that is, they are expected to meet sports and academic excellence, they are always faced with added physical and psychological pressures to perform well. Additionally, student-athletes do not enjoy the services of sports psychologists or counselors to assist them in solving some of their personal problems which may have direct effects on their sports performance. Onfiade (1992) remarked that athletes are preoccupied with distracting thoughts; they may not be able to train effectively and hence may not reach their full potentials. He also observed that inconsistent and unimplemented academic calendar by Universities in Nigeria higher institutions hinder the progress of sports performance. There are cases where Nigerian Universities are closed unexpectedly and indefinitely as a result of strikes embarked upon by academic and non-academic unions of Universities. These actions do not only truncate academic programmes but also impeded appropriate development of Sports programmes in the Universities. Okunbor (1998) contended that the issue of unexpected and indefinite closures of Universities has created a myriads of obstacles in terms of preparing athletes for national and international competitions. Along this line, Venkateswarlu (2000) pointed out that unexpected, frequent and indefinite closures of Universities as well as encroachment by religious bodies on training pitches and facilities have remained the perennial problem facing student-athletes in Nigeria. West African Universities are divided into seven zones by the organizers of the games. Four of the zones are made up of Nigerian 42 Universities, while other countries in the region accounted for the remaining three zones. The seven zonal distribution of Universities is shown in Table 1.

Although Nigerian University athletes came top on the medals table, the quality of their performance in terms of time returned in races; distance covered in jumps and quality of skills /play exhibited in the tennis and table Tennis are now here near the qualitative performance

Table 1: Zonal distribution of Universities in West Africa by WAUG

Zone A	Countries	Number of universities
Zone A	Nigeria	10
Zone B	Nigeria	10
Zone C	Nigeria	13
Zone D	Nigeria	10
Zone E	Ghana	
	Benin Republic	
	Bukina Faso	11
	Togo and Niger	
Zone F	Coted Ivoire , Liberia,	
	Sierra Leone,	7
Zone G	Senegal, Mali and Guinea	5

usually displayed by their counterparts from developed nations at world Universities Games (FISU) and other International Competitions.

The general sentiments expressed during the games was that Nigeria by her share size and number of Universities competing will always come top of the medal table. But what happens when Nigerian athletes perform at World Universities Games or any other high level international championship like the Olympics? Is this so? This study however concerned itself with effects of motivational factors on sports performance of Nigerian universities athletes at the 2006 West African Universities Games (WAUG). The following procedure was adopted.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Descriptive survey is a design that sought information on the pattern of distribution of the items of the study and population without the manipulation of any variable. Two hundred Nigerian Universities athletes were randomly selected to serve as subjects of the study. The athletes were met in their various hostels during their free moments by the researchers to administer the questionnaire. The researchers ensured that the athletes were encouraged to react to the questionnaires without delay. However, out of the original two hundred and seventeen questionnaires administered, only two hundred were retrieved and found treatable.

**Research instrument:** The questionnaire was made up of three sections. Section A which was made up five items was designed to collate demographic data such as sex, age school and events competed for, from the subjects of the study. Section B contained seven items that were designed to confirm the types of incentives put in place to motivate the University athletes by the various Universities, while section C contained five items designed to assess the factors that actually motivated university athletes to perform well in the championship. The instrument was validated by experts in the filed of

physical and health education. A trial testing was also conducted to assess the reliability of the instrument. The trial testing was conducted in Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria. Twenty University athletes were randomly selected from the two University campuses located in the city. The first trial testing was conducted on the 2nd of December, 2005, while the second testing was carried out on the 16th of December 2005. Pearsons Product Moment Correlation technique was used to compare the results of the two tests and a reliability coefficient (r) of 0.86 was arrived at. This was considered good enough for the study.

**RESULTS**

The two hundred subjects of the study were made up of 115 male and 85 female athletes. Majority of them (82.5%) took part in track and field athletics while the rest participated in either tennis or table tennis. A larger percentage of the athletes (74%) were below the age of 20 years while twenty six (13%) of them were more than 25 years of age. Only a handful of them (11%) were representing their Universities at Championships for the first time. The University of Lagos which boast of some second string national athletes in its fold, won the final overall medals table with a total of 30 medals made up of 14 Gold, 8 Silver and 8 Bronze. University of Lagos was outstanding in all the sports of Tennis, Athletics and Table Tennis (TATT). They led in the medals table in all sports. There were also some surprise entries into the final medals table, Benson Idahosa University which finished 16<sup>th</sup> with 2 silver and 3 bronze medals. Nasarawa state University also made its impact felt by placing 5th with 4 Gold medals. All the top three finishers are Nigerian Universities. In general, athletes from the various universities in Nigeria performed extraordinarily well by claiming nearly all the titles in the various sports and events. The host university (Unilag) also made the closing ceremony a very interesting once. Canival like procession of artist added colour and glamour to a very successful hosting of the 2006 WAUG-TATT.

On the various motivational factors/incentives put in place by the various Universities, all the subjects of the study pointed out that there is nothing like University sports scholarship in their various institutions. Eleven (5.5%) of them however confirmed that they are enjoying the sports scholarship offered them by other organizations and State governments. One hundred and seventy six (88%) of the subjects of the study confirmed that sports hostel accommodations are made available to them by their Universities. Only eighteen (9%) of the subjects indicated that special arrangements are made to

Table 2: Motivational incentives made available to athletes in Nigeria Universities, N = 200

Item	Available (%)	Not available (%)
Sports scholarship by the University	-	200 (100%)
Sports scholarship by other agencies/government	11 (5.5%)	89 (94.5%)
Sports hostel accommodation	176 (88%)	24 (12%)
Special consideration of missed tests/exams	18 (9%)	182 (91%)
Annual sports dinner for school athletes	82 (14%)	118 (59%)
Modern/Standard facilities and equipment	38 (19%)	162 (81%)
Payment of adequate competition allowance	53 (26.5)	147 (73.5%)

Table 3: Factors that influence the performance of Nigerian Universities athletes at the 2006 WAUG, N = 200

confirmingFactors	Number of athletes
Retention of sports hostel accommodation	176 (88%)
Making an impact at the national level	79 (39.5%)
Retention of scholarship	11 (5.5%)
Attracting foreign scholarship	43 (21.5%)
Maintenance of competitive sports	5 (2.5)

enable them write the tests/examinations they missed while competing for their schools. Eighty-two (41%) of the athletes claimed that they never experienced sports Dinner organized to honour sports men and women by their Universities. One hundred and sixty two (81) said that modern/standard sports facilities are lacking in their schools while only fifty three (26.5%) of them indicate that the sports competition allowance paid to them is adequate. Table 2 contain a clear illustration of the various motivational factors put in place by the Universities.

While responding to the various reasons that prompted them to come and represent their Universities at the 2006 WAUG, one hundred and seventy six (88%) of the athletes said they were there in order to enable them retain their hostel accommodation. Eleven (5.5%) of them claimed that they were there in order to retain their scholarship while forty three (21.5%) wanted to attract foreign scholarships. Other information on various factors that influenced the performance of the Universities athletes at the 2006 WAUG is contained in Table 3.

**DISCUSSION**

The study revealed that Nigerian Universities athletes performed extra-ordinarily well to top the medals table at the games. Even athletes from two recently established Universities (Nasarawa State and Benson Idahosa Universities) did so well to pace 5 and 16th on the Medals table respectively. This superlative performance by the two new Universities athletes is a

clear testimony about the abundant talents that are found among Nigerian youths. The clear dominance of the medals table by the Nigeria Universities athletes has also confirmed that Nigeria is among other things the biggest sports power in the West African region.

However, it is very difficult to ascribe this high level of their performance by the athletes to the nature and type of motivational factors put in place by the Nigerian Universities. For example, in a situation where study scholarships are not made available and no special arrangements are made to take care of the interest of competing athletes who missed out in tests and examinations, there is absolutely nothing to entice or motivate the students to take part in sports. Provision of sports hostel accommodation as confirmed by majority of the athletes may have contributed in a way to enhance participation and performance of the athletes, but when viewed from the angle of poor or lack of modern/standard sports facilities a more confusing picture emerges. It is therefore natural to become curious about what really makes the Nigerian athletes tick. First and foremost, their good performance at the games may be attributable to the natural talent (ability) the Nigerian athletes are endowed with. Natural ability according to may be employed by an individual as a tool to fulfill personal ambition. This is not the first time Nigerian athletes would performance wonderfully well at championship like this. There were other examples like the World Youth Championship of 1987 in China and the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. On these two occasions, the Nigerian youngsters came from no where to clinch the football trophies at stake.

The implication of the above submissions is that the Nigerian Universities athletes would have improved on the quality of their performances, if their welfare issues had been given proper attention. Welfare issues according to Mshelia (1990) affect the level of motivation of student-athletes while other factors serve as incentives for participation in sports away from school. By quality of performance, reference is made to the quality of time returned in races, distance/height covered in throws and jumps as well as the skills displayed in tennis and table tennis.

The results of the study on how students athletes who missed out in examinations and tests are treated further painted a gloomy picture. Okunbor (1998) pointed out that on several occasions, nothing was done to compensate student athletes for missed lectures/tests. He further revealed that lecturers openly ask student to chose between sports and their lectures (studies). The fact that hardly would anything within the Universities environment positively influence (motivate) the students athletes was further confirmed by five (2.5%) of the

subjects of the study who claimed that they took part in the games in order to maintain their level of competitiveness. The researchers had the privilege of chatting with three of the National athletes who too part in the games as part of their preparation for the Commonwealth Games that was less than two weeks after the WAUG championship. The athletes in question could not even qualify for the second round in their events at the Commonwealth Games proper in Melbourne that is, after they has posted superlative performances at the WAUG TATT.

Among the various factors that actually influenced the Universities athletes performance at the games include the need to retain either their hostel accommodation or the state government sponsorship (scholarship). This is more revealing especially now that many of their compatriots are now being internationally celebrated. Athletes are now aware of the great economic advantages they stand to gain from sports participation at international level. The Nigerian Universities athletes may have therefore resolved to use the 2006 WAUG-TATT as a stepping stone towards shifting their base to foreign and more lucrative environments. The likes of Francis Obikwelu in Portugal and Glory Alozie in Spain are very recent examples of Nigerian athletes who left Nigeria for greener pastures.

The two aforementioned athletes decided to dump Nigeria and take up citizenship of their present countries as a result of very poor welfare programme and outdated/poorly managed equipment and facilities in Nigeria. Onifade (1990) pointed out that facilities are grossly inadequate in our Universities and as a result, participation in sports by majority of the students is hindered. Okunbor and Agwubike (2004) further confirmed that the conditions of available facilities in Nigerian Universities are so deplorable that they are not even fit for use at the level of secondary schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Nigerian Universities athletes performed excellently well at the 2006 WAUG-TATT that was hosted by the University of Lagos. They also exhibited natural talent and determination that enable them dominate the medals table. The quality of their performance however cannot be compared with the high quality performance of their counterpart from developed nations at international competitions.

The various motivational factors including incentives that could have assisted the Nigerian Universities athletes to raise up the quality of their performances were lacking in the Nigerian Universities. And little or no effort is being

made to make the Universities environment more conducive for the student-athlete to train and attain international standard/recognition.

Various reasons for sports participation given by the athletes can simply be described extremely personal. These include: the need to retain sports, hostel accommodation; make impact at the national level and attract foreign sponsorship/scholarship. Even though these reasons actually played an important role in their performances, but they were self-imposed motives. The Universities failed to provide for necessary incentives that would have helped augment the drive provided these motives to enable the student-athletes perform better and become more outstanding athletes in their various events.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made.

- The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) should initiate a more aggressive plan that would make the Nigerian Universities environment become more conducive for the University athletes to thrive excellently both in sports and academics. This could be done through
- A re-orientation of members of staff of the Universities to understand and appreciate the relevance of sports in the Socio-psychological economic and political development of a nation.
- Readjustment of academic programmes to cater for the peculiar needs of established athletes and
- Approves special grant for the upgrading and maintenance of sports facilities in the Universities.
- Nigeria Universities should also emulate similar institution in the developed countries by instituting sports scholarships from promising and talented youth athletes in the society.
- In a bid to address the problems of poverty and youths restfulness, the various governments and agencies including multinationals should be made to put in place concrete programme for sports in the Universities. This could be in the form of provision of modern/standard sports facilities, equipment, enduring scholarships.
- The various workers unions in the universities should also be sensitized towards the needs university athletes. Efforts should be made to ensure that, irrespective of the labour situation on campuses, the welfare, comfort and training programme of the athletes should not be made to suffer.

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