Career Counselling For Malaysia Sports Schools: Possibility And Subjectivity

Wong Kai Yan & Roselan Baki

***Abstract*- Athletes' life is full of challenges and pressures because they may get troubled with stressors like injury, performance pressure, high internal and external expectations, and difficulties during transition are also incline to drug abuse to ease the pressure, uncertainties and frustration that they encounter. Although, students face a lot of challenge in school, same to student-athletes face many challenges as well, the on-going stressor might come from their background, coaches and peers. These overlooked issues would lead to various of mental health issue or other psychological and emotional problems. Eventually, excellent student-athletes' will withdraw from the school sport programs or at worse, drop out from school, which is a big loss for the country. In this concept paper, the purpose is to discuss the challenges of student-athletes' and the importance of counselling as well as career counselling in order to integrate it into the sport education, especially to student-athletes.**

***Keywords*- Career Counselling, Student-Athletes, Sports Schools, Mental Health, Challenges**

I. INTRODUCTION

Career Counselling is "an intensive activity and conducted in one-to-one or small group settings. It is concerned with assisting individuals to identify, own and manage their personal career concerns" (Patton & McMahon, 2001:2). It started a long time ago (Azizah Othman & Siti Salina Abdullah, 2015; Duarte, 2017) and the growth and development was based on the relationship of those who work, how they work, why they work and their needs for guidance (Duarte, 2017) in seeking and maintaining the jobs and handling related issues. Duarte further elaborated the history of career counselling which had existed since Ancient Greek as the strategy to assist those who found it difficult to survive and to avoid poverty among community members. Then in the 20th Century, during industrial revolution guidance were given to youth so that they could strive to live in the difficult time.

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Now there is a clear divide between vocational and career counselling, and career counselling has become a discipline by itself in many western countries (Cheung, 2009).

Today, in the midst of rapid and complex politic, social and economic growth, career counselling is becoming more and more significant as people are looking for solutions to find job, maintaining the job, managing the job politics, the social pressure and so forth, in various economic related fields, including sport. The tremendous growth of sports as a career has opened up various issues about athletes and the people involved in the field. Since sport had become a source of leisure, entertainment, economic activity, profession, social image positioning and popularity, and gradually sport persons have become popular figures and lately they become advertisement and entertainment personalities as well. Though Malaysia started quite late but the influence of sport has crossed borders and gradually affecting Malaysia tremendously too (Wise & Kohe, 2020). As a result, its overwhelming growth and popularity have influenced people, especially the younger ones to dream to be a sport person one day, some even go farther as to be the professional ones and earn a lucrative life (Boyle & Haynes, 2000) and sports too is creating their own social class (Hargreaves, 1986). Besides, sport performance is also significant politically, in terms of image positioning of a nation at international level (Boyle & Haynes, 2000).

However, the growth of sport as a career in Malaysia is still at medium-low level but there are good signs that it is growing more rapidly lately. It is time to look at career counselling as one of the components in training young athletes of the nation because sports involve various issue such as politic, economy, social, psychological, emotional, health and safety and overall well-being of the athletes. Students need to be guided and attended to by career counsellors who are educated, trained and practicing the knowledge and skills in assisting people to develop and maintain positive psychological, emotional and physical well-being in life, and ability to make decision without undue influences from others (Ching & Ng, 2010). This paper aims to look at the interconnectedness between stress and its related issues, the role of career counsellors and, the position of career counselling in Malaysian sports schools' development program.

Student-Athletes' Challenges

Adolescents face lots of challenges and on-going stressors (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2019) if they are young athletes they would have extra expectations to fulfill (Britton, Kavanagh & Polman, 2019). Over a longer period of time the students' performance may decrease for they may lose motivation and finally they may drop out of school. They need to be provided with good stress management skills to sustain in facing challenges of their future lives. Sport school students come from various geographical backgrounds, rural, sub urban, urban and metropolitan and they are of various socio-economic status too. This baggage that they bring to schools are enormous and very complex, and need to be handle with expertise and care (Ferguson, Bovaird & Mueller 2007). Consequently, their academic learning and sport training process would be multi-faceted and need to be handled meticulously because there are many other contributing factors that influence and affecting the process and students' performance (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). These factors should be given serious consideration and analyzed critically because the nation is investing substantially to achieve our sport aspirations.

In the sports schools' students experience training, selection and competition for specific purposes where some are selected while some are not, based on the coach criteria of selection. Some may make mistakes and not selected, and some far better than the others. Moving from one level of sport competitive level to another is a tough and competitive situation and many were not able to cope well (Franck & Stambulova, 2020). These experiences of good and bad, ups and downs stay with the students. Some are less able to manage them appropriately and develop stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, low self-confidence and fear of inability in overcoming those bad experiences. The situation worsens by unreasonable expectations and pressure from managers and coaches who are to fulfill management, committee and fans expectations; students are struggling in coping with studies; gender issues; societal impression on student athletes; and, their career prospects (Undiyaundeye, Godwin & Ukwayi, 2015). In this regard, most students do not succeed in pursuing their sport career and have to opt for alternative fields and career paths (Farerra, Watson II & Zizzi, 2017). When this situation prevails they would be under tremendous pressure and stress if they fail to achieve their targets. Family and their communities have certain expectation and failure would not be easy to manage and they need coping skills to deal with loss and frustration and develop other activities to smoothen the transition (Menke & Germany, 2019). This need to be done by professionals who are educated and experienced in dealing with this situation. And, this need to be introduced as early as possible so that the knowledge and skills are internalized and applicable when the time comes.

Shortcomings of coaches can be another source of challenges to the students. As a young students/ student-athletes, they are not aware of their position and situation. Most of them are thinking of enjoying the sport that they are chosen for, do the academic requirements, train and play sport. However, some coaches are lacking knowledge and skills in certain sport and understand students' need. Coaches are struggling for enrichment but opportunity is lacking, and they have to look for other alternatives. Coaches face problem of knowledge and skills in coaching, commonly they have limited courses and some depend on videos, interaction with other coaches, past experience and social media. For instance, football coach is preferably an ex-football player at competitive level because they can fall back onto their past experiences (Zulakbal Abd. Karim; Ahman Najib Abdul Razak & Ali Md. Nadzalan, 2018). Since they are not very well educated and furnished with their sport knowledge, there is a great possibility that they are lacking other supporting knowledge and skills in coaching, such as in the application of communication and interaction. For example, coaches are trained in different ways of communication, authoritative and directive in nature (Gysbers, 2006). Consequently, it is not surprising when experiences that weaken students' motivation, generally come from coaches' behaviors (Franck & Stambulova, 2020), and, this abusive interaction do come from peers too but the frequency is much lesser (Bjornseth & Szabo, 2017). This kind of communication can lead to abuse and abuse persist because athletes train and compete within a structure that they are subordinates and they are to follow the system and structures imposed on them in pursuit of their career aspiration (Fisher & Anders, 2019).

In addition, student-athletes also face various challenge between them and their coach, which caused a long-terms impact on students. Unhealthy interaction comes through three kinds of interaction; intimate, aggressive and dominant modes of interaction (Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussali, & Tapp, 2008) and most students are not aware about this and tend to regard the modes of interaction as normal and acceptable. As the students are generally still naïve and this kinds of interaction actually have psychological effects to their minds and some of them may unconsciously denying it because of their lack of awareness, knowledge and experience. This unhealthy interaction, be it personal or small group could lead to much serious abuses, including bullying, boycotting, at worse, sexual abuse (Parent & Demers, 2011; Parent, Lavoie, Thibodeau, Hebert, & Blais, 2016; & Stevens, 2019). Unfortunately, these unhealthy interaction is not given attention by researchers and sport administrators, this is just an example of why some outstanding student withdraw from the sport program, however, these negative interaction between the student and their coach is enough to develops into multiple psycho-emotional issues that can lead to depression, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and, suicide ideation and attempts (Bjornseth & Szabo, 2017). Due to the power of coaches within the context, the predominance of

performance over the well-being of athletes and the many opportunities for abuse offered by sport seem to constitute important risk factor (Parent & Demers, 2011). Nevertheless, sport stakeholders tend to regard student-athletes' psycho-emotional issues/ mental health issues as trivial matters though they regard it as important because its exposure would tarnish an organization's image and reputation (Parent & Demers, 2011). At peer level, bullying and boycotting, at worse, sexual abuse in sport under critical issue can lead to numerous inevitable mental health issues, and in some cases even death (Jeckell, Copenhaver & Diamond, 2018). Unhealthy interactions cause psycho-emotional stress to the students, and it is very complex in nature, the expertise of professionals who are trained in this area is critical so that students can be made aware of abuse, have the strategies to prevent and avoid, and know what to do if they face the problem.

Moreover, challenges in student-athletes, such as overtraining could lead to stress also lead to substance abuse too. It is more easily happening if certain students are engaging with students who are having behavioral problems that might be originated from their background. Athletes use narcotics for performance when this occurs sport is no longer for pleasure, development of body and mind, and brilliance of performance. Narcotics are used to win not to reduce fatigue, anxiety, raising power or coping strategy especially because athlete cannot accept defeat (Parnabas, Yahaya Mahamood, Parnabas, Nagoor Meera Abdullah; Mohd. Soffian Omar-Fauzee & Muhamad Nizam Nazaruddin 2013). Life of athletes is full of challenges and stressful situation for they may get entangled with stressors like injury, performance pressure, high internal and external expectations, and difficulties during transition (Jewett; Kerr & Tamminen, 2019) are also incline to drug abuse to ease the pressure, uncertainties and frustration that they encounter.

Significance of Career Counselling

Counselling existed in human life for quite a long time and in Malaysia context, it started since 1960s in the form of vocational guidance and, by 1983 each secondary school was to have a counsellor (guidance teacher then) (Azizah Othman & Siti Salina Abdullah, 2015). In the context of this paper, career counselling can play a significant role in assisting young sport students going through the hurdles of their life (Jewett Kerr & Tamminen, 2019). Counsellors can play a great role in easing the trauma of failure or loss of opportunity/termination (Menke & Germany, 2019). Being pressured with uncertainties, personal and family, peer problems and the expectation and demands, some students are not having a normal life (McMahon & Hanrahan, 2020). Career counselling engagement serve to easing and making students comfortable and safe because working alliance related to students' satisfaction with the intervention and reduce problems in final career decision with the assistance of mental training skills that would ease their anxiety problems (McMahon & Hanrahan, 2020).

On the other hand, coaches normally communicate with students in a big group or smaller ones, but counselling sessions are conducted on small groups or face-to-face and career counselling provide positive implication on the part of the students (Masdonati; Massoudi & Rossier, 2009). The good thing is Malaysian students are generally positive to career counselling, as well as sport psychology and aware of the pro and cons, but they are unwilling to discuss their personal problems openly due to cultural issue of protecting self. This need to be put into the right perspective for their unwillingness is influenced by their characteristics (Sharifah Maimunah & Hairul Anuar Hashim, 2013) because sociocultural and cultural contexts play significant influence and this could be iron out through counselling procedures to improve one's attitude and perspectives (Cheung, 2009). This is where career counselling come into significance for the application of counselling knowledge and skills and procedure would gradually have erased the worries and reluctance and, the attitude and perspectives that are less supportive can be gradually reduced for the betterment of the students. However, this effort needs to be done meticulously with knowledge, skills and special training because making connection between past experiences; current situation; perceived future; integrating past with present; projected future into a career and life strategy are not easy tasks that can be carried out by any trained individuals (Stambulova, 2010). Career counselling is beneficial in overcoming this challenge because it is a comprehensive professional help in solving human developmental tasks, situations during the life journey, to complement the needs in the sphere of labor and career (Milan; Ludmila; Pavol & Miroslava, 2017).

Denying our sport school students of this necessity and meaningful life preparation for knowledge and skills is truly uncalled for. It is very unfortunate to the students because career counseling and early life design in the early life has not been given priority and given minimal consideration leading to the denial of developmental tasks and skills that should be fully developed in the earlier part of one's life (Jain, 2017; Maree, 2018). Consequently, this can jeopardize their future in sport career and the sport aspiration of the nation as well. In other words, the students are to be guided and counselled so that could be equipped and provided with the necessary skills that would endure them throughout the program productively.

Building trust among the students is a big issue. Most people will only confide or rather talk about personal stuffs with someone they trust. Counselling approach is based on honesty, trustworthy, respectful, approachable, likeable, good communication skills, supported by listening, question, paraphrasing, and reflecting meaning (Watson; Hillard & Way, 2017) and it is developmental in nature and conducted in client-centered mode (Gothard & Mignot, 1999). This kind of procedures are most likely be appealing

to students, to enable an individual to accomplish required tasks they need to be guided by one who graduated, trained and licensed to practice career counselling. This is especially true where the inner part of the students are the most crucial because humans are influenced, driven and dictated by their psychological and emotional values (Robinson & Minikin, 2012). This is supported by the nature of the counselling procedure where creating conducive environment is a priority. In that setting providing support for academic and sport training of the students is not an easy task for we need to create the environment where they can learn, practice and later develop the passion for the sport and this the task of everyone (Price, 2017). Ideally, every effort must be taken to ensure the overall performance of these young students who are involved in sports to continuously improve, like earn better grades, manage time better, make quicker decisions, and more aware of their future (Steptoe & Butler (1996) and it must be looked from the perspective sports for the students and not students for the sports (Lang & Hartill, 2015). Career counselling can contribute in the cause because the important factor in counselling is close working relationship between counselor and client (Watson; Hillard & Way, 2017).

The Time Is Now

Sport expenditure is always high and the returns do not always commensurate with the investment. We have been spending substantial amount of money for sport development and the means we are interested, and put a serious effort to succeed in our sport aspiration. But it is not going to progress smoothly if we are focusing more on the physical aspects of the process and not on the materials that would produce the performance. Robinson & Minikin, (2012) presented a paper on our overall sport development and performance, and achievements. So far, our best medal collection was in Commonwealth Game 2010 where in Olympic, since 1956 only 2 Silver & 2 Bronze, while Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia were doing much better. Generally, infrastructure available BUT sport schools for example, have little lifestyle support available. In the context of this paper, little lifestyle support is the little attention given to career counselling to the sport students to enable them to juggle with academic, sport training and personal matters in a proper manner so that have a more stable and comfortable life in the school. They conclude that Malaysia Sport Council is on the right track but need to improve in management, planning, implementation of activities because we do not possess the capabilities to create competitive advantage through medal winning athletes.

Students stress need to be handled with sound coping strategies. Students with stable emotion tend to cope better and more in control of any specific situation. Students with unstable emotion got directly influenced by feeling intense and losing control leading them to maladaptive coping; distraction and disengagement–oriented coping strategies (Liu, Tien & Zhao 2004). When student athlete cannot concentrate and focus, all training and coaching efforts became less meaningful and in return jeopardize our sport aspiration. In this case it is very unfortunate because the materials that we have are full of potentials but they are emotional not stable and not able to give their best performance. This situation must not prevail for not on the nation aspiration is at stake, equally important the students' future is also full of uncertainties. Some students are very sensitive and reactive to stress leading them to feeling less control, no strategy to cope. This need to be understood because it affects performance. Though students have trained well and they are physically fit but if the inner part of the body is not stable and not focus the physical performance would be affected (Liu, Tien & Zhao 2004). Consequently, everyone is confused and lost, because it is unbelievable that one who performed with excellence in preparatory training sessions performed badly in actual competition. This need to be evaluated by professional because coaches and managers have different knowledge, skills and views but coping strategies need to be introduced and developed by professionals in the field.

In summary, all the psycho-emotional and behavioral symptoms mention in this paper is under a bigger issue - mental health. According to World Health Organization, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his/her own potential, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his/community (Guarin, 2018). According to Guarin, America National Alliance on Mental Illness reported that 20% 0f adolescents between 13 years to 18 years of age live in mental health condition; with 11% have mood disorder; 10% have behaviors/conduct disorder, and 8% have anxiety disorder. The scary part is 50% stay with it till adulthood and, 50% of adolescents with mental health drop out from school and it is growing day by day all across the world according to World Health Organization. Similarly, mental health problem is growing too in Malaysia where in 2015, Ministry of Health estimated 29.2 % of adolescents between 16 years-19 years of age have mental related illness which is estimated to represent about 4.2 million people, which means one out of three are living with it (Kamarulzaman & Mohammad Jodi, 2018). It is high time we give a serious consideration to managing the issue, to lessen the impact onto our sport students. Consequently, if not properly attended it would definitely affect the students and the programs in terms of quality, performance and attainment of objectives, and more importantly the future life of the sport students.

It is time to consider making career counselling has an integral part of the sport training programs more seriously. It has been accepted and practiced by most leading sport nation. Since sport career counselling has been an integral part of many developed countries sport development programs, it just appropriate that we do the same to

strengthen the system and programs and of course with specific adjustment for multiculturalism context of our students' backgrounds (Cheung, 2009). It is hoped that students' performance would be more promising in the future. There is a great need and the importance is very clear that sport students value career counselling more than non-sport students and female value career counselling more than the male counterparts (Farerra; Watson II & Zizzi, 2017). All we need to do is to design sport career counselling it in such a way that it is in line with their needs and purposes (Crisan, Albulescue & Oltean (2015). Overall, adolescents too regarded career counselling as very important after the views of their parents but what about students whose parents cannot assist or do know know how to assist their children? It unfortunate because students are not provided with career counsellors to guide them in pursuit of making the right choice of their future (Uzair Yaaqob et al., 2017).

Our sport school excellence programs are advancing and we need the support of professionals in related fields to ensure improvement and consistency in the students' performance. To do so, the students need to have peace of mind, sense of security and positive overall well-being. When they are psycho-emotionally stable they would be more motivated to bring themselves to the next level and this surely bring positive results to the nation sport aspiration. Inclusion of career counselling in sport as an integral part of the program is very appropriate because counselling is a flexible and dynamic in nature, and able to serve the needs of different clients in different setting (Soliman, 1991) and for different purposes.

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