

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS
OF BUCHAREST**

Bucharest, Romania, 2015

Abstract of the doctoral thesis:

**MANAGEMENT OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE COACHING PROCESS OF HANDBALL TEAMS**

Scientific advisor: PROF. PHD SILVIA TEODORESCU

PhD student: CRISTEA DUMITRU NICULAE

Keywords: *coaching, management, interpersonal relationships, handball.*

Introduction

Achieving valuable performances in sport is the desideratum of this activity and even its essence. We cannot pronounce the word "sport" without relating it to performance. This involves a binomial consisting of the athlete and coach, whose relationships are close and based on trust, exceeding the conventional level required by regulations. The respective process is called "coaching" and differs in shades from an instructional-educational process characteristic to education, in general. Through coaching, the athlete valorizes his/her potential for performance under the guidance, advice and orientations of the coach.

The conceptual framework of coaching describes its area of activity and also incorporates it into the management of interindividual relationships governed by psychosocial and psychotherapeutic processes. The conceptual model of coaching provides the terminological unit and creates the necessary framework for scientific research.

Coaching is focused on the awareness of athletes, adjusting their abilities to the requirements of the situations they are facing or will face during training and competitions.

In any sport, there are two areas of engagement: an inner and an outer one, named by Gallaway *Ego 1* and *Ego 2*. The outer game is the result of instruction, while *Ego 1* is in the athlete's mind, hampered by fear, doubt, attention disorders or poor knowledge. The inner game aims at overcoming the obstacles which prevent a person from accessing his/her full potential. Coaching helps the athletes and other professionals improve their performances through a new attitude towards themselves and the profession.

Coaching focuses on the possibilities, not on the mistakes, and is based on interpersonal behavior, which involves a deliberate commitment of the athlete and coach, intended to exploit abilities and improve performance.

Starting from these considerations, we aimed to systematize and apply the content, techniques and sports coaching models to junior handball teams using face-to-face communication, in order to enhance the athlete's confidence in the analysis techniques and, finally, in his/her own potential.

The thesis is structured in three parts, namely: *theoretical background*, which includes *conceptual aspects, topicality of the theme and critical analysis of its reflection in specialty literature*, part II, *preliminary research on the coach's role in achieving sports performance*, and part III, *the research itself, which aimed to optimize the performance behavior of junior handball players by developing/ implementing the coaching guide*.

Part I is structured in four chapters aimed to delimit the conceptual framework of coaching, leadership styles used in sports according to the stages of preparation and communication as a fundamental form of interpersonal interaction in the coaching process. Conclusions related to the first part:

Coaching is an intentional process which focuses on the awareness of athletes as regards the adjustment of their own abilities to the requirements of the situations they are facing or will face, with the purpose of developing performance.

Coaching evolves within a conceptual framework that designates its limits and relationships with other terms in the sports field.

Coaching focuses on the athlete's possibilities, not on his/her mistakes.

Coaching is a process of individual orientation and achievement. It builds a personal point of view on the path to follow in developing performance.

Coaching manages the structure made up of the process objectives, feedback to reach the target and resource management, building a proactive attitude, concentration and responsibility integrated into an action plan.

Coaching modeling consists in the inclusion of at least three elements: planning, intervention and management.

Coaching is a synergic model of the interpersonal relationship, marked by the intervention of variables from the external natural and social environment, and also the objective and subjective conditions of the internal environment.

Leadership styles of the coaching process are determined by the characteristics of the working groups: age, skill level, gender and particularities of the coach's personality.

Part II, Preliminary research on the coach's role in achieving sports performance, aimed at delimiting the scope of sports coaching and specifying its limiting factors (criteria), on the one hand, and on the other hand, establishing (delimiting) the coach's role and leadership styles used in the management process conducted at junior level, sports branch - handball.

Research objectives

- Delimiting the conceptual framework of coaching.
- Interpreting coaching as an interpersonal process.
- Assessing the knowledge of coaches-teachers on the leadership styles in coaching.
- Designing assessment scales for interpersonal relationships, attitudes towards the content of the coaching process.

The investigated subjects were: 16 coaches-teachers (10 men and 6 women) having between 2 and 30 years of experience in the activity, specialized in handball, from Targoviste/ Dambovita county, who agreed to be included in the research, and 20 pupils from the Sports-Program High School of Targoviste, 6 boys and 14 girls in grades 11 and 12, with over 4 years of practice as handball players.

The subjects were administered three questionnaires:

Questionnaire number 1 investigated the coaching interventions within a week (the last before administration), assessing the athletes' activity, motivation, need for communication with teammates, need for being appreciated, theoretical background, assigned tasks, activity reporting, moral condition, gained experience; the questionnaire also investigated preferences for the leadership styles in the following categories of athletes: novice, junior II, junior I, youth and seniors.

Questionnaire number 2 rated seven indicators and their importance in the teachers' preferences, athletes' success, professional career, material gains, glory and successful performances in instruction.

Questionnaire number 3 was applied to pupils for assessing their perception of coaching and the percentage representing the level of satisfaction in eight areas.

Preliminary research conclusions

Most of the investigated coaches-teachers get involved in the athletes' work through systematic feedback, female teachers making judgments more frequently than men.

Evaluation of pupil's motivation is done sporadically by most teachers.

The need for peer communication on professional issues is very low. This shows the large use of autonomy, but also the fear of "disclosing" in front of others.

Teachers' concerns for assigning tasks to the pupils and explaining, during "theoretical sessions", the reasons for conducting training in a certain way are reduced.

Leadership styles are less understood and applied, preferences being for the democratic, participative and authoritative styles.

Teachers' perception of coaching highlights the balance between altruism towards pupils and selfishness of the teacher, as a mutual beneficiary of coaching applying.

Total autonomy during the lesson is largely preferred by boys, while girls do not want to have autonomy.

Pupils want to be encouraged and show great confidence in the advice of teachers, justifying application of the coaching technique.

Both boys and girls believe that motivation is an important factor for progress, coupled with task understanding and explanations.

Responses to the questionnaire items reveal that coaching is differently perceived by the investigated boys and girls. Gender-related particularities underline the need for protection against possible aggressions of the activity itself.

Part III, Optimizing the performance behavior of junior handball players by developing/ implementing the coaching guide, aimed to improve the perception of coaching by the teachers and pupils (a proactive process) using as instrument an explanatory and practical methodological guide.

The outcomes of coaching implementation are reflected in the athletes' results achieved in training and competitions.

Research objectives

- Developing the methodological guide (compendium) for applying coaching to junior teams.
- Providing the teachers with knowledge and skills on the coaching qualities and its behavior in the communication and trust relationships with the trainees.
- Getting the athletes used to automatically act during training and competitions, based on knowledge of the objectives, personal and group values and typical solutions for solving situations.

Research hypotheses

- *Developing/ disseminating a methodological guide for coaches-teachers and athlete pupils will enhance understanding how to apply coaching.*
- *Promotion by coaches of the means for getting used and increasing the ability to focus of the players, by requiring them to give descriptive and projective responses, will ensure awareness of their actions.*
- *Coaching develops in school athletes the ability to self-assess realistically their capacity to solve the objectives by avoiding dissonance between desires and capacities.*
- *Coaching based on participative leadership style provides the subjects increased autonomy.*

Coaching adaptation to the particularities of the two samples, teacher and pupil, was achieved relying on the accessibility criterion, through a terminology known in everyday professional language, which is the gateway to learning. The guide developed and applied by us to the research subjects includes the following chapters:

1. *Highlighting the coaching principles*
2. *The coach's qualities - traits*
3. *Formulating the ideal, stating the purpose and objectives of coaching*
4. *Working plan of the coach*
5. *Procedural interventions in coaching and formulation of questions.*

Conclusions drawn from the research

Assessing the motivation level for understanding the athletes' behavior was insufficient; because of ignoring the appropriate instruments in this process, there were noted behaviors showing dedication, but disregarding the opinions, beliefs, needs and interests.

Teachers have little interest in communicating with colleagues on professional issues.

Interpretation of the responses to questions highlights the following:

- teachers possess skills to relate with the athletes;
- teachers relate well with other specialists;
- assigning tasks to the athletes falls in the category of good relationships;
- the investigated subjects have coaching skills.

Perception of the coaching process, from the altruistic and selfish points of view, reveals that the athlete's involvement, discipline, the provided effort, higher performance and skill improvement are the most important.

Teachers' opinions emphasize the priority of achieving the formative objectives (skills) and performance-related ones. These indicators are the most important in the applied questionnaire.

The coach's activity reputation and a good relationship with the athletes are considered very important, but they do not correlate with the intrinsic satisfaction offered by the activity, which remains at the same low level in both tests.

Although there is improvement of the results at the two mentioned levels, hypothesis number 1 of the research is not confirmed, as the Chi² test values do not show statistically significant differences.

The athletes feel encouraged if they express verbally an idea of their own and demonstrate it (75%), while 75% of girls prefer reproducing and demonstrating an expressed idea. On the advice of coaches, girls respond with 100% confidence, while boys respond with 87.5%, which attests the pupils'

opening for communication. For the entire sample, trust is 90% and conviction is 10%.

However, hypothesis number 2 of the research, according to which *Promotion by coaches of the means for getting used and increasing the ability to focus of the players, by requiring them to give descriptive and projective responses, will ensure awareness of their actions*, **is not confirmed**, as the test values $\chi^2 = 3.136$, $p = 0.208 > 0.05$, do not reveal statistically significant differences.

Self-assessment during lessons is promoted in a 75% percentage, this process involving the deep awareness of training. The test values $\chi^2 = 4.912$, $p = 0.027 < 0.05$, highlight a statistically significant difference, which **confirms hypothesis number 3**, according to which *Coaching develops in school athletes the ability to self-assess realistically their capacity to solve the objectives by avoiding dissonance between desires and capacities*.

New training tasks motivate pupils in a 100% percentage for girls and 98% for boys.

Among the factors: motivation, task understanding, skills, context and further explanations, motivation attracts most preferences, but also task understanding (girls). Responses highlight the pupils' preferences for coaching based on trust and a democratic-participative style.

Actions that influence them most after failure are: encouragements, valorizing the participative leadership style, explanation of the causes and corrective solutions. Athletes of both genders appreciate rationality of the training process promoted by coaching.

Pupils are largely aware of the coaching process, preferring total autonomy, boys - 50%, while 75% of girls do not want autonomy. For the entire sample, total autonomy is preferred by 40%, partial autonomy by 25% and lack of autonomy by 35%.

This confirms hypothesis number 4, according to which *Coaching based on participative leadership style provides the subjects increased autonomy*, the test values $\chi^2 = 8.889$, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant difference.

The level of satisfaction at the time of testing prioritizes health, personal development and sports career, which proves maturity in thinking and awareness of the preparation process by the young athletes.