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Master's Thesis of Global Sport Management

Athlete Representation in Combat

Sports:

The Case of Philippine National Sports Associations

격투종목 운동선수들의 목소리:
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Catherine Joy D. Lariosa



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Advisor: KWON Sun-Yong

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The Graduate School
Department of Physical Education
Seoul National University
Global Sport Management Major

Catherine Joy D. Lariosa

Confirming the master's thesis written by

Catherine Joy D. Lariosa

August 2023

Chair	<u>Kim, Yukyoum</u> (Seal)
Vice Chair	<u>Lee, Yongho</u> (Seal)
Examiner	<u>Kwon, Sun-Yong</u> (Seal)

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To God be the Glory!

Abstract

Athlete Representation in Combat Sports: The Case of Philippine National Sports Associations

Catherine Joy D. Lariosa

Global Sport Management, Department of Physical Education

The Graduate School

Seoul National University

Athletes can be seen as one of the main actors in sports. However, it has been evident that their voices are the least heard of when it comes to decision-making and policymaking of sports institutions. Some sport governing bodies are beginning to establish athletes' commission for athletes to represent themselves. Though majority remain silent, athletes have become more vocal of their experiences about their training, coaches, and sport federation officials. Some elite athletes have started to make their voices heard as seen from Tokyo Olympics.

In the Philippines, few national athletes had spoken out about their struggles as an athlete. This action was welcomed with both support and criticism. In combat sports, athletes rarely speak out, as obedience and respect

are highly valued. Therefore, this paper examines the meaning of athlete representation and how it is carried out in the case of combat sports in national sports associations in the Philippines. To identify how athletes and sports administrators understand and define athlete representation, in-depth interviews with combat sports athletes and sports administrators from different combat sports associations were conducted.

Findings reveal that athletes and sports administrators have different ideas of athlete representation. Some athletes are uncertain about athlete representation but believe that their voices matter and should be considered in decision making and policymaking. Most sports administrators agree that athletes' voice matter. Understanding how athlete representation is understood among different stakeholders can contribute to closing the gaps between athletes and administrators as well as develop policies for athletes' rights.

Keywords: athlete representation, athlete's rights, athlete's voice, combat sports

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1. Background of Study

Athletes are the center of sports as they are the main actors who are primarily training and playing in competitions. Even the Olympic Agenda 2020 has the statement ‘Athletes at the heart of the Olympic Movement’ which indicates that sports revolve around the athletes. However, despite being the main actors in sports, their influence in terms of decision-making and policy formation in various sports governing bodies has been inconsistent and limited (Ciomaga et al., 2017; Seltmann, 2021b). Inconsistent, because depending on the country and type of sports organization, the degree and manner of athletes’ influence and involvement varies. Limited, because the athletes’ voice is considered variably in different sports organization with even some cases of being ignored and neglected. Thus, it is important to look at how athlete representation is manifested in sports organizations to understand how athletes’ voice and their concerns are attended to by sports administrators. After all, the athletes are the ones playing on the field and at the receiving end of the decisions made by the NSAs. Thus, it is important to examine how athletes are involved in these decisions.

Through history, athletes have been influential figures within and outside sports. They are considered role models to young kids, looked up to like superstars by their fans, brand ambassadors, sometimes ambassadors for good will and various advocacies. Athletes have also become activists fighting for human rights, climate change, and other causes. Inevitably, athletes have also become vocal about their own experiences and have started to talk about the issues that are important to them. These issues include wages, salary cap, mental health concerns, doping, abuses, corruption in sports, rule changes, competition schedule changes, etc. One example that athletes have used their voice was to demand for the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics which was eventually postponed a year later (Global Athlete, 2020).

Involvement of athletes in decision-making and policy-formation processes of sports organizations vary in extent and degree depending on the context of the organization (Ciomaga et al., 2017; Seltmann, 2021b). When the International Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission (IOC AC) was established in 1981, the athletes were appointed and does not hold voting rights (Wassong, 2021). That has changed today, as the IOC AC now has more than twenty members and are elected in the positions. Moreover, the IOC AC are now involved in the decision-making processes of the IOC.

On the other hand, sports organizations in the national level like the ones in Montenegro do not have any activities that involve athletes in decision making processes (Begović, 2021). The IOC encouraged the different National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) to build their own athletes' commissions (Chappelet 2020). Although there are now more athletes' commissions in various sport organizations around the world compared before, there are still those that do not have proper athlete representation. Wassong et al. (2021) also took notice of the lack of standards for creating athletes' commissions.

Furthermore, athletes have started to form associations that is outside their national sports federations. Sports unions such as FIFPro, MLBPA, etc. have been created. These athletes' union have been negotiating with professional teams about the rights of athletes to fair salary, benefits, and legal matters. Aside from sports unions, there are also organizations such as Global Athlete and World Players Association which advocate for athletes' rights and athlete representation.

There has been a growing demand for athlete representation that is not only consultative in nature, but one that is also part of the executive body in sport organizations, or at least one that can push for the rights of athletes. It is observed that more athletes have been more vocal about their

struggles in training and in their organization. Athletes have also been more expressive about supporting their fellow athletes. Thus, the rise of power of the athletes is inevitable (Chappelet, 2020) and should no longer be disregarded by sports administrators. With this trend and athletes being the center of sports, sport organizations should focus on athlete representation and avoid the tokenistic approach (Houlihan, 2004) when dealing with athletes' rights and concerns.

Kihl and Schull (2020) in their study about the meaning of athlete representation described it as “standing and acting for the power of the athlete voice and having the capacity to generate the athlete voice into legislation and decision-making” (p. 173). Representation in the context of sports takes various forms depending on the kind of governance a sport organization has (Kihl & Schull, 2020). Some organizations have athlete representation through the athletes' commission or committees, while others through executive councils. Athlete representatives are either elected or appointed, have voting rights or just an advisory council (Thibault et al., 2010). Thus, the meaning of athlete representation varies considering the context where it occurs.

One context that needs exploring is the case of combats sports. Combats sports usually follow an authoritarian and hierarchical structure

which is also present in other sports but could be stricter in combat sports. In this setting, athletes are expected to follow and obey people in authority such as the coach and officials as a sign of respect. Values of respect and obedience are deeply ingrained in combat sports. Which reinforces the culture of hierarchy. This traditional culture of hierarchy could influence how meaning of athlete representation is formed in these sports associations. Thus, athlete representation in combat sports is worth exploring.

Studies related to athlete representation were mostly about the case of developed countries. Seltman (2021b) looked at the institutional position of athletes in Canada, Germany, and United Kingdom. Ciomaga et al (2017) explored the involvement of athletes in governing various sports organizations in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and United States. Begović's, (2021) study on Montenegro's case of athlete representation is just one of the few studies that investigated on the case of a developing country.

In the Philippines, research on sports governance in general is limited. Most of the studies conducted by academics in the country that relates to sports are about human movement science (Fernandez et al., 2017). Although, there are research about sport governance (Blanco, 2016, 2017; Blanco & Bairner 2019), these mainly focus on certain sports

institution's stakeholders, actors, and challenges it faces. This study might represent one of the pioneering attempts, if not among the limited few, to investigate the subject of athlete representation within the NSAs in the Philippines.

The researcher, as a former sport administrator and athlete see the importance of athlete representation. Athletes have concerns and needs that needs to be addressed by the NSAs. At the same time, NSAs officials should be able to communicate with the national athletes about decisions that they make. Presently, athlete representation in the Philippines is also varied and limited. Some NSAs have started to build their athletes' commission while some have their own mechanism of communication and representation. The extent as to how the NSAs in the Philippines involve their athletes in decision-making is not widely known.

This study explores on athlete representation within Philippine NSAs, particularly on the combats NSAs. This research is significant as it contributes to the literature on athlete representation, offering insights on the case of NSAs in a developing county. Furthermore, this study can inform NSAs on how to improve athlete representation in their organizations to better serve the athletes and safeguard the athletes' voice and rights.

1.1. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research attempts to understand the meaning of athlete representation in the context of the different combat national sport associations (NSAs) in the Philippines. It also investigates how athlete representation is carried out in the different combat national sport associations in the country. Lastly, this research presents the perspectives of national athletes and NSA officials on how athlete representation can be promoted and implemented within their organization.

1.2. Research Questions

This research explores on athlete representation in the different combat national sports associations in the Philippines. Specifically, this research attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1. What is the meaning of athlete representation in the context of the different combat National Sports Associations (NSA) in the Philippines?

RQ2. How is athlete representation carried out in the different combat National Sports Associations (NSA) in the Philippines?

RQ3: How athlete representation can be promoted and implemented in the combat National Sports Associations (NSA) in the Philippines according to the point of view of the athletes and NSA officials?

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

This chapter has three major sections. The first section centers on athlete representation and related concepts such as athletes' voice, athletes' rights, and athletes' involvement in sport governance. The second section gives context on combat sports culture. Lastly, the third section provides an overview of sports governance and athlete representation in the Philippines.

2.1. Athlete Representation

Athletes have always been the center of sports as they showcase their athleticism in every competition that they participate in. Without the athletes, competitive sport cannot happen. However, being an athlete comes with its share of challenges and pressures, not only during the competitions throughout their sporting careers. Although, becoming an athlete seems like a noble profession, athletes are subject to harsh conditions, different kinds of abuse, inequality, and exploitation. In the past, athletes were passive recipients of rules and policies set by sports administrators, unable to freely express their thoughts and opinions for fear of impacting their careers. However, with the rise of social media and online interactions, modern athletes have become more vocal in demanding their rights and exposing issues in sports. Additionally, sport organizations have started to shift their

system to become more athlete centered because of pressures from both external and internal factors (Thibault & Babiak, 2005). The observation of the seemingly rising power of athletes has become more palpable nowadays and is predicted to even increase in the coming years (Chappelet, 2020). Despite this apparent increase in athletes' power, they still lack direct involvement in decision-making actions within their sport organizations. Athletes are still the silent major body in sports.

The concept of athlete representation has been studied in various contexts. Kihl and Schull (2020) examined the case of an intercollegiate sports governance system that practices deliberative democracy and found out that the form of governance influences the meaning and motivations for athlete representation. In another setting, a study by Begović (2021) on athlete representation in Montenegro showed that the focus of the academics and policymakers in their region is still on the performance aspect of sports. This is the same case in the Philippines as more research related to human movement science are produced (Fernandez, et al., 2022) by scholars.

Although, research in athlete representation is still few, it can be considered as an emerging field. Grigaliūnaitė & Eimontas (2018) analyzed the literature about athletes' involvement in decision-making and found out that democratization within sport organizations is increasing with the

athletes getting more involved by their organizations. On other parts of the world, especially the more developed countries such as Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, and the United States, athlete representation has resulted to significant contributions to the improvement of sports governance which led to safeguarding policies, safe sports environment, protection of human rights, open communication between sports administrators and athletes, etc. Ciomaga et al. (2017) explored the different ways in which athletes participate in the governance of national sport organization in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and the United States. The four countries were observed to have some similarities which is probably because they followed the IOC guidelines that included an athletes' commission. However, the US system proved to have the widest implementation of athlete representation as mandated by the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports. Seltmann (2021b) compared the institutional position of athletes in Olympic Movement governance networks of Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom and found similar findings with the study of Ciomaga et al. (2017). Seltmann (2021b) found that although the three countries have similarities, the inclusion of athletes in decision-making processes have varying degrees and is dependent on power dynamics.

Ciomaga et al (2017) and Seltmann (2021b) discovered different models of athlete representation. Although, there are sport organizations that follow the model of athlete representation recommended by the IOC which is to create an athletes' commission with a consultative role and of athlete directors elected by athletes, it does not mean that it is the most effective. There are several determinants that shape representation. It is "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209). Thus, to be a representative of someone is to act for and be accountable to their constituents. This includes promoting the interests of the represented, to fight for their rights. Thus, the sport organization should also genuinely advocate for the athletes and their rights. If sport organizations lacked commitment to athlete representation, it could undermine the effectiveness of the athletes' commission by downplaying its role and consistently ignoring its recommendations (Ciomaga et al., 2017).

2.1.1. Athletes' Voice

In the past, athletes are not as assertive about their opinions and concerns as compared to these days. Likewise, their influence on various issues within or outside their sports may not have been as powerful as it is now, but this situation has evolved over time. According to Wassong et al.

(2021), Pierre De Coubertin had considered putting the athletes at the center of the Olympic Games when he was thinking of re-establishing it.

Evidenced in his speech in 1892 at the anniversary of *Union des Sociétés Française des Sport Athletiques*, he stressed the roles of athletes in sport and other sport-related contexts. Coubertin firmly believed that the athletes are the key actors of the Olympics (Wassong et al., 2021).

In 1981, the IOC Athletes' Commission was formed that initially had only six members. Now the IOC Athletes' Commission has expanded to a maximum of twenty-three members. Moreover, the IOC continuous to put the 'Athletes at the heart of the Olympic Movement' in the Olympic Agenda 2020+5 which includes the promotion of athletes' rights and responsibilities. The IOC also encourages the different international federations (IFs) and national Olympic committees (NOCs) to establish athlete commissions within their organizations. Many of these organizations followed suit, however, some of these athlete commissions do not have real power (Chappelet, 2020).

Over the years, athletes' voice has become noticeable as more IFs and NOCs create athletes' commission. Wassong et al (2021) pointed out that there was no standardized pattern for athletes' representation then and that their role and responsibilities in their institutions vary depending on the

sport governing body. Aside from the athletes' commissions put-up by the IFs and NOCs, independent athletes' group such as the Olympic Advocates Together Honorably (OATH) and Athletes CAN, Canada's national team athletes' association (Koss, 2011) were also established. Through the different athletes' group, the athletes have raised various issues affecting them to the IOC. Some of these issues are related to anti-doping, cancellation of major games, Olympic Charter Rule 40 that impact the earnings of athletes, and Rule 50 that infringes the athletes' right of freedom of speech (Chappelet, 2020).

In professional sports, especially in the United States, athletes' voice is echoed through sports unions. FIFPro and MLBPA are just some of these athletes' union. Major sports like football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey have an athletes' union. The athletes' union negotiates with professional team owners about salary, benefits, legal matters, etc. The athletes' union sometimes conducts strikes, as a way to show athletes' voice and collective power (Chappelet, 2020; Hill & Taylor, 2008).

The power of athletes' voice has the potential to impact others and effect change not only in the context of sports but other aspects as well. Thus, athletes have become activists and used their voice for various causes such as but not limited to call for gender equality, fight against

discrimination, environmental advocacy, and defend human rights. Schwab (2018a) argued that global sport, universal human rights, and athlete activism are all interconnected by values that promote human dignity. Thus, the social power of sports can be tapped to reconcile sports and human rights with the help of athletes through their voice and activism individually, collectively, and institutionally.

Nowadays, athletes have been more cognizant of their power and voice. According to Seltmann (2021a), the Olympic Movement must consider athletes as evolving stakeholders who can put them to the test and change the direction of Olympic governance. Furthermore, modern athletes in various sports are more organized and have effectively positioned themselves in their organization. They also know how to capitalize on their image, visibility, and popularity without being too reliant on the media since they have their own platforms that they can use to influence society (Wassong et al., 2021)

2.1.2. Athletes' Rights

Since the foundation of IOC Athletes' Commission, athletes have been speaking out about issues and challenges they face as athletes. Athletes' rights in relation to Olympic reform were discussed by former

Olympians Johann Koss, Ann Peel, and Alexandra Orlanda (2011). In that discussion, Koss shared that there were a lot of positive changes that came from the reforms such as the increased influence of athletes in more areas of the Olympic Movement and having athletes' commissions in both national and international level. However, he pointed out that the issue of transparency remains and that doping issues continue to be a challenge. On the other hand, Peel mentioned about proactively informing and engaging athletes of major decisions in the pipeline so that the athletes will have their inputs considered. But this function for the supposedly athlete members of the boards rarely occur. Peel also talked about the rights of an athlete, which are basically the same fundamental rights of a citizen or individual outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to freedom of expression. Athletes must be given the same human rights enjoyed by all citizens (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). Peel pointed out that there should be a respect for personhood and that an athlete is just like an ordinary citizen who should be unafraid to exercise their voice. Athletes' right must be incorporated and respected within the sports system. Thus, athletes should be encouraged and unafraid to use their voice when representing themselves. Peel appealed that athletes must get involved and actively engaged. She further added that it is crucial to continue educating

athletes about using their voice effectively, to advocate for the important things, and to be constructive as athletes can potentially change the status quo in sports. Lastly, from the discussion, Orlando stated that many athletes are not aware of their rights as national team members or what decisions are being made for them without even consulting them. Orlando said that to have genuine changes, athletes must be integrated more into the system of national and international level, not only as representatives but as equal members. Furthermore, decision-making process will improve with the addition of more athletes as they can offer their specialized background and experience in sports. Orlando also asserted that it is the responsibility of athletes today to voice out the importance of athletes' right and representation and their influence. Athletes have the right to understand the decision-making processes of the sport governing organizations. Orlando encouraged the athletes to ask questions from their sports organizations, the NOCs, and IOC. Asking is a right and should not be perceived negatively. This comes with athletes knowing how the sport system works and understanding how policies are shaped. The only way that the sport organization will improve its governance is when the athletes question the decisions they make.

In an effort to integrate athletes' rights in the sport system, different association of athletes codified athletes' rights declarations that shall be used to guide the various sports governing bodies in assuring that athletes' rights are protected. In 2017, the World Players Association released the Universal Declaration of Players Rights (UDPR) which aimed to protect players from the various human rights violation in sport. According to UNI Global Union (2017), the declaration was developed by more than 100 players associations affiliated with World Players. It is the first document to articulate the universally recognized human and labor rights of athletes. It also addresses the existing imbalance between sports governing bodies and athletes. The UDPR has its framework from the actual experiences of athletes and universally recognized human rights (Schwab, 2018b). The IOC Athletes' Commission also published the Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration (Athletes' Declaration) in 2018. It was developed through a worldwide consultation of 4, 292 athletes from 190 countries of more than 120 sports disciplines (Athletes 365, n.d.) and inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognized human rights standards.

Embedding human rights into the sport system must be taken by the various sports governing bodies. According to Schwab (2018b), sports

organizations should take action to legitimize sports law or *lex sportiva* by integrating the fundamental human rights of athletes and using the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as framework. Schwab (2018b) further added that institutional building and change should also be done through a collective action.

Knowledge and awareness of the human rights of athletes in many sports system is not fully realized by the athletes themselves and the sport organization that belong to. Despite the published documents about athletes' declarations by the World Players Association and IOC, harassment and abuses in sports are still prevalent. The integration of human rights with sport is crucial in safeguarding the athletes however many athletes are still unaware of their rights and unclear how they can act on them. This situation makes the athletes even more vulnerable to exploitation. Being unaware of the human rights of the athletes further heightens the imbalanced power relations between athletes and sport institutions (Schwab, 2018b; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2022).

Athlete representation is one step to promote and protect human rights of athletes. Listening to athletes' perspectives on the challenges and recommendations to promote safe sport is vital (Wilson et al., 2022). Inadequate athlete representation hinders athletes to come forward and give

their statement about their negative experience such as sexual abuse (Krieger & Pieper, 2023). Thus, established athlete representation through athletes' commission can be one solution to address sport-related human rights abuses (Naidoo & Grevemberg, 2021). The lack of knowledge and lack of awareness of athletes about their human rights should also be addressed by educating them on it. However, Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2022) emphasized that knowledge and awareness of human rights is not enough to prevent human rights violations in sports. Sports organizations are accountable to make deeper cultural changes in their systems by doing multi-level strategies to change the mindset, beliefs, biases, behaviors of its various stakeholders.

2.1.3. Athletes' Involvement in Sport Governance

Traditionally, sport and sport governing bodies have been mostly doing self-governance, operated through hierarchical chain of command, and undemocratic (Geeraert, 2014). Moreover, the athletes, who are supposedly the main stakeholders in sport, are not being engaged in decision-making and policy development processes of sport governing bodies. Athletes are rarely consulted in policies that mostly affect them (Houlihan, 2004). However, sport governance has transitioned from having

a centralized structure where decision making power rests on the hands of the few to a more democratic structure where all stakeholders are given the opportunity, which is not necessarily equal, to take part in governing the organization (Chappelet, 2021; Thibault et al., 2010).

The consideration of all stakeholders in sport governance is well demonstrated in the case of the Olympic System which has transformed from the Classic Olympic System that only involved the IOC, NOCs, IFs, and NGBs to now what is referred to as the Total Olympic System that includes every stakeholders of sports such as the athletes, sports clubs, national courts of justice, sponsors, and civic groups (Chappelet, 2016, 2021). This expansion of stakeholders means that sport organizations cannot be hierarchical anymore in its approach of governance but must shift to a more collaborative and democratic approach.

In sports, the call for good governance has been strong due to the various issues of corruption, match-fixing, bribery, cheating, doping etc. Good governance principles include transparency, democracy, accountability, and representation of stakeholders (Ciomaga et al., 2017). Thus, to practice good governance, stakeholders such as the athletes must be involved in decision-making operations of the organization. Democracy in

sports governance means decision-making powers is given to the stakeholders in sports, thus including the athletes.

The early stages of athletes' involvement in sports governance can be traced back to the 1980's with the creation of IOC Athletes' Commission. From there on, various athletes' associations have been formed over the years to voice out athletes' concerns. Athletes have demanded from sport governing bodies that they be included in decision making processes of their organization. The case of the IOC Athletes' Commission was unique as it started from being a commission with appointees by the IOC to having members that are elected by the athletes (Wassong, 2018, 2021). Athletes have been engaged by their sport organizations in various capacities, either through consultation or being given a seat in the board, whether by having a voice or given the chance to both speak and vote (Geeraert, 2014).

Democratization of sport governance has been associated to athletes' involvement in various processes of the sport organization, especially, decision-making and policy formation. Katwala (2000) argued that if sporting bodies are serious in making reforms, then they should take the first step to collaborate and create an open and transparent multi-stakeholder forum on good sporting governance. This way, reforms should be inclusive

and must give the athletes, who are the main stakeholders in sports, a central role in the reform and decision-making processes.

While many sport organizations claim that they are practicing democracy in their governance, there are still some that disregard the principles of elections, participation, and representation in decision-making (Thibault, 2021). Several studies have pointed out the absence of athletes' involvement in the decision-making activities of several national and international sport organization (Begović, 2021; Ciomaga et al., 2017, Donnelly, 2015; Geeraert et al., 2014; Krieger, 2020; Kihl et al., 2007; Thibault et al., 2010).

However, in recent years, athletes' engagement in sports governance have been increasing (Chappelet, 2020; Naidoo & Grevemberg, 2021; Wassong, 2021). Moreover, the IOC has been continuously promoting athlete representation through the establishment of athletes' commission in different NOCs. Recently, the IOC Code of Ethics (2023) was published. The said document includes a section entitled 'Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance within the Olympic Movement' in which one of the principles is about the support to athletes. It mentions the athletes' rights and responsibilities as well as the representation and active participation of athletes in decision-making processes. The document also stipulates that

“the athletes’ voice should be heard, and athletes should be represented with voting rights in the relevant decision-making bodies of their sport organization” (IOC Code of Ethics, 2023, p. 89).

Donnelly (2015) posed the question “What if the players controlled the game?” and argued that democratization of sport is necessary part of the reforms to solve the problem of governance in sport. Thus, sport governance reforms should always engage the athletes. Kihl et al (2007) and Thibault et al (2010) examined athlete representation through the perspective of a specific kind of democracy, that is deliberative democracy.

Democracy is a “form of government where people hold power and exercise this power by selecting athlete representative in free and open elections” (Thibault, 2021, p. 634). Deliberative democracy pertains to the “open public debate and the direct participation of the people themselves in governmental decision-making” (Hess 2000, as cited in Thibault et al, 2010). It involves direct participation which is in the form of face-to-face discourse, or online communication. In deliberative democracy, the decisions made must be explained by citizens, their representatives, and the state (Gutmann and Thompson (2004). Applied to sports setting, the officials of the sport organization need to justify to all who will be affected as to how and why they came up with such decisions. The strength of

deliberative democracy lies in the thoughtful engagement and exchange of ideas among individuals, enabling them to discuss and assess the pros and cons of a policy, fostering well-informed opinion formation (Thibault et al, 2010).

In deliberative democratic system of governance, athletes can actively participate in the discussion, thus giving them communicative power. To encourage athletes' voice, sports organization should consider adopting a deliberative democratic system. Implementing it is challenging because for it to work well, athletes must learn the skills necessary for a good representative. (Kihl & Schull, 2020).

2.2. Combat Sports Culture

Combats sports and martial arts are often used interchangeably. However, Johnson and Ha (2015) defined the two distinctively according to the final learning objectives as they have different educational qualities. Martial arts refer to the way of “mental and social self-cultivation through physical education curriculum based upon self-defense” (Johnson & Ham 2015). while combat sports can be referred to as the competitive side of martial arts. Inherently, there are the teachings from the martial arts that are incorporated in training in combat sports. However, due to the competitive

aspect of combat sports, other lessons such as facing the opponent, aggressiveness, competitiveness, mental toughness, winning, etc., are heavily emphasize. Combat sports is the term that is used in this study as it seeks to understand athlete representation the case of national sports associations that handles the national team athletes.

Combats sports athletes are expected to train hard to prepare for competitions. With the emphasis on training but still practicing the teachings (respect, discipline, etc.) of the martial arts, the athletes are caught in a situation that prevent them from speaking out about anomalies such as verbal and physical abuse, bullying, and harassment in their training. News about abuses in combat sports in top level have been reported (McCurry, 2013; Stone, 2021) through the years and these could mean that there are far more other issues that are kept hidden to the public.

De Cree (2015) reviewed and analyzed sexual abuses in Judo and investigated potential factors that provoke bullying and sexual harassment in this sport. Some of which are having full contact during the grappling, access to voyeuristic opportunities during weigh-ins and showering, and Judo's authoritarian and hierarchal structure, etc. The authoritarian and hierarchal structure is common in combat sports. Athletes are expected to follow the seniors in the team and not question authority. These perpetuates

abuses within combat sports. Moreover, bullying and harassment, referred to as the ‘dark side’ of sports, are experienced more in combats sport (Vveinhardt et al., 2020) compared to other sports because of this traditional culture of hierarchy. Unfortunately, coaches and leaders oftentimes shrug off issues of bullying and harassment. These issues are further exacerbated by the lack of intervention and complaint desk within the team or the organization (Vveinhardt et al., 2020).

2.3. Sports Governance and Athlete Representation in the Philippines

Studies related to sports-related topics in the Philippines are scarce. This could be associated to the overall lack of support to the field of sports from the government and societal perception that sports are not lucrative. Sports research in the country is still in infancy and the researchers focus more on topics that are related to human movement science (Fernandez, et al., 2022). This is also because the sport science field, although not that prominent as well, is more practiced in the Philippines compared to sport management. Thus, studies that explore on sport governance in the Philippines are few.

Blanco (2016) did a retrospective review of the history of sports governance in the country and provided an overview of the Philippine sports

governance, its stakeholders, and actors, and the issues and challenges it is faced with. Overview of the stakeholders, actors, issues, and challenges in the governance of Philippine women's volleyball (Blanco, 2017) and governance of the college basketball in the country (Blanco & Bairner, 2019) were also done. These articles provide a general picture of sport governance in the Philippines. Common issues and challenges that were identified are lack of funding, lack of international exposure for athletes, training-related matters, lack of good governance, politicking, etc.

At the national level, there are three major sport governing bodies in the country: Philippine Sports Commission (PSC), Philippine Olympic Committee (POC), and National Sports Association of each sport (NSA). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship among these three entities.

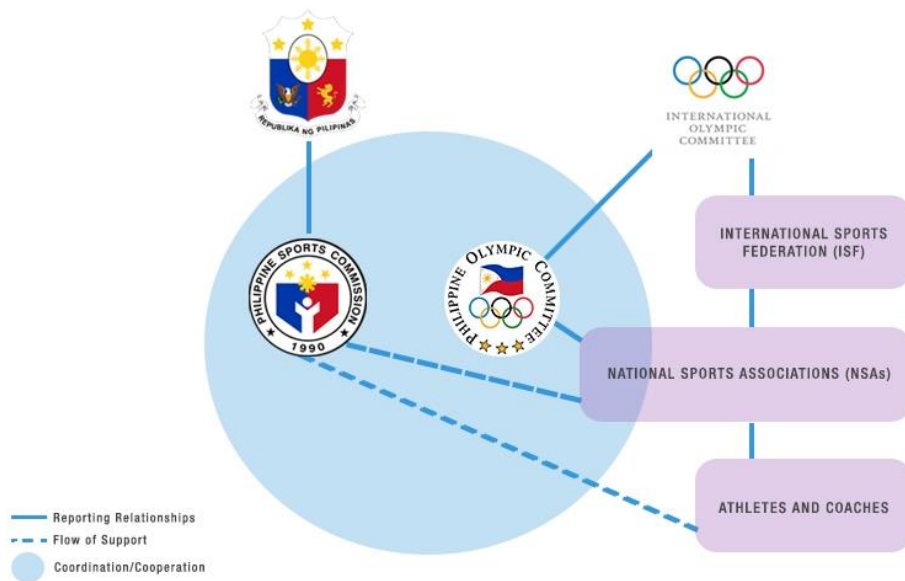
PSC is a national government agency that is directly under the Office of the President of the Philippines. Its mandate is to promote physical education and sport development from the grassroots to the elite level. The Philippine government funds the national athletes (honorarium, sports equipment, etc.) through the PSC. It should be noted that although it is the PSC who gives funds to the national athletes and NSAs, it does not intervene on the matters of the NSAs. It also does not intervene with the concerns of POC. However, there were instances in the past where the

Philippine government pressured the PSC to intervene with the issues that some NSAs got involved in.

Figure 1

Relationships of Sport Governing Bodies in the Philippines

RELATIONSHIPS OF
SPORT GOVERNING BODIES
IN THE PHILIPPINES



Note: From The What and Why of the POC, PSC, and the NSAs, by Dina Bernardo, 2015, SportPhil, (<https://www.sportphil.com/the-what-and-why-of-the-poc-psc-and-the-nsas-part-1/>). In the public domain.

The POC is a non-government organization that has is the sole authority for representation of the Philippine athletes in major sports events like the Olympics, Asian Games, and SEA Games, etc. It is autonomous and is affiliated with the International Olympic Committee. The NSA reports to POC especially when it is related to the major games.

The NSA is the autonomous sport governing body for a given sport. They promote their sports, recruit national players and coaches, promulgates the rules of the sports, develop referees, etc. They get funding from the PSC and sometimes from the POC through the Olympic Solidarity program. NSAs are affiliated with their International Federations (IFs) and POC. The POC and IFs sometimes recommend changes that the NSAs must do to improve governance of their sport. An example of this would the formation of athletes' commission within the NSA. However, there are cases that these recommendations are not followed swiftly by some NSAs. Since NSAs are autonomous, it is their discretion how they are going to run and govern their organization and sport. Thus, the leaders or officials of the NSA have the wheel to steer their organization to the direction that they want it to go.

The lack of academic research in sport governance does not mean to say that it should not be explored anymore. Doing studies in this field can contribute not only to the body of literature in sport governance and sport

management but can also serve as guide to decision-making, policymaking, and strategic planning by people in position in sport governing bodies. A lot of matters can be explored related to sports governance in the context of the Philippines. However, the most pressing issues that can be examined is about athlete representation.

In the past decade, news concerning top Philippine national athletes made it to major headlines, worthy of national attention, and had been a part of peoples' conversation. Hidilyn Diaz, a female weightlifter, who won Philippines' first ever Olympic gold medal, made the news in when she posted in her social media account about having a hard time in terms of financial support in her bid for Tokyo Olympics (Marquez, 2019). This led to discussions about lack of funding for national athletes and even became political as it was perceived by some people as a callout to government's lack of support. Another national athlete, Junna Tsukii, a world champion female karateka told the public about her being bullied by her coach after getting a gold in the SEA Games (Go, 2019). The issue led to discussions of bullying and abuse. The most recent issue involved Olympian and one of the world's top ranking pole vaulter, EJ Obiena (Go, 2022). The pole vaulter was accused of falsifying liquidation by his NSA, Philippine Athletics Track and Field Association (PATAFA). As one of famous Olympians in the

Philippines, his issue got massive that it reached the Philippine Congress and got some senators to be invested in the case. The PATAFA president was declared *persona non grata* by the Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) (Dioquino, 2022). The case was later resolved through a mediation process initiated by the Philippine Sports Committee (Yumol, 2022). Obiena's case brought out to the surface a lot of discussions about the experiences of national athletes in their respective NSAs. Issues of safeguarding and suggestions for structural changes in the NSAs and the system's processes were mentioned. There was a discourse on good governance in sports and a lot of talks about athletes' experiences in social media. These issues about the top national athletes and their concerns are also the same concerns and experience of other national athletes. However, most of the national athletes do not have the same influence and social power like Diaz, Tsukii, and Obiena. Majority of the national athletes do not speak out about their concerns despite the establishment of the Philippine Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission (POC-AC).

POC-AC serves as an advisory and consultative body for the Philippine national athletes. Its task is to assist POC and connect POC leaders and the athletes. The mission of the POC-AC is "to ensure that the voice of the Philippine national athletes will be expressed, heard, and

submitted to the POC Executive Board and their associated decision-making bodies. (Philippine Olympic Committee, n.d.).” Aside from the POC-AC, some NSAs have already established their own athletes’ commission. The number of NSAs that have an athletes’ commission is unknown. This could imply that many of the national athletes are not aware of what an athlete commission is and what are its functions. The notion of athlete representation might also not be widely known in Philippine sports.

Athlete representation is one of the issues in sports governance that should be explored. The existing body of literature on athlete representation, athletes' voice, athletes' rights, and athletes' involvement in sport governance predominantly focuses on international sport governing bodies and those from developed nations. However, there is a notable dearth of research exploring athlete representation within the context of developing nations. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by providing valuable insights into athlete representation within the context of a developing country. Moreover, this study explores the specific category of combat sports, as limited research has been conducted on athlete representation in combat sport associations.

Chapter 3. Research Methods

This study follows a qualitative research method to explore on the case of athlete representation of national athletes in the various combat NSAs in the Philippines. This chapter explains the logic for using qualitative research for the study. Furthermore, this section elaborates the role of the researcher having experienced both being an athlete and a sports administrator. The chapter also includes how data were collected, analyzed, and checked for trustworthiness.

3.1. Qualitative Research

The use of qualitative research method in sports studies have increased over the years and are much common nowadays (Evans et al., 2021; Hoeber & Shaw, 2017). Qualitative research involves data that are non-numerical which are gathered from multiple sources such as in-depth interviews, document analysis, observation of behavior to explore and understand how an individual or a group perceive and interpret social or human issues. This method allows the researcher to explore and get a better and deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants by answering what, how, or why of a phenomenon that cannot be done through numbers alone (Creswell, 2013; Skinner et al., 2021). Moreover, qualitative

research uses methods that are interactive and humanistic, leading to the collection of data that can be identified as themes which can be interpreted to describe the issues being studied about (Campbell, 2014). Qualitative research is best for studying meaning as it affects social interactions of an individual and groups (Skinner et al., 2021). Therefore, experiences of athletes in relation to their representation in their NSAs can be explored through qualitative research.

Exploring athlete representation and how it is carried out in different sports institutions has become more important nowadays as athletes have started to recognize their power and voice. Athletes, at the center of sports, are the primary actors in their field who receive the decisions and policies made by their NSAs. However, despite being the most affected, they have little say or none in decision-making processes and policy-development by their organization. Through qualitative research, problems and issues related to the experiences of the athletes in terms of voicing out their concerns, fighting for their rights, and their involvement in decision-making and policy formation can be explored. This study aims to understand the meaning of athlete representation to Philippine national athletes from various combat NSAs. The researcher chose qualitative research for this study as athlete representation is an issue that can be explored by digging

deep into the experiences of the national athletes. The meaning of athlete representation cannot easily be defined as it is a complex subject matter that is influenced by various factors such as social, political, and cultural contexts. Thus, athlete representation might be interpreted differently by the national athletes from combat sports because of the difference in context that they are exposed to in their NSAs. Qualitative research can help define what athlete representation is for them, how it is being practiced in their NSAs, and explain why this is the case.

This study follows the case study approach. Creswell (2014) defined case study as a design of inquiry that develops in-depth analysis of a program, an event, process, individual or individuals, or activity. Therefore, this study looks at the case of athlete representation of Philippine national athletes in their NSAs. Thematic analysis, particularly, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) was used to analyze the data for this research.

3.2. Role of the Researcher

The researcher's background potentially affects how a study is shaped thus it is important to be aware of the personal experiences of the

researcher in relation to the subject matter being explored to set boundaries when collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher of this study had a background of almost two decades, training and competing in various combat sports such as Judo, Wrestling, Jiu-jitsu, and Taekwondo. Despite playing various combat sports for that long, the researcher never joined the national team. However, the researcher served as a sports director in one of the combat NSAs in the Philippines and also worked with various sports administrators from different NSAs in the country. The researcher also has acquaintances with national athletes from different Philippine national teams. As a former athlete and sport administrator, the researcher was able to observe the relationship dynamics between national athletes and sports administrators with both hats. This eventually led to the interest of the researcher to explore about athletes' voice and athlete representation in the NSAs. She observed the disconnect between how national athletes voice out their concerns to their NSA officials and how these concerns are heard.

Athlete representation in the context of combat NSAs is the focus of this study as the researcher thought that their context could be stricter compared to other sports as combat sports, that is martial arts, tend to put more weight on discipline, obedience, and seniority.

The researcher's background and connections provide insights on both national athletes' and sport administrators' point of view. This gives a balanced perspective as how data were collected and analyzed by the researcher. The background on combat sports also provide context to understand the experiences of the participants in this study.

3.3. Data Collection

To collect data, the researcher first identified the combat NSAs in the Philippines. The Philippine Olympic Committee website listed fifty-four NSAs as their regular members. Out of the 54 NSAs, 14 are combats sports. The researcher sent an email to these fourteen combat NSAs to seek for NSA officials who would agree to participate in this study.

The data collection for this research were two-fold. The first one was to look at the official documents from the participating combat NSAs. This required letter of requests to get a copy of their official documents. However, not all participating NSAs were able to provide official documents to the researcher. The other means to collect data for this study was to conduct in-depth interviews with national athletes and sports administrators or NSA officials from the participating combat NSAs.

3.3.1. Official Documents

The researcher tried to get hold of the official documents of the combat NSAs by requesting a copy of the organization's statutes, written policies, and charters through email. The researcher also looked at the NSAs' websites and scoured the internet for news and articles about them. However, majority of the combats NSAs do not make their official documents public. The researcher was only able to get official documents from three combat NSAs. These files include the following:

1. One statutes and by-laws
2. One strategic plan
3. One official athletes' commission charter
4. One document about the mission and aims of the athletes' commission of an NSA.

The combat NSAs do not post their official documents in their websites, thus the researcher was only able to collect a few official documents. Although official documents were scarce, the files collected were reviewed and included in the thematic analysis. The documents provided some information and context about the current state of athlete representation in those NSAs.

3.3.2. In-depth Interviews

After identifying the combat NSAs, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with national athletes and NSA officials. The interviews were done remotely through an online set-up through Zoom, a video-conferencing software, and were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants. Before the in-depth interview, the researcher sent a copy of the consent form to the participants and were asked to return the signed consent form through email. The sample of the consent form can be found on the appendix section of this study. During the meeting for the interview session, the researcher asked first for permission to record the meeting. The participant must audibly say ‘yes’ before the researcher proceed to asking the questions.

In-depth interviews are used in research to have an understanding on the deep meaning of the experiences of the participants through their own words (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This kind of interview is suitable to get meaningful information from the national athletes and NSA officials. The in-depth interviews were done using a semi-structured interview guide which can found at the appendix section of this thesis. The semi-structured interview guide was helpful to the researcher to have a systematic inquiry with the participants of this study. It allowed

flexibility so that the interviewee felt comfortable with the researcher which made the conversation spontaneous and made room for follow-up questions to be asked. Despite the online set-up of the in-depth interview, the researcher was still able to build rapport with the participants due to the shared experiences in combat sports training and competition, as well as the common experiences in being a sports administrator.

Combination of English and Tagalog languages, ‘Taglish’ as it is referred to, was used during the interview. This allowed the participants to fully express and articulate their views when answering the questions of the researcher. The in-depth interviews lasted on average from 60 to 90 minutes per participant. Follow-up interviews of 20 to 30 minutes were also conducted to clarify important points with the participants. The participants were asked questions such as what their notion of athlete representation is, how athletes voice out their concerns, how the NSA officials communicate with the national athletes, etc. After the in-depth interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings in the original language that was used.

3.3.3. Research Participants

Eight out of the 14 combat NSAs were covered in this study. The participants are from one of the following combats NSAs: Judo, Kurash,

Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, Sambo, Taekwondo, Wrestling, and Wushu. The participants consist of eight national athletes and five NSA officials who were recruited using the snowball sampling technique. The table below lists down the participants for this study. The researcher cannot provide further information about the participants to protect their anonymity.

Table 1

Participants of the Study

Participant's Identification	Sex
Athlete 1	Female
Athlete 2	Female
Athlete 3	Female
Athlete 4	Female
Athlete 5	Male
Athlete 6	Female
Athlete 7	Male
Athlete 8	Male
NSA Official 1	Male
NSA Official 2	Male
NSA Official 3	Male
NSA Official 4	Female
NSA Official 5	Male

Snowball sampling method for qualitative research was done by the researcher by identifying initial participants for the in-depth interview and these first few participants referred other participants who also took part in this study. Although snowball sampling technique was employed to look for participants in this study, the researcher still set some criteria before an individual was included for the in-depth interview. For the national athletes, the participant should have been a member of the national team for at least one full year and had already competed in national and international competitions under the supervision of the combat NSA that they belong to. For the NSA officials, they should be part of the executive board of the combat NSA. These criteria were set to make sure that the participants have enough information about the system in their respective sport associations.

The researcher attempted to get as many participants as possible to reach 'saturation' which is the stage in data collection where one cannot get any more new or additional information than what was already collected (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Saturation is sometimes not done in research as data collection can be affected by several factors such as time constraints, lack of budget, etc. (Braun and Clarke, 2021c) Due to the timeframe, capabilities, and boundaries of the researcher, ten participants were originally targeted for this study. However, the researcher was able to

interview thirteen participants. All the participants provided valuable information about their experiences in their NSAs and were capable to answer the questions effectively and adequately.

3.4. Data Analysis

Collected data from official documents and in-depth interviews were analyzed by doing thematic analysis, specifically reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis methods are categorized into three broad types: coding reliability approaches, reflexive approaches, and codebook approaches (Braun et al., 2019). Thus, the researcher emphasizes that reflexive thematic analysis was used for data analysis in this study.

Braun and Clarke (2021a) called their approach as reflexive thematic analysis to point out the importance of researcher's subjectivity as 'analytic resource' and to maintain flexibility when engaging with data. In reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher must do an extensive analytic and interpretative work to develop themes, thus the generated themes are mediated with the researchers' values, skills, experience, and training (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, 2021b)

Since this research explored on the meaning athlete representation in combat NSAs in the Philippines, themes were generated from the

experiences that were shared by the participants in the in-depth interviews. The generation of themes were done by identifying, analyzing, and reporting the patterns within the data collected. The main proponents of thematic analysis emphasized that this method is not about looking for ‘emerging’ themes rather it is a method that is active and generative that requires a great deal of time for data immersion and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thus, the researcher took a lot of time to interpret the data and identify the themes that are compatible to the purpose of this research.

The six-phase guide by Braun and Clarke (2006) in doing thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher. The steps include familiarization with the data, coding the data systematically, identification of initial themes from coded and collected data, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and finalizing the report. The process by the researcher is summarized in the table below. During the familiarization step, the researcher transcribed the interviews in its original language, reviewed the transcriptions and the official documents, and took notes and ideas while transcribing the interviews and rereading the official documents. Coding was done to mark points of interest in the data. Related points were then collated and assigned with labels. The labels that were identified were organized into related themes and subthemes. After the naming of themes, they were reviewed to

check if they are aligned and compatible to the purpose of the study which is to explore athlete representation in the NSAs. After careful review of the generated themes, the researcher related the themes once again to the research questions and wrote the report by extracting samples from the data to support the analysis. The quotes from the transcriptions which were included in the final report were translated to English.

3.5. Strategies for Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative data analysis is subjected to more interpretation and debate, thus ensuring the trustworthiness of the study is highly regarded. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness refers to a set of criteria to evaluate the goodness of a qualitative research. Establishing the trustworthiness of the study is making sure that the findings are representative of the experiences of the participants in a study (Skinner et al., 2021). Thus, the researcher performed various techniques to ensure trustworthiness in this study. These techniques include reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Reflexibility is practice self-awareness and critical reflection on the researcher's biases, roles, and subjectivity in every step of the research process (Skinner, et al., 2021). Throughout this research, especially during

data collection and data analysis, the researcher is fully aware of her background as a former athlete and former sports administrator. Thus, there was a conscious effort from the researcher to minimize her own biases and preconceived notions during the entire process of the study.

Creswell (2014) explained member checking as the process of determining the accuracy of the findings by sending either the final report or just specific themes back to the participants for verification if the researcher was able to precisely capture the information given out during the interview. Member checking is considered as the most critical step in ensuring the credibility of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This can be done both formally and informally. The researcher conducted member checks by sending transcripts to the participants after the in-depth interviews. Member checks were also done during in-depth interviews by paraphrasing the statement of the participants to see if the researcher fully captured what they said. Member checking was conducted to give participants the opportunity to correct if there were any errors that the researcher committed in trying to understand and interpret the data. Follow-up interviews were also done to conduct member checks.

Peer debriefing was also conducted to ensure trustworthiness of this research. The researcher sought feedback from colleagues regarding the

research design, data collection methods, data analysis and findings of this study. The peer reviewers provided support and challenged my interpretations of the data and served as the external checks in my research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the collected data and is structured into three principal sections which address each specific research questions. The first section examines the meaning or conceptualization of athlete representation as perceived by the national athletes and NSA officials involved in various combat sports. The second section provides an overview of the existing practices as how athlete representation is being carried out across the various combat NSAs. The final section explores the perspectives of national athletes and NSA officials on the promotion and implementation of athlete representation within combat NSAs.

4.1. Meaning of Athlete Representation

National team athletes and NSA officials from combat sports such as Judo, Kurash, Muay Thai, Sambo, Taekwondo, Wrestling, and Wushu, exhibit shared perspectives on athlete representation. However, despite these similarities, there are also some differences on interpretations of athlete representation that emerge among the participants, principally influenced by the presence or absence of an athletes' commission within their respective NSAs. Table 2 presents the themes and subthemes, identified through

reflexive thematic analysis, on the meaning of athlete representation for NSA officials and national athletes involved in various combat sports.

Table 2

Meaning of Athlete Representation

Themes	Subthemes
“Atleta ka!” [You’re an athlete!]	Athletes’ voice and rights Athletes’ initiatives
Country’s representative: ‘ <i>Para sa Bayan</i> ’ [For the Country]	

Two main themes relating to athlete representation were identified. The first theme, ‘*Atleta ka!*’ [You are an athlete!], revolves around the notion of having a designated representative who advocates for athletes, conveying their concerns and issues to NSA officials. Both national athletes and NSA officials acknowledge that athlete representation entails the presence of an individual or a group of individuals who can effectively represent athletes and engage in meaningful dialogues with policy and decision-makers within the sports organization. This theme is divided into two subthemes: athletes’ voice and rights and athletes’ initiatives. The identification of these subthemes stems from the variation in the presence or

absence of an athletes' commission within an NSA. The second theme, 'Country's representative: *Para sa Bayan*' [For the Country], denotes the initial association made by some of the national athletes and NSA officials, linking athlete representation to the role of athletes as representatives of the country in international competitions.

This section also provides information about athlete representation related to the context of the Philippine Olympic Committee – Athletes' Commission (POC-AC). Although it may not be the primary focus of the study, it is crucial to examine whether the NSA officials and national athletes are aware of its existence and its functions. The POC-AC has an important role in facilitating athlete representation for national athletes. As platform dedicated for the national athletes, POC-AC serves as a channel through which national athletes can express their needs, concern, and aspirations. The POC-AC has outlined its strategic goals for the period 2021-2024, with a mission to ensure that the voices of Philippine national athletes are expressed, heard, and presented to the POC Executive Board and other relevant decision-making bodies. One of the key strategies highlighted in the same document is to encourage other Philippine national athletes to establish athletes' commissions within their respective NSA. This initiative aims to foster improved communication channels and establish

designated point persons for each sport. While the POC-AC primarily functions as a consultative and advisory body, it is important to note that awareness of its functions and activities can significantly influence the concept of athlete representation for both NSA officials and national athletes.

4.1.1. *Atleta ka!* [You are an athlete!] – Athletes’ Voice and Rights

Participants in this study belong to NSAs that either have an existing athletes’ commission or lack one altogether. The presence or absence of an athletes’ commission influenced the participants’ conceptualization of athlete representation. Irrespective of their affiliation with an NSA featuring or lacking an athletes’ commission, both national athletes and NSA officials associated athlete representation with the empowerment of athletes to articulate their rights, providing them with a platform for voicing their perspectives and recommendations on matters affecting them.

The national athletes provided an elaborate account of athlete representation, emphasizing the act of advocating for their needs and concerns to relevant authorities. It transcends mere expression, as it necessitates the presence of decision-makers who actively listen to their

voices. Athlete representation, for the national athletes, revolves around fostering meaningful dialogues:

It is to have someone represent the team, who will voice out the concerns of the athletes not only to the coaches or to the NSA officials but to the whole sport which includes other authorities that have a say on the situation. (Athlete 1)

Athlete representation is to share our experiences, to speak on behalf of the other athletes, to express if there are good or bad experiences in the NSA or the Philippine Sports Commission. (Athlete 2)

To be able to express our thoughts and opinions, our grievances, to the higher ups, to the coaches, or to the bosses. (Athlete 3)

Notably, these expressions align closely with the conceptualization of athlete representation among NSA officials who perceive it as a venue for athletes to be heard and seen and for them to listen and take action to address their concerns. An NSA official, affiliated with an NSA that has an athletes' commission, expressed the following viewpoint:

Athlete representation means really having a voice, making sure that they are heard, that they are seen, and their concerns are met, and they are treated as equals. They are not just treated as *'athlete ka lang'* [you are just an athlete]. *Alam mo naman sa Pilipinas 'di ba?* [You know how it is in the Philippines.] They (the athletes) always have that face. For us, it's *'athlete ka!'* period [you are an athlete, that's it!]. And you have the same respect, you have the same voice,

you have the same value as the coaches, as the board members, as the management. (NSA Official 4)

One NSA that has established an athletes' commission includes in their charter the explicit purpose of the athletes' and that is to ensure that athletes' voices are heard by the governing body of the federation. Conversely, NSAs that do not have athletes' commission still share a similar perspective on athlete representation. They acknowledge the importance of considering athletes' unique viewpoints distinct from those of NSA officials: "Athletes have a different point of view that we cannot even see as administrators" (NSA Official 2). Furthermore, an NSA official highlights the connection between athlete representation and athletes' rights, affirming that athletes have the right to voice their needs and concerns, and athlete representation facilitates the exercise of this right: "They can voice out about their needs as athletes, because that is their right" (NSA Official 1).

4.1.2. Atleta ka! [You are an athlete!] – Athletes' Initiatives

Two NSA officials and one national athlete affiliated with NSAs with athletes' commission presented an additional perspective on athlete representation that extends beyond athletes simply expressing their concerns. According to their viewpoint, athlete representation entails

providing athletes with opportunities to pursue their own initiatives and actively contribute to their respective organizations beyond their roles as athletes. The national athlete expressed that athlete representation allows athletes to suggest and take the lead in initiatives aimed at enhancing their fellow athletes' progress stating, "To suggest initiative for athletes' development" (Athlete 3). This perspective of athlete representation being related to athletes' initiatives is echoed in the charter of one NSA. The charter highlights the objective of enabling athletes to conceive and participate in initiatives that promote the well-being and support of all members.

Beyond merely granting athletes a voice, athlete representation is also regarded as a mechanism for spearheading initiatives and projects by athletes for their fellow athletes. These NSA officials and national athlete acknowledge the potential for opportunities for their organization when athlete representation is also viewed from this perspective. One NSA official articulated, "Our intent in the athletes' commission is for initiatives. What they (the athletes) can do to help the federation. I guess, for the athletes, that is the purpose they have for the athletes' commission" (NSA Official 3). An athlete who is a member of the athletes' commission within their NSA explained, "We plan programs for the athletes, not only for us national team

members but also for all athletes affiliated with our NSA” (Athlete 3). Another NSA official emphasized the impact of athletes’ action to the organization: “Their (athletes’) actions also affect the entire organization. Athletes are part of the organization” (NSA Official 4). This assertion underscores the idea that athlete representation holds significant value that extends beyond the athletes themselves and contributes positively to the organization.

4.1.3. Country’s Representative: *‘Para sa Bayan’* [For the Country]

While the concept of athlete representation, wherein athletes have representative to speak out on behalf of them in a dialogue with the NSA officials and actively participate as members of the organization, is understood by all participants in this study, it is not the initial notion that immediately comes to mind for everyone.

Among the thirteen interviewed participants, one NSA official and three national athletes initially associate athlete representation with the responsibility of representing the country in international competitions. While this understanding is not incorrect, their awareness of athlete representation in terms of advocating for athletes’ voices and rights is not their primary association. It is important to note that their initial

understanding of athlete representation as representatives of their countries in international competitions does not necessarily mean that they are unaware of athlete representation in the context of athletes' voice and rights through dialogue. NSA Official 5 is familiar with the concept of athlete representation in relation to the existence of an athletes' commission, as their NSA includes an active athlete member within the athletes' commission of their International Federation. Nevertheless, when further asked about the specific functions of an athletes' commission, the official suggests approaching the athlete for more detailed information. The three athletes sought clarification if the interviewer was referring to athlete representation in terms of competition and bringing honor to the country. They inquired if it entailed "representing the country and the sport in international competitions" (Athlete 4, Athlete 5, Athlete 6). After being informed that the study explores a distinct form athlete representation, the NSA official and the three national athletes demonstrated a level of familiarity with the concept. However, they acknowledged that it was not their initial understanding or immediate association with athlete representation.

4.1.4. Knowledge and Awareness of the Philippine Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission (POC-AC)

The Philippine Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission was started in 2005 to provide athletes with a platform to voice their opinions during POC Executive Board meetings (Cadayona, 2005). However, it was not until 2015 that the POC-AC gained more prominence and became actively involved (Henson, 2020). As part of the athlete representation structure, the POC-AC selects one male and one female representative to participate in the POC General Assembly, where they hold voting rights. Consequently, the POC-AC serves as a tangible example of athlete representation for the various NSAs and national athletes.

To determine the participants' awareness and perception of the POC-AC as it relates to athlete representation, they were specifically asked questions about their prior knowledge of the commission. The findings revealed two distinct responses: some participants displayed familiarity with the POC-AC, while others acknowledged having heard of it but lacked a comprehensive understanding of its purpose.

All interviewed NSA officials confirmed their knowledge of the POC-AC and their familiarity with some of its projects and activities. They also mentioned sending representatives from their respective NSAs to attend

meetings and events organized by the POC-AC. One sport administrator (NSA Official 4) demonstrated awareness of the POC-AC's functions and mandates, highlighting their similarity to their own NSA Athletes' Commission, which is based on the mandates of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). While acknowledging the POC-AC's active programs and athlete seminars, this official admitted limited familiarity with the commission's other activities. Another NSA official expressed their pre-existing familiarity with the POC-AC and explained that their NSA had already included an athlete representative in their board even before the POC recommended forming an athletes' commission. The said NSA official shared:

Even before the POC mentioned to us to form an athletes' commission, we already have an athlete representative in our executive board. Our main motivation why we put an athlete representative in the board was because we have an athlete who is part of the board in our international federation. So, we saw the importance of involvement of the athletes in the organization. So, we also considered that our NSA should be aligned to the IF. That motivated us to include athletes in the board. (NSA Official 3).

These two NSAs, having their own athletes' commissions, adhered to the recommendations of the IOC, IF, and POC by establishing athletes' commissions within their respective organizations for athlete representation.

NSA Official 1 expressed familiarity with the POC-AC but noted that only a select few individuals serve as athlete representatives in the commission. This said NSA official expressed openness to establishing an athletes' commission within their NSA, having already started with a women's commission, and emphasized the need for representation from every sport in the POC-AC. NSA Official 2 acknowledged the existence of the POC-AC and mentioned that they have athletes active on it. However, they clarified that their organization itself do not have an athletes' commission.

Among the athletes, only one displayed familiarity with the functions of the POC-AC, mentioning that previously two athletes per sport were sent to the POC-AC meetings but noted a decrease in its recent activity (Athlete 3). The remaining athletes exhibited varying levels of awareness, recognizing some members of the POC-AC and attending certain activities initiated by the commission. They mentioned seminars and activities organized by the POC-AC, with one athlete describing a meeting where the POC-AC was present, consisting of Olympians and top-level athletes from different sports (Athlete 1). Another athlete acknowledged hearing about the POC-AC but expressed limited knowledge of its function, appreciating a recent seminar on sports law and the committee's role in assisting athletes. The national athlete shared,

Heard of it but not fully familiar about it. Recently, they held a seminar about sports law so that we (athletes), can be aware of whatever rights we have, and I am thankful that there is such committee that is there to help the athletes. (Athlete 2)

Other athletes expressed limited familiarity with the POC-AC, mentioning uncertainties about its functions, membership, and outreach to the broader national athlete population:

I think there is a POC-AC, but I am not familiar what it is and who are the members of it. Before I just heard of the names who are aiming to be a part of it. But in terms of their function or if they have been reaching out to the whole national athlete population, it seems that there is none of that. I am not aware if they even called for a meeting before. (Athlete 4)

4.2. Overview of Athlete Representation in Combat Sports

This section describes how athlete representation is carried out by the eight combat NSAs covered in this study. The findings are organized into four themes. The first theme ‘The Athlete Representative’ focuses on the individuals who is assigned the role of athlete representative within the NSAs. This theme comprises two subthemes: ‘Athlete Commission Members’ and ‘Agents-in-Charge.’ Furthermore, it explores the qualities that are sought in an athlete representative, as perceived by both NSA officials and national athletes.

The second theme, 'The Desk,' delves into how athlete representation serves as a platform for addressing grievances and spearheading athlete-driven initiatives. It highlights the role played by athlete representatives in advocating the interests of their fellow athletes and providing a voice for their concerns.

The third theme 'The Bridge' examines the crucial role of athlete representation in bridging the gap between NSA officials and national athletes. This theme is subdivided into two subthemes, which revolve around the structure of the relationship between NSAs officials and national athletes. The first subtheme, 'Equal Footing,' reveals the dynamics of interaction and communication between national athletes and NSA official through the athlete representative, emphasizing their equal standing within the organization. The second subtheme, 'Chain of Command,' emphasizes the hierarchical dynamics in the NSA.

The final theme for this section is titled 'Athletes' Involvement'. It revolves around the significance of athletes' participation in decision-making processes and policy formation within their respective NSAs. There are two subthemes under this section: 'Consultation Only' and 'Voting Rights'. These are based on how athletes are involved by their NSAs when policies and decisions are made. As the central figures in sports, athletes

bear the brunt of the consequences resulting from decisions and policies implemented by their organizations. This theme sheds light on the present state of athletes' involvement in such matters. Table 3 provides a concise overview of the themes pertaining to how athlete representation is carried out across different combat NSAs.

Table 3

Athlete Representation as Carried out in the Combat NSAs

Themes	Subthemes
The Athlete Representative	Athletes' Commission Members Agents-in-Charge
The 'Desk'	Grievance Desk Initiative Desk
The 'Bridge'	Equal Footing Chain of Command
Athlete's Involvement	Voting Rights Consultation Only

4.2.1. The Athlete Representative

The identification and selection process of athlete representatives varies across different NSAs. The presence or absence of an athletes' commission within an NSA significantly influences the way athlete

representatives are identified within the organization. Consequently, the selection and identification of athlete representatives differ depending on the organizational structure of the NSA. NSAs with established athletes' commissions employ more formal processes to choose and designate their athlete representatives compared to those without athlete commissions. Among the eight NSAs in this study, only two have established athletes' commissions. Notably, one NSA has institutionalized its athletes' commission, incorporating it into the organization's by-laws and charter. In contrast, the other NSA has a functioning athletes' commission but is yet to formally include it in the by-laws, as amendments are still underway. As for the remaining six NSAs, they lack a dedicated athletes' commission but maintain an informal type of athlete representation.

4.2.1.1. Athletes' commission members

In this study, the two NSAs with athletes' commission present different scenarios. One NSA has an athletes' commission that is already institutionalized, meaning that it is formally included in the NSA's charter. On the other hand, the other NSA is in the process of institutionalizing its athletes' commission, but it has already developed the mission, vision, and objectives of the commission. Given that these two NSAs have established

functional athletes' commission, the selection process for its members is formal.

The two NSAs with athletes' commission differ in their approaches to identifying the members of their athletes' commission. However, it is noteworthy that these two NSAs adhere to the recommendations of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) by maintaining a consistent number of athletes' commission members. This ensures that the composition of the commission reflects gender diversity with both men and women included. By doing so, different genders are equally represented and that their respective concerns and perspectives are given proper attention and consideration.

One of the NSAs with an athletes' commission has a broader scope, encompassing not only national team members but also extending to grassroots athletes. This enables the commission to address the needs and issues of athletes at different levels of participation. Conversely, the other NSA focuses solely on national team members, as the responsibilities of attending to grassroots athletes are primarily delegated to their respective club officials. Table 4 offers a concise overview of the composition of the athletes' commission and the selection process employed by the NSAs.

Table 4*Athlete Representatives of NSAs with Athletes' Commission*

Status and Members	Selection Process	Duties
Institutionalized 5 members: at least 2 males and 2 females will be elected.	Active club members of the NSA shall have one male and one female representative who will vote to elect AC members. Eligibility Criteria: 1. Member of the national training pool. 2. Minimum of 5 years as practitioner of the sport. 3. Clean track record without any disciplinary sanction.	The AC elects 1 male and 1 female to represent the AC in the meetings and congress of the NSA. Delegates have voting rights in the NSA board.
Yet to be Institutionalized 5 members: 1 national athlete, 1 national coach, 1 NSA board member, 1 from grassroots, 1 vice- chair.	Currently, the chairperson is voted by the national athletes, while the other members are appointed.	The AC is still a consultative body but will be included as part of the board with voting rights in the future.

4.2.1.2. Agents-in-charge

In NSAs that do not have an athletes' commission, the term "agents-in-charge" is employed to encompass athlete representatives who are not specifically designated as part of an athlete commission. Typically, these "agents-in-charge" are individuals such as the coaches, team captains, senior or members of the team. While these representatives do not hold an official position in the traditional sense of athlete representation, they assume the responsibility of representing the athletes by virtue of being assigned as leaders of their respective teams. Table 5 outlines the individuals or 'agents-in-charge' who serve as athlete representatives and the selection process within NSAs that lack an athletes' commission.

Table 5

Athlete Representatives of NSAs without Athletes' Commission

Agents-in-charge	Selection process
Coach, Team Captain, Senior Members of the Team	Informal. Individuals are chosen based on their assignment as team leaders. They are not official athlete representatives, but they naturally assume the role of representing the athletes due to their leadership positions within the team.

One NSA official mentioned that as a rule, athletes should channel their training-related concerns exclusively through the coaches. This NSA places considerable trust in their coaches and prioritizes their perspective over that of the athletes. The NSA official stated, "For us, it is the coaches who should relay to us the concerns of the athletes. The players should inform the coaches first, and then the coaches will tell us about it" (NSA Official 5).

In this manner of athlete representation, the NSA assumes that the coaches are the most reliable and knowledgeable sources of information regarding the athletes' concerns. By instructing national athletes to initially communicate their concerns to the coaches, an additional responsibility is placed upon the coaches. This suggests that the NSA places a high level of confidence in the coaches' ability to accurately represent the athletes' perspectives and effectively communicate their needs to the association.

In other NSAs, team captains or senior members of the team are designated as the athlete representatives. NSA official explained that their system considers the team captains as the individuals who lead and represent their fellow teammates. These team captains serve as the primary point of contact for athletes to voice their concerns. The NSA official described the system:

So, the team captains who are leading their respective co-players, they talk to the coaches. The coaches in turn also talk to the officials in direct contact in relation to the national team. Although, we do not have a formal title like the athletes' commission – we are just flowing – they are free to air out their concerns. We are very easy to talk to. We do not have to have a formal setting. If they have a concern, they just need to go to the coach and then have a discussion. If it is a valid concern then, we must address it. (NSA Official 2)

In this kind of system, team captains assume the responsibility of being the link between the national athletes and the NSA. They play a crucial role in facilitating communication and ensuring that athletes' concerns are conveyed to the relevant authorities. While lacking a formal athletes' commission, the athletes can express their concerns through their team captains, who act as their representatives within the NSA.

This reliance on team leaders can give rise to challenges due to conflicting priorities and the different roles they fulfill. It may result in a conflict of interests and present a problematic scenario as it is not their primary responsibility to act as representatives of the national athletes. One official from an NSA with an athletes' commission explicitly highlighted this issue, emphasizing the potential pitfalls of relying on team leaders who may have competing responsibilities:

If the coach acts on everything that they (athletes) ask for, they will no longer think *'Do we have an athletes' commission?'* *We have coaches, they will address everything we say.* But we cannot rely on having good coaches. Even if we say the coach is excellent and the best, the coach is just a human being who can be so busy. There are so many athletes. It is possible that the coach forgets or that to one coach these things are important but to another coach they are not that important. So instead of the coach doing the filtering, it is better to hear directly from the person affected. (NSA Official 3)

Furthermore, the athletes themselves expressed a strong desire for the establishment of an athletes' commission, as they believe it would provide them with a safe and open platform to freely voice their concerns without hesitation or fear of negative consequences. Athlete 1 expressed concerns about potential isolation or heated responses if they were to raise their issues within the current framework in their NSA. Some athletes even admitted that they just choose to remain silent and refrain from sharing their concerns with their coaches, as they anticipated that they will be ignored. One athlete candidly shared, "We chose not to speak anymore, we already know the result. We've got used to it. We are not part of the decision-making process. They will not listen to us because the priority is training" (Athlete 5). The national athletes have grown accustomed to the belief that their input and concerns would not be taken seriously or considered in the

decision-making process. This sentiment stems from the perceived prioritization of training over addressing the athletes' needs and issues. The athletes feel excluded from the decision-making process, leading to a sense of resignation and reluctance to voice out their concerns.

4.2.1.3. Qualities of the athlete representatives

In addition to examining the structure of athlete representation within NSAs, the qualities of athlete representatives are also crucial considerations. The qualities possessed by athlete representatives can significantly impact the effectiveness of athlete representation. This study presents the ideal qualities of athlete representatives as perceived by both national athletes and NSA officials. By comparing the perspectives of national athletes and NSA officials, commonalities and differences in their viewpoints can be identified which can then be useful when looking for athlete representatives. During the interview, national athletes were asked to identify the qualities they deem important in an athlete representative. Table 6 summarizes the qualities they mentioned.

Table 6*Qualities of a Good Athlete Representative According to National Athletes*

Qualities	Supporting Statements from National Athletes
Assertive and Straightforward	Knows how to justify and has confidence to face high ranking NSA officials (Athlete 1); Has the courage to address team members' concerns assertively without being offensive (Athlete 2); Can effectively explain athletes' concerns without being dominating or unclear. “ <i>Walang paligoy-ligoy</i> [no beating around the bush]. Gentle but is clear in explaining things (Athlete 7)
Critical Thinking Skills	Balances both athletes' and management's views filters which concerns should be brought up to NSA officials and resolves issues internally among athletes (Athlete 4); Has good organizational skills and deals with matters in an orderly manner (Athlete 6); Fair and capable of discerning the correctness of a judgement (Athlete 7)
Interpersonal skills	Has excellent communication skills, interacts effectively with athletes and NSA officials, demonstrates care and support for the team and teammates (Athlete 2); Proficient communicator (Athlete 3); Empathizes with athletes (Athlete 7)
Leadership skills	Has strong leadership skills (Athlete 2); Exhibits a strong personality, natural leadership abilities, and initiative (Athlete 3)

Lifelong Learner	Diligent in learning things (Athlete3); Does not need to be super studious but is a learner and understands the situation of the athletes (Athlete 7)
Open-minded	Approaches athletes' concerns with an open mind and attentive ears (Athlete 4); Receives concerns without bias regardless of the problem (Athlete 5); Welcomes all input and ideas from others (Athlete 7)
Trustworthiness	Possesses trustworthiness through relevant experience and a consistent approach (Athlete 4); Approachable and provides a safe environment for expressing concerns without fear of judgment (Athlete 8)

From the Perspective of NSA Officials

The task of athlete representation entails immense responsibilities for individuals chosen as spokespersons for athletes. Athlete representatives are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of their fellow athletes' concerns and effectively convey those issues to the NSA. Consequently, NSA officials have distinct perspectives on the desirable qualities of athlete representatives. NSA officials have noted the natural inclination of athletes to gravitate towards the most senior members of their team. One official remarked, “We cannot really pinpoint certain qualities but the athletes themselves get to observe who is the most suited person to represent them. Whether it comes from us or the athletes, they always vote

for the seniors” (NSA Official 3). This suggests that experience and seniority play a role in the selection process.

Furthermore, another NSA official highlighted the importance of accountability and responsibility in an athlete representative. The NSA official stated, “Assuming such a position is not just for labels or display. That athlete should be responsible for his or her actions. Once given a position, you are accountable to it” (NSA Official 1). Athlete representatives are expected to display these qualities as they act as spokespeople for their fellow athletes.

The NSA officials stress the importance of athlete representatives being good role models for their fellow athletes. This includes breaking gender barriers and stereotypes, as well as advocating for athletes' well-being beyond the realm of sports. Officials value representatives who excel not only in their athletic pursuits but also academically and socially. The selection of representatives who actively participate in community projects, contribute to social causes, and have a positive image is seen as essential in promoting a holistic view of athletes. The NSA official expressed,

We wanted members who strongly believe in what they're doing as an athlete.... vocal, who has their own opinions, who knows the programs and activities that they want. Somebody who is also very involved in the sport and in the community. We wanted somebody who's a strong advocate of the athletes, who sees them

not just as athletes who churn out medals, but who sees them holistically as a person and who cares about their well-being. (NSA Official 4)

The alignment between the perspectives of national athletes and NSA officials is evident in the qualities that they look for in athlete representatives. Both parties recognize the importance of selecting individuals who can effectively represent the athletes' interests within the NSA.

4.2.2. The 'Desk'

Athlete representation in combat NSAs is carried out through the concept of the 'Desk'. Athlete representatives play a crucial role in relaying athletes' concerns to NSA officials for appropriate action. This approach ensures that athletes have a dedicated platform to voice their issues, allowing them to focus on their sporting performance during training and competitions. The matters brought to the 'Desk' can generally be classified into two categories: Grievances and Initiatives.

4.2.2.1. *Grievance desk*

A primary responsibility of athlete representatives is to function as a 'Grievance Desk', where athletes can express their complaints and have

them communicated to the NSA board members. The concerns raised by the national athletes in this study encompass a wide range of issues, all of which impact their performance. Addressing these concerns alleviates the burden on the athletes and enables them to concentrate on their sporting endeavors. Table 7 outlines some of the key concerns expressed by the national athletes:

Table 7

Concerns Raised to the Athlete Representatives

Athletes' Concerns	Supporting Statements from National Athletes
Sports performance, training related (equipment, injury, etc.)	Primary concern is the athletes' training needs, unequal access to facilities, training equipment, etc. (Athletes 1, 2, & 4); I hope they can provide us with more training camps. (Athlete 5); Sometimes, they only provide us with accommodation and equipment when there is an upcoming game (Athlete 6)
Team dynamics and relationship related (conflict with coach, teammate, selection process)	“ <i>Biro lang naman!</i> ” [It’s just a joke!], but I feel it borders on verbal abuse since my teammate feels uncomfortable. The ‘joke’ has begun to affect my friend. In a full contact sport, this becomes a problem when we play together (Athlete 1); Coaches argue in front of us. They have unresolved training issues that affect us directly. We have nowhere to turn to since we

<p>Athletes' needs outside training (allowance, dormitory, etc.)</p>	<p>cannot approach NSA officials directly unless they initiate contact, which is rare (Athlete 6); Sometimes, there is favoritism in player selections. Predefined selection criteria are not always followed (Athlete 8)</p> <p>We are not even allowed to do laundry in the dormitory. How are we supposed to wash our uniforms? (Athlete 1); The salary is low and there are no extra benefits. Some players have already quit because it is not sufficient to cover living expenses (Athlete 2); For some of us, being a national team member is our only job, so it is essential that our allowances are disbursed on time and, if possible, increased (Athlete 5)</p>
<p>Physical and mental health</p>	<p>We need more medical support considering we are in full contact sports (Athlete 1); It would be beneficial to address athletes' mental health (Athlete 7); We often train overtime, leaving us with little time for other activities. Rest is crucial. Nobody has the courage to tell the coach about it (Athlete 2).</p>

4.2.2.2. *Initiative desk*

In addition to functioning as a grievance desk, NSAs with athletes' commissions utilize athlete representation as an opportunity to establish an 'Initiative Desk'. This platform serves as a hub for athletes' initiatives and projects, aimed at empowering athletes and raising awareness on pertinent

topics such as athletes' rights, personal development, safe sports practices, etc. Athlete representatives, given their position, are well-equipped to initiate programs that benefit both the athletes and the organization. Table 8 provides an overview of some of the ongoing projects undertaken by athlete representatives within their respective NSAs and suggestions that can be conducted by the athletes' commission.

Table 8

Initiatives of the Athlete Representatives

Initiative or Projects	Supporting Statements from the Participants
Athletes Assistance Program	We have a program called 'Assistance for Athletes in Crisis Situations' which aims to help indigent members of our NSA. (Athlete 3)
Fundraiser activities	The main thing that we need in the federation is to come up with funds... the athletes' commission can help the NSA to have creative ways to come up with funds. (NSA Official 3)
Help in the Expansion of Grassroots Athletes	The athletes' commission should also cover the grassroots because that is where the elite athletes come from. (NSA Official 1) Promote the sport so more people will know about it because the players have been decreasing (Athlete 7)

Seminars on different topics such as raising awareness about Safe Sports, Athletes' Rights, Personal Development, etc.	To expand the athletes' commission and to make sure that they have more programs when it comes to professional and personal development of the athletes, to be more proactive. (NSA Official 4)
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Engaging in these initiatives provides athletes with a sense of fulfillment beyond their primary sports activities. Moreover, athlete representation fosters the development of leadership skills among national athletes, allowing them to acquire additional competencies alongside their athletic prowess.

4.2.3. The 'Bridge'

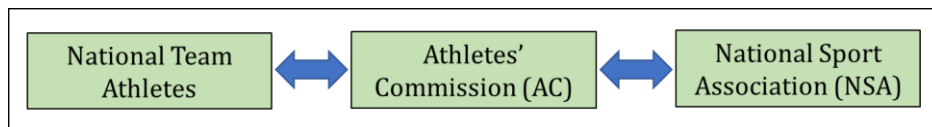
Another emergent theme regarding athlete representation in combat sports NSAs is the concept of the 'Bridge.' This pertains to the interaction and communication between national athletes and NSA officials, facilitated by athlete representation. Two distinct forms of the 'Bridge' have been identified through thematic analysis: 'Equal Footing' and 'Chain of Command'.

4.2.3.1. Equal footing

The first form, or subtheme, describes a scenario where national athletes and NSA officials are considered equals within the NSA structure. In this case, the athletes' commission serves as the bridge connecting the two parties. Figure 2 provides an illustration of equal-footing athlete representation.

Figure 2

Equal-Footing Athlete Representation



The figure above depicts an open line of communication between national athletes and NSA officials through the athletes' commission. Note that this type of athlete representation is primarily observed in NSAs with an existing athletes' commission. NSA officials acknowledge the national athletes as their equals. One athlete affiliated with such an NSA shared,

Our athlete representative is very approachable. You can go to the person directly and express your concerns. We have a group chat. What is good is that there is always feedback. Our athlete representative follows up and updates us about the concerns we raise. (Athlete 8)

In this form of athlete representation, athletes feel comfortable expressing their concerns to athletes' commission members. They have confidence that their concerns will reach the NSA officials and will be taken into consideration. Athlete representatives are highly trusted by both national athletes and NSA officials. Furthermore, there is mutual respect among all parties involved.

Transparency is a key characteristic of this athlete representation model. National athletes are well-informed about ongoing developments and know where to direct their concerns. Athletes receive relevant reports through the athletes' commission and the NSA officials consistently communicate with the national athletes through the athlete representatives. In NSAs with athletes' commission, the communication systems and reporting procedures are clearly defined, ensuring that athletes can voice their concerns to the NSA officials and be confident that they will be heard because processes and protocols are streamlined.

Effective communication is recognized as a two-way process by both national athletes and NSA officials. One national athlete expressed, "We also want to hear their side to understand the reasons why our concerns are not being addressed" (Athlete 6). Athlete representation should facilitate this two-way communication between national athletes and NSA officials.

One NSA official explained their communication process with their national athletes,

Well, they do have direct communication with the management. They message me directly if they need anything. But right now, since we're trying to streamline everything, any concerns would have to go through the proper committees or channels. Coaches go directly to me, of course, but for the athletes, they go through the athletes' commission. Majority of them would go through the athletes' commission for any concerns. And then if there are any other stakeholders involved in that concern, then we try to include them. Of course, we include them and then we have that meeting. That's our communication process right now. (NSA Official 4)

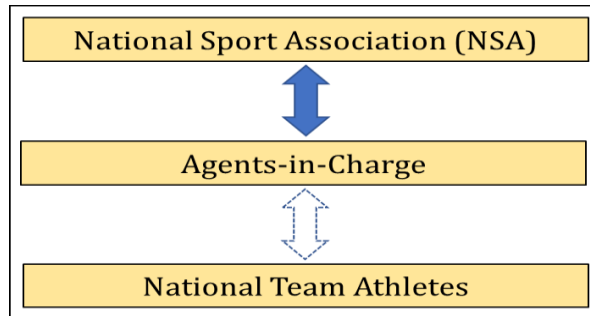
Equal-footing form of athlete representation fosters an environment of open communication and equal partnership between national athletes and NSA officials. It ensures transparency, trust, and an effective flow of information, allowing concerns to be addressed collaboratively and enhancing the overall functioning of the NSA.

4.2.3.2. Chain of command

The figure below illustrates another structure of the 'Bridge' which is the 'Chain of Command'. NSAs without athletes' commission typically follows this kind of athlete representation.

Figure 3

Chain-of-Command Athlete Representation



The ‘Chain of Command’ form of athlete representation can be visualized through a hierarchical system, resembling that of the military.

One national athlete described the mode of communication in their NSA:

It is like the chain of command in the military. Athletes are at the bottom level. If there is an issue or concern, we go to the team captain. If the team captain cannot resolve it, then we can approach the coach. However, this rarely happens. So, it is usually either the team captain or the most senior member of the team who must gather the courage to communicate the concern to the coach. When we approach the coach, we must present the concern indirectly, as if we are merely inquiring about something. We cannot be assertive in our approach. Sometimes the coach will inform us that they have already addressed the concern. Although these responses are somewhat satisfactory since we receive an answer, it might be better if we could discuss the concerns together with the NSA officials and other parties involved in the issue. (Athlete 1)

In this setup, issues are not raised directly, athletes hesitate to express their concerns, and the agents-in-charge may dismiss the issues, preventing them from reaching the NSA officials. Another national athlete shared,

Maybe they know about our concerns, but I don't think they are doing anything about it. We cannot even communicate with them directly. Very rare that they come to see us in training and when they do, they only scold us. (Athlete 6)

This situation highlights a potential disconnect where concerns may go unheard or unmentioned due to various reasons such as dismissal, lack of perceived importance, or athletes' inability to speak up. Thus, this approach may not always be effective.

Some NSA officials claim that their athletes can directly contact them if they have any concerns. This personal level of communication is facilitated by providing athletes with the officials' contact information. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this mode of communication can be rendered pointless if actions are not taken by the NSA officials to address the issues raised by the athletes.

Within the 'Chain of Command' structure, the national athletes occupy the bottom of the chain, and there is no guarantee that their concerns will reach the NSA officials, as the acting athlete representatives may not

effectively address these issues. This is not necessarily due to a lack of care on the part of the agents-in-charge but rather because it is not their primary responsibility, potentially leading to communication breakdowns.

Consequently, the concerns of NSA officials may also fail to reach the national athletes. In this approach, the NSA officials may appear less accessible, as athletes do not frequently hear from them, resulting in limited dialogue.

One NSA official emphasized the importance of athletes learning to communicate with the management stating, "It's important that athletes learn to communicate upward, not only with their peers" (NSA Official 2).

However, there may be various reasons why athletes are hesitant to speak to their officials such as fear of judgment, fear of being ostracized, or feeling unsafe.

The type of 'Bridge', whether it is the 'Equal Footing' or 'Chain of Command', plays a crucial role in determining the nature of athlete representation within the NSA. The primary difference between these two forms lies in the athlete representative. In the case of 'Equal Footing', there is an existing athletes' commission. Thus, the representing the athletes is a primary responsibility of the athlete representative. Whereas in the 'Chain

of Command', the athlete representative who is just an agent-in-charge may have multiple roles, thus representing the athletes is not their main duty.

4.2.4. Athletes' Involvement

The last theme that pertains to the practice of carrying out of athlete representation in the combat NSAs is related to the involvement of athletes in the decision-making and policy development processes within their respective NSA. All interviewed NSA officials and national athletes agree on the necessity of including athletes in these processes. The current situation in various combat sports reveals two distinct approaches adopted by NSAs regarding athlete involvement: consultation only and with voting rights.

4.2.4.1. Consultation only

NSA officials associated with NSAs lacking an athletes' commission acknowledged the importance of considering athletes' perspectives when it comes to decision-making and policy formation that affects the athletes. However, their current approach to involving athletes is limited to consultation, not granting them the right to vote in policy formulation or decision-making processes within the NSAs. Officials from these NSAs

expressed reservations about granting athletes a position on the board, citing the preference for alternative methods such as open forums or meetings to gather athlete input on matters directly affecting them. Thus, the NSAs primarily engage with athletes through consultations concerning issues that have the potential to impact their training or competition. These NSA officials perceive training, competition, and injury as the main issues affecting the athletes as these are directly related to their performance. They believe that other matters are no longer a matter of concern to the athletes, but rather fall within the responsibility of NSA officials and coaches. As one NSA official stated,

What's the responsibility of the athletes? It's to do your best to produce what is required of you. So as far as they have a concern in that aspect, I can call their attention. Most of the time, in our level, that is management. I also ask them to assess if the problem is just a team matter, then let's solve it. If it can't be resolved, then that's the only time we go up the management. It depends if it concerns the athletes.
(NSA Official 1)

Furthermore, another NSA official emphasized that athletes should only be engaged in specific subject matters based on their specific needs as athletes. The official stated:

I would say there are subject matters that they can be involved in based on their needs and we are open to that... they have an open line for as long as it's going

to benefit them—NSA and its officials will always be agreeable. That is for sure. If the NSA can address it, why not? So, whatever it is, is it matters related to training? But if the subject matter is already outside training and just extras, like let's say free housing, then that's entirely a different issue. (NSA Official 2)

Despite the lack of proper platform for athlete representation, one NSA official believes that they have open lines for consultation, “Although we don't have a formal athletes' commission, we are very flowing, they are free to air out their concern, we are easy to talk to. In our experience, they write to us” (NSA Official 2).

Even though NSA officials hesitate to involve athletes in the decision-making and policy making processes, it should still be noted that these NSA officials are open for a possibility of building an athletes' commission with athlete representatives who can vote on behalf of the athletes if clear guidelines will be established and that will benefit both the national athletes and the sport organization.

The national athletes who are part of the NSAs without athletes' commission shared that although they are being consulted by their NSA officials regarding matters that affect them, especially that affects their athletic performance and training, they expressed that these consultations or dialogue are not regular and only happens when there are upcoming

competitions. They also expressed their hope to be a part of the decision making and policy formation processes of their organization. One national athlete shared,

When we are consulted, there's a positive feeling, that we are given importance, that our opinions matter. When they don't consult us, we feel left out in the decision that matters to us. Maybe partly, we wanted to feel the sense of belongingness, it's a basic need, that we are part of the team, of the organization. So, our opinion should be heard on things that matter to us... I hope we can have a deeper discussion... or they can also do some sensing survey. (Athlete 1)

Not all national athletes are vocal during forums with NSA officials despite being encouraged to say their opinions and concerns. This kind of set-up is not taken by everyone as an opportunity to speak up since some athletes are not vocal or cannot be straightforward in a group forum. Some athletes are concerned about the possible negative repercussions on their part for being outspoken. Some athletes also expressed shyness when approaching persons of authority in the NSA. Thus, they cannot freely talk about their concerns without filtering what they have to say. Consultation done in the manner of open forums or meetings is not an assurance that their concerns will be heard objectively. One national athlete expressed,

Not everyone has the courage to voice out their concerns. I hope that the NSA officials will have a way for us to say our concerns, maybe in writing, so

we can fully express what our concerns are. I hope they can listen to us and not take it personally. We are just sharing our experiences. (Athlete 1)

Another athlete expressed that although their NSA officials are easy to approach and that they can say their concerns directly to them, the existence of an athletes' commission is still sought by them. The athlete shared:

It's still better to have an athletes' commission because it will form the camaraderie among athletes. Although the NSA is quite good now because there is an open line of communication, it is still different if there's a group for athletes and representative... If given the chance, it will be better to include the athletes in decision making and policy formation. Maybe we can provide unique ideas... input from the athletes. (Athlete 4)

All the national athletes interviewed in this study agreed that they should be part of the decision making and policy formation of their organization. However, they have different takes as to what extent of involvement should athletes have. Some are fine with just being consulted but should be done with consistency. While the others believe that athletes, at least through a representative, should be a part of the NSA board and cast their vote whenever there is something that should be voted on that concerns them.

4.2.4.2. With voting rights

NSAs with athletes' commission recognize the need for the athletes to be part of the executive board and to be able to cast in their vote in decisions that the organization is making. Thus, in these organizations, athletes' voice has weight and are counted in the votes through their athlete representative. They fully support that athletes should take part and have say in the policies and decisions that the NSAs are creating.

The NSA with an institutionalized athletes' commission has long been involving their athletes in decision-making processes. Even before the formation of their athletes' commission, national athletes have been intentionally included as part of their executive board. When the athletes' commission was finally created, they indicated in their commission's charter that they must have one male and one female athlete representatives who must attend board meetings and vote on matters concerning the athletes. The national athletes discuss the issues they have in their athletes' commission. Whatever the consensus they come up with, it will be presented by the athlete representative board members at the executive meetings, and then they can cast their vote. The athletes' commission is not only a consultative body but has a say in the matters that are put on the table during meetings. There is two-way communication between the NSA

officials and the national athletes as athlete representatives see what happens in the board and relays them to their fellow athletes. The NSA official further explained the positive effect of having athlete representatives seated on the board:

It is a big factor that they are in the meeting. You can explain to them the matters that are being discussed and they can ask further questions about these before they vote. Not everything that the athletes want is given but at least it was explained to them. They will not formulate and have assumptions on why their demands are not granted. The athlete representatives then can wear their board member hat and explain to their fellow athletes the side of the NSA board. (NSA Official 3)

The other NSA that has yet to institutionalize their athletes' commission also intends to let their athletes have a vote during executive meetings through their representative. Their NSA official expressed that the athletes is not to be limited on the areas that they can have a say,

Athletes, they are the heart of the organization. I think there's no limit for athlete representation, as long as they feel whatever policy is being put on the table will affect them. So, they will always have a voice on those matters. There's no limit there. (NSA Official 4)

The official affiliated with the NSA with institutionalized athletes' commission further shared the effects of having proper athlete representation in decision making and policy development in their

organization. He pointed out three immediate effects. First, they experienced less grievances which the official associated as the result of “giving more trust to the athletes”. Second, they were able to create good policies with athletes’ being involved in the process. The policies they made about selection process and retention rules involved the critical inputs of the athletes. They saw that the policies they made are much better with the contributions from people who experience these things firsthand. The NSA official expressed: “The policies that we have created are very relevant, applicable, and not only applicable to a small population but generally to the general population [can also be adopted by others]” (NSA Official 3). Lastly, the national athletes take responsibility in helping the organization. The NSA official explained that since the athletes were given more trust, they take responsibility and take action as part of the board. They take initiatives to also help the organization.

Regardless of whether they are affiliated with an NSA with or without an athletes’ commission, the national athletes think that it is empowering for them if they will be involved in the decision making and policy formation processes of their NSA. The national athletes understand that to be involved in these processes means to take responsibility and accountability. An athlete from an NSA without athletes’ commission said:

If we will be given the opportunity to be a part of the NSA board, I feel that we will also have a sense of accountability. It's like because they listened to us, we also need to be accountable of our actions.
(Athlete 1)

One national athlete affiliated with the NSA with an athletes' commission said that compared to before when they did not have it, the communication now between the national athletes and the NSA officials is much better. The athletes are always updated of what is happening in the NSA. The said athlete shared:

Involving us (the athletes) in governing the NSA makes the whole environment open and comfortable before the stakeholders. Because the NSA is listening to the athletes, they can think of more effective programs that they can implement for us. Moreover, they will know better about the needs of the athletes.
(Athlete 3)

This perspective is also echoed by the two NSA officials with athletes' commission. One of them expressed,

The policies of the NSA should revolve around the two mandates that we have: to grow the sport and to produce elite athletes. And it is only the athletes themselves who knows what we are not doing, what needs to be done for the NSA to fulfill our mandate and so that they can be excellent athletes. (NSA Official 4)

The NSA that has yet to institutionalize their athletes' commission said that solidifying their athletes' commission will make their national athletes "more at ease on how to go about policy changes, policy making, and how to lobby for it" (NSA Official 4). They will give the national athletes through the athletes' commission the power to vote. Somehow, there are resistances to the changes and shift of power to the athletes, but the NSA official said that they are continuing their efforts to educate the coaches, athletes, and fellow officials about why it is important for their organization to become athlete-centered and why they are giving the athletes this opportunity to truly represent themselves in the NSA board.

Engagement of athletes in the decision-making and policymaking of the NSA executive board varies from NSA to NSA. Some NSAs are deliberate in involving their athletes in decision making and policymaking. They give them a seat in the board, allow them to cast a vote in the decisions they make, and provide them opportunities to air their opinions in policies that the NSA is working on. On the other hand, there are NSAs that will just consult the national athletes and the involvement ends there. Nevertheless, both NSA officials and national athletes believe that there should be athlete representation in the NSA.

4.3. Promotion and Implementation of Athlete Representation

4.3.1. Organizational Changes

In the case of the combat NSAs in the Philippines, athlete representation is not pervasive. Only two out of eight combat NSAs in this study have athletes' commission. The other six combat NSAs have maintained the status quo where national athletes must focus on training and if they have any concerns, they must course it through their team captain or coaches, hoping that these agents-in-charge acting as 'representatives' can bring the issue to the NSA officials. Although the NSA officials are open to discussions and consultations, these are admittedly not regularly done. Thus, NSA officials and national athletes believe that necessary changes in the organization should be done to promote and implement athlete representation. Some of these changes include the following points:

1. Change of mindset of NSA members

NSA officials recognize that to improve the current situation of athlete representation in their organization, changes should be initiated by the management. Be it related to having consistent consultations with the national athletes or one that requires a systemic change, it should start from the officials of the organization. One NSA official said, "it should really

come from the management, that we (officials) must encourage this growth on everybody” (NSA Official 4).

For NSAs with athletes’ commission, they keep and practice their core purpose as an organization which is to serve and put the athletes first in everything. When they involve their national athletes and put up the athletes’ commission, they must remind everyone about the reason for the NSAs existence. These NSA officials expressed:

We won’t be an organization if without the athletes. I had to make other officials and the coaches understand that they we are not the boss, the coaches are not the boss, the management is not the boss either. It’s the athletes that must be heard; they really are the heart of the organization. (NSA Official 4)

I’m sure that I share this with the other members of the board; definitely, without athletes there is no purpose for the NSA to exist. (NSA Official 3)

2. Amendment of the NSA constitution and by-laws

Although NSAs are there to serve the national athletes and to grow the sports, to establish this, changes in the constitution and charter should be made to include the formation of athletes’ commission. One NSA official expressed:

Our constitution and by-laws are too general. Although, we are doing well as an organization, I told our trustees and board members that we have to amend our constitutional by-laws. We must amend to

enhance it, to include new commissions. Our IF has newly amended their statutes... I saw their new structural organization; I think we must adapt that... If it's (athletes' commission) already in the by-laws, it's like a rule that will be followed. There won't be personal issues anymore. (NSA Official 1)

3. Being updated and open to new perspectives

In relation to following suit to the changes being made in the international federations to make accommodations for athlete representation, one NSA official expressed that it is important for NSAs to be updated about recommendations from the IOC and IFs when it comes to sport governance. The POC already followed the IOC by establishing the POC-AC, thus the NSAs are also encouraged to do so. The NSA official also shared about having members who can bring improvements to the organization despite not a practitioner of the sport but has a credible background to help govern the NSA. The NSA official said,

I think it is advantageous for our organization that I am not from the sport. That there are members that are not from it because what I saw, there is the tendency to become too myopic and to get stuck in their old ways. They get used to what they have been in the past or experienced. But that's not the way to go especially now that it is more globalized. So, it's better for the NSA if they have people from outside to gain more perspective. It's important for the growth of the NSA and the athletes. (NSA Official 4)

4. Continuous learning through capacity building and various training

Change in the mindset toward the capabilities of the national athletes to be involved in decision-making and policy formation processes by giving them leadership roles in the board or in the athletes' commission is also seen to be a vital step to promote athlete representation. Both national athletes and NSA officials agree that to make this shift happen, capacity building and training of the different stakeholders of the NSA including the board members, national coaches, and national athletes should be provided. Training about safeguarding, ethics, athlete-centeredness, gender equity, leadership, etc. should be taken to better equip the leaders and potential leaders, including the national athletes, to handle the duties and responsibilities to them and to attend matters that is related to athlete voice, rights, and representation. Orientations should also be conducted about the charter of the athletes' commission if there is already an existing one.

5. Develop an athlete-centered culture

Creating a culture that is more athlete-centered and is open for growth is also another important change that must be realized by the sports organizations. One NSA official that is a member of an NSA with athletes' commission shared, "We've created a culture where everybody is

encouraged to really grow and thrive. We must make everybody understand that everybody has a strength and can bring something to the table, our athletes included” (NSA Official 4). Moreover, the shift of mindset can be done in small but constant way of reminding the stakeholders of the organization that athletes should always come first. The NSA official added,

Whenever we have a congress or event, we always include discussion about putting the athletes first. We see to it that the programs we do are for the athletes. Eventually, our stakeholders observe the changes that we are shifting the direction toward the athletes’ well-being. (NSA Official 4)

6. Include athlete representation in policies and procedures

Creating policies that incorporate and promote athlete representation are also necessary changes that can be taken by the NSAs. These includes the strategic plans on how to improve athlete representation such as having regular consultations with the national athletes, creating a protocol on how to report athletes’ concerns, and establishing an athletes’ commission.

4.3.2. Establishment of an Athletes’ Commission

Both national athletes and NSA officials believe that the voice of the athletes is important. Thus, a proper venue for a safe expression for the

athletes' voices and opinions should be established. All national athletes in this study agreed that there is a need for an athletes' commission.

National athletes who belong to NSAs without athletes' commission associated the lack of athletes' commission due to little information about athlete representation and what an athlete commission is. Some of the national athletes shared:

I think our NSA is not yet there to think about having an athletes' commission. But if there is someone who will nudge them to create it and saw that other NSAs have it, then I think they will also do it. So far, our NSA is focused on promoting the sports. (Athlete 2)

Maybe our NSA is not aware of it. Or probably, there is but is not active. (Athlete 4)

I think the idea of an athletes' commission has not been introduced yet. (Athlete 7)

A unique insight from one national athlete about athlete representation is to have an athletes' union that is not only based in the organization but one that is open to all athletes. The national athletes shared:

Some of us are thinking, let's just establish a union of athletes. If there is an athletes' union whose members are from different NSAs and can help one another, then we can also help each other to voice out our concerns as athletes. The union will not only be about the national athletes but will also include athletes in the grassroots level. (Athlete 2)

Although some of the athletes are also not fully aware of what an athletes' commission is, what is clear is that they want their voices to be heard and they see that this could be done through having an athletes' commission or some form of a group where they can freely express their opinions and concerns. The athletes wanted to have a safe environment where they can discuss about their rights and needs as athletes. The athletes' commission can serve as platform where they can request and suggest things to the NSA officials. The following are the suggestions that the national athletes have in establishing an athletes' commission:

1. *Purpose* – The athletes' commission should first and foremost advocate for the national athletes and athlete representation. The athletes' commission should be an entity that will genuinely represent the athletes' voice in the NSA.
2. *Membership* – Active national athletes should be members of the athletes' commission. Some of the interviewees considered also having outside consultants or former national athletes to be also part of it to provide insights based on their past experiences as well. But there should always be an active national athlete member of the athletes' commission. There should be both male and female athlete representatives that will be chosen by the national athletes to become

the commission heads and eventually board members if the NSA decides to let the athletes be part of the executive board.

3. *Board membership* – The national athletes believe that they should have a seat on NSA the board and have voting rights through the athletes’ representatives from the athletes’ commission.
4. *Regular consultation and dialogue* – This should be conducted by the athletes’ commission with the national athletes, so they check with their fellow athletes for any concerns and update them with what is happening in the federation. The athletes’ commission should make sure that both the NSA executive board and the national athletes are well-informed of each other’s side.
5. *Safeguarding* – The athletes’ commission should foster a safe environment for the national athletes especially in issues that are sensitive that might require anonymity and investigation.
6. *Establish protocol for complaints and suggestions* – The athletes’ commission should come up with protocols on how to go about processes such as filing complaints or giving suggestions.
7. *Initiatives or projects* – The athletes’ commission should come up with projects for the development of national athletes. Assistance

programs for national athletes should also be included in their projects.

8. *Scope* – Some national athletes also suggested that the athletes’ commission should also cater to athletes in the grassroots level to help grow the sports. This, however, will depend on the purpose and vision of the athletes’ commission that will be formed.

The NSA officials also have their ideas about the role and functions of the athletes’ commission:

1. The athletes’ commission should help the national athletes to become proactive members of the organization. Training them to become more participative in programs and activities created for the athletes.
2. Through the athletes’ commission, processes will be centralized and can help filter out concerns that can be easily resolved within the athletes’ commission level and issues that needs to be brought to the executive board. This empowers the athletes as they can already make some decisions at the athletes’ commission level.

3. Athletes' commission will be cross functional as they will need to deal with various committees about various aspects such as safe sports, arbitration, ethics, anti-doping, etc.
4. The athletes' commission should help establish good communication between the NSA officials and national athletes.

With clear guidelines, the setting up of an athletes' commission in the NSA is perceived by both national athletes and NSA officials to be beneficial for athlete representation and the improvement of the organization. The athletes' commission will help improve communication between national athletes and sports administrators. Furthermore, with the establishment of athletes' commission in the NSA, there is a unit within the organization that the national athletes can go to regarding their concerns with the assurance that they are heard.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research examined the case of athlete representation in eight combat National Sports Associations in the Philippines that includes Judo, Jujitsu, Kurash, Muay Thai, Sambo, Taekwondo, Wrestling, and Wushu. Reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) was used for this study.

The researcher reviewed official documents and conducted in-depth interviews with five NSA officials and eight national athletes using semi-structured interview questionnaire to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the meaning of athlete representation in the context of the different combat NSAs) in the Philippines? 2) How is athlete representation carried out in the different combat NSAs in the Philippines? 3) How athlete representation can be promoted and implemented in the combat NSAs in the Philippines according to the point of view of the athletes and NSA officials?

In this chapter, the findings are discussed into three sections that answer each of the three research questions. Practical implication of this study and limitations are also presented Direction for future research and conclusions are also provided in this chapter.

5.1. Discussion

5.1.1. *Atleta ka, hindi atleta lang!* [You're an athlete, not just an athlete]

Throughout the history of sport, athletes have evolved from just following the rules and playing the game to becoming influential figures who shape it. Athlete representation has gained significant importance in recent years as athletes voice out their concerns on safe sports, doping, abuses, mental health, corruption in sports, compensation, and more (Chappelet, 2020; Wassong et al., 2021). The case of athlete representation in the combat NSAs in the Philippines has also gained some traction as both national athletes and NSA officials recognize its importance.

In this study, the meaning of athlete representation is associated with the identity as an athlete. '*Atleta ka! Hindi atleta lang*' [You are an athlete! Not just an athlete] is an assertion of the abilities and capacities of athletes to use their voice (athletes' voice) and fight for their rights (athletes' rights). This mindset about athlete representation is also shared by Olympians who became athlete representatives in Athletes CAN, OATH, and IOC (Koss, 2011). Moreover, for the combat national athletes and NSA officials, athlete representation involves ensuring that the athletes' voices are heard, and their concerns are addressed, either through a representative or by directly communicating with the athletes. This notion of athlete representation is the

same with the study of Kill and Schull (2020) on athlete representation in the context of intercollegiate sport governance.

In this study, the combat NSAs can be described as either open or traditional. An open NSA gives decision-making power to athletes, while a traditional one maintains a hierarchical structure where athletes are not engaged in decision-making. Kill and Schull (2020) pointed out in their research that existing form of sport governance influences athlete representation. Building on this, the current study observed that the interpretation of athlete representation differs depending on whether an athletes' commission exists or not. Specifically, within NSAs that have established athletes' commissions, categorized as "open," the concept of athlete representation holds a broader scope compared to traditional NSAs that lack such commissions.

Furthermore, athletes who have prior understanding of athlete representation and related concepts can better articulate their understanding of what athlete representation entails. However, the lack of information about athlete representation does not necessarily mean a lack of understanding regarding its meaning. Therefore, increased awareness about athlete representation, athletes' voice, and athletes' rights might also have a contribution in the conceptualization of athlete representation.

Additionally, athlete representation extends beyond addressing grievances. It also encompasses active involvement of athletes in decision-making and policy development (Thibault et al., 2010). This is evident in NSAs with athletes' commissions, where athlete representation goes beyond merely raising complaints. It involves listening to the national athletes' ideas for potential initiatives and projects. National athletes are seen as individuals capable of making significant impact on others, through sports (Koss, 2011; Schwab, 2018a). They become more empowered when they are given the opportunity to express themselves (Naidoo & Grevemberg, 2021). Athlete representation in the case of NSAs with athletes' commission actively drives change and includes the national athletes in decision-making processes.

On the other hand, certain national athletes and NSA officials who are affiliated with NSAs lacking athletes' commissions and who might have limited knowledge about athlete representation and associated concepts tend to perceive athlete representation primarily to express their opinions and concerns. They may not strongly associate athlete representation with athletes actively participating in organizational decision-making processes. In situations like these, the way national athletes and NSA officials view athletes' role in terms of representation is captured by the idea of '*atleta ka*

lang' [you are just an athlete], conveying the belief that athletes should restrict themselves to training, and their involvement in the organization's decision-making is either minimal or nonexistent. Thus, athlete representation becomes more limited when there is no platform for athletes to air out their concern.

On a related matter, this study also explored the participants' familiarity with the POC AC as it is the earliest manifestation of athlete representation in the national level in Philippine sports (Cadayona, 2005; Henson, 2020). The varied statements from the participants revealed that those who belong to NSAs with athletes' commission are more informed about the projects of the POC AC. On the other hand, those who belong to NSAs without athletes' commission are unfamiliar with the functions and projects of the POC AC. The range of responses from NSA officials and national athletes indicates a lack of consistent understanding and awareness regarding the POC AC. Despite POC-AC's established status as a representative body for national athletes, the limited familiarity of the participants hints at a lack of widespread awareness about the existence of the commission. It was expected that the POC-AC's existence would lead to the dissemination of information regarding athlete representation among

national athletes and NSA officials, but this study's findings suggest otherwise.

Despite the POC AC being established nearly two decades ago, there is still a limited awareness about the concept of athlete representation. This situation could be attributed to various factors. One factor could be the dynamics between sport governing bodies in the Philippines (Blanco, 2016; Go, 2015) which might have an influence on the establishment of athletes' commission within the combat NSAs. The NSAs are autonomous organizations, and the establishment of the athletes' commission is their discretion. The IOC and POC can only make recommendations to the NSAs to form an athletes' commission but lack the authority to enforce their creation or penalize their absence. Similarly, the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) lacks the power to impose to the NSAs due to the private nature of these organizations, which are not under government control.

Another potential explanation is that the initial establishment of the POC AC might have been driven mainly by the need for compliance and could have served a symbolic function during that period (Houlihan, 2004). The commitment, goals, and capabilities of the POC AC members could also impact its effectiveness in advocating for athlete representation.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that in present context, considering the increasing influence of athletes globally (Chappelet, 2020), the POC AC is starting again to become active in their campaigns and advocacies for the national athletes. With this resurgence of the POC AC, it is hoped that the push for athlete representation will be gain more momentum and will be more widespread, potentially prompting more NSAs to establish athletes' commissions.

5.1.2. Existing Practices of Athlete Representation

The manner that athletes are represented in the combat NSAs vary across different NSAs. This research has revealed that national athletes are represented within their respective NSAs through either a formal athletes' commission or an informally designated agent-in-charge. The subsequent sections discuss the distinctions between combat NSAs with existing athletes' commission and those without, providing insights on these practices within combat NSAs in the Philippines.

5.1.2.1. Combat NSAs with athletes' commission

Athlete representation through the athletes' commission is not prevalent as there are only two out of eight combats NSAs having such

commission. In NSAs with athletes' commission, certain members of it take on the role of representing the national athletes on the NSA executive board. These two NSAs that have implemented athletes' commissions have been proactive in integrating the perspectives and opinions of athletes into their decision-making and policy development. This action fosters democratic sport governance and promotes good governance (Ciomaga et al., 2017; Donnelly, 2015).

In NSAs where athletes' commission are in place, 'desk' role of athlete representation attends to both grievances and initiatives. Notably, the centralized processes within NSAs with athletes' commission has led to fewer grievances escalated to the executive board. This reduction is attributed to the athletes' commissions' ability to handle various issues and devise solutions at their level. This operational approach follows the principles of deliberative democracy governance system (Kihl et al., 2007; Kihl & Schull, 2020; Thibault et al., 2010). At the athletes' commission level, national athletes could engage in thoughtful discussions about their concerns as an official commission. Should issues prove unresolvable at this level, they are then elevated to the executive board for consideration. Furthermore, athletes' commission is also bestowed with the authority to

lead initiatives that originate from athletes which can be beneficial to them and the whole organization.

The athlete representative holds the responsibility to cast votes on behalf of the national athletes during executive board meetings of the NSA. Communication between the national athletes and NSA officials is through the athletes' commission and the designated athlete representatives. This ensures that the national athletes are in equal footing with the NSA board when it comes to their involvement in the decision-making processes of the organization. The presence of a well-structured athletes' commission makes the interaction between national athletes and NSA officials better by having both sides well informed.

In contrast to Houlihan's (2004) criticism that often characterizes athletes' commissions as mere symbols, this study reveals a different view. Athletes' commissions have actually empowered athletes within their respective NSAs by entrusting them with significant roles. These roles include active involvement in policy drafting and realigning the organization's structure to become more athlete centered. These findings align with other studies where sport various sports governing bodies have afforded athletes a more influential role in decision-making processes

(Chappelet, 2020; Ciomaga et al. (2017); Grigaliūnaitė & Eimontas, 2018; Seltmann (2021b).

True athlete representation can be realized when sports organizations are willing to integrate athletes into leadership roles in the executive board. Notably, in this study, combat NSAs that have athletes' commissions tend to instill greater confidence in their athletes. The athletes' commission serves as a conduit to strengthen the athlete's identity as an empowered individual – 'atleta ka!' – having opinions, capabilities, and awareness of their rights. Athletes are empowered through the inclusion of athletes' voices, giving them the right to vote on decision-making and policy development processes, and having them as board members of the NSAs.

As articulate by Katwala (2020) and Donnelly (2015), involving national athletes in decision-making can lead to significant changes in sports organizations. Because of their vast experience, athletes are clearly the top experts in their field, making their role in governance quite logical. Through this involvement, athlete representation becomes tangible as athletes now have the capacity to affect how policies will be crafted. However, this will only be possible if the NSA officials see and believe in the importance of the athletes as members of the board.

The existence of an athletes' commission is possible when the organization's leadership recognizes its significance and understands the value of involving athletes in decision-making. Athlete-centeredness in sport organizations can happen when there is pressure from the external and internal environment (Thibault & Babiak, 2005). This could explain the creation of athletes' commission in the two combat NSAs. Despite not being compelled to establish such commissions, these NSAs were receptive to recommendations from other governing bodies in the sports realm.

One of these NSAs, right from its inception, have included athlete representatives in their executive board. This initiative was motivated by the recommendation of their international federation, indicating an external influence and an initial effort to raise awareness about the importance of athletes' commission. The other NSA with an athletes' commission is undergoing restructuring and implementing necessary changes to improve governance of their organization. By seeking fresh perspectives from outside sources, adhering to IOC's guidelines, and staying updated with contemporary best practices in good governance in sport, these NSAs aspire to cultivate an athlete-centered ethos, fostering a culture that consistently places the well-being and interests of athletes as the top priority.

5.1.2.2. Combat NSAs with agents-in-charge

The other six combat NSAs in this study have informally designated ‘agents-in-charge’ as athlete representatives of national athletes. These agents could be the team captain, senior members of the team, or the coach. While they assume the role of informal athlete representatives due to their leadership positions within the team, they are not officially designated as representatives for the athletes. However, it is important to acknowledge a caveat and recognize the potential risks associated with this arrangement.

In NSAs lacking an athletes' commission, the responsibility of athlete representation becomes the burden of the agents-in-charge. National athletes turn to them to voice their concerns, albeit sometimes with a bit of hesitation. This ‘type’ of athlete representation lacks consistency and assurance, as the agents-in-charge are not primarily tasked with representing athletes to the NSA board. Furthermore, the filtering of information – determining what should be escalated to the board and what can be addressed at their level – can also present issues. This is because these individuals might be preoccupied with different matters or possess an alternative perspective on the problem. This can result in the dismissal of certain issues that they perceive as less significant or irrelevant.

This form of athlete representation follows a hierarchical structure, where national athletes need to approach the agent-in-charge to voice their concerns. The communication pathway is not always assured and the level of involvement in decision-making is often limited or even non-existent. Despite the existence of an option to communicate directly with the NSA officials, there is no guarantee that national athletes will avail of it. In NSAs without athletes' commission there exists a risk of important concerns raised by national athletes being left unattended, essentially leaving the athletes unheard and unseen.

This approach to athlete representation within NSAs without athletes' commission draws parallel to Begović's (2021) study on the silent voices of athletes in Montenegro. Despite being 'democratic' this set-up can still lead to conflicts between those who hold positions of authority – the NSA officials – and those excluded from such positions – the national athletes (Begović's, 2021).

Ciomaga et al (2017) pointed out that national sports organizations, often prioritize maximizing international sport performance. Thus, the essential need to allow athletes to have more power to defend their own concerns become less prominent compared to the pursuit of medals. This is the case in combat NSAs without athletes' commissions where athletes tend

to be diminished as '*atleta lang*' [just an athlete] and are expected to put their entire focus on training and churn out medals rather than be involved in management and governance matters of the NSA.

Furthermore, the hesitation to involve athletes in decision-making and policy formation processes can be attributed to several factors. These include a lack of information regarding athlete representation, a certain degree of mistrust towards athletes that hinders the sharing of power, and a deep-rooted familiarity with the existing system of the NSA that makes the prospect of change seem almost impossible. Additionally, there is the notion that providing athletes with a platform to voice their opinions and concerns may lead to an influx of endless complaints. The most tangible form of athlete representation within these NSAs is through consultations, which are predominantly organized or determined by NSA officials based on their perceived necessity and only when matters directly pertain to the athletes.

NSA officials might not always stay updated on the recent recommendations from bodies like the IOC, POC and IFs. Thus, they may not be aware of the increasing emphasis on athlete representation. Lack of information about athlete representation has been recognized by both NSA officials and national athletes, which could explain the absence of an athletes' commission. Moreover, there might be other pressing issues within

the organization that must be resolved first, leading to a lack of attention towards athlete representation.

It should be noted that the absence of an athletes' commission does not imply that these combat NSAs are indifferent to the welfare and well-being of their national athletes as they can have other alternative methods to address their concerns. However, the national athletes expressed a strong preference for athlete representation through an athletes' commission. They perceive such a commission as a secure and open platform to voice their concerns. Additionally, an athletes' commission is seen as an assurance that their concerns will be attentively heard and properly addressed.

Lastly, the athletes may not be vocal enough to complain, demand for better athlete representation, or question authority because of what Begović (2021) identifies as institutional pressure caused by the hierarchical and vertical structure of the organization. This pressure could result to an athlete's removal from the team. To add to this point, the national athletes might not be fully aware that they have the right to proper representation, thus contributing to a power imbalance between NSA officials and national athletes. Even if they are aware of their rights, it does not necessarily guarantee their ability to exercise them (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2022).

5.1.3. Perspectives on the Promotion and Implementation of Athlete Representation

Both combat NSA officials and national athletes share common ideals for athlete representation, with their perspectives largely aligning than conflicting. Given this, it is advisable for them to jointly establish clear criteria for selecting athlete representatives. Defining qualities valued and deemed significant by both parties serves as a solid basis for identifying representatives capable of adeptly advocating for athletes' concerns while working collaboratively with the NSA. Furthermore, the disparities in perspectives between NSA officials and national athletes pinpoint potential areas of disagreement as well as areas for improvement in athlete representation. Recognizing the areas where both parties align and differ allows for a better understanding of the dynamics in play and can inform strategies to bridge any gaps in perception or expectations. By juxtaposing the perspectives of athletes and officials regarding the attributes of athlete representatives, the selection process is enriched. This contributes to the overall improvement of athlete representation within the combat NSAs. It ensures that the chosen representatives possess the requisite qualities to effectively advocate for the athletes and foster a positive and productive relationship between the athletes and the NSA.

These suggestions put forth by combat NSA officials and national athletes to enhance athlete representation underscore the importance of establishing a formal athletes' commission. Such a commission would serve as a dedicated platform where athletes can confidently express their concerns and contribute to the decision-making processes that directly impact them. By establishing an athletes' commission, the apprehensions of athletes about being ignored or isolated would be prevented. This would foster a more inclusive and transparent environment for addressing the athletes' needs and ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Regardless of the form of athlete representation, the NSAs should have a mechanism for athletes to voice out their concerns because it is their right (Koss, 2011). Without a well-defined protocol for communication and obtaining feedback following the reporting of an issue, the communication line between athletes and NSA officials could break down. This is where proper athlete representation becomes crucial. Establishing proper athlete representation, preferably through an athletes' commission, would not only be advantageous for addressing athletes' concerns but also for ensuring their overall well-being (Willson et al., 2022).

Promoting and implementing athlete representation within combat NSAs requires a multi-faceted approach to organizational change. One

approach that can be employed is the top-down strategy for organizational change (Ryan et al., 2008). Since organizations are complex and operations are not always uniform and linear, incorporating an additional strategy for organizational change should be taken. Such strategy that complements the top-down approach is capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016) aimed at all stakeholders involved. By investing in capacity building, NSAs can empower individuals across the organization with the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to effectively engage in athlete representation.

Participatory and deliberative engagement (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Kihl & Schull, 2020) of athletes can also be done to promote athlete representation. This entails actively involving athletes in consultations, decision-making processes, and policy formulation to ensure that their voices are heard, and their perspectives considered. Moreover, changes in the NSAs can be done by doing a review and amendment of the policies through the perspective of deliberative democracy approach (Kihl et al., 2007; Thibault et al., 2010).

These suggestions for promoting and implementing athlete representation would only materialize when there is a willingness among current NSA officials to share power with the national athletes. This collaborative approach acknowledges athletes as integral stakeholders and

enables them to play an active role in shaping the direction of the organization. Such a shift in power dynamics contributes to a more balanced and inclusive environment, ultimately enhancing athlete representation and organizational effectiveness.

5.2. Practical Implications

For athletes to be properly represented within their NSA, it is important that their voices and opinions are integrated in the decision-making processes of the organization. The establishment of an athletes' commission has been demonstrated by organizations that have it to be an effective strategy to engage athletes and provide them with a platform where their opinions and concerns can be heard and considered by the NSA officials. With the athletes' commission, national athletes and NSA officials can have a direct communication.

While some combat NSAs do not have an athletes' commission, it does not necessarily mean that channels for athlete feedback and concerns are non-existent. However, the current system of representation that is through the agent-in-charge is perceived by the national athletes as inadequate representation. The national athletes find dialogues and consultations with NSAs inconsistent, leaving them uncertain about the

considerations of their inputs. Consequently, NSAs without athletes' commission could benefit from observing and adopting the practices of NSAs with athletes' commission in terms of athlete representation.

At present, while some NSA officials may think and believe their communication methods with their athletes are effective, national athletes themselves still hope for a separate committee or commission dedicated to athletes. To address this disparity, honest dialogues between the NSA officials and national are essential to determine the best path forward for meaningful athlete representation. However, this dialogue may face challenges if the NSA officials have a blind spot and if athletes lack the confidence to demand change.

The POC and POC AC have a pivotal role in driving change in the athlete representation in the country. They should take proactive measures to advocate for better athlete representation within NSAs. These actions could involve organizing seminars on athlete representation, assessing the state of representation, and facilitating the sharing of best practices among NSAs with established athletes' commission.

Incorporating athlete representation through an athletes' commission requires structural adjustments in the sport organization. Constitutional amendments should be pursued to formally outline and include athlete

representation and its structure within the NSA framework. As these changes are being rolled out, consistent and continuous education for all NSA stakeholders should be provided. Educational initiatives can cover topics on representation, human rights in sports setting, safe sport, safeguarding, sport governance, and other related topics. Capacity building and leadership training are also crucial.

Establishing an athletes' commission is a considerable step forward for the NSAs. During its implementation, athlete consultations are imperative, as the initiative directly concerns them. Empowering athletes with decision-making power, such as including athlete representatives in the executive board of the NSAs, is key to ensuring the legitimacy of representation.

Lastly, since organizational changes, putting up athletes' commission, constitutional amendments, and educational efforts take time, an interim solution like an ad hoc athletes' committee can be formed. This ad hoc athletes' committee can initiate discussions, consultations, and meetings with the athletes and other stakeholders, serving as the beginning for more and broader changes. NSA leaders may refer to the suggestions of NSA officials and national athletes about promoting and implementation of athlete representation in this study as a guide for point of discussions.

5.3. Limitation of the Study

This study is not without limits, thus it is important to examine the limitations and boundaries identified during the process to understand the interpretation. This research explored on the meaning athlete representation in eight Philippine combat NSAs namely Jiu-jitsu, Judo, Kurash, Muay Thai, Sambo, Taekwondo, Wrestling, and Wushu. The national team athletes and NSA officials who agreed to be a part of this research are all active members of their respective NSAs. There is no age range nor gender exclusivity for the participants. While broad assumptions about people who fit this profile can be made, it may differ for other people. Moreover, there are other combat NSAs of the Philippines that were not part of this study. Out of the 14 combat NSAs in the country, only eight were covered by the researcher. Further study including the other six combat NSAs can address this limitation.

The number of participants seemed to provide adequate information about the state of athlete representation in various NSAs. However, more insight might have been provided if the researcher was able to interview one NSA official and one national athlete per combat sport. However, due to the limitation of the researcher being abroad and challenges in getting a common time with potential participants, the equal number of national

athletes and NSA officials was not fulfilled. Nevertheless, the information gathered is deemed sufficient to get a picture of the athlete representation in the eight combat NSAs.

Additionally, the researcher was only able to gather few official documents from the participants and from other reliable sources, Most of the NSAs do not post their documents publicly and some of them do not have a functioning website. Only few NSAs sent official documents via email. Future studies may want to look deeper on the NSAs document to get a better perspective about the organization's structure.

Despite the limitations, this study offers valuable insights regarding athlete representation, athletes' involvement in decision-making and policy formation, and athletes' voice, especially in the context of combat sports in a developing country and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in these topics.

5.4. Suggestion for Future Studies

Considering the limitations of the study, the following are opportunities for future studies. To gain a better understanding about athlete representation, exploring on the impacts of the athletes' commission on the NSAs that have establish them is suggested. This can be a case study that

can contribute to the discussion of athlete representation in various sport governing bodies.

The second potential research direction is to investigate on athlete representation in other sport NSAs in a developing country. Covering more NSAs can provide more information about how different NSAs deal with the concerns of their athletes. By pursuing this study, differences, similarities, and best practices can be identified, thus can contribute to the literature of good governance in sport. Moreover, comparisons between various categories of sports can be done which may provide insights on the nuances of sport culture that may influence how athletes are represented and engaged in their respective organizations. Such research can also contribute to the literature of sport organization management.

It is also interesting to explore the factors influencing athlete representation in NSAs in the developing countries as most studies that have been conducted in the past were about developed countries. This will provide a more contextualized approach to studying athlete representation and finding solutions to improve it.

Lastly, the researcher suggests conducting studies on athletes' rights and its relationship with athlete representation. Oftentimes, both national athletes and NSA officials are not aware of the declarations of human rights.

Thus, resulting to the neglect of these rights. This will contribute to discussion of human rights and how athlete representation can be used to safeguard the athletes and protect them from human rights violations.

5.5. Conclusion

Athlete representation in sports organizations around the world has expanded significantly. More sport entities are now acknowledging the importance of incorporating athletes' voice in decision-making processes and policy development in their organizations. This emphasis on athlete representation is imperative not only to address the athletes' needs and concerns but also to safeguard their rights and well-being. Consequently, it is essential to explore the meaning of athlete representation for both athletes and sports administrators. Equally, it is also critical to understand how sport organizations promote and implement athlete representation to ensure that athletes are genuinely represented in their organizations and to identify areas for improvement where necessary.

Examining the context of combat NSAs in the Philippines revealed areas for improving athlete representation within the organization's decision-making processes. In this endeavor, it is advisable for these combat NSAs to look at others sport organizations' practices of athlete

representation and adopt them into their own systems. The establishment of athletes' commission is the most viable strategy to provide a platform for athlete representation. Through the athletes' commission, athletes are empowered, and athlete representation becomes an integral part of the organization's structure. Setting up an athletes' commission requires collaborative efforts which should involve the NSA officials, national athletes, and possibly other stakeholders within the organization.

For sports and sports organizations to thrive and flourish continuously, a departure from the status quo is imperative, in addition to proactive changes. Power should be shared among the stakeholders of the organization, most especially to the athletes. As the main actors in the realm of sports, athletes possess not only the capacity to influence others through their athleticism but also to actively shape the course of sports through participation in decision-making within their organizations. By recognizing athletes as "*atleta ka, hindi atleta lang*" [you're an athlete, not just an athlete], organizations can harness their potential to inspire and trigger positive transformations within the realm of sports and through the amplification of their voices and contributions.

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Appendix A.

Interview Consent Form

Representation of National Team Athletes in the Philippines

Researcher

Catherine Joy Lariosa
Master's Candidate
Global Sports Management
Seoul National University
cdlariosa@snu.ac.kr
[whatsapp#: +639163297218](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/00299163297218)

Purpose of the Study

I am a graduate student in the Global Sport Management Program at Seoul National University. Currently, I am doing my thesis on representation of National Team Athletes in the national sports associations (NSA). I am particularly looking at the case of combat sports. My research aims to understand the meaning and nature of athlete representation for combat sports national team athletes and NSA officials and how athlete representation is being carried out in the NSA. My hope is that my study will contribute to the improvement of athletes' condition and NSA's administration.

Description

I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in a remote (online) interview via Zoom. If you agree, you would be asked questions about your experience relating to athlete representation, athlete's concerns, and how they are being raised in your NSA. With your permission, the interview would be video/audio recorded. Your participation would require approximately 60 minutes of your time.

Use of Research Information

The results of this study will be presented in a final thesis required for completion of my degree and may also be used for conference publications, presentations, and published in academic journals.

Risk of harm to participants and strategies to manage risk

As strategies to manage risks, your personal identity will not be revealed in the products of the research. With your permission, the interview would be video/audio recorded, transcribed into text, and you will be provided a copy of the transcript and be invited to make changes to the transcript if you wish (e.g., if you would like to withdraw a particular statement you made during an interview).

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, without explanation, up to when I begin analysis of the data. If you would like to review and make changes to the transcript of the interview, or withdraw from the study, you may do so within a week from the time of being provided a copy of the transcript by contacting me by email. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

Management of Research Information/Data

Zoom will be used to for the online interview. If you agree, the interview would be recorded using my personal laptop. I will also use Simon Says transcription software that will be reviewed manually.

All data derived from the interview will be stored on my personal computer that is password protected. All data associated with our interview not included in the products of the research will be permanently deleted at the end of my program, approximately August 31, 2023.

Consent

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>I consent to the interview being video/audio recorded.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
| <i>I give consent to the researcher to quote from our interview without exposing my personal identity and affiliation in the products of the research.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |

Participant Name _____

Participant Signature _____

Date Signed _____

I, Catherine Joy Lariosa, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact Dream Together Master Global Sport Management Graduate Program, Seoul National University by email at snugsm@snu.ac.kr.

Appendix B.

Interview Questions – National Athletes

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>RQ1. What is the meaning of athlete representation in the context of the different combat National Sports Association (NSA) in the Philippines?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word athlete representative? 2. How important is it for athletes to have a proper athlete representation in their federations? 3. What do you think should be the characteristics of athletes' representatives? 4. In your perspective, what are the issues that should be dealt with by the athletes' commission or committee? 5. What should their projects be? 6. Who do you think should be the members of an athletes' commission or committee who could best represent the rights of athletes? 7. How familiar are you with the roles and duties of the athletes' commission or committee in your sport federation? 8. What do you think should be the mandate of the athletes' commission or committee?
<p>RQ2. How is athlete representation carried out in the different combat National Sports Association (NSA) in the Philippines?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. How familiar are you with the statutes and by-laws of your sports federation? 10. Do you know if you have an athlete committee or commission in your NSA? Do you know about its history of creation? 11. How familiar are you with the selection process of athletes' commission or committee members in your federation? 12. How familiar are you with the projects of the athletes' commission or committee in your sport federation? 13. What are the ways that your sport federation has supported the athletes' commission or committee projects? 14. How does the athletes' commission or committee members reach out to you?

15. What are the ways that your sport federation has supported the athletes' (commission or committee projects?)
16. How do your NSA listen to your concerns as athletes?
17. How does your NSA address the concerns you raise to them?
18. How does your NSA reach out to you? How can you reach out to them if they have any concerns?
19. Does your NSA involve you in decision making processes in the NSA? Give some examples How does your sports federation officials involve athletes in policymaking and decision-making in your organization?
20. How does your sports federation officials involve athletes in policymaking and decision-making in your organization?
21. What do you think are the reason why there is no athletes' committee now in your federation?

RQ3. How athlete representation can be promoted and implemented in the combat National Sports Association (NSA) in the Philippines according to the point of view of the athletes and NSA officials?

22. How do you feel whenever athletes are consulted or not consulted by the sports federation officials?
23. Does your federation encourage you to voice out your concerns?
24. What do you think should your federation do to genuinely hear out the concerns of the athletes?
25. Do you think athletes should be involved in policy-making and decision-making processes of the federation?
26. How do you think you can take part in the policymaking and decision-making processes of your federation?
27. What should be done to engage the athletes in policymaking and decision-making processes in your federation?
28. What do you think are the effect of athletes being involved in governing the sports federation?
29. Do you think your NSA should be more deliberate in involving the athletes in governing your organization? Why or why not?

Appendix C.

Interview Questions – NSA Officials

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>RQ1. What is the meaning of athlete representation in the context of the different combat National Sports Association (NSA) in the Philippines?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word athlete representative? 2. How important is it for athletes to have a proper athlete representation in the federations? 3. In your NSA, do you have an athlete committee or commission? If yes, tell me about it. History, how was it formed? Who composes it? What are its mandates? If you don't have, are you considering forming one? If yes, share your visions about it? 4. In your perspective, what are the issues that should be dealt with by the athletes' commission? 5. What do you know about athletes' rights? And do you think there are differences between men and women athletes' rights? 6. What do you think should be the characteristics of athletes' representatives? 7. Who do you think should be the members of an athletes' commission or committee who could best represent the rights of athletes? 8. What should be the roles and duties of the athletes' commission or committee in your sport federation? 9. What do you think should be the mandate of the athletes' commission or committee? 10. What should be the projects of the athletes' commission?
<p>RQ2. How is athlete representation carried out in the different combat National Sports Association</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. How familiar are you with the statutes and by-laws of your sports federation? 12. Do you know if you have an athlete committee or commission in your NSA? Do you know about its history of creation? 13. How familiar are you with the selection process of athletes' commission or committee members in your federation?

(NSA) in the Philippines?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. What are the ways that your sport federation has supported the athletes' (commission or committee projects?) 15. How do you listen to your athletes' concerns? What are the common issues raised? 16. Are you aware with the rights of athletes? Men, women? 17. How does your NSA address the concerns being raised by your athletes? 18. How do you reach out to your athletes? How can your athletes' reach out to you if they have any concerns? 19. Do you involved your athletes in decision making processes in the NSA? To what extent? Give some examples How does your sports federation officials involve athletes in policymaking and decision-making in your organization? 20. What do you think are the reason why there is no athletes' committee now in your federation?
RQ3. How athlete representation can be promoted and implemented in the combat National Sports Association (NSA) in the Philippines according to the point of view of the athletes and NSA officials?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Have you ever consulted with your athletes about their concerns? How do you feel whenever you hear their concerns? 22. What do you think should your federation do to genuinely hear out the concerns of the athletes? 23. How do you encourage your athletes to voice out their concerns to you? 24. Do you think athletes should have an active role in policymaking and decision-making processes of your federation? Why or why not? 25. How do you think you can involve your athletes in taking an active role in the policymaking and decision-making processes of your federation? 26. What should be done to engage the athletes in policymaking and decision-making processes in your federation? 27. What do you think are the effect of athletes being involved in governing the sports federation? 28. Do you think your NSA should be more deliberate in involving the athletes in governing your organization? Why or why not?

국문 초록

격투종목 운동선수들의 목소리:

필리핀스포츠기관 사례 중심으로

Catherine Joy D. Lariosa

글로벌스포츠매니지먼트 전공

체육교육과

서울대학교 대학원

스포츠에서 운동선수는 중요한 주역으로 간주되고 있다. 그러나 스포츠기관 주도의 정책수립 혹은 사회이슈에 대한 의사결정(decision-making) 과정에서 운동선수들의 목소리는 가장 적게 들리는 것이 명백해지고 있다. 일부 스포츠기관에서 운동선수들을 대표할 수 있는 운동선수위원회를 설립하기 시작했다. 비록 대다수의 선수들은 여전히 침묵하고 있지만, 운동선수들은 점점 각자의 훈련환경, 지도자, 스포츠 관계자들과의 관계에 대한 경험을

공유하고 있다. 도쿄 올림픽에서 확인 할 수 있듯이 몇몇 운동선수들은 본인들의 목소리를 키우고 있다.

필리핀 운동선수들의 경우 국가대표선수들이 선수 생활의 어려움을 밝힌 사례들이 나타나고 있다. 이와 같은 행동은 지지를 받는 동시에 비판을 받고 있다. 예의와 존경이 중요시되는 격투종목의 선수들은 개인의 경험을 숨기는 경우가 많다. 따라서, 본 연구는 필리핀 격투종목 스포츠기관 운동선수의 대표성(representation)의 모습과 표면적으로 어떻게 드러내는지 알아보고자 한다. 대표성을 어떻게 이해하고 정의하는지 알아보기 위해 여러 격투종목의 스포츠기관에 소속되어 있는 운동선수와 스포츠행정가들 대상으로 심층면담을 진행했다.

결과에 따르면 운동선수와 스포츠행정가들은 각자 대표성을 다르게 이해하고 정의하고 있다. 운동선수들 중 대표성의 정확한 정의를 모르고 있지만 본인들의 의견이 중요하다고 인지한다. 그럼으로 그들이 의견과 관점은 스포츠기관에서 정책을 수립 및 수정 과정 중 고려해야 한다는 주장을 했다. 대부분의 스포츠행정가들은 운동선수들의 의견과 관점의 중요성에 대한 논의를 했으며 인정하고 있다. 이처럼 운동선수의 대표성은 이해관계자에 따라 다르게

나타나며 운동선수와 스포츠행정가들 관점의 차이점을 좁힐 수 있도록 기여하다. 나아가 운동선수들의 인권을 강화하는 정책에 발전적인 영향을 미칠 것으로 본다.

키워드 : 선수인권, 운동선수, 스포츠기관, 격투스포츠

학 번: 2021-23794