

## EXAMINING THE CAUSES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND STRATEGIES FOR ITS IMPROVEMENT

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study is examining the causes of underdevelopment of professional sports in the West Azerbaijan province (Iran) and offering strategies for its improvement. Research methodology was descriptive-survey. The statistical population included the chairmen and deputies of the General Office of WA Province Youth and Sport and the towns' offices, presidents and secretaries of the sports bodies, professors of sports management and national coaches of the WA Province. Considering the number of the population, research statistical sample included all the above-mentioned people and the final number of the participants as the statistical population was 85. Data was collected through the researcher's questionnaire, verified by experts, and its reliability measured at 0/83 by Cronbach's test. Descriptive statistical tests, the One-Sample t-Test and the Friedman test were applied for analyzing the data. The results of the one-sample t-test showed that the human, financial and legal resources as well as the sports equipment required for professional sports in West Azerbaijan Province are in unfavorable and inappropriate conditions. After identifying the factors influencing the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province, the results of Friedman test confirmed that financial and human resources and the equipment required for professional sports are respectively the main elements affecting the underdevelopment of professional sports in West Azerbaijan province.

**Key words:** development, professional sports, West Azerbaijan (Iran).

### Introduction

Like other social endeavours, sports need to improve and develop themselves constantly and expand and establish their dimensions. Sport is intermingled with economy and this intermingling is increasing over time (Gratton & Henry, 2002). Professional sport is defined as those organized activities which are carried out purposefully in order to make money for developing economical and social values (Ehsani, Amiri, & Gharah Khani, 2013). Also, Gutterson (1994) defines professional sport as the basis of Americans in twentieth century. Professional sport like money is something we love and are attracted to it. Gutterson's description clearly shows the strong role of professional sport in the daily lives of many people and its importance in occupying their minds. All managers and authorities in all economical, industrial, and service organizations try to make the best use of their different sources like human resources, capital, material, energy and information. Since one of the main purposes of sport clubs and institutions related to professional sport is making profit and, as a result, these clubs and institutions, as economical organizations, concern themselves with the aforementioned factors (Alberta's Sport Plan Task Force, 2002). Proper organizational structures, efficient methods of execution, sound and undamaged equipment and tools, balanced work atmosphere, and the most important of all, competent human resources are those requirements that managers need to pay attention to in order to fulfill the purposes of professional sport (Farmer, Mulrooney, & Ammon, 1996). The more we move toward professional sport, the more complex the situation gets and science and global experiences and, more

importantly, planning and planned mentality become crucial. Professional sport with the highest level of performance gets the most publicity from press and electronic media. This kind of sport, done individually or in groups, provides sufficient pleasure and excitement for the spectators. However, group sports have deeper economic influence and create many job opportunities (Parks & Zenger & Quarterman, 2006). Professional sport is the climax of sport progression in which the number of athletes reduces and the number of spectators increases. In fact, the most talented and capable of individuals can get to this level (Parks & Zenger & Quarterman, 2006). Improving sport industry to reinforce its role in national economy and GNP requires new approaches and one of these approaches is the development of professional sport. Professional sport leads to creating income and a professional athlete is the one who makes money through sports and this creates added value. Clubs have indisputably important role and are regarded as the core of professional sports. The development of professional sport is rooted in clubs; they function as factories and economical institutions in this industry (Khabiri & Elahi, 2004). In developing countries like Iran, due to numerous problems and obstacles, the private sector is not interested to invest in professional sports. Jalali Farahani and Alidoust Ghahfarokhi (2013) in their study, "Analyzing the influential economic obstacles in executing the general policies of Principle 44 in Constitution in Iran's professional sport", detected 21 important obstacles and categorized them into two groups of economical and financial obstacles and investment and sponsoring obstacles. According to them, the most important obstacles

are the followings: lack of stability in national monetary and financial policies, lack of participation among foreign investors in Iran's market, state ownership in many sport and other industries, institutions, and organizations, low national income per capita, lack of economic security and danger of investing in professional sport, lack of paying the TV broadcast right to clubs, and unfair rivalry between private and state-sponsored teams. Ramamurti (1999) mentions economic stability, and not limiting economy to unnecessary regulations as the inseparable factors for the success of privatization planning. Keen (2009) suggests choosing the right person(s) as the owner of the club as a solution for overcoming financial problems of the club. Michie and Oughton (2005) suggest in their research that running clubs in a participatory mode can solve the economic difficulties in sport industry. Like other social endeavors, sports need to improve and develop themselves constantly and expand and establish their dimensions. Professional sport was the result of the natural growth and development of physical education and sport in the world.

It gradually attracted many people as a potential industry for creating income. Thus, the tendency for growth and development in sport has bound us, whether we want it or not, to professional sport and made us actualize the required mechanisms for its creation and development. The main motivation for doing this research is the underdevelopment of professional sport in Western Azerbaijan Province. Also, the development of professional sports has these benefits: creating job opportunities, attracting the spectators, attracting the sponsors, changing the mind of the people in the province about sport, developing infrastructures and sport facilities in the province, educating and training efficient managers in professional sport, developing athletes, detecting the talents, etc. WA province, though replete with sport talents, is not in a desirable status in professional sport, and, excluding volleyball, no other sport is focused on professionally in the province and the weak participation of the province's teams in national leagues confirms this claim. Given the increasing complexities of professional sport, it seems necessary to investigate the reason for the underdevelopment of professional sports in the province and suggest solutions for improving professional sports in WA province.

## Methods

Research methodology is descriptive-survey. Regarding its purpose, it is a practical study. The statistical population included the chairmen and deputies of the General Office of WA Province Youth and Sport and the towns' offices, presidents and secretaries of the sports bodies, professors of sports management and national coaches of the WA Province. Given the number of the population (about 100 individuals), research statistical sample included all the above-mentioned people and the final number of the participants as the statistical population was 85. Data collected through the

researcher's questionnaire was verified by experts. This questionnaire was made based on the existing theoretical principles in professional sports and includes two sections. The first section is related to demographic information and the second one includes the question which consists of six dimensions: human resources, financial resources, legal resources, professional institutions, equipment and infrastructures, and professional sport facilities. The questionnaire was designed in Likert 5-value scale ranging from completely disagree (5) to completely agree (1). In order to measure the ability of trust in this research, Cronbach's alpha was used. Thus, 30 of the questionnaires with confirmed validity were distributed and, once they were collected, their general reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha and its coefficient was 0.83. Once the questionnaires were collected, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, etc.) was used to describe demographic features and variables, Cronbach's alpha's test was used to determine the reliability of questionnaires, and single-variable t test and Friedman test were used to answer the questions.

## Results

The average age of samples was 40.13. 81 percent of the participants were men and 19 percent were women. Their level of education was as the following: graduate (49.5 %), postgraduate (24.7 %), undergraduate (22.3 %), PhD (3.5 %). The average of work experience was 16.41 years. The average of their managerial experience was 6.65 years. Table 1 shows the results of investigating the status of professional sports in WA province. Given this table, the results of single-variable t test for investigating human resources status in WA province shows t test with 15.05 is significant at 0.01. The average of human resources is 3.73 which is higher than 3. Therefore, the human resources of WA province for doing professional sports are not in a desirable status. As the results of single-variable t test as pertaining to financial resources for professional sports in WA province shows, this test with 14.76 is significant at 0.01. The average of financial resources is 3.85 which is higher than 3. Therefore, the financial resources of WA province for doing professional sports are not in a desirable status. As the results of single-variable t test as pertaining to legal resources for professional sports in WA province shows, this test with 9.97 is significant at 0.01. The average of financial resources is 3.48 which is higher than 3. Therefore, the legal resources of WA province for doing professional sports are not in a desirable status. The results of single-variable t test for investigating professional sport institutions' status in WA province shows t test with 0.56 is not significant at 0.05. The average of professional sport institutions is 2.96 which is close to 3.

Therefore, the status of sport institutions of WA province for doing professional sports is in a desirable status. As the results show, t test with -0.102 is not significant as 0.05. The average of professional sport equipment is bad.

Table 1. single-variable t test for investigating the status of professional sports in WA province

Variable	Mean difference	DF	T	Sig.
Human resources of professional sports	0.73	84	15.05	0.001
Financial resources of professional sports	0.85	84	14.76	0.001
Legal resources of professional sports	0.48	84	9.97	0.001
Professional institutions in sports	- 0.04	84	- 0.56	0.579
Equipment and infrastructures of professional sports	- 0.01	84	- 0.11	0.919
Professional sport facilities	0.75	84	13.22	0.001

Table 2 shows the results of chi-square test for investigating the influential factors on the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province. The results show that chi-square with 15.76 is significant at 0.01. Given the ranking of averages, "financial resources of professional sports in WA province" with the average score of 2.86 holds the first rank, "human resources of professional sports in WA province" with the average score of 2.58 holds the second rank, and "professional sport facilities" with the average score of 2.54 holds the third place among the influential factors for the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province. Figure 1 shows the ranking of the influential factors for the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province.

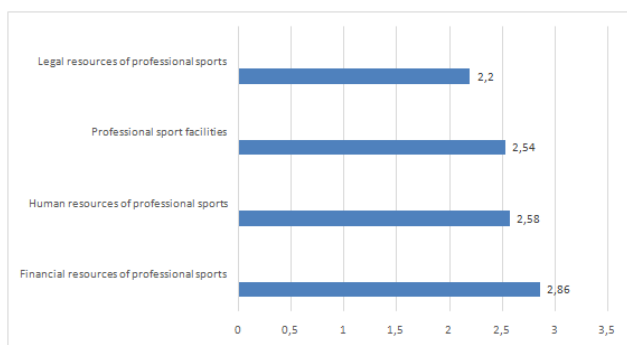


Figure 1. the ranking of the influential factors for the underdevelopment of professional sports

Table 2. chi-square test for investigating the influential factors on the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province

Variable	Number	DF	X2	Sig.
influential factors on the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province	85	3	24.92	0.001

infrastructures is 2.995 which is close to 3. Therefore, the status of professional sport equipment and infrastructures of WA province for doing professional sports is in a desirable status. As the results of single-variable t test as pertaining to the status of sport facilities for professional sports in WA province shows, this test with 13.22 is significant at 0.01. The average of sport facilities is 3.75 which is higher than 3. Therefore, the status of sport facilities of WA province for doing professional sports is not in a desirable status.

## Discussion and conclusion

Given the results of this research, human resources for doing professional sports is not in a desirable status and t test with 15.05 is significant at 0.01. Also, its average is 3.73 which is higher than 3. Human resource management in sport organizations is as important as all the other organizations. Each organization, based on its mission and tasks, employs its human resources. Sport organizations, due to their special characteristics and social roles, are different from other organizations. These organizations and their managers are in constant contact with people and the heightened emotions and feelings in sport fields influence the way human resources are managed inside and outside the organization. A sport organization is mostly concerned with providing services and these services are related to external environments. If the internal integrity of the organization is not desirable, it falls short of providing its services for individuals or groups outside the organization. The human resources in professional sports include managers, coaches, referees, athletes, etc. In order to educate efficient managers, coaches, and referees, the authorities of the province need to send them to national training courses so that they can upgrade their information. Also, in hiring new managers, they should focus on the applicants' expertise and education if they want to face fewer problems in the future. Professional training is required for having professional athletes in the province. Examples from world class athletes should be brought forth for semi-professional athletes throughout the province and the ethical and educational points should be highlighted in brochures, etc. Also, coaches need to be trained so that they can teach the professional behaviors of world class athletes to their trainees. The results show that financial resources of professional sports are not in a desirable status. T test with 14.76 was significant at 0.01. The average of financial resources is 3.85 which is higher than 3. In the world of sports, financial sponsors have a crucial role for sport organizations. Since almost all organizational sports in Iran are state-owned and their managers receive budgets from the government with no difficulty, they make little attempt to attract sponsors and this will turn to a big challenge in future. The results show that the participation of private sector with the average of 3.95 has not developed in the province. Sport authorities need to improve conditions through media coverage, utilizing modern facilities, and advertising sponsors' logos and products before, during and after sport matches and in this way encourage sponsors for investing in professional sports. It's better for sport clubs to employ marketing experts and develop their plans and guidelines for sponsoring. Proposals for sponsoring should include target market and the sponsor's sources and take the expectations of the sponsor into consideration. It should include many areas such as the description of the spectators, the purposes for sponsoring plan, the number and period of sponsoring contacts, the benefits and

incomes of sponsoring, the required capital, anti-recession strategy, marketing strategy, etc. Therefore, these proposals can attract companies in private sector to invest in professional sports and help sport organizations to obtain their sponsoring. According to the results of this study, legal sources for professional sports are not in a desirable status. T test with 9.97 is significant at 0.01. The average for legal sources is 3.48 which is higher than 3. One of the reasons for this undesirability may be the lack of rules and regulations related to professional sports in the province and also in the country or the numerous weak points of current ones which needs revision. It is suggested that a comparative study be carried out in which the regulations of professional sports in leading countries are investigated. The results, then, can be localized and turn into a comprehensive document to be executed in the province and also in the country. The results also show that sport institutions are not in an undesirable status. T test with - 0.56 is not significant at 0.05. The average of professional institutions in sports is 2.96 which is close to 3. Although the population of this study doesn't consider professional institutions as an influential factor for the underdevelopment of professional sports in the province, the current status of sport organizations is related to their future.

Though the results show the desirability of the status of sports institutions in the province, the average of 2.96 indicate these institutions are not working desirably either. Given the fact that professional sports are defined in the context of economy and business, it is suggested that sport clubs as the most important professional institutions in sport take non-sport dimension like economy, business, marketing and legal issues into consideration and make themselves more attractive for economical enterprises so that they can gain their help and become less dependent to government and public institutions. The sport clubs in the province have to introduce financial transparency and business mindset into their structures; otherwise, they lose the competition to national and international rivals. The results of the research show that professional sport equipment and infrastructures are not in an undesirable status. As it was shown t test with - 0.102 was not significant at 0.05. The average is 2.995 which is close to 3. Though this factor is not considered influential on the underdevelopment of professional sport in the province, 2.995 indicate equipment and infrastructures are not in a desirable status either. In other words, WA province is not in a desirable status in this regard and needs to develop its equipment and infrastructures. Sport organizations, for doing so, are required to cooperate with municipalities and other organizations to develop urban standard infrastructures and update them. Developing these infrastructures based on high level documents in bordering and deprived regions must be seriously into consideration. Some suggestions in this regard are as the following: facilitating the construction process of unfinished sport projects, creating a comprehensive campaign

for providing enough sport space for everyone, optimal use of the organization's resources, making the civil plan of the province purposeful by using the resources of all cities and towns and increasing the role of local authorities. The results indicate that sport facilities are in an undesirable status. T test with 13.22 was significant at 0.01. The average of this factor is 3.75 which is more than 3. The population of this study contends that the most important factors as related to professional sport facilities are:

- Shortage of sport devices and facilities as compared to the competitors
- Lack of advanced sport devices and facilities
- Lack of devices and facilities for some sports.

Devices and facilities are required for executing any plan within the organization. The human resources are only able to do their responsibilities when they have the basic facilities. Given the progress and innovation in sport facilities, utilizing new technologies can lead to better results in sports. According to the results and chi 2 test in investigating the factors influencing the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province, it is significant with 15.76 at 0.01. Given the ranking of averages, "financial resources of professional sports in WA province" with the average score of 2.86 holds the first rank, "human resources of professional sports in WA province" with the average score of 2.58 holds the second rank, and "professional sport facilities" with the average score of 2.54 holds the third place among the influential factors for the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province. According to the results about influential factors for the underdevelopment of professional sports in WA province, it is concluded that having a vision for managing future changes and events is highly required. This vision should be developed by sport experts and talents so that it is fulfilled at certain time and based on high level documents. A vision is formed based on a process of major external and internal events. The aforementioned vision can be developed by detecting the province conditions (internal) and the country's conditions (external) and following the principles of interaction. It is clear this vision can influence and be influenced by different changes and evolutions. The management in professional sports in the province should direct all social changes with a strategic approach. Thinking, planning, and performing strategically can lead to developing a scientific approach. Sports, nationally and globally, are very much different from the past. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the age of communication and information, sports, like other social phenomena, becomes more developed, complex, and unexpected and makes any sort of analysis difficult. Deep analysis, high ability, teamwork, and developing study groups for different sports can help. Since individuals behave differently, spending money in sports and being a member in different sport communities are among important features of

sport culture in a society. Sports, today, are among the best opportunities for investment and, from the medical perspective, play an important role in the health of the society. It is suggested to the General Office of WA Province Youth and Sport to expand its cooperation with Education Office and universities in the province and use their human resources to develop public sports and educate a healthy generation for future athletes. Suggestions for further research:

- Investigating the causes and results of unfair distribution of state budgets and credits among sport associations

- Investigating the causes of complete dependence of professional and semi-professional sports in the province to state budgets
- Investigating the legal environment of sports regarding lack of regulations in the province
- Investigating the methods for attracting private sector for investing in the professional sport of WA province
- Investigating the methods for attracting charity and private sector for investing in sport equipment, infrastructures, and facilities for professional sports in WA province.

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## PROUČAVANJE UZROKA NERAZVIJENOSTI PROFESIONALNIH SPORTOVA I STRATEGIJA ZA NJIHOV RAZVOJ

### Abstract

Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja je ispitivanje uzroka nerazvijenosti profesionalnog sporta u pokrajini Zapadni Azerbejdžan (Iran) i nuđenje strategije za njegovo poboljšanje. Metodologija istraživanja bila je opisno istraživanje. Statistika stanovnika uključivala je predsjednike i zamjenike Glavnog ureda WA Provincije Mladeži i Sporta, gradske urede, predsjednike i tajnike sportskih tijela, profesore sportskog menadžmenta i nacionalne trenere iz pokrajine Zapadni Azerbejdžan. Obzirom na broj stanovnika, statistički uzorak istraživanja obuhvatio je sve gore navedene osobe i konačan broj sudionika bio je 85. Podaci su prikupljeni upitnikom istraživača, ovjerenim od stručnjaka, a njegova pouzdanost mjerena je na 0/83 po Cronbachovom testu. Deskriptivna statistička ispitivanja, t-test uzorak i Friedman test su primijenjeni za analizu podataka. Rezultati jednog uzorka t-testa su pokazali da su ljudski, financijski i pravni izvori, kao i sportska oprema potrebni za profesionalni sport u Zapadnom Azerbajdžanu u nepovoljnim i neprikladnim uvjetima. Nakon identificiranja čimbenika koji utječu na nerazvijenost profesionalnog sporta u pokrajini Zapadni Azerbejdžan, rezultati Friedman testa potvrdili su da su financijski i ljudski resursi i oprema potrebna za profesionalni sport glavni elementi koji utječu na nerazvijenost profesionalnog sporta u pokrajini Zapadni Azerbajdžan.

**Ključne riječi:** razvoj, profesionalni sportovi, Zapadni Azerbajdžan (Iran).

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