

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Unveiling Athletic Talents: Exploring the Selection Process for Young Wrestlers in Armenian Sports Schools

Anna Martirosyan^a and Lusine Stepanyan^b

^aArmenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport, Armenia;

^bYerevan State University, Armenia

Abstract

In contemporary wrestling, talent identification plays a pivotal role due to stringent criteria for athletes, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional attributes. However, limited research exists regarding the athlete selection process in the Republic of Armenia, representing a critical knowledge gap that this study aims to address. This research investigates the criteria used to admit young athletes into Armenian wrestling training schools by analysing responses from 24 wrestling coaches through a structured questionnaire. Using coding and participative ranking methodology to evaluate the data, the findings revealed a notable absence of formal athlete selection criteria in Armenian wrestling schools. This highlights the urgent need for a structured and transparent selection system within the Armenian wrestling community. Based on the results, the study recommends comprehensive improvements—incorporating psychological, physical, and emotional criteria—to enhance fairness and effectiveness in talent identification.

Introduction

Considering the ubiquity of contemporary high-achievement sport, the burgeoning participation rates, and the heightened performance expectations placed upon athletes, the success of individuals within this domain is increasingly contingent upon an amalgamation of innate physical and psychological attributes. Presently, athletes endowed with the requisite physiological and mental predispositions for their respective sports exhibit a heightened propensity for success. Notably, premier athletic competitions often feature rigorous contests characterised by near parity among competitors. The outcomes of such contests are frequently determined by

minuscule temporal differentials, marginal spatial differentials, or, in certain instances, culminate in draws. This suggests that sport is a physical battle, as well as a mental and emotional one. Nowadays, sport is characterised by the deep integration of science into all stages of sporting activity, including selection, training, and participation in competitions (Abbott & Collins, 2004; MacNamara et al., 2010). Based on this, to achieve results in high-performance sport, it is essential to select the sport correctly from the outset. For this, it is essential to guide the child and assess their physical abilities and psychological characteristics (Hardy et al., 2018).

Educators within the fields of coaching and physical education possess

Keywords:

access to sport for all, quality sport structures, sport equity and inclusion, talent development, youth sport development

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ORCID ID

Anna Martirosyan
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2599-510X>
Lusine Stepanyan
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2904-4085>

a nuanced understanding that not all attributes inherent in a student can be subject to cultivation. A longstanding recognition within the pedagogical domain stipulates that, irrespective of the specific sport considered, an optimal set of characteristics is deemed desirable for a proficient sport practitioner. These attributes encompass, but are not confined to, strong emotional stability, self-assurance, self-regulation, tenacity, conscientiousness, a proclivity for leadership, initiative, a propensity for calculated risk-taking, sociability, and a pronounced motivation to achieve success (Ilyin, 2016).

Social and genetic influences shape human development. Societal knowledge, built over generations, is passed down through education, forming the foundation for pedagogical guidance (Belenco, 2009; Ovechkina & Minchenkova, 2014). Within this educational perspective, certain sociological traits—such as industriousness and conscientiousness—are considered key targets of pedagogical influence. While these traits are not entirely malleable, they can be nurtured through sustained educational interventions.

In contrast, the psychophysiological domain is more conservative and less susceptible to change. The traits of the nervous system—such as the strength, mobility, and balance of neural processes—are stable individual characteristics that significantly influence physical performance, motor skill acquisition, and overall athletic potential. Psychophysiological characteristics encompass the interaction between psychological processes and physiological responses, including reaction time, attention regulation, and stress reactivity. These can be assessed through established measures such as the Stroop Test (for cognitive control and

attention) and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EQ) framework (for understanding emotional regulation and social adaptability) (Goleman, 1995; MacLeod, 1991). Belenko (2009), along with Ovechkina and Minchenkova (2014), emphasise that careful assessment of these psychophysiological characteristics, particularly in athletes in football and basketball, enables coaches to better align athletes with sports that match their innate capabilities. Their findings suggest that athletes possessing specific neurological traits are more likely to achieve elite performance levels, highlighting the value of integrating psychophysiological evaluation into the talent selection process.

Genetic factors inherently underpin the developmental potential of an organism. Nevertheless, realising these latent possibilities necessitates direct engagement with the organism's environment. Therefore, all human characteristics manifest as a product of the intricate interplay between heredity and environmental influences. It is imperative to avoid underestimating the impact of environmental factors or the significance of genotype, as both play pivotal roles in shaping the multifaceted spectrum of human traits and characteristics (Epstein, 2013; Hossein et al., 2016). Morphological traits are highly heritable. Consequently, developing these traits proves challenging, which lends them substantial prognostic value in assessing athletic abilities (Franchini, 2021; Platonov, 2006, 2018).

While promoting a healthy lifestyle and cultivating mass sport participation hold significance in our republic, children's early initiation into sport is paramount for their subsequent specialisation. Early sport orientation facilitates the optimal realisation of a child's sporting potential and proves instrumental in resource optimisation for

both the athlete and the coach. This strategic approach aids in the judicious allocation of time and financial resources, thereby streamlining the developmental trajectory. It is noteworthy that a substantial proportion of sports schools in the Republic of Armenia (RA) operate under state auspices, resulting in significant per capita financial investment.

Some athletic disciplines demand an intensity of exertion that borders on the exceptional, and wrestling is one of them. Wrestlers often face gruelling competition schedules, engaging in three to five bouts daily, which impose substantial physical demands and considerable psychological pressures. This situation underscores the importance of psychological resilience and stability as essential factors in sustaining high performance under such conditions.

Among the psychological attributes essential for wrestling success, emotional intelligence and neuropsychological stability are particularly important. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilise emotions effectively in oneself and others (Goleman, 1995). In high-stakes combat sports such as wrestling, it allows athletes to cope with stress, make strategic decisions under pressure, and maintain emotional control during competition. Neuropsychological stability, often associated with traits of the nervous system such as emotional regulation, attention control, and behavioural consistency, underpins an athlete's ability to remain focused and adaptive in unpredictable and rapidly changing match environments. These traits can be evaluated using standardised tools such as Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework for assessing interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional competence, and the Stroop Test for measuring cognitive control and selective

attention (MacLeod, 1991). The inclusion of these attributes in our analysis is supported by previous research highlighting their predictive value in elite athletic performance (Ilyin, 2016), as well as their direct alignment with the cognitive and emotional demands of wrestling.

In the broader literature, neuropsychological stability is commonly assessed through tools such as the Stroop test, reaction time assessments, and stress tolerance evaluations. These tests quantify cognitive flexibility, impulse control, and overall mental resilience—key components for peak athletic performance. However, in the current study, standardised testing instruments were not employed directly, owing to logistical constraints and the exploratory nature of this initial investigation into Armenia's athlete selection system. Instead, psychological factors were indirectly assessed through coach-reported criteria and perceptions included in the questionnaire.

This approach, although limited in objectivity, offers foundational insights into how psychological readiness is informally assessed during athlete selection. Future studies should incorporate validated psychological assessments, such as structured emotional intelligence scales, executive function tests, and stress resilience measures, to enhance precision and comparability across athletes. By systematising the evaluation of these traits, wrestling development programmes can better prepare athletes for the sport's rigorous mental and emotional demands and enhance long-term performance outcomes.

Consequently, aligning the athlete with a sport that harmonises with their physical and psychological attributes can yield substantial cost savings and

facilitate the attainment of high-level accomplishments. To realise this synergy, implementing a sophisticated sport selection system becomes imperative. Such a system should be aimed to predict an athlete's potential success and achievements from the initial stages of selection. This situation necessitates a comprehensive evaluation encompassing not only morphological characteristics but also an in-depth consideration of psychological traits and genetic predispositions. Such a holistic approach to sport selection is integral for optimising resource allocation and enhancing the likelihood of an athlete's success in their chosen discipline (Chernenko et al., 2020; Maksum & Indahwati, 2023; Sidorenko & Nechuvilin, 2022).

Moreover, the absence of a robust sport selection system contributes to a notable attrition rate among trainees. While preparatory groups may initially accommodate thousands of children, the transition to advanced training and sport skill improvement groups typically witnesses a considerable reduction, with only a limited cohort, perhaps a dozen or two trainees, continuing. This phenomenon poses a significant challenge, particularly for countries with small populations, such as Armenia. Implementing an effective sport selection framework becomes imperative in mitigating this challenge, optimising resource utilisation, and fostering the sustained development of athletes.

A crucial facet in the preliminary selection process, essential for subsequent athletic development, involves determining the optimal age for prospective wrestlers. Although identifying future wrestling talents early is challenging, it is necessary to conduct fitness tests at the beginning of training. Conducting fitness assessments not only helps gauge the physical aptitude of

aspiring wrestlers but also serves as a valuable metric for identifying latent potential. These tests make a substantial contribution to refining the selection process, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the athletes' baseline physical capabilities. Moreover, the incorporation of fitness assessments assists in crafting tailored training regimens, ensuring a holistic and individualised approach to athletic development. As such, the judicious integration of fitness testing into the early stages of wrestler selection fosters a more informed and strategic trajectory for the development of aspiring athletes' careers (Khodayari et al., 2014; Platonov, 2006; Platonov, 2018).

The considerations outlined above underscore the heightened relevance of the sport selection issue within the Republic of Armenia. Several developed nations have established long-standing, effective systems for athlete selection, which are integral components of their overall sport policies. Diverse methodologies and perspectives on athlete selection exist, with varying authors advocating distinct stages in the selection process. Nonetheless, a consensus prevails among experts that the selection process ought to be multilevel, encompassing distinct sets of indicators at each stage. This convergence of perspectives underscores the clear need for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to athlete selection, recognising the multifaceted nature of sporting potential.

There is a growing consensus that effective athlete selection must adopt a multilevel and multidimensional approach. This aligns with the Multidimensional Model of Talent Identification and Development (MMTID) proposed by Abbott, Button, Pepping, and Collins (2005), which posits that talent identification should

not rely on isolated traits or short-term performance outcomes. Instead, the model emphasises the importance of assessing a combination of physical, psychological, technical, and sociocultural factors that develop. The MMTID framework supports the implementation of multi-stage, longitudinal selection systems, which are currently absent in the Armenian wrestling context. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of incorporating coach perceptions as valuable insights into an athlete's potential, especially in the early stages of talent identification. By integrating this framework, the present study adopts a comprehensive perspective that acknowledges the complex and dynamic nature of sport talent development, thereby justifying the investigation into existing selection practices in Armenia.

Since gaining independence, Armenia has produced only two Olympic wrestling champions, a modest result for a nation where wrestling is considered a national sport and occupies a central role in the country's athletic identity. Although wrestling participation is high and state-supported, Armenia's limited international success suggests a lack of structured, evidence-based selection criteria for wrestlers. Most wrestling schools in Armenia are publicly funded; however, in the absence of clear guidelines for talent identification, resources are often invested in children who may lack the requisite attributes for elite performance.

This results in both human and financial inefficiencies: many children spend years training without progressing to the professional level, and valuable state resources are expended without a measurable return in terms of national or international sporting success. The absence of structured selection frameworks means that decisions about

admitting children into wrestling programmes are often subjective, leading to inconsistencies and missed opportunities to support genuinely talented individuals. Therefore, the development and implementation of a data-driven sport selection system are not merely desirable—they are essential. By identifying athletic potential early and directing support toward those most likely to succeed, Armenia can increase its chances of producing world-class athletes while maximising the impact of its limited developmental resources. The purpose of this research is to comprehensively investigate the sport selection system within the Republic of Armenia, with a specific focus on individuals admitted to sports schools for wrestling training.

Methodology

Study Context and Rationale

Given the absence of explicit standards governing sport selection procedures in Armenia, this study aimed to investigate the current practices used by coaches to select young athletes. In the Republic of Armenia, most state schools operate with broadly inclusive admission processes; however, there is limited guidance on how children are identified and enrolled in specific sport disciplines. This research was designed to gather expert perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of the real-world factors that influence selection decisions, thereby informing the potential development of evidence-based frameworks.

Participants

The survey involved 24 wrestling coaches from the Institute of Physical Culture and Sports of Armenia and the sport schools named after Tork Angeg. These coaches represented disciplines including Greco-Roman wrestling,

freestyle wrestling, sambo, and judo. Although limited, the participants were purposively selected from a larger pool of approximately 100 eligible coaches due to their strategic value as key decision-makers within Armenia's national sport federations. They were selected based on criteria such as years of professional experience, past athletic achievements (all were members of the RA youth and adult national teams), involvement in decision-making processes, and roles within the governing bodies of wrestling federations. Many are directly engaged in the admission process, providing them with firsthand knowledge of existing selection practices. Additionally, their substantial experience as former athletes and coaches equips them to offer nuanced insights into the realities of athlete selection in Armenia.

While the small sample size may limit the study's ability to generalise findings at a national level, the targeted inclusion of these high-profile decision-makers provides depth and relevance to the analysis. Their collective expertise enables a focused understanding of the gaps and practices in Armenia's current approach to talent identification and development. Expanding the sample size to include a larger cross-section of coaches from diverse regions and disciplines is recommended to strengthen future research and allow for broader conclusions.

Research Design and Data Collection

The study employed a Participative Ranking Methodology (PRM), a mixed-methods approach that engages knowledgeable participants in generating and prioritising responses to a specific research question or set of questions. PRM integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to produce contextually rich data that is amenable to

ranking, comparison, and analysis within or across participant groups. This methodology encourages active participant engagement, facilitating the identification of key insights while allowing for in-depth analysis where resources permit (Skinner et al., 2014).

This research utilised a specially designed questionnaire featuring both general and specific questions, with a strong emphasis on open-ended items to allow respondents to share their detailed professional insights. The questionnaire was developed based on the authors' expertise, grounded in extensive professional experience in sport psychology, physiology, and sport science, with a particular focus on long-term work with combat sport athletes, and supplemented by a thorough review of relevant literature in talent identification and athlete development.

To enhance its content validity, the instrument was evaluated for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness by a panel of experts, including a sport psychologist, a sport psychophysicologist, and two head coaches of Armenia's national youth and senior wrestling teams. Although the questionnaire was not formally piloted or subjected to statistical validation, this expert review process ensured that the questions were contextually appropriate and meaningful for the target population.

The study was conducted anonymously and voluntarily at the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sports and Tork Angeg Sports School during a professional training course in December 2023. The PRM was employed to capture firsthand perspectives on sport selection, leveraging coaches' extensive personal experiences. This approach was particularly suited for exploring the informal selection processes in Armenian sports schools. A structured

questionnaire enabled respondents to rank selection criteria based on their observations and preferences, facilitating a nuanced understanding of current practices within a reflective and open educational environment.

Data Analysis

During data analysis, a systematic qualitative content analysis was employed to identify and code recurring themes from the coaches' responses. Initial open coding was conducted to categorise key concepts and patterns, followed by axial coding to group related codes into broader thematic categories. To complement this qualitative approach, PRM was utilised, allowing respondents to rank the importance of various selection criteria quantitatively. This mixed-methods approach enabled the quantification of response frequencies and prioritisation of themes while maintaining the depth and richness of qualitative insights. Although the study's sample consisted of 24 coaches, the integration of rigorous coding procedures and ranking methods provided a comprehensive overview of current selection practices. Future research with larger samples and more advanced statistical analyses will further validate and refine these findings, supporting the development of standardised, evidence-based athlete selection frameworks within Armenian sports schools.

Results

This study involved 24 experienced trainer-educators who completed a structured questionnaire. The participants represent a cross-section of Armenia's wrestling coaching community, encompassing Greco-Roman wrestling, freestyle wrestling, sambo, and judo. Their backgrounds span both Soviet-era and modern

training systems, offering a unique blend of traditional and contemporary coaching perspectives. At the time of the study, the coaches, on average, were 39 years old and had approximately 12 years of combined coaching and pedagogical experience. The group was predominantly male (87.5%), with a small proportion of female coaches (12.5%).

All participants had competitive or professional backgrounds in sport—50% were multiple-time winners or medallists in national championships, while others had achieved European or international recognition. Notably, 87.5% of the coaches worked primarily with athletes aged 6–18, reflecting a strong focus on youth development within Armenia's state-supported wrestling programmes. This diverse and extensive professional experience provides a valuable foundation for examining current athlete selection practices. While preliminary results indicate limited awareness of formal selection criteria and a predominant emphasis on physical traits over psychological characteristics, the sections that follow offer a more critical exploration of how individual coaching practices intersect with broader issues of system-level governance and evidence-based talent development.

All interviewed coaches were members of the RA youth and adult national teams. Twenty-one (87.5%) of the interviewed coaches work with athletes aged 6-18, and three (12.5%) work with adults. This data indicates a strong focus on youth development in Armenia's wrestling programmes. In the Republic of Armenia, there are state-run, free sport schools, where mainly preparatory and training groups are located, accepting children from 6 to 8 years old, depending on the sport. The first question in our questionnaire was about "how coaches select children for

their team.” Nine of the interviewed coaches (37.5%) stated that they accept a sport school or group at the child's request, six (25%) with the doctor's permission, six (25%) taking into account physical fitness, two (8.3%) taking into account the hereditary characteristics of the child, and one of the coaches (4.2%) only stated that they take into account the reticular characteristics by applying special tests.

The coaches were asked, “Are there specific criteria for your sport?” Eight of the coaches (33.3%) indicated that there are no special criteria for practicing their sport, seven (29.2%) indicated that flexibility and agility are essential criteria, one (4.2%) indicated genetic data, one (4.2%) considered psychological characteristics as a special criterion, and seven (29.1%) considered the desire to do sport, strength, anthropometric data, health status, etc., as criteria.

The next question pertained to the standards for sport selection in RA. Sixteen respondents (66.6%) answered this question. Nine of the respondents (56%) indicated that they were not aware of the sport selection criteria, four (25%) indicated that there were no existing criteria, and the remaining three (19%) indicated that it does not work.

Most of the interviewed coaches consider the presence of basic motor abilities as an essential criterion for practising their sport: strength, agility, endurance, and coordination. However, some coaches gave special emphasis to stress resistance, willpower, self-control, persistence, and friendliness. It is notable that most coaches still emphasise the physical data, largely ignoring the psychological indicators.

Eighteen of the coaches answered the question of whether there are special criteria for admitting children to a sports school. Eight of the respondents (44%)

stated that they value physical data, three (17%) answered that they accept taking into account the child's age, the other three (17%) value the child's health condition and the necessary consideration of the presence of a medical certificate, and four coaches gave different answers.

One of the coaches believes that the child's hereditary and psychophysiological data, as well as their ability to reason, are essential for admission to a sports school. Another coach believes honesty, hard work, will, and desire are crucial. Two other coaches state that there are no special criteria for admission to the sport school.

Our last question concerned the qualities an athlete should possess. Not all respondents answered this question; however, 18 (75%) did. Various answers were given to this question as well. However, eight coaches (44.4%) emphasised the will characteristics: the will to fight, the will to train, and the will to win. The other 10 (55.6%) provided different answers, including courage, honesty, respect, discipline, and others.

The interviews of 24 Armenian coaches revealed that 37.5% select athletes based on personal requests, 25% prioritise physical fitness, and 56% are unaware of or report no formal selection criteria, indicating a lack of standardised, evidence-based selection practices. Based on these analyses, the researchers concluded that it is imperative to establish a unified system for sport selection and orientation in the Republic of Armenia. Such a system would enable the scientifically validated implementation of the sport selection process, thereby optimising time and financial resources.

Table 1 presents key open-ended questions and the frequency of overlapping responses given by the 24 participating coaches. The terms

“common answers” and “rare answers” refer to the proportion of participants who provided similar responses to a given question. These were determined by grouping responses with comparable themes or wording through an inductive thematic analysis. No advanced coding software was used; instead, content was manually reviewed and categorised based on recurrence and semantic similarity.

The ranking shown in the table is based on the percentage of respondents who gave matching or thematically similar answers, listed in descending order under the “common answers” column. Conversely, the “rare answers” column shows how infrequently those same questions received consistent or recurring responses from the group. This dual presentation helps illustrate both consensus and variation in coach perceptions related to athlete selection.

Table 1. Frequency of Common and Rare Responses to Key Questions on Athlete Selection

Question Number	Question Topic	Common Answers (%)	Rare Answers (%)
N6	Are there special criteria for choosing children to play any sport in Armenia?	56	4
N9	What qualities do you think an athlete should have?	55.6	4
N8	What standards are you guided by when accepting children to your group?	44	17
N4	How do you select children to practice in your group/team?	37.5	19
N5	Are there any specific criteria for playing your sport?	29.2	44

⁽¹⁾N6: Are there special criteria for choosing children to play any sport in Armenia?

⁽²⁾N9: What qualities do you think an athlete should have?

To facilitate reference, each questionnaire item was labelled (e.g., N6, N9) and is explained in footnotes above. Responses were categorised based on frequency: “common” responses were those endorsed by more than 50% of participants, indicating shared views among the coaches, while “rare” responses were those supported by fewer than 30%, reflecting limited agreement or relevance. For example, N6¹, regarding the existence of formal selection criteria, was affirmed by 56% of respondents, suggesting a broadly held perception. Similarly, N9², which inquired about essential athletic

qualities, was endorsed by 55.6%, indicating a consensus around key psychological traits. These classifications helped distinguish between dominant and peripheral perspectives within the coaching community.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer important insights into the current practices of athlete selection in Armenian sports schools, revealing key patterns, systemic gaps, and areas for improvement. While wrestling remains a culturally significant and widely practised sport in Armenia,

the mechanisms used to identify and nurture young talent are marked by inconsistency, informality, and a narrow focus on physical traits. In this section, we examine three major themes that emerged from the data: over-reliance on physical criteria, the lack of standardised selection frameworks and tools, and the underutilisation of psychological assessment in identifying athletic potential. Together, these themes highlight critical challenges and missed opportunities within the national talent development system.

1. Over-reliance on Physical Criteria.

The early identification and development of athletic talent require a nuanced balance between biological predispositions and contextual influences. However, our findings suggest that current selection processes in Armenian sports schools remain disproportionately reliant on observable physical characteristics. A significant proportion of coaches (56%) admitted to having no formal criteria for athlete selection, and only 4.2% reported using any structured or psychometric tools for this purpose. These results underscore a prevailing bias towards anthropometric features and physical capacity—such as strength and endurance—over holistic evaluation methods. This over-reliance neglects the complex, multi-dimensional nature of talent (Abbott et al., 2005) and risks excluding athletes whose primary strengths may lie in psychological resilience or cognitive agility.

2. Lack of Standardisation and Formal Tools.

The absence of a unified national framework for athlete selection in Armenia reflects a deeper systemic issue: the gap between theoretical best

practices and their practical application. Coaches' responses revealed a lack of consistency in how children are recruited, with many admitting that selection decisions are often made informally or in response to competition needs, rather than through a long-term developmental lens. This reactive and unstandardised model compromises the reliability and fairness of talent identification processes (Abbott & Collins, 2004) and undermines efforts to develop sustainable athlete pipelines. The lack of structured assessment tools—particularly in the psychological and cognitive domains—further limits the validity of current practices.

3. Missed Opportunities in Psychological Assessment.

Despite growing recognition of the role that psychological attributes play in long-term athletic success (MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010), Armenian coaches continue to prioritise physical traits over mental or emotional qualities. While motivation, discipline, and adaptability are frequently cited in talent development literature as critical determinants of elite performance (Goleman, 1995; Epstein, 2013), these variables were rarely mentioned by coaches in our study. This oversight suggests a missed opportunity to integrate emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and intrinsic motivation into the selection process—factors that may be especially vital for success in high-pressure sports such as wrestling or judo. Without tools to assess these components, many psychologically gifted yet late-developing athletes may be overlooked.

Conclusion

This study, supported by both empirical findings and a synthesis of relevant scholarly literature, confirms the critical importance of early talent identification in sport, particularly in the context of Armenian wrestling. Notably, the research reveals significant shortcomings in the current selection system: 56% of coaches report being unaware of formal selection criteria, and talent identification remains predominantly reliant on physical attributes, often overlooking psychological and cognitive dimensions of performance. The minimal use of formal testing and psychometric tools highlights a missed opportunity for more objective and holistic talent evaluation. Together, these findings indicate that the system is fragmented and overly reliant on subjective judgement, hindering fair and effective athlete development.

To address these deficiencies, there is an urgent need to establish a structured, inclusive, and evidence-based selection framework for youth wrestling in Armenia. A more systematic approach will enhance the fairness and efficiency of talent identification and enable the development of a new generation of athletes equipped to compete at national and international levels. By transitioning from informal, locally driven practices to a standardised model grounded in scientific criteria, Armenia can strengthen its wrestling programme and more fully realise its athletic potential.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to a specific cohort of wrestling coaches, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings beyond

the Armenian context. Second, the study did not incorporate direct input from athletes, whose perspectives could provide valuable insights into the selection experience. Lastly, the questionnaire instrument used was not subjected to formal pilot testing or psychometric validation, which may affect the reliability and consistency of the responses. These limitations point to important directions for future research, including larger-scale, multi-perspective studies and the refinement of assessment tools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and its contribution to ongoing research on talent identification in wrestling, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. *Develop a national talent selection framework.* Establish a standardised, sport-specific selection protocol for wrestling schools that integrates physiological and physical criteria tailored to the developmental needs of young Armenian athletes.

2. *Integrate objective assessment tools.* Incorporate validated instruments, such as emotional intelligence assessments, age-appropriate psychometric tools (e.g., the adapted Kholle test), beep tests for endurance, and field dependence/independence measures, to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of athletic potential.

3. *Expand stakeholder involvement.* Engage a broader range of stakeholders, including sport psychologists, physiologists, educators, and policymakers, to refine and validate the proposed framework. This multidisciplinary approach will enhance the framework's relevance, applicability, and sustainability.

4. *Strengthen research through larger samples.* As this study forms part of a thesis project, future research should involve larger, more diverse samples to enable statistically robust analyses and generalisable findings.

5. *Train coaches in evidence-based practices.* Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for coaches on talent identification tools, interpreting test results, and integrating psychological assessment into athlete development.

6. *Policy support and implementation.* Collaborate with national sport authorities and education ministries to formally adopt and institutionalise the selection framework within Armenia's youth sport development programmes.

By adopting these recommendations, Armenia can move toward a more equitable, scientifically grounded, and effective system of talent identification, ensuring that all young athletes, regardless of background, can pursue excellence in sport.

Ethics

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport (protocol code 2023-PT-4) and was conducted in accordance with the *Declaration of Helsinki*.

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Notes on Contributors

Anna Martirosyan has an academic background in kinesiology, sport management, and psychology. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sports (ASIPCS), in the Chair of Medicobiological Sciences. She has worked at the Ministry of Sport of the Republic of Armenia and various sports schools, gaining experience in athlete development. Anna has also studied and worked internationally in Germany and South Korea. She is the author of several scientific articles in sport science and currently works as a physical therapist with elite Armenian athletes while also teaching as a university lecturer. Please direct correspondence to anna.martirosyan@sportedu.am

Lusine Stepanyan is an Associate Professor at Yerevan State University's Department of General Psychology. She specialises in psychophysiology and adolescent psychology, with a focus on the mechanisms of aggression. She earned her Candidate of Sciences degree in 2009 and was awarded the title of Associate Professor in 2015. Fluent in Armenian, Russian, and English, she has held leadership roles at ASIPCS, including Dean and Vice-Rector. She actively supervises student research and has published numerous academic works in her field. Please direct correspondence to l.s.stepanyan@gmail.com.

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