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Are Malaysian Young Athletes Really Talented? An Examination of the Relative Age Effects among the Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM) Athletes



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Abstract. The Relative Age Effects (RAE) phenomenon refers to the overrepresentation of athletes born in the early part of the year in sports. This study examined the prevalence of the RAE among all the sports competed in the 2017 Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM). The birthdates of all 24 sports participants from three age categories, comprising 6301 boys (U12=2067; U15=1670; U18=2564) and 4061 girls (U12=1428; U15=1162; U18=1426) were examined. Birth dates were analysed according four quarters (Jan-March; Apr-June; Jul-Sept; Oct-Dec) plus one 'below age' division with the cut-off date set at 1st January. Separate chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were conducted according to age group, gender and sports. Results showed significant relative age effects in both gender for all age groups. Athletes born in the first three months were significantly over represented than those born in the last quarter of the year. However, further analyses on individual-event sports participated by the girls (i.e., tenpin bowling, artistic gymnastic, rhythmic gymnastic, chess, golf, sailing, squash, and tennis) and three sports (i.e., artistic gymnastic, sailing and squash) in the boys category did not reveal significant unequal distributions. It is speculated that physical maturity characteristics of the athletes influenced their selection instead of sport specific skills. The implications and suggestions are discussed subsequently.

Biography. Assoc. Prof. Dr Jeffrey Low Fook Lee, is a senior lecturer at the Sports Science and Coaching Faculty, Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), Tanjong Malim, Perak. Upon completion of secondary school education, he pursued his career in teaching at the Specialist Teachers Training Institute (MPIK) in physical and health education. Began his career as a physical education teacher in SMK Methodist (ACS), Ipoh in 1986. He continued to further his education in the same field at the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia from 1991 - 1995. Upon graduating, he took up the position as a teacher-coach at the Bukit Jalil Sports School, KL in 1996. He specialized in cricket and has served as the national age-group coach in various tournaments in Asia. Juggling his time between teaching and coaching, he pursued post graduate education in Sports Science at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Upon completing his Masters of Sports Science, he took up the position of a lecturer with the Sports Science Department in the Sultan Idris Education University in 2003. He then pursued and completed his PhD in motor behaviour with the Liverpool John Moores University, UK in 2011 before returning to serve as a senior lecturer with the Sports Science and Coaching Faculty, UPSI. His research area of interest is the factors influencing the development of expertise in sport. He is a member of the National Sports Council Coaching Academy as well as a member of the sports science and physical education curriculum panel with the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education. He is a co-author of the Form Five Sports Science text book currently being used by the secondary schools in Malaysia.