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FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

THESIS SUMMARY

***WATER POLO SPORT PERFORMANCE UNDER THE
INFLUENCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS***

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Key words: sport sociology, sport performance, water polo, interpersonal relationships, coach, family, team mates, friends.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to establish the role that interpersonal relationships have within the water polo teams, of different ages, in acquiring sports performance. Moreover I would like to compare the influence these relationships have in obtaining sports performance at different age groups (12-13 years category children, 14-15 years old junior III, 16-17 years old junior II and 18-19 years old junior I).

Interpersonal relationships will be analyzed from two perspectives. The first aspect would be to study the influences that relationships with the coach, family, teammates and friends / classmates may have in practicing water polo game for personal benefits. A second approach would be to analyze the influence of interpersonal relationships on sports performance and the role they can play for those involved directly in the preparation and in the process of obtaining exceptional results.

Unfortunately, the game of water polo in our country but also in other sport branches, the comun conscience in the evaluation of results and performances, but also the training methods used, is mainly focused on physical skills, talent, methods and means of training. In most of the cases the fact that all actions are happening to people and between people is overlooked, in an invisible system of human relationships where the organization, hierarchy, leadership and motivating of individuals making up a team, together with the settlement of conflicts, managing situations of themselves or between them and others, are just as important as the specific methods used in sports training.

In Romania, water polo game is the only team sport that has qualified for the 2012 London Olympics. In addition to this remarkable result compared to the number of pools and legitimated athletes who practice this sport, the senior national team has participated in all major competitions over the past 10 years like World Championships, European Championships and World League tournaments. These results could not have been achieved without creating an effective sport system at the level of juniors and in addition to the primary role of producing athletes, fulfills a secondary role that of generating health and well being among the participants.

Analyzing the results of junior national teams, we can say that by the age of 14, our athletes are competitive in terms of the achieved performance. Once this level is overpassed, there is a space created between us and the established teams, based on the lack of infrastructure and individualization patterns of training, but also on the lack of a clear vision on integrating all systems that a teenager depends on (school, family, friends). Thus, young polo players do not have a long-term development model by which they could achieve an optimal level in preparation, in participation in competitions and in recovery, based on the athlete's age characteristics.

SPORTS PERFORMANCE IN THE GAME OF WATER POLO

In the first part of my thesis, being inspired from the literature I have defined the main concepts of the game of water polo, history and specifics of sport, together with the previous research accomplished in this field.

Water polo or football in the water, as it was originally called, is one of the oldest sports games and first one included in the program of the modern Olympic Games. The name of this sport appeared as the resemblance of the players, who played at the beginning from boats, with the horses from the classical polo played on the grass. The game is played over 4 rounds, each round consisting of 8 minutes of actual play. Each team consists of six field players, a goalkeeper, along with six reserves. Specific for the game of water polo is the position of the athletes in the field, where the center is positioned in front of the gate, at 2 meters, and the other players place themselves on an on an imaginary semicircle.

The positions of the players, depending on the layout in the field are: wings, driver, center back, center forward and goalkeeper. The workouts are customized depending on the position every sport occupies in the team and according to the game structure. From the total of actions during a water polo game, the players have a horizontal position at a rate of 35%, the remaining 65% being carried out in a vertical position (Lozovina, 1984). Therefore, the game of polo is made up of one-third of the time in which players swim with different intensity and two-thirds on different displacement in the water with help of feet movements.

The main topics analyzed by professionals from the branch of the water polo game were the following: issues concerning throwing at the gate; aspects concerning anthropological factors and morphological characteristics of water polo players; analyze of

the factors that contribute to the performance of the polo game; individual and collective elements of technics and tactics; elements concerning optimizing of the physical training and injury issues.

EMPIRICAL STUDY CONCERNING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL FACTORS IN OBTAINING OF SPORTS PERFORMANCE IN THE GAME OF WATER POLO

This study aims to analyze social factors that influence athletic performance, among children and juniors playing water polo. The novelty of this research consists in studying the role of interpersonal relationships of the water polo players from Romania and their achieved performances. Another novelty consists in studying all water polo teams from Romania, starting with the categories of children and youth, following junior and senior; this means that an estimated number of 570 players were analyzed from all water polo clubs in the country and from all the teams that entered the national championship. This study also included those who have passed the group phase and have qualified for the final tournament (namely 6 teams for each category of children and juniors), but also the ones who haven't won a place for the finals of the national championship.

Concerning the used method, technique and research tool, we chose the method of quantitative research and the technique of the sociological study, having as instrument the questionnaire. The survey was tested on 28 children and adolescents, aged 12-19 years, in the period of 28th-30th January 2014. Due to the fact that certain terms were more difficult for children aged 12-13 years, the language research tool has been simplified and adapted to be self-administered without difficulty by the athletes included in this research.

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Determining the degree of association and influence of social factors in athletic performance among children and juniors practicing water polo;
- Determining the degree of influence that the following may have in obtaining sports performance: social network, relationship with the coach, teammates, friends / classmates, teachers, family support;
- Identifying the degree of influence of psychological and individual factors in sports performance;
- Identifying the level of individual performance of each athlete.

Namely following interrogations and assumptions:

- The results of sports among children and juniors differ depending on the type of social and family relations? More precisely: we expect that athletes who experience positive relationships to achieve better results than those who do not enjoy such relationships.
- Sports performance among children and juniors differs depending on the type of relationships with their friends / classmates? More precisely: we expect those athletes who experience positive relationships with friends or classmates to obtain better performance compared to those who experience negative relationships.
- Sports performance among children and juniors differs depending on the type of relationship they have with their teammates? More precisely: we expect athletes who have positive relationships with teammates to obtain better results compared to those who experience negative relationships with them.
- Sports performance among children and juniors differ depending on the relationship with the coach? More precisely: we expect athletes who have a good relationship with the coach to perform better than those who do not have a good relationship with him.
- Sports performance among children and juniors differs depending on the relationship with the teachers? More precisely: we expect athletes who have a good relationship with the teachers to perform better than those who do not have a good relationship with them.
- Sports performance among children and adolescents who practice water polo differs depending on the material, financial and life standard? More precisely: we expect athletes who have a better financial and material condition, to perform better than those who do not have the same conditions.
- Are children and junior practicing water polo able to correctly auto appreciate their sports performance? More precisely: we expect that athletes with good results to appreciate themselves as performant and those with poor results as less performant.

In order to achieve this survey we have taken and adapted items from studies conducted by Donohue et al. 2007 and Williams et al. 2003.

CONCLUSIONS

Concerning the relationship with the coach:

The attitude of the coach has a stronger impact on female athletes compared to male players evolving in junior category, where the impact is lower and almost minimum for the players evolving in the childrens category.

Marginalisation and isolation that the female athletes may feel, coming from the coach, can influence: the way they asses themselves as players generally speaking and, in

particular, how they appreciate themselves among the team they are playing with the selection and were they participate to different training tournaments together with the national junior team.

Athletes who play for juniors are influenced by the coach's behaviour concerning: the way they assess themselves in general as water polo players and the selection and participation at the qualifications for the World championship together with the national junior team.

The behavior of the coach has not been proved to be influential in terms of the frequency with which athletes participate in training, of the qualification of the team to the national stage, of the qualification and participation in the European championships, of the participation in the world championships or of obtaining an important result in the game of water polo.

The most important predictors concerning the probability of players to practice also in the future performance sport, or the probability that the relationship with the coach might influence the self-appreciation of the players couldn't be identified.

Concerning the relationship with the family

The negative attitude of the family members doesn't influence the way how players assess themselves in general or the possibility of being selected to the junior national team.

The attitude of the family members affects the possibility of obtaining significant results only in juniors and the opportunity to be part of a good team in the national championship stage, only for female athletes.

The training program is affected by the fact that parents prohibit their children and athletes to go to training because of the school results.

The interest shown by the family members and the encouragements received even after a weaker evolving, represent the most important predictor of the probability that the players feel good about themselves.

The practice of sports in the future may depend mostly on the encouragement and support of the family in this regard, starting with the holiday planning, depending on the agenda of competitions.

Therefore, also the selection to the national team may depend greatly on the parents encouragements, on the negative attitude these might have, but also on their decisions to plan activities in accordance with the children's competition.

Concerning the relationship with the teammates

Marginalization and isolation that players can feel from their teammates has not been shown to impact the way in which they appreciate themselves and the possibility of being part of a good team on the national stage.

However, marginalization is significant for the frequency of training participation, the results achieved so far, for the selection to the national team of juniors and for the teams qualification in the national round, evolving as juniors.

Concerning the relationship with friends and classmates

The attitude of classmates and friends may influence in case of juniors, the frequency of participating to training and obtaining of valuable results.

In the case of female athletes, the marginalization and isolation they can feel, coming from their friends and classmates, may influence both juniors and seniors, the qualification for the national stage with the team were they are evolving, but also the results obtained so far in the water polo game.

Interesting is also the fact that, in case of children, the attitude of others influences only the qualification for the national stage with the team were they are evolving and the results obtained so far in the national stage.

At any of the studies categories, the attitude of friends and classmates doesn't influence the way they appreciate themselves in the team.

There were not able to identify the most important predictors of the probability that players generally consider themselves good.

Concerning sports performance

By analyzing the reasons that may determine the obtaining of sports performance there was noted that female athletes are more conscientious and participate more often in training.

This involvement of female athletes can be justified in part by the fact that female polo is under development, the first national championship being held in 2012.

At the opposite end are children taking part less in training. This is partly justified by the fact that coaches are sympathetic with them and recognize that children are going through a period of adjustment to the training program and rules. The frequency with which athletes

participate in team trainings can be influenced by the team they are playing and the settlement where they are located.

Although the conditions of education provided varies greatly from one club to another, this does not significantly influence how often athletes want to train.

There are a number of players who are less involved in their sports training, motivating it by the fact that they can't learn enough because of training. In turn, the training program affects the opportunity of the athletes to play on a team of seniors or be selected to the national team.

EMPIRICAL STUDY CONCERNING THE PROGRESS OF THE RESULTS, FOR CHILDREN AND JUNIORS, WITHIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS OVER THE PAST DECADE

This chapter aims to follow the analysis of factors that may influence the athletic performance within a team of water polo, through the investigation of changes of results within three generations of players (athletes born in 1995, 1996 and 1997) from the category of children (12-13 years) to junior athletes (18-19 years). The differences between clubs registered in the national championship in the last 10 years, will be examined as well, based on the results obtained in each category.

At this stage there has been used the method of quantitative research and the document analysis technique based on the competition calendars published annually by the Romanian Federation of Polo.

Within this study there have been analyzed 21 polo teams, representing all the teams that participated in the national championships between 2006-2015, for the following categories: children, juniors III, II and I.

CONCLUSIONS

By analyzing the development of the game of water polo at the level of children and juniors in Romania and by studying the "Competition calendar", a booklet printed by the Romanian Water Polo Federation, we reached the following conclusions:

From the standpoint of the analysis by categories we note that there is no unified strategy for the development of performance, by investigating the results obtained by clubs (public or private) over the past 10 years. Each team should pass through a learning process, designed to ensure their athletes the basis for further development of performance, regardless

of the homogeneity of players. This could lead to some consistency in the achieved results, but more often in our championship, teams rely on perfecting some players who possess at that moment better skills, ignoring therefore the others. The only teams that do not respect this principle are those of Oradea, which have achieved over the years a constant performance.

Clubs that have won the national championship regressed to the next generation, with one exception: Crișul Oradea. This happens due to the small number of coaches in charge of preparing the athletes. Teams from Serbia, Croatia and Hungary have one coach in charge for one team and the technical staff counts ten coaches already for the teams of children and juniors. In our country, coaches are required to prepare at least two groups, usually a competitive generation, juniors III, II or I (14-19 years) and a group of beginners (8-13 years old).

Conditions of training and financial support, provided by involving the local decision-making factors and parents are very important in achieving athletic performance. Access to the material bases (pools, gyms) is required in order to achieve results. Once the preparation conditions are established, a well known club needs more coaches in order to prepare the future champions. Very important is the coach of the goalkeepers, which is missing unfortunately from the clubs in the country, with one exception in Oradea. Following, there are preparation tournaments, training camps and movements within the national championship. The last mentioned is ensured by the club, but the friendly matches in order to prepare the athletes and homogenize the group, are supported by the parents. Depending on the involvement of each coach, teams can ask for help from nutritionists, masseurs, physical therapists, psychologists, physical coach, task that belongs again to the parents. We can observe a partnership between all clubs and parents, in order to obtain better sport results. For a country that states that the main objective in every major competition (European Championships, World Championships or Olympic Games) for junior or senior is ranking in the top eight teams, it is unacceptable that there is no club (public or private) to prepare athletes scientifically, in order to achieve a high performance. Over the past years there has been a development in the performance of the teams located in Bucharest, based on increasing the number of pools, three new polo pools being built at Dinamo, Steaua and CSS1. The other teams have also improved their training conditions, because they have abandoned the positions they held in pools where the training was common.

If they notice that they don't have results for children and juniors III, the influential teams from Bucharest (Steaua, Dinamo) transfer players from other teams. This explains the

progress, but also decrease of the number of teams participating in each category. Therefore, a team that has no notable results in the category of children, nor hope of improvement, prefers to sell the best players for other teams in Bucharest, abolishing a generation in favor of those with better financial opportunities.

Teams of junior I (18-19 years) are those promoting the best players to seniors. In order to access the best players, the senior clubs partner with one or more junior clubs, offering them different facilities. Therefore, the teenagers have better conditions for training and aspire to a bright future together with one of the notable teams of senior.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The main mode in which coaches can influence athletes life is by their own behavior. The effective conduct of the coach is the one that results in sport performance and positive psihological results like perceived ability, self-esteem and the joy of practicing the game of water polo. The coach influences the way athletes appreciate themselves in general as water polo players and in particular, within the team they are evolving, trough a constructive behaviour that stimulates success and personal development of the players. Furthermore, the marginalization and isolation female athletes may feel from the coach, influences the selection and the participation in training tournaments within both female and male junior national team.

The coach has proved to be more influential for juniors (14-19 years), since the use of a supportive style, reassurance and explanations when a mistake is being encountered, leads to increase the self-esteem among athletes. This is similar to previous researches of the authors Weinberg and Gould (2007). Regarding the category of children (12-13 years) the impact on them is almost insignificant, because the relationship needs time to be effective, and the family has an important role at this age. Wylleman (2001) identifies as main influence in childhood, the parents, brothers or sisters and teammates and friends.

Interestingly, the negative attitude of the coach influences the participation with the national team at the qualification tournament for the World Championship. Coaches with unreal (greater) perceptions in the assesement of: athletes skills and capacities; support from parents and comunity, tend to be more confident and effective in motivating the athletes.

There are also several reasons why coaches adversely affect the performance of players. They do not have continuity in the training process a team is running trough, while

players and coaches relations are not stable and long lasting. Like any interpersonal relationship, it requires a period of knowledge and adjustment, and the fact that changes appear shortly after the mutual trust has been formed between players and coach, have the effect of diminishing results.

By analyzing the results obtained in this paper we can assert that we can distinguish two kinds of relationships in terms of practicing the water polo game: those aimed for achieving athletic performance and relationships aimed for the simple practice of personal gain. The behaviour of family members influences the obtaining of important results in polo only in the juniors category. Therefore, the ones who feel a negative attitude from parents will practice a sport for health and physical development, while family support is associated with obtaining a medal at the national championship.

Family influences the athletes' performance through the manifested level of support, expectations and involvement. Parents are the ones who determine utmost the sports training program of their children, because very often they prohibit athletes to participate in training because of school results or in order to care for a brother / little sister. Therefore, in order to be competitive in sport, adolescents should firstly not neglect their school performance.

National team selection depends on the encouragement of parents, the negative attitude that they might have, and their decisions to plan activities in accordance to the children's competitions. In the case of female athletes, juniors and seniors, parents have a strong impact on the possibility of being part of a good team in the national championship stage. Therefore, achieving good results with the team is influenced by the level of involvement of the parents. Family's interest for results, encouragement received after a weaker performance, holiday planning based on the competitive calendar and support offered for practicing performance sport in the future are the factors that influence the self-esteem of athletes, increasing them the confidence in their own capabilities.

Along with the maturation of the child, the importance of parental support is diminishing in favor of close friends who will offer emotional support, emotional challenges and will satisfy the need to be heard (Rosenfeld, Richman and Hardy 1989).

Concerning the relationship with teammates their attitude is significant for adolescent athletes. The behavior of team members often influences the attendance in workouts, the results achieved so far in the game of polo, the selection for the national team and the qualification of the team in the national championship stage.

Athletes who feel marginalized or isolated by one of the teammates will have a lower presence in training and will practice water polo more for personal gain. Interestingly, those players who have won one of the individual titles (the most technical player, best goalkeeper, top scorer in the competition) experienced some negative feelings from their teammates. As for the children and juniors or seniors, their contribution was found to have a lower impact. Relationships with friends and classmates will positively affect performance if they will have the same concerns, if they will be at the same time practitioners of polo or other sports, and negative if they are not interested in the results that they achieve in competitions or they have very different concerns.

Most likely, you can outline here two categories of players, the ones who will not participate very often in training because they will fear the event of losing their friends and will prefer to stay with them along, and at the opposite pole athletes who will be more involved in the training program for fear, in order not to distance themselves from their teammates.

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