

THE PEDAGOGUE-COACH AS A DETERMINANT FACTOR OF FOOTBALL TALENT DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT. Background: By the 1990's a drastic decline of the general quality of football was experienced in Hungary which called for urgent actions in the field of talent development. Decision-makers realized that the development of more technically proficient home-grown players would be in everyone's best interests. **Objectives:** The aims of the study are the following: 1. to overview the evolution of the Hungarian Football Development Program; 2. to present the unique features of a youth football club participating in the Program as an example of good practice; 3. to examine the importance of coaches as educators of players. **Methods:** A qualitative research methodology has been applied in the study. Access was gained to archive sources (decrees, acts, accounts, committee meeting reports) related to state-aid of football talent programs which were examined through document analysis. The study also applied several in-depth interviews with those persons who had key roles in implementing the OTP Bank Bozsik Program in a football club through a fusion (N=5). **Results and conclusions:** The most important outcome of the predecessors of the OTP Bank Bozsik Program was that they gave a mass base for the selection of football talent which served the development of Hungarian football in the long run and also focused on coaches' education and professional development. The results also confirmed me that bigger emphasis must be put on the pedagogical knowledge learned within the football coach training.

Key words: *youth development, football, talent, physical education*

Introduction

State participation in Hungarian football has always been present and most significant though with a considerably different system of aims and means (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2000).

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Along with the Hungarian Football Federation (HFF) that became anonymous in 1989, state football officially ceased to exist in Hungary. However, the organisational and economic system proved to be absolutely incapable of reviving football. The most serious mistake of Hungarian football was that no improvement strategies were devised (Földesiné & Gáldiné, 2008).

By the 1990's a drastic decline of the general quality of football was experienced in Hungary which made decision-makers realize that any recovery would urgently call for emphasis on talent development programs (Bognár, Gécz, Vincze & Szabó, 2009; Vincze, Fügedi, Dancs, & Bognár, 2008). It was realized that the development of more technically proficient home-grown players would be in everyone's best interests.

It is definite that all actors involved in football (coaches, players, league captains, the sport press, a section of the fans) saw the same possible way of progress in capital invested in the field and in the role of young talents (Krausz, 1999). On the other hand, talent development does not exist without high-qualified coaches (Gécz, Vincze, Koltai & Bognár 2008/2009).

Coaches as pedagogues

Likewise the pedagogues, the coaches as well have significant role in the establishment of premises of diverse development built on biological basis and abilities (Istvánfi, 2005). In the field of sport it is well-known that talent development requires not only good conditions of training and scientific services but also the complex and conscious pedagogical coaching is of primary importance (Gécz, Révész, Bognár, Vincze & Benczenleitner, 2005). Success cannot be assured without the profound pedagogical knowledge of coaches (Gombocz, 2004).

The coaches whom János Gombocz calls "educators of the fields", have to choose wisely what managing methods and guidelines to follow in their team, what kind of education and teaching styles are used, meanwhile, what motivational techniques and conflict management strategies are applied (Gombocz, 2002).

Unfortunately, coaches put more emphasis on the transfer of professional football knowledge than they put on the education of players (Németh, 2011).

Objectives

The main aim of this study is to overview the evolution of the Hungarian Football Youth Development Program and to describe a good practise which makes more effective the development of talents as part of the Program. The study presents the strengths of the talent development system applied by the Csácsbozsok-Nemesapáti Sport Club (CSNSC). The third important aim was to examine the significance of the educator role of coaches.

Methods

A qualitative research methodology has been applied in this study (document analysis, in-depth interviews).

The systematic examination of the printed and written materials played an important role in the study. It was important to examine documents, because they provided a behind the scenes view of a lot of aspects that might have not been available through other means of data collection (Tenenbaum, & Driscoll, 2005). First access was gained to archive sources related to state-aid of football talent programs. Interesting and important sources was found as related decrees, acts, accounts, committee meeting reports.

The study also applied several in-depth interviews with those persons who had key roles in implementing the OTP Bank Bozsik Program through a fusion (N=5) of which one manager, one schoolmaster, one coach, one councillor, one physical education teacher. During the interviews, audio recordings were made, or if the interviewee has not approved the audio recording, then written notes were taken. Prior to the conversations, the participants were informed about the confidential handling of their opinions, and their use exclusively for the purpose of the study. All opinions were taken into account during the research.

By the use of more than one source of data, triangulation of data was ensured in order to establish validity and reliability (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2005).

Results and discussion

State-aided models of football talent program

By means of document analysis I examined the antecedents of the current Hungarian Football Youth Development Program, the so called OTP Bank Bozsik Program which has an almost one and a half decade long history.

Talent identification had been operating since the conception of organized competitive sport but we have to go back only until the turn of the Millennium, when in the spring of 2000 the former Ministry of Youth and Sport (MYS) elaborated a complex development program of Hungarian football, the György Orth Reform Program. The third cornerstone of the György Orth Reform Program was the implementation of a standardized youth development system next to stadium reconstruction and initiation of the criteria of business-based football (reorganization).

Because of its significant and particular social role, the broadening, strengthening and supporting of football talent system became a major part of the National Youth Development Strategy.

On July 21, 2000 the MYS, the Hungarian Football Federation (HFF) and the Professional Football Sub-Association concluded an agreement of cooperation, in which the criteria of the implementation of the standardized National Football Youth Development Program were stated. The agreement disposed on the setting up of the National Football Academy (NFA) in order to coordinate and organize the tasks on the different levels of the Program. Until the voluntary dissolution of the non-profit company in 2004 the Advisory Board of NFA were formed by such legends of Hungarian football as Flórián Albert, Lajos Baróti, Jenő Buzánszky, Gyula Grosics, Rudolf Illovszky, Kálmán Mészöly and Ferenc Puskás.

The technical details of the Program, the division into school and club level were regulated by the Government Decision 1147/2001 on the state guarantee related to the Bozsik Program aiming the reform of the institutional system of youth development in the Hungarian football.

Due to this in 2002 the school football subprogram (Bozsik I.) with the responsibility of the MYS and club football subprogram (Bozsik II.) managed by the HFF and the NFA were operated parallel.

In the above mentioned Government Decision the Government also approved 5.2 billion HUF loan for leveling up club youth football. A Government Agent was charged with the coordination and monitoring of the utilization of this fund. Due to the Government Decision and the series of its amendments finally 0.5 billion HUF was granted for the HFF.

From 2004 the support system of Bozsik Program had changed and was replaced by a financing based on the Sport Ministry's budget appropriation.

From 1 September 2008 there was another change in the governance structure. From that time the Hungarian Youth Football Federation coordinated youth development at the schools and studentsport clubs, in the age group of 5-12.

The direct control went back to the HFF in 2011-ben when as a matter of fact the Program was restarted with a budget more than a billion HUF thanks to the OTP Bank and MOL who became the sponsors of the Program again.

The main objectives of the Program:

- Setting up a standardized and transparent youth development system.
- Authentic, up-to-date and controllable registration.
- Increasing the number of the registered football players participating in the Program.
- A modern competitive and training system based on the requirements and guidance of UEFA and FIFA.
- Broadening the basis of men's football.
- Formation of the youth basis of women's football.
- Selection and training of talents.

Main characteristics of the Program:

- Every level has a special role and significance.
- Synergia of the programs of different age groups.
- Every talent has to get the chance regardless age, gender, residence and social situation.
- Personality should be in focus.
- The development of talents should be ensured.
- The program should be developed continuously based on the experiences.

Scenes of the OTP Bank Bozsik Program

- Child Institutional Program: Its aim is to reorganise the “grund-age”, to make play enjoyable, to broaden the pool for the selection of gifted players. It supports out of class activities and events (festivals) in the schools and kindergartens. It requires 2 afternoon activities per week which offer the opportunity for regular training, play and match for children 5-14 year old.

- Child Club Program: Its aim is to establish a mass base in clubs, to strengthen the bonds to football, to lay the fundamental technical skills, to inspire creativity. Its most important element is the district-based tournament system in the age group of U6-7, U8-9 and U10-11. It requires at least 4-5 teams to take part in every district. It supports the trainers leading the tournaments and the organizing clubs, with the supervision of the trainer in charge of the subcenter and the county-level coordinator.

- Selection Program: It is implemented in the following, mutually integrated scenes: the district, subcenter, county, regional and national scenes, as well as the Youth Development Centre (Telki), each of which has a responsible professional leader appointed by HFF. This setup allows the selected football players to be given trainings that fit their age and talent.

In 2014/2015 the aim of the HFF in line with its strategic objectives is the increase of the mass base of football. Its intentions in numbers: in 20 countys, in 180 regions, in 2200 institutions, in 5400 sportgroups, 70.000 children’s activities.

The indicators of Bozsik Institutional Program in the season 2014/2015: 107 subcenters, 214 groups, 1200 sportclubs, 70 000 registered players (between the age of 5-14).

It was reinforced that OTP Bank Bozsik Program has been elaborated on in detail, thoroughly considered, and structured in a systemic manner (Csáki et al., 2014).

Good practice

The Csácsbozsok-Nemesapáti Sport Club (CSNSC) in order to comply with the conditions of the OTP Bank Bozsik Program was formed by the fusion of a district (Csácsbozsok) of the chief town of Zala County and a village of 514 inhabitants (Nemesapáti).

The fusion was based on a simple but effective idea: to unify the strengths of two parties. The sportclub of Nemesapáti had a history of several decades, since it was established in 1928, firstly in football and bowling. It had a large grass field in good condition, while Csácsbozsok district had a modern indoor gym in an institution, the Imre Izsák Elementary School. So the available sport facilities defined the project.

The main goal of the club met the endeavours of the OTP Bank Bozsik Program: based on an own youth mass to train more and more children. CSNSC joined the Program with the Imre Izsák Elementary School for the September 2013 with 65 children. Girls are also involved in the Program.

The fusion fulfilled the expectations. The CSNSC already has 117 registered players in 7 age groups (U7, U9, U11, U13, U15, U17, and U21). It was not long before the success came.

Several talented players could reach the pitches owing to the deliberately planned and widely managed youth development and so soon the standard of CSNSC's play ameliorated, too.

The teams have 76 trainings per month in all.

But what are the reasons behind the positive experiences? Thanks to the fusion adequate infrastructure was provided. Committed human resources help the work. The Club follows the central regulations.

This triunity of human resources, facilities and regulations exist in other „Bozsik clubs”, too, so other factors are behind the results: the individual student treatment and talent care which can increase motivation and efficiency.

The founders of CSNSC carefully thought out their possibilities in order to work more effectively. The 7 teams are handled as one provided in this way the continuous youth development.

The small village and the ten times bigger district found common solutions. The students of the village were helped to the Program by the better facilitated (included high-standard human resource) urban institution. On the other hand those from the city can enjoy the advantages of the good infrastructure of the village.

CSNSC has many unique, special features.

Analyzing the statistics of the HFF on the utilization of the artificial grass field in 2014 multiple usages appeared unequivocally. The educational institution uses it for out and in class football, the sportclub for youth and adult team.

Those who participate in the Program can meet regularly the adult players, the ideals. It also has a pedagogic effect.

Establishing the local good practices helps first of all the selection mechanisms. Hence, the selection of football talents is a long-term, complex process (Lawrence, 2008).

The Club contributes to the progress. Based on the experiences of the performance measurements, comparative tests and practical observations, the most talented get special attention from the coach. They get the chance to join the A team in the 1st division. At the same time not only the most talented are treated by care. Those who by any reasons (e.g. injury) cannot perform adequately have the possibility to play football in a lower league until recovery.

In order to provide an evenly high-standard training for the players in the Program, an "internal coach-selection system" was in the Club. Recognizing the 18-21 year old players' personality, talent, managerial competence, every year the two most suitable players get the chance to participate in the UEFA licence training for coaches by the support of the Club. Its cost is covered by the incomes e.g. from rental fee, sponsorship.

One graduate and one university student also get support for their studies.

Individual student treatment and talent care

It is a very valuable idea of the Program that every talent has to get the chance regardless his social situation. The external factors (e.g. financial advantages, parental attitude) cannot be a bar of the development.

The CSNSC expects from its coaches to follow with attention the scholastic record of the players, especially in the case of second examinations. If this latter occurs the Club helps with pedagogic coaching.

The coaches regularly discuss the experiences with the teachers, if they noticed any positive changes in the students' concentration and other abilities. If they realize that the student is faint, untidy or behave in a particular way, they explore the reasons and try to help.

When the games are held farther the families living in better conditions help to transport the poorer.

The most talented are helped by mentors who play in the A team.

All of the above are very motivating moments.

The records proved that a diverse development of the student competencies takes place in practice.

The selection of qualified coaches is not easy for CSNSC. Partly only a limited number of well-qualified coaches are available, on the other hand financial reasons make it more difficult.

The managers of the club are sports lover and of creative types. Their work proved that one must dare to plan. But one must also do a lot in order to implement plans.

They regularly keep analyzing consultation to form common policies and to handle arisen conflicts. They organize consultations also for the parents and operate parent-teacher association.

The selection and talent development cannot be separated. It is not enough to recognize who has outstanding skills but talent development is even more important and more difficult task. Progression should be followed with attention to not only training theory or physiological aspects but also the education of the child is essential. The relation between the educator and the educand is permanent, it does not cease to exist when they are not together.

Coaches have to take into consideration though that the appearance and usage of pedagogical principles in competitive sports is very specific. Success reflects the importance of education and communication not only in competitions but during the selection, the development and the trainings, too.

The personality of coaches, their moral preferences influence directly the ethical level of players.

Every word, decision or gesture of the coach has significant moral effect that is the reason why the coach should set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct.

Conclusions

The most serious mistake of Hungarian football was that no improvement strategies were devised. Through sufficient financial support and well-developed educational materials, HFF experts have framed and shaped a development program of young players so that every Hungarian child could find an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and improve their skills.

The most important outcome of the predecessors of the OTP Bank Bozsik Program was that they gave a mass base for the selection of football talent which served the development of Hungarian football in the long run and also focused on coaches' education and professional development. One can state that the Hungarian Football Development Program was a general investment into sports. The growing professionalization of the soccer field (Roderick, 2006) encourages young children to choose to devote more time and effort to develop their soccer skills.

The Program enables talented children even from the smallest settlements of the country to demonstrate their skills, and who deserve admission to the selection teams of the given age.

The presentation of CSNSC and its special implementation of OTP Bank Bozsik Program can be useful for such small youth football organisations. Its main achievement is the individual talent care by the "educator coaches".

I also wanted to get a better picture and to draw attention to the importance of pedagogical knowledge of coaches. The Program reinforced opinions that only those coaches with high-level understanding, competencies, and motivation can make changes in the sport. The results confirmed me that bigger emphasis must be put on the pedagogical knowledge learned within the football coach training. I believe that the outcomes could prove profitable for experts in football.

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