

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHING AND MANAGEMENT DURING THE PRE-COMPETITION PERIOD AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE PERFORMANCE RESULTS FOR 16-18 YEAR-OLD SOCCER PLAYERS

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### Abstract

*The article is meant to identify some aspects related to a sportsperson's feelings before competition. The more important the competition, the more intense the feelings. Such feelings may have a positive influence, if they are well managed by the sportsperson's technical staff, or a negative influence on the result. Therefore, we have focused on pointing out these feelings, how they are externalised, how to deal with them, in order to ensure a psychological preparation that allows a sportsman, through the attitudes and behaviours he acquired, to cope with the requirements of any competition, so as to achieve performance.*

**Key words:** *management, coaching, mental state for competition, athletic performance.*

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of the psychological preparation for competition seen as a component of coaching is widely recognized. In most cases, this preparation distinguishes between the competitors, particularly that for a high level of performance everyone is well prepared from the physical, technical, tactical and theoretical point of view. Materialized in a set of measures, actions and efforts made by sportspersons and technicians, the psychological preparation for competition is becoming an important factor that influences performance under competitive conditions. Great results can be achieved during coaching, too. But the only result that ranks and confirms values is competition. That is why competition is very important, and all the participants - sportspersons, official coaches, audience – live intensely the moments before, during and after the contest.

Competition creates a state of mental tension that usually brings changes to the habitual, learned motion behaviours. Under such circumstances, it is absolutely necessary for the "sportsperson to learn contest-specific behaviours, to learn how to control himself, to adapt his actions to difficult or unexpected situations, to keep his mental freshness before, as well as during competition" (M: Epuran, 1990).

Competition brings the sportsperson against a problematic situational field, with random factors, difficult to control (opponent, weather conditions, audience, officials, etc.). All these aspects are selected subjectively by the sportsperson in the pre-competition stages, his thoughts and concerns being directed towards the competition. There is often an inner dialogue with an important emotional load.

These aspects can be best observed around the moment of high-stake competitions. The more important the competition, the more acute and visible these aspects are.

From the **mental** perspective, this stage records a strong development of the cognitive and affective processes. Thinking develops, its efficiency develops; logical reasoning is being formed, the capacity of analysis, synthesis and differentiation are developed. At the same time, the world and life view take shape, under the influence of education.

The wish to assert oneself, to take initiative is manifested, new interests and inclinations appear in the field of motivation, they are maintained and tend to be completed. The sense of responsibility develops, the stratification of professional interests ends and a series of traits is formed. These traits have to be well managed by everyone around the sportsperson-coaching.

Among the most significant mental aspects of this period we can point out the development of consciousness and self-awareness, as the teenager is objectively and subjectively confronted with multiple changes related to his sexual maturation and to the discovery of the social reality dimensions.

The dignity and honour they all aspire to are influenced by the personal experience and by social, cultural and professional accumulations. From the early childhood stage, the individual has successively got over different environments, which have been demanding for him in a different and intermittent way and where he has had various roles.

From the **intellectual** perspective, the teenager has reached a good level of knowledge of the reality,

the functions of reception and processing of information being fully developed; they are based on the ability to concentrate his attention, on a satisfactory reaction to long intellectual effort, and particularly on the presence of various cognitive interests. A teenager reads a lot in order to satisfy his curiosity, is focused on various domains (sometimes he does not make a critical selection and does not remember, as he is only reading to have fun or to escape), likes talking about life issues, is preoccupied by ideas related to himself, to society and to existence in general. There is a great eagerness to get knowledge and a wish to confront ideas, using exact and lofty verb forms.

**Thinking**, which has reached the level of abstraction and logic, is critical, inclined to problematization; original and self-controlled statements occur. He conveys knowledge based on his logical memory, which has reached a complex development. The world view starts to take shape, the fundamental attitudes towards people, work and society. The wish to become a literate person is consistent and in order to achieve it he reads a lot, is open to the information he comes across.

**Self-awareness** is one of the fundamental dimensions of the intellectual and moral personality of an individual. It is formed through a long process starting with a sketch of the body scheme from early childhood and being completed during adolescence; at this point it includes the individual's relation to himself and to others, not only at a certain point in time, in a single situation, but within the dynamics of the social activity. Obviously, the self-image is dynamic throughout time, in point of its structure and depth, if we take into account the years that pass and the maturation they determine, as well as the multiple and various social influences.

Comparing oneself to the others, the assessments, particularly the critical analyses of actions and results lead to the formation of a self-image that the teenager himself wants to transform, following a chosen model. A teenager likes being appreciated.

The refined strategies of learning, noticed in teenagers, are based on various aspirations and interests, with complex stimulations of the intellectual potential facilitated by the entire mental development. The whole process is made easier through language, as a hypercomplex self-regulating and self-improvement system for the entire mental and behavioral activity. Thus, with the help of thinking and language we work with symbols, concepts, images, schemes and representations, generalizations and abstractions, which organize the directions of the intellectual activity.

In terms of *affectivity*, a teenager has an extremely rich mental life. The erotization of behaviour is still manifesting itself, but there is a better emotional balance compared to the previous period.

A teenager has strong feelings, mainly internalized and exclusive. Although they are still under the influence of imagination, they have a higher degree of awareness. The feeling of friendship is widely developed, in most cases desinterested, but not lacking the tendency to do less moral, incorrect actions. The sense of personal honour, of social prestige, the patriotic feeling, etc. are manifested, the teenager being capable of abnegation and sacrifices for noble, patriotic or humanitarian purposes.

**Personality** does not evolve linearly, it oscillates, including periods of imbalance, even disharmonies, that generate a series of positive or negative structures, depending on the conditions of social educational factors and on those related to the acquisition of hereditary peculiarities.

The full manifestation of personality is determined by the beginnings of its social integration, by the discovery of the world of values and by the opportunities to actually take part in it in a useful way. The social conscience of a teenager acts in such a way that he can understand his school and professional obligations, he can support efforts to achieve precise goals, even if sometimes they have not enough affective support. The development of moral conscience points out the discovery of the world of values. Convictions are imposed by logic and less by emotional bonding. Although a moral idealist, the teenager is not objective in his judgements, as the social criterion acts like a critical philter of attitude towards the others, towards work and profession. The thirst for knowledge, the desire for what is new, for what is special or spectacular, as well as the affective dynamics and the behaviour turn the teenager into a very active and versatile receiver.

**Motivation** occupies an important place alongside *abilities and attitudes* which energize it or diminish mental reserves, maintain or inhibit a tensed state and thus actionable ways of certain type and intensity are created. Motivation is also influenced by the circumstance of the activity, as an intermediate mental variable, highly sensitive to changes in the surroundings. When motivation and affectivity intersect, a teenager acquires a set of behaviours related to self-conceit, politeness, reluctance, avoidance, goodwill, compassion etc.

The complex of affective states the sportsperson experiences before competitions is included in *the competition mood*. By definition, moods are diffuse affective states, of variable intensity and relative duration. The competition mood appears like an affective state having the traits of a conditioned reflex; it may be specific to competition in general, to a certain contest, to a series of contests or to an entire competition season, hence having a relative duration. It is accompanied by a series of physiological and bio-chemical changes occurring before the competition, meant to prepare the body

for the effort to follow; they are known as the *special competition state*. Both the mood and the special competition state are aspects of the same phenomenon, namely the state of a sportsperson before competition. This state exists, either we want it or not, and it manifests differently from one person to another. Some cannot hide this state, hence it is visible, others manage to dissimulate, either by bravery or by negation. In fact, this emotional load is to be found in the following:

- Tendency toward introversion, retreat, isolation.
- Non-specific tendencies toward extroversion (anger, violence).
- Concentration focused on factors that can ensure success or, on the contrary, can lead to failure.
- Anxiety, which in Sports is called an emotional state with well-determined causes (even if anxiety is translated through reasonless fear) is expressed like a reaction to situations that could disturb the sportsperson's balance, or his *ego*; anxiety is presented from two perspectives: as a trait, being genetically determined by the level of the constitutional one, but also by competition-specific stress factors, sport underlines two major types of pre-competition anxiety:
  - a. fear of failure (most frequent);
  - b. fear of success.

According to the sportsperson, to his personality, to the acquired experience, the specific states that occur may be more or less deep, longer or shorter in duration. It is very hard to describe the diversity of the sportsperson's mental state before competition, mainly because they are regarded as reactions and not as voluntarily created states that are regulatory from the point of view of information, decision and energy.

The reasons of these feelings must be searched for in the relationship between the will to win and the fear of losing, in the analysis made by the sportsperson, who contrasts his own abilities and the requirements of the competition; but mostly, they must be searched for in the contextual factors, very hard to control, such as : the preparation level in relation to the competition level, the opponent's preparation level from all perspectives, the state and quality of sports equipment, weather conditions, altitude, time zone, the supporters', the spectators', the officials' attitude, attitude of the social environment.

The fact that the sportsperson goes through these pre-start states is normal, positive, as they illustrate the fact he cares if he losses or wins; they show us a fighter, a person willing to take part in competitions and who lives for it. In other words, the sportsperson is connected to the competition to follow, is aware that self-affirmation may be endangered by several causes and therefore, many

times without event wanting it, he imagines the race, the conflict states he will experience, the success or lack of success.

If we talk about this type of sportsperson, and about the intensity reached by his pre-competition feelings, we must underline the fact that there are two situations :

- optimal level of emotional tension, indicated by sthenic, pleasant emotion, good, tonic sleep, appetite, trust in his own forces, slight anxiety, will to fight, to win;
- level of emotional over-excitement, expressed through increased nervousness and irritability, insomnia, low appetite, introversion.

In order to extend the possibilities to measure the special state the sportsperson is experiencing, it is recommended to emphasize some of the characteristics of these states:

- **Ready to fight state.** The emotional pressure is supposed to be at its optimal level. From the mental perspective, the sportsperson is experiencing a tonic waiting, is slightly anxious, irritable, preoccupied with what is to follow, taking care to spare effort. A short physiological examination will show the following: enhanced pulse, a modification of blood pressure, an increased respiratory rate, muscle tone, mild tremors sometimes, a normal number of blinks and an increased diuresis. The sportsperson in this state must be kept away from other factors that can have a negative influence on his performance. A series of information factors, related to the opponent and which are not correctly perceived may lead to an overrating or an underestimation, anticipating the competition result at the same time.
- Mass-media can usually induce such attitudes, which can endanger the sportsperson's performance. Therefore, the sportsperson must prove unaltered objectivity and lucidity. At this point, the sportsperson's coach shall have a strong intervention, so as not to expose the sportsperson excessively to the external environment of the competition, game.
- The sportsperson in a ready to fight state should be a little bit more tensed, more concerned, but in a positive way, that is to be more attentive, more responsible. Driven by a growing desire to succeed, he should be more aggressive, more combative, supported by a good preparation. Experiencing much more emotiveness than usual, the sportsperson must be capable of self-control, self-regulation, so as to keep as stable as possible the emotional balance.
- **The Fear of starting.** This state is mainly determined by over-excited emotional situations. On closely examining the sportsperson from the mental perspective, one may identify a high state of agitation,

pronounced anxiety, affective lability translated by an easy transition from laughing to crying and vice versa. Memory becomes confused, the attentional capacity and the ability to take the right decision decrease, influencing mostly the tactical component of the competition.

- **The Apathy of starting.** It is considered a hyposthenic state, with a low emotional excitability. Mentally, the sportsperson shows a state of indifference, apathy, drowsiness, lacking the desire to compete. Physiologically, a highly flexed body posture may be noticed, chin to chest, the sportsperson yawns a lot, presents profuse sweating on his palms.

The coaching intervenes to correctly identify the sportsperson's type of pre-competition state. There are slight possibilities to correctly assess the special competition state and the way of manifesting itself. They are generally based on observation, the sportsperson being closely supervised. The assessment of the sportsperson state before competition may be achieved by comparing his normal state to the pre-competition state.

The psychological adjustment methods may be used in two ways:

1. As activators, to bring the body, seen as a whole, to an optimal functioning stage;
2. For psychological prevention, to create mechanisms that become resistant to disturbing factors, so as to train the sportsperson to develop resistance to such factors.

The neuro-psyche parameters, including the degree of activation, need an optimal level of adjustment and self-adjustment. The degree of activation is synonymous to a certain general tone of the body, and if it is reduced, it leads the sportsperson to apathy, lack of interest and lack of attention. A high level of the degree of activation leads the sportsperson to anxiety and overmotivation. For an optimal level of activation, there will be a maximum of efficiency. That is why, adjustment and self-adjustment are needed, but they will be different from one sportsperson to another and even from one situation to another.

The adjustment of the special competition state made by the coach and by the psychologist may be performed long time before the contest by every day training sessions, by specific feed-before training sessions or by mental training. The *activation training* is used around the date of the competition, particularly during the week before it. The first aspect to be achieved by the coaching is to transfer the feeling of success, victory from the previous contests, on the competition to follow. The sportsperson shall be prepared to record a great number of suggestions in this respect. But he will prove the same level of responsiveness to the unfavorable suggestions from the multitude of factors around him. Some of them are inner to the

sportsperson and are related to his specific anxiety, to his state of uncertainty concerning the result of the competition, to the self-confidence or lack of confidence, to the level of motivation, of correct perception of the opponent's capacities, etc.

An important aspect in adjusting the pre-competition state is the use of the so-called invisible coaching (comply with the normal lifestyle, the training program, the recovery and sleep program, rational and scientifically administered nutrition, professional activity, leisure program, etc.)

M. Niculescu (1999) proposes the next steps for the activation training:

1. establish a tactical plan to approach the competition;
2. enter a special agreement with the sportsperson, by a close and open discussion with him;
3. establish the level of mental tension and its type (positive or negative) even if the sportsperson shall try to hide or negate this state, as it surely exists;
4. establish as clearly as possible the relationship between the sportsperson's fear of failure and desire to win, between his own capacities and the requirements of the contest;
5. suggest the idea of winning the competition, supported by arguments related to the good preparation, to the real and increased opportunities he has, through the formula: "it is possible and I must win the competition";
6. discuss again about the tactical plan and check if the sportsperson masters it;
7. discuss again the content of the feed-before coaching related to possible unexpected aspects that may rise before and during the competition, and the ways of solving them to the sportsperson's advantage.

The self-adjustment of the special competition state includes the same stages as the adjustment: a long time before the competition or during its previous microcycle. Self-adjustment involves the acquisition of methods such as:

- Muscle relaxation by the emergence of the muscle contraction sensation, of muscle relaxation and heaviness in the segments, etc.
- Mental relaxation, connected to the muscle relaxation by the use of soothing, calm words, and for the well trained - the psychoton training.
- The dissociation and detachment training involves the opportunity of the sportsperson to isolate himself mentally from all stress situations, when he wants so.
- Acquisition of feed-before training, based on information about the competition, their processing and establishing solutions to various problems, predictable or unpredictable, that may arise, related to the physical and social environment the competition shall take

place in, basic organizational aspects, competition equipment and materials, the biopsychological condition and other concrete aspects of the competition.

- Mental training related to the repetition of technical and tactical aspects and the effort management.

During the microcycle previous to competition, the auto-adjustment is made by repeating and reliving the activation training, repeating the coach's indications related to the competition and following a mental program meant to acquire mental and physical energy.

Most specialists in the field recommend that all activities related to the adjustment and self-adjustment of the special competition state stop two days before the competition.

### CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from all facts presented up to this point. They point out what a sportsperson experiences before a competition.

- Competition is a factor that triggers mental tension with an obvious emotional component.
  - During the pre-competition a subjective load arises, the contest mood, whose content, namely the special competition state, derives from the changes in the physiological and biochemical processes. These changes influence in their turn the mental processes and phenomena, mostly the affective ones, but also the psychophysiological, the psycho-motor and the psycho-behavioral ones.
  - The expression of the special competition state is to be found in :
    - psychophysiological states: *ready to fight ( ready to start)* (positive state) or *the fear of starting* and *the apathy of starting* (negative states);
    - psycho-behavioral states:
- a. in the case of a superior value : self-confidence, respect and dignity towards his own person, the reliability on victory (positive

states) or formal participation, carelessness, indifference, vanity, minimizing the value of the opponent (negative state);

- b. in the case of a balanced value of the opponents: active presence, self-control, reliability on victory, discipline, mobilization, determination, firmness, rational risk (positive states) their reverse (negative states);
- c. in the case of an inferior value: volitional mobilization, search for surprising strategic solutions, mobilization to overcome oneself, audacity, inspiration (positive states) or panic, inhibition, resignation, cowardness, accentuated fear of failure ( negative states).

The possibility to assess objectively the special competition state is low due to the multiple aspects they include, to the multitude of factors they generate, to the individual mental structure of every sportsperson, to the sportsperson's availability to make it known or to hide it.

The possibilities and means of adjustment and self-adjustment of the special competition state belong to the psychologist, to the coach and to the sportsperson.

The adjustment and self-adjustment of the special competition state involved the acquisition and application of different types of coaching methods, necessary to put into practice the various adjustment and self-adjustment programs.

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