Data-driven sports management hits SA shores

South African and African sports teams gained access to the same technology used by the German football team in their successful bid for the 2014 FIFA World Cup at the recent launch of SAP Sports One.

The launch was attended by delegates from many of South Africa's top sports bodies, including the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC), Federation International of Football Association (FIFA), Gauteng Sports Confederation and other key members of the sporting industry.

SAP Sports One is reportedly the first sports-specific cloud solution powered by SAP's HANA platform. It provides teams and administrators with a single unified platform for the efficient management of teams and players and delivers powerful analytical insights for performance optimisation.

The solution was born out of a partnership between SAP and the German football team. Following the team's victory at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, SAP was heralded as the team's "12th Man" by the *Wall Street Journal* and credited with a significant contribution to the famous win.

Bernhard Escherich, global head of New Markets & Strategic Customers: Sport & Entertainment at SAP, says this experience prompted SAP to expand the scope and functionality of Sports One and release it as a single product for sports teams.

"SAP Sports One provides team management, training planning, player fitness, performance insights, scouting and penalty insights functionality to some of the world's leading high-performance sports teams. While it was initially designed to support football teams, today Sports One has been adopted by a range of other sports disciplines, including rugby, basketball, skiing and ice hockey. "

Cloud tech driving on-field performance

Deployed in the cloud, SAP Sports One helps clubs and organisations digitalise sports performance management by coordinating all administrative, training and team management, scouting and medical processes.

Israel's plan to accelerate innovation in sports tech
Lauren Hartzenberg 31 Jul 2018

"The solution is built on SAP HANA, so data analysis and processing take place in real time to equip coaching, medical and administrative staff with in-the-moment insight into various performance areas relating to the team or organisation," says Escherich.

"Most sports already generate a wealth of data from video feeds and equipment sensors, and we have partnered with a number of sports companies to generate player data via their wearable devices: our platform integrates all the data sources and enables real-time management of teams."

Escherich adds that many of the company's innovations in other industries have been incorporated in the Sports One platform.

> "We have embedded powerful tools to understand the relationships between data sets, apply geospatial analysis of data, and present the findings in new and interesting ways that are relevant to the person consuming the data. For example, the coach will have a very different interface when using Sports One than what the physiotherapist will experience. This ensures each user gets the information most important to them and their job functions."

ERP history points to future applications in sports industries

According to Simon Carpenter, chief technology advisor at SAP Africa, the company's rich history in developing ERP solutions for large, complex industries has opened the door to developing solutions for the media, sports and entertainment industries.

"Modern sports teams are huge, multi-billion-dollar businesses with millions of fans, extensive facilities, thousands of employees, and of course the sports stars themselves. As the sports industry is increasingly professionalised, administrators face many of the same challenges other industries encounter: procurement, talent management and retention, performance management, marketing, and CRM. Attempting to manage all these disparate elements manually while still ensuring peak team performance is nigh-impossible. That's where Sports One comes in."

Carpenter says there is a global war for talent, and this is even more closely fought in the sports industries.

> *"Social listening integrated into Sports One can pick up fan conversations about which players are perceived to be performing well, pointing talent scouts to potential future superstars. The ability to identify talent at an earlier stage further enables better talent development, helping grow and develop promising players. Through the deep analytics embedded in the platform, team managers can also start identifying patterns that point to exhaustion or excessive workload, which may be precursors to injury. With this insight at hand, sports teams can make more informed decisions over how players are managed for optimal performance."*

Sport's mass appeal and global reach make the fan experience essential to the growth and success of sports disciplines and teams. Large sports events can draw billions of viewers - the FIFA World Cup attracts on average 3.5 billion viewers, with 1 billion watching the 2014 final alone - and technology has emerged as a vital component to improving the viewing experience for fans.

Data in sports

"The explosion in data use in sports has created compelling new opportunities to provide fans with deeper levels of insight and engagement," says Carpenter.

Source: pixabay.com

"In a long-standing project with Sailing Team Germany, we applied our data analytics and planning expertise to reduce the complexity of sailing and make what is happening on the water more compelling for crews and sailing fans. The solutions focused on the team and the events, with event solutions using live streams, real-time and post-race analyses, and data analytics of wind and water conditions to make the races more comprehensible and hands-on for spectators and fans. In another example, our work with Formula 1 teams has given viewers unprecedented access to data relating to trackside conditions, including the temperature of the tyres, the G-force experienced by drivers at different stages of the race, and more, to give fans exciting new data points to interact and engage with."

From 'gut feel' to verified data

Carpenter believes the sports industry is moving away from 'gut feel' to a more science-based approach built on accurate data.

"The world is evolving to the point where we can generate deep, accurate insights about anything happening in the physical world. This was evident in a recent project with the Volvo Ocean Race, where we used our SAP Leonardo IoT Edge technology to track sailors' fitness levels and exhaustion during the race, so that the crew can optimise their performance based on the data collected. Physical and mental exhaustion are the biggest threats to crews during the eight-month race -

considered to be one of the toughest of any sports event in the world - and by using technology we take the guesswork out of the crew's fatigue, reaction to weather conditions, stress levels and other biometric measurement data."

Sports Tank creates platform for sports technology startups
20 Nov 2018

He adds that the pace of change is simply too fast for so-called 'shooting from the hip'. "Successful sports teams will increasingly use technology and data to understand how to improve performance. European and US sports teams already make great use of data; with the introduction of SAP Sports One here on our continent, African teams have access to a powerful platform that can improve and optimise every aspect of their operations, training and performance."

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