Understanding talent selection in sport: Perceptions, processes and personal biases

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Background: Talent identification programs continue to be a critical component in competitive sport. Despite the use of these programs, little is known about what coaches conceive ‘talent’ to be, and how it can be measured within the sport context. Additionally, little is known to date about the cognitive biases and beliefs that affect how talent is viewed, assessed and selected for in sport.

Objectives: This research project will take place in three separate phases and aims to a) uncover coaches’ conceptualizations of talent, b) analyze the processes, strategies, and practices coaches use when making decisions for player selection, and to c) evaluate their decisions under various conditions.

Methods: This project will utilize a mix methods design to gain insight into the complex and nuanced processes of decision-making for talent selection in sport. Phase one and two will utilize semi-structured interviews to better understand coaches’ perceptions of talent and the processes used for assessment. The theory of personal constructs will be adopted as the main theoretical framework, which acknowledges that people’s perceptions are shaped by their experiences. Phase three will draw on previous empirical work to examine beliefs and biases within the decision-making context. Findings from phase one and two will be used to inform the experimental design in this phase. Coaches will be asked to make hypothetical selections to their team. Choices for selection will be manipulated based on the preferences they reported in phase one and two. To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in the Canadian sport landscape and may have important implications for researchers and practitioners alike.