
Providing scenarios for the development of professional sports in Iraq

Articles in Press

Jabry & Et'al

Abstract

Purpose: The development of professional sports is a primary concern for nations as they aim to improve elite performance and provide opportunities for collective participation, so the purpose of the present study is to generate scenarios for the development of professional sports in Iraq. **Methods:** Based on purposeful and snowball sampling, theoretical saturation was achieved through 25 interviews. The data collected were then coded and summarized with the Nvivo software and a focus group. Using scenario wizard software and expert opinions, the interplay between these factors was discussed and synthesized. **Results:** The coding of the interviews and the input from the focus group led to the identification of 10 trends and 30 drivers. Further analysis with the help of an expert focus group revealed 6 key drivers (Creating a national strategy for hosting major sporting events, Gender justice and a supportive view of women's sports, Involvement of key stakeholders, Meritocracy and meritocratic system, Standard guidelines for financial support of professional athletes in terms of contract and reward system and Standardization of equipment and facilities of professional clubs), each with 3 uncertainties. **Conclusion:** The findings of the current study suggest that, given the unstable security conditions that currently prevail in Iraq, the country must prioritize security and executive stability, as well as work towards greater social acceptance of women and the development of sports infrastructure. Additionally, standard guidelines for financial support and contracts must be put in place, and sports hardware must be improved to support key stakeholders and promote meritocracy.

Keywords:

Futurism, Development, Scenario planning, Uncertainty, Sports.

Introduction

People have always attempted to discover and decipher the future because it is impossible to succeed in tasks such as goal setting, replacement, or planning without first observing and understanding its future developments. The primary cognitive endeavor of planners and managers is to determine whether the future will be a continuation of the present and the past. In this regard, planners employ various approaches to address future challenges, primarily by analyzing past trends, following temporal and spatial constraints. Furthermore, the status quo has persisted (Mirzaie et al., 2023). Presently, the science of foresight has transformed the disorganized and discrete narratives surrounding future planning into an established scientific discipline based on principles and foundations. Its objective is to scrutinize historical approaches, and uncover, innovate, and assess futures that are plausible, probable, and desirable (Zali, 2012). The purpose of these prospects is to generate scenarios (Mohebbi et al., 2018). In the field of strategic thinking, foresight into various futures and efforts to build the future is based on an interactive and collaborative approach that is of equal significance. Establishing a favorable future through the evaluation and management of foresight initiatives is facilitated by this collaborative and interactive method (Shahryari et al., 2023). Recently, there has been an increased recognition of the value of foresight among university students and it is now being systematically implemented by governments and institutions to aid in long-term planning (Zali & Poursohrab, 2017). Consequently, foresight may be defined as the systematic pursuit of non-binding futures to ascertain the potential rationale behind present decisions (Gong et al., 2020).

Slatter (2015) was the initial futurist researcher to employ the term "foresight." In his view, foresight not only equips us with the knowledge required to confront the challenges of civilization but can also be applied indirectly to organizational policy. He held the belief that foresight could potentially shape the competitive landscape of the future and generate a diverse range of forward-looking and high-quality visions, such as the ability to anticipate unfavorable circumstances, direct systems, and mold outcomes. It pertains to the evaluation of novel markets, products, and services concerning strategies (Ma et al., 2019).

Sports constitute a highly impactful decision about an organization's overarching strategic plan and the methods by which it attains its long-term objectives, thereby fostering genuine national growth and prosperity across multiple dimensions (AlShiblawi et al., 2022). This phenomenon is examined from a variety of perspectives, including professional, public health, and societal well-being-oriented notions. The correlation between sports and cultural, social, political, and economic phenomena demonstrates the significance of this phenomenon and its function in national development initiatives; in a broad sense, the strength of a nation is closely tied to the development and progress of its sports. Something like that (shahvali kohshouri et al., 2021).

Sports development comprises a range of policies, procedures, and actions that collaborate to furnish all segments of society with access to sporting opportunities and experiences (Keshavarz & Hemti Afif, 2020). The realm of sports is characterized by remarkable progress and swift transformations. Such rapidity and unexpected change can result in strategic ignorance across all facets of the sports industry. In an environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, and change, the sole strategy that is probable to attain greater success is one that endeavors to construct the future (Mowlaei & Ghasemi, 2023). While this endeavor has historically entailed considerable risk, it is far more prudent to embrace this risk rather than passively observe forthcoming developments (Shermamatovich & Latif, 2023). Strategic decisions and plans derived from foresight yield optimal investments in the realm of professional sports development. Exercise, as a fundamental aspect of human existence, occupies a unique and significant position in the daily agendas of individuals. Adib Roshan et al. (2020) state that the advancement of

professional sports is a fundamental concern for all nations in their efforts to improve elite performance and facilitate collective participation. A comprehensive, strategic, and codified system is necessary to regulate professional sports. An examination of the table of professional medals for various nations reveals that the majority of national honors have been bestowed upon countries that possess adequate and standard sports facilities. At present, a significant factor impeding Iraq's ability to organize international competitions is the inadequate quality and dearth of standards at its sporting venues. Financial support, a comprehensive and integrated approach to the development of professional sports, athlete participation, talent identification, and system advancement, employment assistance for athletes, educational infrastructure and facilities, coaching provision and coach selection methodology, international competition, and scientific research are all critical components of professional sports. Gwartz & Spence (2020). According to a study by Emami et al. (2020), the advancement of professional sports is significantly influenced by the level of scientific and technical expertise possessed by coaches, the supervision and control of coaches' work, the expansion of facilities and halls along with their full equipment, specialized facilities, and educational support. Participating in or hosting international competitions is a critical determinant of success in professional sports. Presently, governments allocate substantial resources towards obtaining authorization to host major sports events, as they perceive it to be a worthwhile investment in the advancement and progress of professional sports. Country status is attributed to it (Adib Roshan et al., 2018). Approximately 95% of significant sporting events are held in 30 established nations while developing countries receive only 5% of the allocation (Acquah-Sam, 2021). Conversely, research findings in this domain indicate that a nation's affluence and population size are significant determinants in acquiring medals and success. Santagada concluded (Khan et al., 2020) that the significance of the economic role, cultural factors, and the discovery of people As well as budget and financial support, talent acquisition, specialized and high-quality coaches, the implementation of scientific methods and long-term strategies, Teixeira et al. (2023) also consider the impact of these elements on professional sports, which include the presence of a strategy, financial supports, talent identification, high-quality

coaches and expertise and holding competitions at the international level (Teixeira et al., 2023). Over fifty percent of the international success of fifteen countries across the continents of Europe, Asia, Oceania, and America in professional sports can be attributed to the three factors of population, gross domestic product (or property), and sports participation (Rosenkrantz, 2018).

As previously stated, the advancement of sports is influenced by a multitude of factors. This is especially true in the context of Iraq, The country has a population of about 40 million people, making it the 36th most populous country in the world. It covers an area of approximately 438,317 square kilometers, ranking as the 58th largest country globally. Despite numerous plans and programs being proposed for sports development, it seems that these efforts have not been successful thus far. Iraq's sports face substantial challenges, such as an unreasonable development process and heavy reliance on sports-related imports. In a study by Ahmed Ameen Altaee (2023), it was found that attempts to establish sports teams in Iraq date back to the 1930s, with requests for permission to form outfits like the Al-Jazeera team in 1934 and the Al-Ahly team in 1949 in Mosul. While these teams have achieved commendable results at the national level, they struggle due to inadequate support from the Iraqi government and lack of funding. Considering the significance of professional sports in Iraq, this study attempts to examine the interrelationships among the key determinants influencing the growth of professional sports from a novel planning perspective. Foresight methods, including scenario writing and logical reasoning, are implemented, taking into account forthcoming developments and the insights of sports experts. In order to address the inquiry, "What are the scenarios for the development of Iraqi professional sports?"

Materials and methods

The current research is based on inductive approach and a fundamental orientation and its method is descriptive-analytical and based on prospective research methods, theoretical data is prepared by documentary method, and experimental data is prepared by survey method. Documentary studies and experimental data were used in the preparation of variables that affect the future state of sports development in Iraq in the form of a survey based on the methodological approach. This research was based on future forecasting with the model of Voros (2001), The overall framework of Verus comes from combining and reworking ideas from other sources. In this model, inputs are

key drivers or factors that have happened in the past or present and influence the future situation. At each stage, fundamental questions are asked and actions are taken. Finally, the output is the actions taken in accordance with the foresight. The selection of participants in the research was made using the the purposeful and snowball sampling method. The selection criteria of the experts included theoretical mastery, practical experience, willingness, and ability to participate in the research protocol and access to them. Determination of the number of experts, the criterion was to ensure the comprehensiveness of views; At this stage, the researcher reached theoretical saturation through conducting 20 interviews, but due to the scope of the field of foresight, which requires more accuracy and depth, a further 5 interviews were conducted. Nvivo software was used for qualitative data analysis and coding, and Scenario Wizard software was used to design the scenario portfolio.

Also, in order to calculate the reliability of the interview with the intra-subject agreement method of two coders (evaluators), a doctorate in sports management as a research partner was asked to code 3 randomly selected interviews after the necessary trainings and explanations. Then, by comparing the coding done by the research associate with the coding done by the researcher, similar codes were identified by the two coders. Then, by using non-agreement and non-similar codes, the percentage of intra-subject agreement was calculated under the formula below. The results showed that the reliability between the two coders is equal and is at a very good level.

$$\text{Reliability percentage} = \frac{2 \times \text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100$$

Table 1. The results of the reliability of two coders

Interview number	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability percentage
1	21	10	4	95%
2	23	11	3	96%
3	27	12	3	89%
Total	71	33	10	93%

The obtained results indicate that the total number of codes recorded by the researcher is 71, the total number of agreement between the codes is 33, and the total number of non-agreement is 10. Also, the reliability between the coders for the interviews conducted in this research using the mentioned formula was 93%. As a result, the reliability of coding in this research is confirmed. As it was said in the above section, data coding was done in three stages in the form of open, central and selective coding, each of which is explained separately.

Results

Description of the characteristics of the interviewees: The personal characteristics of the interviewees are described in table (2):

Table 2. Personal characteristics of the interviewees

Post	Education level	Sex	Age (year)	Experience	
				University	Executive
University faculty member	PhD in Sports Sciences	Male	39	*	
		Male	42	*	*
		Female	37	*	*
		Female	32	*	
		Male	52	*	*
		Male	39	*	
		Female	44	*	
		Male	53	*	*
		Female	40	*	
		Male	46	*	*
Senior managers of sports clubs	BA of Sports Science	Male	45		*
	BA of Sports Science	Male	49		*
	MA of Sports Science	Female	49		*
	MA of Management	Female	52	*	*
Senior managers of sports federations	PhD in sports management	Male	40	*	*
	MA of Sports Science	Male	46		*
	MA of Sports Science	Male	56	*	*
	MA of Sports Science	Male	31		*
Experts of the Iraqi Ministry of Sports	MA of Sports Science	Male	43	*	*
	PhD in sports management	Male	38		*
Sports management experts	MA of Sports Science	Male	50		*
	MA of Sports Science	Female	41		*
	PhD in sports management	Male	43	*	*
Experts in the field of foresight	Future Study	Male	33	*	
		Female	29	*	

Six key success factors for different possible situations can be imagined, which are important for planning the future of professional sport in Iraq, so it is necessary to analyse and define the possible situations in order to develop scenarios. At this stage, three possible situations (optimistic, ambivalent, pessimistic) were identified for each of the six key success factors, giving a total of 18 situations (Table 3). These 18 situations were then presented to the experts in an 18x18 matrix. In this new matrix, situations can also have a negative effect and the numbers of the matrix are variable from 3 to -3 (+3 is a strong enabler, +2 is a moderate enabler, +1 is a weak enabler, 0 has no effect, -3 is a strong limiter, 2-relative limiter, 1-weak limiter), Table (7).

Table 3. Key factors and their possible situations in the future of Iraqi professional sports

subset of each factor		Condition	Key influencing factors
A	Creating a national strategy for hosting major sporting events	optimistic	Comprehensive and integrated synergy for hosting sports events
		ambivalent	Implementation of strategies for hosting sports events
		pessimistic	Failure to develop a national strategy for hosting major sports events
B	Gender justice and a supportive view of women's sports	optimistic	Maximum support for gender equality and a supportive view of women's sport
		ambivalent	Scattered and fragmented support for women's sport
		pessimistic	Lack of support for gender equality and support for women's sport
C	Involvement of key stakeholders (coaches, athletes, etc.)	optimistic	Full and continuous support from key stakeholders
		ambivalent	Limited and intermittent support from key stakeholders
		pessimistic	Lack of support by key stakeholders
D	Meritocracy and meritocratic system	optimistic	Implementation of the stages of meritocracy (seeking merit, finding merit, appointing merit, cultivating merit and meritocracy) in professional sport
		ambivalent	Appointments based to some extent on the system of merit and meritocracy
		pessimistic	Appointments based on the form of breeding
E	Standard guidelines for financial support of professional athletes in terms of contract and reward system	optimistic	Standardised, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sport
		ambivalent	Standardised, sporadic and cross-sectional recipes for professional sport
		pessimistic	Lack of standardised, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sport
F	Standardization of equipment and facilities of professional clubs	optimistic	Full development of modern and standard sports facilities and equipment
		ambivalent	Gradual development of modern and standard sports facilities and venues
		pessimistic	Lack of modern and standard sports facilities

By completing the matrix, the experts analysed the data in the Scenario Wizard analysis software and identified scenarios with a high probability of compatibility and scenarios with a low probability, as follows:

High (probable) scenarios 1 scenario, High compatibility scenarios (credible) 3 scenarios, Weak scenarios (possible) 44 scenarios

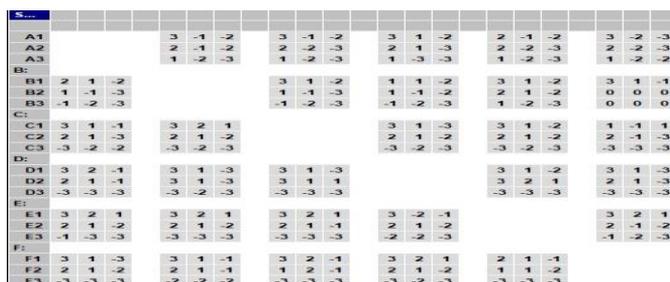


Figure 1. Status of enablers and limiters in the factors in the Scenario Wizard software

According to the nature of the Scenario Wizard software, the possible dimensions of the scenarios, and that the software does not insist on the existence of all types of scenarios from different spectrums, and only takes into account the negative and positive relationships that influence the design of the scenarios, and 44 weak scenarios such as planning It is almost impossible for them, so they are not dealt with, and only the scenarios between strong and weak scenarios, known as high compatibility scenarios, are dealt with, and by examining the acceptable, by examining the acceptable adjacency and the desired compatibility of the drivers and the final uncertainty, the following four scenarios are presented as follow in Table 4,5,6 and 7.

Table 4. Statuses of each factor by each scenario

Equipment and facilities of professional clubs	Standard instructions for contracting and financial support	The system of meritocracy and meritocracy	Participation of key stakeholders	Gender justice and a supportive view of women's sports	Creating a national strategy for hosting sporting events	Key factors
Full development of modern and standard sports facilities	Standardized, comprehensive and integrated guidelines for professional sports	Implementation of the stages of meritocracy	Full and continuous support of key stakeholders	Maximum support for gender justice and a supportive view of women's sports	Implementation of strategies to achieve the hosting of sports events	First scenario
Full development of modern and standard sports facilities	Standardized, comprehensive and integrated guidelines for professional sports	Implementation of the stages of meritocracy	Full and continuous support of key stakeholders	Scattered and fragmented support for women's sports	Implementation of strategies to achieve the hosting of sports events	Second scenario
Lack of modern and	Lack of standard,	Appointments based on	Lack of support	Scattered and fragmented	Failure to develop a	Third scenario

standard sports facilities	comprehensive and integrated guidelines for professional sports	dwarfism form	from key stakeholders	support for women's sports	national strategy for hosting sporting events	
Lack of modern and standard sports facilities	Lack of standard, comprehensive and integrated guidelines for professional sports	Appointments based on dwarfism form	Lack of support from key stakeholders	Scattered and fragmented support for women's sports	Creating a national strategy for hosting sporting events	Forth scenario

Table 5. Definition of the concept of numbers and situations on the scenario page

Score	Feature	Condition
3	Being the best possible conditions for the development of professional sports	Favorable (optimistic)
1	Uncertainty in professional sports and gradual growth	Static (ambivalent)
-3	Staying away from missions, constant and sometimes negative growth	Crisis (pessimistic)

Table 6. Stature for each of the factors separately for each scenario based on the triple spectrum

Creating a national strategy for hosting sporting events	gender equity and a supportive view of women's sports	The participation of key stakeholders (coaches, athletes, etc.)	meritocracy and meritocratic system	Standard instructions for the financial support to enter into a contract and reward system	Standardization of equipment and facilities of professional clubs	Key factors
Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Static	First scenario
Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Favorable	Static	Static	Second scenario
Crisis	Crisis	Crisis	Crisis	Static	Crisis	Third scenario
Crisis	Crisis	Crisis	Crisis	Crisis	Favorable	Forth scenario

Table 7. Ranking table of believable scenarios based on usefulness to criticality score

Scenarios	Score the scenario in terms of consistency	Scenario score in terms of statures competency	Conditions
First scenario	7	83	Favorable
Second scenario	3	30	Very slow process
Third scenario	0	10	Unfavorable process
Forth scenario	0	-84	Crisis

The results obtained from the scenario page seem to indicate the superiority of the unfavourable situation over the favourable situation, and only the first scenario is the only one that imagines the favourable situation for Iraqi professional sport, while the rest of the scenarios show unfavourable and critical trends.

Discussion

The purpose of the current research is to advance the scenarios of the development of Iraqi professional sports, The output of the software includes the possible scenarios that the possible scenarios include the first scenario with a positive impact score and a non-negative compatibility value is considered a strong scenario and the second scenario with a positive impact score and a negative compatibility value is considered a relatively strong scenario and the following scenarios with a negative impact score and a negative compatibility value are considered weak scenarios, as a result the output of the software includes 4 possible main scenarios. In fact, a change in any of the uncertainties of the research will lead to the production of a new scenario by the software. The compilation of the final space of scenarios is shown in the form of four separate scenarios, which modes of their descriptors are internally consistent with each other, and which combination of the listed uncertainties is more likely to occur (more than others). On this basis, the first and fourth scenarios are the optimistic and pessimistic scenarios of the model, the second and third scenarios are the intermediate scenarios whose constructive uncertainties are a combination of different uncertainties. The results are in line with the findings of Rahadian et al. (2020), Shahryari et al. (2023), Alfahham & Asefi (2024), Teixeira et al. (2023), Cury et al. (2023); According to the results of their research, Rahadian et al. (2020) found that insufficient support for athletes, inadequate infrastructure that does not provide optimal training conditions, and the need for more investment to encourage participation in sports are the main reasons for the lack of sports development. Cury et al. (2023) also identified the characteristics of talent transfer to the elite level and the existence of a number of technical parameters as effective factors in the development of sports. In addition, inter-organisational cooperation is necessary to provide structured talent transfer pathways. Teixeira et al. (2023), the results of this research show

that the coaching and development of elite sports must be systematically and professionally managed and requires a collective commitment and includes all the capacities of the country. In addition, the results of the research of Shahryari et al. (2023) indicate the compilation of 3 scenarios to achieve the desired future; the first scenario includes the components of financial resource allocation, all-round entry of the layers, single and integrated management and dealing with the media, the second scenario includes the components of financial resource allocation, social status of the family, specialisation and highlighting and modelling, the third scenario includes the components of financial resource allocation, all-round entry layers, specialisation and media coverage. Also, Alfahham & Asefi (2024) research results showed that 7 economic drivers, 8 social drivers, 8 cultural drivers, 8 political drivers, 7 legal drivers and 8 technological drivers play a role in the development of public sports.

The output of the software, including scenarios with strong compatibility, includes the 4 mentioned scenarios that have non-negative compatibility (zero or positive) and the relationship between their uncertainties has a positive impact score. Following the results of this study, a summary of the history of the four scenarios defined for the development of Iraqi professional sport in 1416 and the proposed policies are presented:

According to experts, the first scenario with the title "leap" means accelerated changes in time, and the atmosphere of this scenario is created from the result of uncertainties from the six main drivers, as follows, in which a comprehensive and integrated synergy to host major events sports has been realised and full and continuous support of the main stakeholders (coaches, athletes, etc.) is particularly visible, and the selection between the elements of sport based on meritocracy and in the heart Standard, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sports have paved the way for the development of professional sports, and the full support of the main stakeholders is particularly visible. Standard, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sport have paved the way for the development of professional sport, and the full development of modern and standard sports facilities and venues has been achieved, and the development of professional sport has been carried out in a favourable and stable manner, but the support is scattered and disjointed. It is still visible in women's sports.

According to the experts, the second scenario with the title "Delay" means to think and the atmosphere of this scenario is created from the result of uncertainties (descriptors) from the six main drivers, as follows, which is the maximum support for gender justice and a supportive view of women's sport and support Complete and continuous cooperation of key stakeholders as well as the implementation of meritocracy in professional sport and standard, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sport have led to the full development of modern and standard sports facilities and venues, but the fragmented and piecemeal implementation of strategies to achieve the hosting of major sporting events (security, performance, etc.) has made the development of professional sport a very slow and semi-sustainable process.

According to the experts, the third scenario, entitled "Scrutiny", means to scrutinise carefully. The atmosphere of this scenario is the result of the uncertainties of the six main drivers, and according to the experts, it is a kind of continuation of the existing situation in the future of the development of professional sports in Iraq, which is a comprehensive and integrated synergy to host major sporting events (security, performance, etc). However, the lack of support for gender equity and a supportive view of women's sports, as well as the lack of support from key stakeholders and the appointments of the core of professional sports have been based on the form of patronage, and the lack of standard, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sports, and even the lack of sports facilities and venues. Modern and standard has caused an unfavourable trend in the development of professional sports in Iraq, and only in terms of security, Iraq is able to hold major sporting events, but no infrastructure is possible to achieve.

According to the experts, the fourth scenario, titled "Stagnation", means dryness or mental dryness and is the most pessimistic picture of the future of professional sports in Iraq and depicts the decline of standards related to the development of professional sports in Iraq. Uncertainties arise from the six main drivers, the failure to create a national strategy for hosting major sporting events (security, executive, etc.) , athletes, etc.) in addition to appointments based on the form of tyranny in professional sports, as well as the lack of standard, comprehensive and integrated recipes for professional sports and the lack of modern and standard sports facilities

and venues cause a crisis in Iraqi professional sports. It turns out that there is practically no possibility of making policies in this field for professional sports.

conclusion

As a result, professional sports in Iraq have not been fully supported by the government. Looking to the future, it must be noted that the uncertainties surrounding the development of professional sports in Iraq and the security issues associated with holding international events in the country are significant factors that are affected by Iraq's unstable security conditions. In addition, the government's traditional view towards women's sports is hindering the success of professional sports in the country.

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