

SPORT COUNSELING - A NEW APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCES

Dana BĂDĂU

University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tirgu Mures, Romania
danabadau.brasov@gmail.com

Abstract

The sport counselor is a professional working mainly with athletes, experts and the managerial staff of the sport field, offering specialized counseling services with the view to solve difficult professional situations derived from the sport performance activity, as well as to promote the personal image, to manage the training process and the sport structures, to improve performances, work relations and communication etc. The opportunities to implement and to extend the sport counseling profession will be dictated by the social tendencies specific to the dynamics of the occupational market from our country and by the influence of European backgrounds.

Key words: *sport counseling, sport counselor, responsibilities, competences, perspectives.*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has the right to engage in sport, which is important factor in socio-cultural development. Because of its links with the present-day sports scene, the impact of recreational sport is growing all the time. [4]

In the Romanian sport profession area, the appearance of a new line of work like the one of sport counselor was essential.

Education should be directed towards the needs of the knowledge society to the problems that emerge from the current modern context that applies in the future. The knowledge or information society includes activities and sources of income as a result of the management of contents. Quality in higher education, including teaching and scientific activity is dependent on intangible capital targeting the following: qualification of human resources, creativity, flexibility and specialized knowledge and interdisciplinary basis. The place and role of physical education in the context of a high-quality integrated education are clearly defined and aim at the maximizing of human potential imposed by the dynamics of the modern society.

The development of the sport phenomenon determined the emergence of some complex backgrounds and their solving needed a qualified intervention toward career guidance for the athletes or of the persons wanting to practice physical activities with sanogenetic and recreational purpose, toward the management of difficult situations, representing different sport structures in relation with other structures and the athletes in relation with the colleagues, sport staff, mass-media, etc.

Our purpose is to highlight the role, the competences and the influence areas of the sport counseling process, as it was created and elaborated by us, in order to be implemented as a new occupation in our country, introduced in the Romanian Classification of Occupations as sport counsellor.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the current European context education and training are two important processes that ensures the liaison between the labor market requirements expressed by the skills and competences necessary to practice an occupation and the defining elements of education and training expressed as: knowledge, skill level, educational level, plan and theoretical and practical training syllabus, access conditions, terms of promotion, personal development, diploma / certificates, diploma supplement / certified under quality assurance system: [6]

- Diversification of occupational offer in the field of Physical Education and Sports is required out of the need to unitarily align it to the national requirements and European trends.
- According to the guideline of developing the occupational standards for education and professional training, the correlation of current labor market requirements with the education and training market requirements based on the following fundamental ideas.
 - The individual has developed skills in formal, non-formal or informal ways which are necessary for personal development and employment offered by the labor market.
 - Training for practicing an occupation is considered as a specialization of the individual in

accordance with the actual requirements of the job, which highlight the specific competences according to a specific standard job, developed by specialists.

- The individual must be seen dynamically in terms of his individual personal development and the acquisition of permanent and continuous lifelong skills - career development; These skills will be included in the professional passport, regardless of their acquisition and recognition ways either formal, non-formal or informal.

- For the skills acquired formally / non-formally there should be a training plan and a theoretical and practical accompanying the certificate / diploma - which leads to the transparency of acquisition (see www.europass. I), which is a cornerstone of the current education and training.

- The occupational standard supports the individual mobility as it indicates the correspondence through international standards and norms, between the document / certification obtained from an authorized training provider in accordance with the national legislation and the similar documents / certificates obtained by graduates of the training courses in the European countries.

Following an extensive analysis of the occupational needs situation on the labor market in the field of Physical Education and Sports, it was concluded that this must be diversified, thus complying with the similar requirements from the European countries and the current social trends.

Sport counseling represents the intensive and complex process of offering assistance and orientation to persons practicing sport activities or involved in the sport phenomenon, which the view to make the sportive, personal and interpersonal performances objective and optimum.

Sport counseling covers the activity of intervention, prevention, intercession and optimization of the sport activity, of the personal behaviors involved in the sport phenomenon, with the help of a specialist called sport counselor.

Sport counseling aims to develop: [2]

- action potentialities
- vocational potentialities
- psychological potentialities
- relational potentialities
- performance and competition potentialities
- managerial and self-management potentialities

Sport counseling: [1]

- represents a relationship and a special form of communication between two actors of the counseling process: the counselee and the counselor;

- holds the role of diagnosis for the motric and performance capacity level of the athlete and forecasts his evolution as well;

- consists of an orientation activity of the subject towards sport activity practice according to intrinsic preferences and motivations;

- has a double role: prevention of crisis situations and pro-activity;

- is based on the counselor's competences and experience in the sport performance activity and recreational sport area;

- represents a confidential method of offering help;

- consists of a mediation activity of conflict situations within the sport environment;

- the background of this type of counseling is specific to sport activities;

The sport counselor is a qualified person that based on specialty knowledge and specific abilities offers assistance to some persons or groups involved in sport activities, with the view to solve specific problems.

Sports counseling involves services and interventions directed towards helping athletes and staff to better meet the demands of their sport and sport management. Sports counseling can also be an effective service for sport team to improve unity and cohesion, and can help improve team performance. [5]

The persons or sport groups deciding to resort to a sport counselor are motivated by the fact that they have a decisional conflict and feel their thoughts, feelings and behaviors are blocked with reference to the intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations and motivations.

In these situations, the counselor has the job to identify and offer to the counselee a new perspective which can lead to behavioral changes and positive thinking, necessary to overcome difficult situations and to optimize the behavioral performances specific to sport activities.

The counselor's responsibility offering assistance and guidance to an athlete, to a team or a person involved in sport activities is important because the results of this process will determinedly influence the evolution of future events, of the sport career and performances.

The main objective of counseling is represented by the development of personality, in its evolution to maturity.[3]

The main purpose of sport counseling is to guide the athlete, the groups and persons involved in sport activity and to coordinate it in both sport and daily life, in order to identify optimal solutions to fulfill personal, group or institutional objectives, by improving the training and work relations.

The main responsibility of the sport counselor is to assist and help the counselee to identify the optimal solutions to his problems, to teach him where to find his own solutions; without any doubt he is not the one who creates the problems and provides solutions, while the client

just chooses the ones he considers to be appropriate.

One of the major problems that the counseling process needs to highlight is the development of a coherent system of life purposes, in other words, the consolidation of intentional behavior.

Persons orientated towards real purposes are aware of their own capacities and competences, this facilitating the activation of some alternative behavior models in a given situation, being capable to approach life issues and specific sport issues from varied perspectives.

Efficient counseling has to be correlated with the daily life realities and with the sport realities.

The efficiency of the process ("training") should be the main purpose of every assistance, monitoring and orientation process, within sport activity.

The counseling process implies an organized undertaking with the help of which a specialized counselor offers assistance to a person or sport group, using the following operational techniques: interview, conversation.

The sphere of influence of the sport counseling aims the psychic, motric and performance development as well as the orientation and career monitoring development, along with social integration of the athletes or former athletes.

The sport counselor has to guide clients to identify objectives and solutions connected with [2]:

- creating and developing self-awareness capacities;
- developing personality;
- positive communication and inter-relations;
- assisting the athletes or sport groups in overcoming the difficulties of sport life;
- establishing personal, group and institutional objectives;
- shaping the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations;
- expanding the capacity basis and competences necessary to practice sport activities and managing the sportive structures;
- changing problematic behaviors or non-adaptable thinking patterns;
- improving negative emotions and consequences determined by different traumas;
- offering support for sport and social integration;
- acknowledgement and development of strategies to adapt to the sport environment;
- facilitating the assimilation of new behaviors and abilities;
- preventing the appearance of conflicts and solving the problems amiably;
- maintaining and improving the physical and mental health condition.

Personal qualities of the sport counselor:

[2]

- respect for the athlete, sport group or any other persons involved in sport activities;
- good communication with the clients;
- active attention;
- constant re-adaptation to the client's behavior and opinions;
- focus on the problems;
- attention to details;
- empathy;
- tolerance, analysis and synthesis capacity;
- behavior, feelings and words have to be in agreement;
- self-control ability;
- positive thinking;
- creativity;
- down-to-earth;
- flexible;
- interaction capacity and adaptability to different work conditions, depending on the person;
- resistance to extensive intellectual effort;
- evaluation capacity.

The required attitudes of the sport counselor are: objectivity, calm, attention, involvement, patience, correctness, seriousness, responsibility, confidentiality, perseverance, openness, receptivity, constructivethinking.

The necessary knowledge of the sport counselor with regard to guidance, assistance, and monitoring of the sport training covers: [2]

- basic and specific knowledge related to the theory and methodology of physical education and sport;
- sport training theory;
- specific terminology;
- bio-motric particularities depending on age categories;
- effort control in motric activities;
- methodology of motric activities;
- instructional design in motric activities;
- assess, measurement and evaluation in motric activity;
- sport ethics and legislation;
- efficient communication knowledge;
- sport psychology knowledge;
- knowledge to diagnose and foresee the athletes' activity;
- knowledge regarding data confidentiality and athlete autonomy;
- knowledge of professional deontology;

The counseling activity of the athletes consists in: [2]

- preventing crisis situations and pro-activity;
- developing relations within the sport structures;
- sport counseling practice specific to performance sports;

- identifying positive performance aspects of the athlete, selecting and organizing his objectives;
- detecting the underperformance of the athlete;
- recognizing the contextual particularities of the athlete's activity;
- assessing the progress according to the training plan;
- evaluating the lifestyle and motivation for practicing different types of sport activities;
- identifying opportunities, selecting and arranging them depending on the athlete's possibilities and preferences.

Duties and responsibilities of the sport counselor: [2]

- gathers, selects information and informs the athletes about the sport field evolution;
- identifies professional problems of the athletes with impact on sport performances and work relationships, and searches solution methods;
- orientates the athletes to solve their professional problems, with which they are confronted in various moments of their career;
- suggests solution alternatives and facilitates the athlete's choice for the optimal action method correlated with his own professional interests and objectives;
- manages the athlete's relationships with the sportive structures and the promotion environment of the athlete's own brand;
- ensures connections between different sportive structures and the athlete;
- assists the athlete during negotiations;
- guides the athlete in conflict situations;
- orientates and monitors the subjects in the independent physical activity with the view to improve health and life quality.

Relational skills for a counselor are focus on:

- Developing relationships based on cooperative behavior, empathy, mutual respect within the new structure.
- Functional behavior / knowledge and advice.
- Active involvement in project teams.
- Participation in teaching and teacher mobility programs for academic system.
- Continuing and expanding participation as a visiting professor at international conferences and seminars.
- Continuing and expanding participation as keynote speaker and chairperson at national and international scientific meetings.
- Developing partnerships between academic and sport-specific structures for all the other sports structures.

The sport counselor has also general duties and responsibilities referring to his own activity organization, application of legal requirements related to health, work security and the emergency

situations area, as well as developing his own career.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of the sport counseling process with the view to improve the relations between the involved factors and to manage specific situations within the physical and sport activity areas is connected with the current tendencies specific to the European background for new occupations implementation.

Introduction to Romanian Occupational Code (COR) Nomenclature of the profession "Sports counselor" will lead to defining its content in relation to the actual needs of the labor market and to enabling the professional development of specialists by authorizing and carrying out continuous training programs completed with nationally recognized certificates.

Defining the profession of "Sports counselor" will also support the vocational retraining efforts of athletes who are at the end of their career, enabling them to capitalize their previous experience in a new form of useful sports activity. The occupational standard of the sport counselor targets the second level of qualification, for high education, being accessible to university graduates with the specialty: physical education, kinesiotherapy and so on, approved in December 20th 2012. [1]

The developing perspectives for this activity are determined by the social needs of the performance sport with the target to optimize performances, work relations and the practicing of physical exercises during free time, in order to improve personal performances, health indices and life quality.

Additionally, the counseling process is addressed to all persons wishing to begin a program of motric activities during their free time or to those wanting to improve their motric performances, the health condition and life quality level. In this case, the sport counselor has the role to create a somatic, motric and preferential profile of the counselee, in order to guide him towards the optimal motric activities which concur with the individual particularities. For the activity of physical exercise, the role of the counselor is to ensure the monitoring of the evolution and of the results upon the counselee's performance of practicing motor activities.

The social requirements will significantly contribute to the expansion of the occupational context of the sport counselor that will be able to activate on all levels within the performance sport structures, as well as on specific sportive-recreational ones and particularly through a qualified and personalized intervention at individual level.

A Sport counselor is a specialist who works predominantly with athletes, offering advice to people interested in solving various current problems of professional nature, derived from the preparatory work for performance in sports, contests and competitions participation, to promote the personal image, etc. Counseling is also addressed to large target groups who are interested to practice constantly one or more forms of physical training to maintain health, improve motric capabilities, develop the body harmoniously and enjoy leisure time who need expert and proper guidance in sporting activities correlated with the functional somatic profile, individual interests and preferences expressed.

The Sports counselor can work independently as an authorized person or as an employee of the sports structures. His activity is aimed to promptly and correctly inform the sportspeople and staff in the sports on news and developments in the field in which they work, counseling sportspeople on contractual issues , advising them to solve current and special or occasional character issues, monitor the sports training process , their representation in relation to sport structures and support for the amicable settlement of any disputes arising in sporting relationships by encouraging the generation of beneficial, realistic and constructive solutions, , consistent with the interests of the parties involved. Also, targeting and editing motric

somato-functional profiles with a view to guidance and counseling people in various sporting activities to improve the quality of life.

Implementation on labor market of this profession will require the development of scientific research to highlight the impact and efficiency of specific activities to the sports counselor and to the counseling process.

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