Socialisation, Motives and Obstacles in Coaching Polish Top National Athletes in Selected Sports

Michal Lenartowicz, Zbigniew Dziubinski, Krzysztof W. Jankowski, Piotr Rymarczyk
Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland

Objectives
Presented research results are part of the investigation of Polish national Olympic teams’ coaches and athletes. The aim of the research was to provide up-to-date knowledge concerning ways of entering the field of sport coaching by national teams’ coaches, motives that run national teams coaches at their work, problems that coaches encounter and solutions they proposed.

Material and methods
Pilot tested standardised questionnaire developed for this project was applied in the research. Interviews were gathered in 2005, mainly during training camps of national teams all over Poland and abroad. The research embraced 53 coaches—main national team coaches and their direct supporting coaching staff. The sample was male dominated and included only 3 female coaches. Average age was 46 and mean coaching experience was 20 years. Yet, investigated group was very heterogeneous with regard to the age and work experience. The youngest investigated coach was 26 years old, while the oldest one was 72 years old, while coaching experienced varied from few to 50 years. Mean coaching time on the position of national team coach was 7 years, while 10 out of 53 coaches had over 10 years of practice on the position of national team coach. Majority of our respondents (48 coaches) had sport profiled university education. Two thirds of coaches declared that coaching national team was the main source of living, which means that one third was additionally involved in sport-club or school PE work. Latter concerned mainly supporting coaching staff, yet, still—taking into account high requirements of professional sport—we considered it somehow surprising. This could be related to the perceived low stability of national team coach position and the need of having additional financial backup.

Figure 1. Sport disciplines represented by investigated coaches
Results

Investigated coaches started to gather their sport knowledge and experience long before they became involved in formal coaching education. All of them were athletes before started coaching. About 1/3 of respondents (19 coaches) performed sports on world or European level, although majority of them did not achieved significant successes in their athlete’s careers. It seems that own sport experiences were of key importance with regard to choosing professional career. Half of respondents declared they met coaches whom they considered as role models and “significant others” to follow. Over half of coaches declared they “always” wanted to be sport coaches and if they had a chance, they would chose to be coaches again, which—regardless to many complains concerning their work—could be considered as a strong indicator or work satisfaction. Respondents perceived sport coaching as a specific profession which requires both great deal of knowledge and skill and number of psychological and social predispositions that are quite hard to define. This group of predispositions for 11 coaches included also simple luck.

Majority of work motives declared by coaches were of autotelic character (e.g. personal satisfaction from professional success, “possibility of doing what I really like”). Instrumental (external) motives, such as financial gain or social recognition were declared less important. Financial gain is was an important motive for 28 respondents, yet only one respondent considered it as the most important motive driving of his/her work. It could be expected that type and general popularity of sport disciplines might vary coaches’ answers concerning work motives. Yet, no significant correlations between types of motives and sport discipline were found. The same concerned motives and work experience, self-evaluation of own professional success, age, satisfaction with remuneration. The only correlation was found between the role of social recognition motive and declared own self-esteem (0.406 at p= 0.01). When comparing work motives of investigated coaches with motives of maintaining sport involvement of investigated national teams’ athletes, we receive quite similar pattern. In both cases top items in motives hierarchy are occupied by autotelic motives and hope for future success. With regard to coaches these results may let us assume, that their professional involvement is based on strong foundations. Yet, as all social scientists are aware of, domination of declared autotelic motives could be also a simple result of providing answers considered as “socially acceptable” and not really true. There is also some contradiction between hope for success as an important motive for over 90% of respondents and “feeling safe in doing job they know” declared also by over half of coaches. One may notice that strive for professional stabilisation may, but does not have to, foster professional success.

Over 2/3 of investigated coaches were fully satisfied with their work. Main source of their satisfaction (and main threat!) was their athletes. Major fears were lack of success (41.5%), bad relationships with athletes (30.2%). Investigated coaches were very critical about fast mode of terminating their working contract in case of lack of sport success (about 90% of coaches). It may be quite interesting to notice, that 28.3% of investigated coaches declared they need more independence in their coaching decisions and “peace of work” meaning mainly—not being interrupted in their work by sport officials (15.1%).

Personal physical health was considered a key factor in coaching career and both own health problems and their athletes’ injuries were also considered as threats to their coaching careers. With regard to their athletes, national teams’ coaches frequently blamed junior coaches and club coaches (dealing previously with national teams) for professional mistakes that make it difficult for them to achieve success with adult athletes.

Respondents were asked to suggest actions which would improve their work and bring sport success for their athletes. This was an open question and coaches’ suggestions were categorised into the following groups of issues, presented from the most important on tom to the least important at the bottom:

1. improved marketing and gaining more sponsors for their teams,
2. higher stability of coaches’ work
3. more competitions and training camps
4. continuous professional development of coaches
5. popularization of their sport discipline
6. better work of club and junior coaches
7. better sport infrastructure
8. better organisation of training process
9. improved scientific and medical support

The list includes items, which would probably be mentioned by majority of sport coaches around the world. We would like to stress coaches’ awareness of the need of continuous professional development and the importance of marketing and media recognition of their sport discipline. The latter may result from the composition of our sample dominated by disciplines that are not very popular in television (at least in Poland). The research projects continues

---

*Paper prepared within the research project of the Josef Piłsudski University of Physical Education, Warsaw, Poland: “Socialization, Motivations and Barriers of Sports and Professional Activity in Top Sport” (DS 92).