Over the last few decades the power struggle between nations to win medals in major international competitions has intensified. This has led to national sports organisations and governments throughout the world spending increasing sums of money on elite sport. Several nations have indeed shown that accelerated funding in elite sport can lead to an increase of medals won at the Olympics. Nevertheless, in spite of increasing competition and the homogenisation of elite sports systems, the optimum strategy for delivering international success is still unclear. There is no model for comparing, and increasing, the efficiency and effectiveness of elite sport investments and management systems. This makes it difficult for sports managers and policy makers to prioritise and to make the right choices in elite sports policy.

This book presents an international comparison of elite sport policies in six nations (Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and United Kingdom). Over 1,400 athletes, coaches and performance directors in these nations have provided information on the climate to perform at the highest level of elite sport in their country. Over a hundred criteria are evaluated and compared using a scoring system in nine sport policy areas. This book is aimed at sports professionals, academics and politicians seeking a better understanding of the factors that lead to international sporting success and seeking insights in future sport policy developments.

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The Global Sporting Arms Race
Veerle De Bosscher, Jerry Bingham. Simon Shibli, Maarten van Bottenburg, Paul De Knop

The Global Sporting Arms Race
An International Comparative Study on
Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success
The SPLISS Consortium came together early in 2003 to compare and analyse sport structures, policy and performance in three nations – Belgium (Flanders), Netherlands and the UK. Aware that increasing sums were being spent on high performance sport across the world, we were concerned that there was no model for comparing the efficiency and effectiveness of such investments.

The study, which subsequently broadened out to include Canada, Italy, Norway and Belgium (Wallonia), could not have been completed without an extraordinary amount of assistance from a wide variety of individuals and institutions. Athletes, coaches and performance directors in different nations provided information on their personal circumstances and filled in lengthy questionnaires. Many other policy makers, high performance coordinators, and sports officials also gave freely of their time and provided valuable insights into their policies and programmes. We are most appreciative of all their help.

Our greatest thanks go to the dedicated researchers who joined this study from the other participating nations: David Legg (Canada); Berit Skirstad and Torkild Veraas (Norway); Alberto Madella and Lorenzo Di Bello (Italy) and Luc van de Putte and Thierry Zintz (Wallonia).

This book is aimed at sports professionals, academics and politicians seeking a better understanding of the factors that lead to international sporting success. We hope that readers will understand the complexity of this research and we invite them to share their comments with us – especially concerning the further development of this study.

The SPLISS Consortium, September 2006

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