

THE GOALS AND COMPETENCES THE TRACK AND FIELD COACHES HAVE IN VIEW WHEN TRAINING CHILDREN

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Abstract: *This paper is an observational study conducted in December 2012 on 20 track and field coaches who train children. The research was based on a questionnaire comprising 8 items that tried to create a diagram of the coaches' conception in regards to their priorities during training. We used as research methods: the study of the professional literature, the questionnaire method, the statistical method, the graphical representation method. The results have shown that out of the 20 coaches who were questioned, only 16 had 1 to 4 athletes participating in final competitions, meaning 36 athletes in total, and only 22 of those athletes ranked in the first 8 places (a reasonably good percentage). Fourteen of the questioned coaches put more emphasis on the learning of the performance technique, 9 of them on the ability of perceiving the movement, 11 on the training disposition, 8 on the answer given to the request, 7 on the athletes respecting the performance request, 11 on achieving a progress, and 12 on concentrating the athletes' attention, which shows that the training activity is focused on forming a correct performance technique. Also, the priority for 6 of the questioned coaches is to obtain high athletic results, for 11 is the performance ability, for 9 is the planned schedule, for 12 is continuous practice, for 13 is attaining the perfect number of repetitions, for 9 is the development of psycho-motor skills, and for 8 is the athletes' participation in the training, which shows that one part of the coaches prioritize the athletic results. Our two hypotheses were confirmed, in the sense that the coaches with good athletic results working with beginner athletes go through an instructive-educational process based on the idea of forming athletic competences by accentuating, in the children's training, the perception, disposition, the answer to the coach's request, respecting the request, progress, and concentration of attention, but also that the coaches who have in view the way in which the technique is performed during training have the best results in the competitions for beginner athletes.*

Key words: *track and field, coaches, children, goals, competences.*

1. Introduction

The goal of professional sports is to change human behavior by engaging the athlete in the teaching-learning-assessing

activity. This change is determined by the types of demands to which the body is being subjected, and by how it is organized by the coaches.

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The performance of a motor activity “depends on the maturing of the nervous system, and on the ability to interpret and use the stimuli that modify the behavioral patterns to achieve maximum functionality in relation to the environment” [6].

Athletic competence is, essentially, the ability to perform the movements that are specific to one particular sport, sports branch, or athletic event, at an appropriate level for the professional competitions, in specific situations.

Athletic competences are formed of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and skills that allow the athlete to obtain the aimed results/performances. They are represented by the major changes produced in the human behavior after subjecting the individual to the process of motor learning, consolidation, and perfecting.

They can be assessed using assessment instruments and performance indices that are specific to every sport.

Athletic competence is assessed through measurements, evaluating the athletic performance, but it depends on the way in which the movement performance technique is learned.

The achievement of the goals and the formation of the athletic competences are influenced by the way in which the training process is organized and conducted, by the coaches' level of understanding and application of the psycho-pedagogical science.

From this point of view, this study tries to highlight the way in which some of the track and field coaches approach the instructive-educational process in regards to children.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to conduct an investigation regarding the athletic competences that the coaches have in view when training very young athletes.

This study was conducted during the December 2012 competitions at the Bacau

Athletics Hall, and comprised Moldavia region coaches who initiate children in track and field.

Taking into account that athletic initiation and training depends on the coaches' actions, it felt necessary to conduct an investigation that would shed some light how they accomplish the formation of a technical basis in regards to the beginner track and field athletes.

2. Hypotheses

In conducting this study, we started from the following hypotheses:

- 1.the coaches with good athletic results working with beginner athletes (children I and II) go through an instructive-educational process based on the idea of forming athletic competences by accentuating, in the children's training, the perception, disposition, the answer to the coach's request, respecting the request, progress, and concentration of attention;
- 2.the coaches who have in view the way in which the technique is performed during training have the best results in the competitions for beginner athletes.

3. Research methods

In this study, we used as research methods: the study of the specialized literature, the questionnaire, the statistical-mathematical method and the graphical representation method.

To evaluate the way in which the coaches approach the instructive-educational process, a questionnaire was applied, comprising 8 questions with two answer choices.

The first answer choices for the questions envisaged the perception, the disposition, the answer to the coach's request, respecting the request, progress, and concentration of attention, these showing the coaches' focus toward the

children learning the correct technique of performing the movements, while the second choices, envisaging the achievement of the aimed athletic result, the performance ability, the planned program, the continuous practice, the number of repetitions, the development of the motor skills, and the children's participation in the training, show a tendency toward an immediate achievement of athletic results.

4. Research contents

The questionnaire comprises identification data (Questionnaire for track and field coaches regarding the children's training process, Full name club....., level, age....., date of filling, years of experience in training children), and the 8 questions with the answer choices (1. On what do you focus more during the children's process of learning the track and field events? - on the learning of the performance technique, or on obtaining the athletic result?; 2. On what do you focus more during the learning of the performance technique? - on the children's ability to perceive the movement, or on their ability to perform; 3. In order to develop the "specific movement sense" in the track and field trained children, do you take into account: - their disposition for training or the planned program; 4. In the children's training process, do you have in view: - the answer given to the requested demand or continuous practice; 5. In the children's training process, what do you consider to

be more important: - respecting the performance request, or performing a number of repetitions; 6. On what do you focus during the children's training process? - on making progress, or on developing their motor skills; 7. On what do you focus more during the internalizing of the performance technique? - on concentration of attention, or participation during training; 8. How many athletes have you got in the finals, how many of your athletes ranked 1-3 in the national championships, how many ranked 4-6, and how many ranked 7-8). The questionnaire was applied on 20 coaches who initiate children in track and field.

5. Results

The results from the applied questionnaire have been recorded, analyzed, and can be found in the eight tables and two figures presented in the paper.

The answers to the *first question* "On what do you focus more during the children's process of learning the track and field events?" (see Table 1) show that 70% of the coaches focus more on the children learning the performance technique, and 30% on obtaining athletic results, which highlights the fact that not all coaches focus on the correct learning of the performance technique, an aspect that must be a priority in the training activity of children, of athletes who are just initiated. It is a well-known fact that in order to obtain a high athletic performance, you must first learn the right technique to do it correctly.

Answers to question 1

Table 1

Indices	Answer choices	
	learning the performance technique	obtaining the athletic result
No. of answers	14	6
Percent%	70%	30%

The answers to the *second question* “On what do you focus more during the learning of the performance technique?” (see Table 2) show that 45% of the respondents focus more on the children's ability to perceive the movement, and 55% on their ability to perform. This highlights the aspect that not all coaches focus on the

perception and on a correct representation of a movement, a fact which influences in a negative way the correct learning of track and field events, and later, the children's athletic results. When the technique is correctly learned, the results are also better.

Answers to question 2

Table 2

Indices	Answer choices	
	on the children's ability to perceive the movement	on their ability to perform
No. of answers	9	11
Percent%	45	55

The answers to the *third question* “In order to develop the “specific movement sense” in the track and field trained children, do you take into account:” (see Table 3) show that 55% of the coaches take into account more the disposition manifested by the athletes regarding the performance of their daily training, but also that 45% of the coaches are interested more in accomplishing the planned program.

It must be said that the working disposition during training takes priority over the planned schedule because it ensures an effort from the athlete that determines a certain progress. This aspect highlights the fact that not all coaches focus on respecting the training disposition, which can be highly influenced by the athletes' health and state of rest.

Answers to question 3

Table 3

Indices	Answer choices	
	their disposition for training	the planned program
No. of answers	11	9
Percent%	55%	45%

The answers to the *fourth question* “In the children's training process, do you have in view:” (see Table 4) show that the demand requested by the coaches for the children to perform takes priority for 40% of them, and the continuous practice is more important for 60% of them. It must be said that, during the beginner athletes' training process, it is important for them to perform the motor response exactly the way the coach told them to, and not to perform it randomly (“the best they can”).

Answers to question 4

Table 4

Indices	Answer choices	
	the answer given to the requested demand	the continuous practice
No. of answers	8	12
Percent%	40%	60%

The answers to the *fifth question* "In the children's training process, what do you consider to be more important:" (see Table 5) show that only 35% of the respondents consider the respecting of the performance request to be more important, while 65% think that performing the required number of repetitions is more important. The percentages highlight the fact that not all coaches think that respecting the request

given for the performance is very important, which denotes certain superficiality and a lack of responsibility in regards to the training process.

"The number of exercises used during a session can be between 4 and 6, but only the athletes' level of motor potential and their adaptation to the demands" [2], can determine the actual number of repetitions for each exercise used during training lessons.

Table 5

Answers to question 5

Indices	Answer choices	
	respecting the performance request	performing a number of repetitions
No. of answers	7	13
Percent%	35%	65%

The answers to the *sixth question* "On what do you focus during the 9-10-year old children's training process?" (see Table 6) show that 11 coaches, representing 55%, think that it is very important to make progress, while 9, meaning 45%, try mostly to develop the children's motor skills. What is important in the athletic training for beginners is to respect the performance demands that would ensure a correct internalization of the movement mechanism, the specific motor skills being developed only after the performance technique was well-learned

The answers to the *seventh question* "On what do you focus more during the internalizing of the performance technique?" (see Table 7) show that 60% of the coaches focus more on concentration of attention, while 40% focus on participation during training.

Concentrating the children's attention on the characteristics of the movements they are performing constitutes a starting point in making them aware of their movements when they are learning them, and is also important for achieving success in competitions.

A participation of the children during training without them focusing their attention does not ensure an effective training, being a waste of time and work.

Table 6

Answers to question 6

Indices	Answer choices	
	making progres	developing their motor skills
No. of answers	11	9
Percent%	55%	45%

<i>Answers to question 7</i>		Table 7
Indices	Answer choices	
	concentration of attention	participation during training
No. of answers	12	8
Percent%	60%	40%

The eight question (see Table 8), which has the most sections, envisages the correlation between the answers given by the coaches and their athletic results.

To the section “How many athletes have you got in the finals” one can see that in 2012, only 16 of the 20 coaches who were questioned had 1 up to 4 athletes participating in the final competitions, which is a total of 36 athletes.

Regarding the results obtained by the athletes, only 22 of them ranked among the first 8 (a relatively good number).

Out of the 20 coaches, 4 succeed in getting medals through their athletes (ranked 1-3), 6 coaches got their athletes to

positions 4 and 6, and 7 coaches managed to place their young athletes in positions 7 and 8. Out of the 12 coaches whose athletes occupied positions between 1 and 8 in track and field events, one coach got 5 places for his athletes, two got 3 places each, two got 2 places each, and seven got each one place.

This are worthy results at a national level, considering the number of 36 athletes who have met the participation standards to compete in the finals, but are also mediocre results in regards to the 20 coaches who train beginners to enter the competitive athletic life.

<i>Answers to question 8</i>																	Table 8			
Coaches	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Partici- pants	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	0	0	0	0
Percent %	8.33	5.55	11.11	5.55	5.56	11.11	8.33	2.78	2.78	5.56	8.33	5.56	2.78	5.56	8.33	2.78				
1-3	1	1			2				1											
4-6	2		2	1		1		1			1									
7-8	2	2		1	1		1			1		1								
Total	5	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1								
Percent %	22.72	13.63	9.09	9.09	13.63	4.54	4.54	4.54	4.54	4.54	4.54	4.54								

The answers, as seen in Chart 1, show that there are differences in the way in which the training is conducted. As one can observe from the first figure, 14 of the questioned coaches put more emphasis on the learning of the performance technique, 9 of them on the ability of perceiving the movement, 11 on the training disposition,

8 on the answer given to the request, 7 on the athletes respecting the performance request, 11 on achieving a progress, and 12 on concentrating the athletes' attention, which shows that the training activity is focused on forming a correct performance technique.

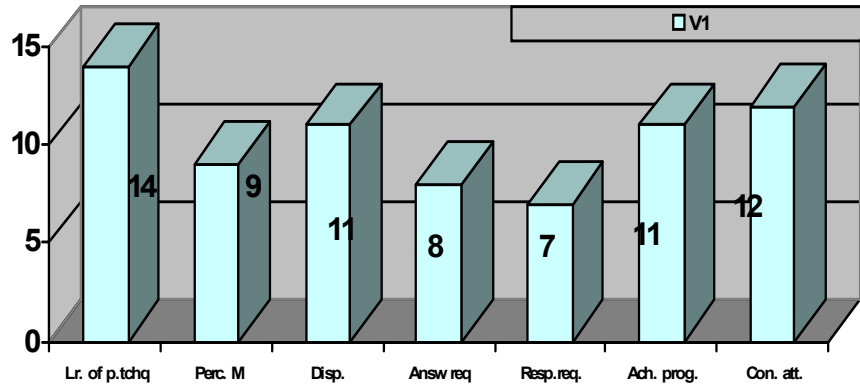


Chart 1. *Representation of the options that ensure training focused on learning the performance technique*

One can observe from Chart 2 that 6 coaches focus mostly on obtaining athletic results, 11 coaches on the children's ability to perform, 9 coaches on the planned program, 12 on continuous practice, 13 on accomplishing the aimed number of repetitions, 9 on the development of the children's psycho-motor skills, and 8 on the children's participation during training

One can observe from Figure 2 that 6 coaches focus mostly on obtaining athletic results, 11 coaches on the children's ability to perform, 9 coaches on the planned program, 12 on continuous practice, 13 on accomplishing the aimed number of repetitions, 9 on the development of the children's psycho-motor skills, and 8 on the children's participation during training.

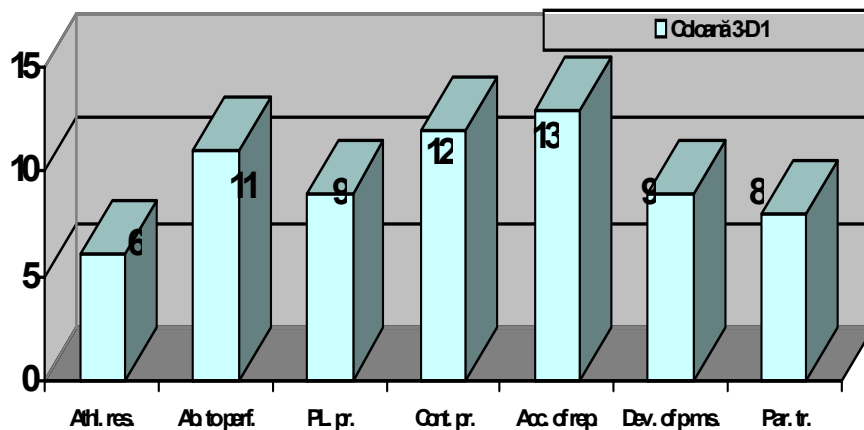


Chart 2. *Representation of the options that ensure training focused on obtaining results*

The development of the human behavior is determined by genetic heritage, education, and the environment in which the individual is raised, believes that "the personality begins at birth," the infant has a "potential personality" characterized by "certain skills and characteristics that are ready to be developed [3].

Physical character, temperament, and intelligence can be regarded justifiably as prime matter of the personality," but these develop slowly, in time, according to how much they are used. During sports training there are major changes happening in the human personality, according to the way in which the instructive-educational act is performed, and to the proficiency of the coach who forms such athletic competences.

The continuous practice in professional sports contributes through its effects to the youth's general education, being "the indispensable component that contributes to the formation of the human personality" [5]. The instructive process in sports is complex, being based on goals envisaging to form athletic competences, but also being centered on the athlete, on forming the movement skills that would help him/her adapt to the competition life.

The athletic experience is formed and accumulated during the training process as practical reproducible and applicable knowledge that is finally concretized as athletic results.

The athletes must confront, during the instructive-educational process, with "situations and difficulties that they must successfully solve and overcome, but this happens only if there is a methodical gradation of the actions, presented in time

and space in a manner that would be in perfect accord with their possibilities" [4].

The formation of an athletic personality that is specific to a particular sports branch, sports discipline, or event, is based on the education of perception, availability, attention, ability to follow the request, ability to make progress, aspects that ensure the existence of the competence to have a high athletic result.

"Through the system of means used in the psycho-motor education process, the teacher acts upon the body, a situation that can be considered as being intermediary between pedagogy, psychology, and physical education thus favoring the fulfillment of the goals and the formation of athletic competences"[1].

"An individual's bio-psycho-social unit indicates the uniqueness of each person" a uniqueness that influences the formation of those athletic competences needed for obtaining high athletic performances [7].

6. Conclusions

This study allowed the extraction of a series of conclusions regarding the development of the instructive-educational process for children's track and field training, taking into consideration the answer choices that were chosen by the coaches.

Regarding the first answer choices, more than half of the questioned coaches put more emphasis on the learning of the performance technique, on the training disposition, on achieving a progress, and on concentrating the athletes' attention, while the others focus more on the

children's ability to perceive the movement, on the answer given to the request, on the athletes respecting the performance request, aspects that reflect in the small number of athletes participating in the finals of the national championships, and the low number of results.

Regarding the second answer choices, less than half of the coaches focus more on the children's ability to perform, on continuous practice, on accomplishing the aimed number of repetitions, while more than half of the questioned coaches put more emphasis on obtaining athletic results, on the planned program, on the development of the children's psychomotor skills, and on the children's participation during training, which shows the coaches more intense focus on the aspects that facilitate the getting of quick results, and less the learning of the performance technique.

The first hypothesis, stating that the coaches with good athletic results working with beginner athletes (children I and II) go through an instructive-educational process based on the idea of forming athletic competences by accentuating, in the children's training, the perception, disposition, the answer to the coach's request, respecting the request, progress, and concentration of attention, was confirmed.

The second hypothesis, stating that the coaches who have in view the way in which the technique is performed during training have the best results in the competitions for beginner athletes, was also confirmed. Only five of the studied coaches managed to occupy a place in the top eight finalists with 2-5 of their athletes.

Twenty coaches participated in this study, out of which 16 had athletes who participated in the finals.

The coaches, in their application of the psycho-pedagogical science, are not always focused on the performance technique; for many of them it is more important to get athletic results, an aspect that influences negatively the results.

7. Suggestions

During the organization and development of the training lessons, the coaches must have in view, primarily, that the children learn correctly the performance technique.

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