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**The Indonesian National Sports Games : Expectations and Reality**

**Amung Ma'mun, Cep Ubad Abdullah, Suherman Slamet, Rahma Kharunnisa, Sally Hanako Budiarti**  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

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**Article Info**

*Article History :*

Received August 2018

Revised October 2018

Accepted March 2019

Available online April 2019

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*Keywords :*

Indonesia National Sports Games (PON),  
Expectation, Reality, Objectives.

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**Abstract**

*This paper describes an empirical study about the expectation and reality of the Indonesian National Sports Games (PON) after the regulation about national sport system came in to force in 2005. To describe the achievement and issues associated with the objectives of PON, analyses of report documents of the 2008, 2012, and 2016 PON were carried out. In addition, interviews with athletes and officials from several contingents and focus group discussions with experts were also conducted. In terms of maintaining the unity and integrity of the nation, PON could be deemed to meet the expectations but some modifications should be made to the idealism, management, and sport contents to improve the development system of national sport. However, organizing PON as a talent scout effort is no longer valid due to some issues associated with recruitment system, match and sport categorization system, and event time selection. Even so, PON is still needed to stimulate sport development in regional level. There should be a new policy in order for PON to achieve all of its goals.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesian National Sports Games (PON) is analogous to the Olympic Games that has become the culmination of a nation's sporting achievements in international level (Roche 2002). The objectives of PON are similar to those of the Olympic Games. They include maintaining the unity of Indonesian nation which is analogous to peace if associated with the relationships among the participating countries in the Olympic Games, recruiting new potential athletes, and improving high performance sports (Binder 2012; Chu 2015; Chappelet 2016). Since the participants of this event are athletes representing all provinces in Indonesia, the event is of national level. However, outstanding and potential athletes will usually represent Indonesia in international sport events such as SEA Games, Asian Games, and Olympic Games. Like many national events in other countries, be it of multi- or single- sport, PON is a national athlete selection process (Leopkey, Mutter, and Parent 2010; Gulbin et al. 2013).

To date, Indonesia's international elite sports have not been getting any better. In the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; for example, Indonesia only managed to win one gold medal, one silver medal, and one bronze medal. The former was in badminton, and the other two in weightlifting. Indonesian peoples by all means expect more than this because a nation's sporting success entails its prestige (Shariati, Khabiri, and Hamidi 2013; Park et al 2016). In local context, being a host means a pride for a city and improved budgetary allocation which in turn will have a greater positive effect on the development of the city (Tsvetkova 2011). Thus, in a universal context, there should be a new policy in sport development. The policy should be shifted from the development of sports to the development through sports. Sports can be a mean through which health and quality of life are developed and urban and state developments are accelerated (Burton et al. 2010; Maguire 2011; Yamamoto 2012; Ha, Lee, and Ok 2015). And political support is also necessary to establish such policy (Morissette 2014; Park et al. 2016; Zhouxiang 2016).

The sport development strategies may vary in various countries but tend to give up the model implemented in Indonesia through PON despite the fact that this model is still applicable to maintain and promote the nation's unity (Creak 2010; Li and Hong 2015). In Eu-

ropean countries; for example, single-sport event systems are becoming more and more popular than multi-sport event systems, and so is in America (Durand and Bayle 2002; Koski and Lämsä 2015). This model is in accordance with that implemented in the commercialized sport industries (Veal, Toohey, and Frawley 2000). The sport development through schooling systems also continues to grow. England; for example, implements Physical Education, School Sport and Club Link (PESSCL) strategy with School Sport Partnership (SSP) as its core program. SSP could be said as a partnership of various sport schools, funded by government as much as £270,000 annually (Daniel Bloyce and Andy Smith 2010). However, effective sport development through schooling systems should be equipped with clear and standardized implementation guidelines (Bailey, Morley, and Dismore 2009).

The present study was conducted to analyze the organization of PON in 2008, 2012, and 2016 or after the national sport system (NSS) came into force in 2005 as well as to answer the following questions: (1) Is PON still feasible to be held as a quadrennial multi-sport event to promote the national unity? (2) Is PON still feasible to be held every four years to recruit new potential athletes? (3) Should the sport development model implemented in PON be maintained or be modified in order to keep up with other countries that have already advanced? (4) What kind of policy should be used as the basis of modification in order for PON to satisfy the demands of sport development system and to optimize the regional role as the key support for the national development system?.

## METHOD

The interviewees were 80 athletes consisting of 43 male athletes and 37 female athletes of 43 different sports contested in PON XIX in 2016 and 20 officials consisting of five of each of four different sports including martial arts, measurable sports, games sports, and accuracy sports. To the athletes were posed such questions as whether they thought PON was still on the right track to fulfill its objectives, what they thought of the number of contested sports and matches, what they thought of the proliferation of the practice of transfer of athletes from one province to another, and what they thought of the refereeing practice. And to the officials

were posed questions associated with the relevance of regulation and competition system of PON to the trend of current sport industries, the relevance of national sporting achievement to the needs required to compete in international level, the relevance of regulation system of PON to the development system required to compete globally, the feasibility of continuing or giving up PON as a facilitating event to develop athletes to compete in international level. The interview questions were meant to address the gap of PON between expectations and reality. The results of interviews were triangulated with the data gathered through focus group discussions with experts who had sport education backgrounds including lecturers, sport practitioners like coaches and umpires/referees, and students enrolled in master's and doctoral degree in sports.

In addition, report documents of the 2008, 2012, and 2016 PON from the library of National Sports Committee (KONI) of East Kalimantan, the library of Riau KONI, and the library of West Java KONI were also analyzed to find out information regarding number of contested sports and matches, average age of the athletes, and top ten athletes from respective provinces. In addition, the athletes' achievements were also analyzed to see the feasibility of giving them further trainings to compete in international level.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A shift in the value of sporting achievements among PON participants

Something worth noting of the PON XVII, XVIII, and XIX is that the competition cannot be said to support the effort of local athlete development process. This is due to easiness for athletes to be transferred from one province to another and due to the fact that idealism does no longer matter to some prominent board members of national sport federations (NSF) in establishing a clean and fair competition system that is oriented to developing athletes for international competition. Transfers of athletes and even match fixing become normal and common practices. Another notable thing is that there was 17 out of 43 contested sports in the 2008 PON where the host delegated 50 athletes that were previously transferred from other provinces during 2005-2007. This paid them off. The host managed to win 28 gold and 15 silver medals in 17

sports in question. Similarly, in the 2016 PON, West Java as the host delegated 72 athletes who were originally transferred from other provinces, and they managed to secure 43 gold medals. These practices will likely continue to happen in several PONs to come.

It is not unusual to see the achievements of some participants skyrocketing in a very unreasonable time in light of the principles of high sport performance development. On one hand, some provinces struggle to win gold medals, and some other provinces, on the other hand, could easily and surprisingly top the medal table (see Table 1). Although it is not illegal to take such shortcut since it is made possible by a policy provided by the organizing committee, this condition cannot continue to happen because it will disrupt the sport development system in the regional level, and in turn the nation's high performance elite sport in international level such as Olympic Games, Asian Games, and SEA Games will continue to slump. Rumor has it that the transfer of athletes and match fixing by the officials of the regional contingents and the organizing committee also took place in PON XVIII in 2012 in Riau. It is then hard to imagine what would happen to the PON XX in 2020 in Papua. There should be a regulation to deal with the aforesaid issues unless it will disrupt the development of national elite sports and the spirit of national unity. Thus, a clear and measurable regulation for organizing PON in the future, like what has been implemented in Canada and Switzerland (Leopkey, Mutter, and Parent 2010), is a must.

**Table 1.** Gold Medal Winners in PON XVII, XVIII, and

No	Province	National Sports Week (PON)		
		XVII/ 2008	XVIII / 2012	XIX/ 2016
1.	Special Capital Region of Jakarta	122/II	110/I	132/III
2.	West Java	101/IV	99/II	217/I
3.	East Java	139/I	86/III	132/II
4.	Central Java	53/V	47/IV	32/IV
5.	East Kalimantan	117/III	44/V	25/V
6.	South Sumatra	12	10	6/XXI
7.	Riau	16	43/VI	18/VII

### Comparison between numbers of sports matched in PON and other events

Seeing the number of sports matched, PON XIX in 2016 in West Java seems to just repeat what happened in PON XVII in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. The host was deemed very obsessed to dominate the games. The addition of non-Olympic sports is burdensome to the other participating provinces. Meanwhile, the host won most of gold medals in the non- Olympic sports and in matches with which the results are upon the umpire's decision.

This is a real condition that needs investigating and analyzing from different perspectives, especially to find out the involvement of some particular parties in helping the host win the competition. This is necessary to prevent such compromises between stakeholders such as KONI, NSF, PON committee, and hosts from reoccurring. The addition of sports and matches does not seem to be well-designed and is not oriented to prepare the athletes for the bigger events like Olympic Games, Asian Games, and SEA Games. Matches contested in PON are getting numerous (see Table 2), especially when compared with the number of sports and matches contested at SEA Games, Asian Games, and Olympic Games, and this is only to satisfy the ego of NSF.

**Table 2.** The Comparison between Numbers of Matches in PON and Other Events

No.	Event	Province/country, year, and number of matches		
1.	PON	East Kalimantan	Riau	West Java
		2008	2012	2016
		755	650	756
2.	SEA Games	Indonesia	Myanmar	Singapore
		2011	2013	2015
		554	461	402
3.	Asian Games	PRC	South Korea	Indonesia
		2010	2014	2018
		477	436	485
4.	Olympic Games	PRC	England	Brazil
		2008	2012	2016
		302	302	306

Table 2 shows that the number of matches contested at PON is very close to twice the number of matches at Olympic Games. The addition of matches in the Olympic Games and Asian Games is very reasonable because it shall pass strict verification and validation. Besides, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or

the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) cannot facilitate the host to add matches without approval from other competing countries. Thus, the modification to PON should be necessarily made but with taking account of academic studies and with the involvement of government/bureaucracy by providing a proper and measurable regulation (Tinaz, Turco, and Salisbury 2014).

### Olympic sports and matches at PON

To what Olympic sports should PON modification refer? Of course, the sports and matches contested in PON must be in line with the sports to be competed at the Olympic Games, and if necessary the standard of PON should be similar to that of the Olympic Games. This should be taken into account when modifying PON. PON should adopt the system of Olympic Games to achieve its objectives. The implementation strategy may be hierarchical, starting to adopt the system of Olympic Games, Asian Games, and then SEA Games. Like multi-sport events in other countries, the sports and matches contested in PON should be similar to those contested in the Olympic Games (Howell and Howell 1980). Otherwise, PON is no more than an event and cannot improve the nation's sporting achievement at international level. There will be a huge gap between expectations and reality.

Improper PON competition systems lead to the nation's sporting slump in international events such as Olympic Games, Asian Games, and SEA Games. The nation's sporting achievement in SEA Games since 2001 up to 2009 have declined. This is true that Indonesia topped the medal table of the 2011 SEA Games; however, this is actually a result of the reconstruction matches rather than of its athletes' performance. What happened in the 2013 and 2015 SEA Games in Myanmar and Singapore where Indonesia only managed to secure the fourth and fifth position respectively says it all. In the last four SEA Games before 2011 and the two SEA Games after 2011, both in terms of rank and the acquisition of (gold) medals, Indonesia's rank were under Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. Thus, the sport development culture in Indonesia has not been very well established.

Similarly, Indonesia's rank in the Asian Games since 1998 to 2014 have continued to decline, even when compared to that of its neighboring countries in South East Asia like Thailand. It goes to show that Indonesia's best rank have not been able to bounce back

to the level when Indonesia reached its golden days in the 70-80s.

In the 2016 Olympic Games, Indonesia has nothing to show off, except one gold medal in Badminton, and one silver and one bronze medal in weightlifting. If not for badminton, Indonesia would have been recorded in history as a nation that has never won a gold medal. Table 3 below summarizes the comparison between sports contested in Olympic Games (OG), Asian Games (AG), SEA Games (SG), and PON.

letes from being transferred and encourage the sport development in all provinces in Indonesia. This way, Indonesia will have many athletes. This is of course very beneficial for the national sport development. Thus, the PON modification is certainly not oriented to the reduction of sports and matches only, but to conform to the international sport events. Moreover, age restriction should also refer to the optimum age range of athlete improvements based on the type of sport they are in. And it might be better if some particular sports

**Table 3.** The Comparison between Sports Contested in Olympic Games, Asian Games, Sea Games, and PON

No.	Sports	Event				
		OG	AG	SG	PON-17	PON-19
1.	Aquatics (swimming, diving, synchronized swimming, water polo, kayaking, rowing, sailing, underwater diving, and water skiing)	87	84	83	148	160
2.	Gymnastics (aerobics, rhythmic, and trampolining)	18	18	19	27	23
3.	Athletics (athletics, pentathlon, and triathlon)	51	47	51	46	47
4.	Martial arts (boxing, judo, taekwondo, wrestling, tarung derajat, wushu, fencing, silat, and karate)	61	96	89	195	193
5.	Games (badminton, table tennis, tennis, basketball, soccer, hockey, softball, volleyball, handball, baseball, bowling, golf, sepak takraw, squash, billiard, futsal, and cricket)	27	68	64	80	83
6.	Target (fencing and shooting)	19	48	50	54	52
7.	Motorcycle sport/horseback riding/cycling	24	20	25	36	43
8.	Weightlifting	15	23	20	44	38
9.	Mind sport (chess and bridge)	0	3	0	18	20
10.	Aerosports (aeromodelling, hang gliding, paragliding, gliding, and parachuting)	0	0	0	52	38
11.	Others (dancing, rock climbing, roller skating, and drum band)	0	0	10	55	59

### The logic behind age restriction

The logical reason behind age restrictions is to ensure the recruitment of potential athletes as defined in the objectives of PON. Top-class or Olympic athletes should no longer compete in a national-level multi-sport event. In many countries, the national events, like soccer in Germany, give the priority to amateur athletes, so they can gain more play minutes (Güllich et al. 2016). In addition, age restrictions may prevent the ath-

letes from being transferred and encourage the sport development in all provinces in Indonesia. This way, Indonesia will have many athletes. This is of course very beneficial for the national sport development. Thus, the PON modification is certainly not oriented to the reduction of sports and matches only, but to conform to the international sport events. Moreover, age restriction should also refer to the optimum age range of athlete improvements based on the type of sport they are in. And it might be better if some particular sports

### The logic behind participation and development culture

As an effort to harmonize the historical value of PON that has been organized for more than 65 years

with an industry-worthy competition system, the future PON should be initiated by the participant recruitment through scheduled and standardized national championship systems that are running throughout the year. This way, the national rank in every sport can clearly be defined. Competitions become a key to a long-term sport development system in many countries, both of amateur and professional. In addition to giving play times, competition will also enable the youth athletes to understand the sport development system including the vision, mission, and organizational management (Hubball and Robertson 2004).

Standardized matches in every sports should be organized at least four times in a year's calendar, or if possible, more than four times. This way, every athlete's national rank can easily be identified before taking part in PON. In addition, the development culture will be established on its own because athletes will compete in structured, systematic, and sustainable systems throughout the year. The championships should meet the national and international standards in order to improve the quality of sport development in every region.

## CONCLUSION

The National Sports Games as a high performance sport competition in Indonesia is still necessary to keep being organized. Besides its a long-established historical value, PON is also needed to promote political ideology in social and national life contexts and to strengthen the national unity. As an effort to recruit new young potential athletes for a long-term development and preparation for international competitions, both single and multi-sport events, PON is not relevant anymore because the number of sports and matches are too many, the athlete transfer from one province to another has become a common practice, matches are frequently played unfairly, and there is no age restriction. Thus, it is necessary to revitalize various regulations associated with PON in a systematic and measurable way.

The industrialization of a long-term and economic-oriented competition system becomes important to be developed in addition to continuing to run the elite sports development system through education. In order to improve sporting achievements, PON requires a policy that can manage the number of sports and matches,

ensure participant recruitment through preliminary championships that run throughout the year, and give priority to single-sport events. The PON regulation should be a critical and focal point of the government's attention, so that PON can meets its objective and eliminate the gap between the expectations and reality.

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