

Thoughts about Handball by Lino Cervar

I know that today is not the time for words but for actions.

I know that often a vision, an idea or the contents are not as important as marketing, which is becoming a way of life.

We should not accept such an outlook on life.

As I receive this prestigious recognition for my forty-year-long career as a coach, I want to thank the European Handball Federation, but at the same time I desire to defend and give more importance, as well as to reaffirm the institution of coaching.

Very few jobs are under an everyday magnifying glass like our coaching job. Today, the demands and expectations from a coach have very much risen.

Still, the work that a coach does today is an area of more solid and tangible truths and facts – the results, which, unlike in many other jobs, cannot be manipulated with.

Today, a coach is much more than the profession itself and its marketing value.

A coach is constantly raising and developing the human potential, but also cultures of work, success, failure and the culture of behavior as well as the team spirit.

It is only through team work that dreams come true and we must constantly remind our players and our children of that, because this concern for others is the foundation of morality.

These days we have individuals, but less and less top teams.

No man is as big as he is when he dedicates himself to someone else's child.

Think of the years and years we gave to other children. Because of that we, in our sport of handball, must have great respect toward you, the coaches of any age or club ranking.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBALL GAME

Talking about a model of the handball game of the future is difficult, because we, unlike other team ball sports, do not have scientific research and proofs of efficiency of various methods of training and teaching.

Equally, in handball we don't have reliable criteria for the assessment of the actual situational success of players in a handball match, both the individual as the one in synergy with other players in the team, even though there have been some attempts at creating them.

The assessment of the actual situational success must be based on the assessment of handball experts first and foremost.

Therefore, only with such relevant and reliable study results we may begin to search for new creative and innovative ideas for the development of the handball game.

Because of that, we must dedicate more attention to these lines of research in the future, as this is one of the causes of regression and stagnation of handball.

The evolution of handball game, but also of any other collective team ball sports, imposes a review of the status quo as well as any long term "comfort status".

If we truly wish to improve the handball game, then we must change the present status, but also the bad habits which are the biggest enemies of learning. Handball needs change!

When talking about problems, I first and foremost think that we have an ever decreasing number of coach-teachers which teach our children the basics of handball and the understanding of the game, as well as quality coaches-competitors that use the potential and build upon the quality of a player. Therefore, we have less and less ball coaches that train the head and more body coaches that impose their belief that the player's technical-tactical deficit can be replaced by his motoric and functional abilities.

I cannot accept such an attitude!

A player may be in perfect form (and this is of course also very important), but that still does not mean that he knows how to play handball.

Because of that I welcome the decision of the European Handball Federation which insists on the improvement training of handball coaches.

Passion, as well as curiosity and investing in oneself must become an everyday thing for a coach, because no coach, no matter how talented he may be, will never pass all exams.

The second large problem of handball are the dated rules of the game which prefer subjective assessment of referees when it comes to the interpretation of the rules of handball, especially in making key decision which open up a space for injustice and manipulation.

Because of such conservative rules we have a lot of complaints in the world of sports.

Such interpretation of handball rules in a handball match is absolutely contrary to the principles of sport ethics and the Olympic Charter.

Handball rules should not be changed just on an aesthetic level, but on a fundamental one (passive attack, breaking through, expulsion, the question of advantage and etc.). The professionalization of the referees is not enough, the rules have to be changed.

With the current interpretation of the handball rules, the referees come forward not by their fault and become the main protagonists of the match, which is something that should not be.

Watching handball matches, we are witnessing the neglect of development and perfection of the handball skill.

Due to the players' lack of training, important roles have been taken by strength and speed.

Untrained players, often encouraged by referees' decisions, have imposed a game of jumping over, breaking through and a game of individual conflict in defense.

Such a game is dominated by raw force. The creativity of a player is killed, as is the attractiveness of the handball game itself.

This is the reason why handball has not reached its full development stage.

Our players are untrained and undertrained in technical-tactical knowledge and skills.

When talking about revolutionary approach to training, I am first and foremost referring to the need to develop the cognitive competences which are in fact mental and intellectual skills needed for coping in new situations during a handball match.

Naturally, they are largely determined by genes, but if we are to insist mainly on the repetitive situational methods of training carried with the ethics of hard work, these skills can be improved.

All situational exercises should encompass anticipation, perception, reaction and watchfulness as well as focalized attention for a better processing of the details of the game.

I see the future of handball in intensive thinking, intensive training and intensive playing.

Nevertheless, in order for us to significantly improve the handball game in both basic conditions, meaning in position and transition, my belief is that anticipation and perception are the key.

Handball perception is in fact the speed of the reception of visual information or the so-called quick scanning of the situation on the field.

It is the process of creating an overview of the situation during the game.

Visual perception, sharpness of vision and the perception of depth are most important here.

This is in fact the ability to assess space, time and distance, which is extremely important due to motoric activation.

Anticipation is equally important due to motoric activation.

Anticipation is equally important because it helps in the speed of perception. This is the ability to foretell the events during matches, training and practice.

Reading the attacker's or defender's intentions allows the player to have a quick tactical response as well as his proactive approach and initiative.

Anticipation as a way of making conclusions about something in advance brings an appreciable advantage, but one should not forget that the level of anticipation quality under pressure is what separates top players from those of a lesser quality.

Even today, modern handball suggests that the easiest and the most rational way of winning is through defense and quick transition.

Nevertheless, attack from the position should not be ignored.

For the eye of the viewer, attack is still more attractive than defense and it should thus be improved also because it is not an easy task, as the excess of players are in always there where the ball is.

We can improve the potential possibilities and the creative potential of our universal players only through a dynamic attack, by changing the attacker's positions and by upgrading the individual and group tactics.

WORKING WITH THE YOUTH

I see large areas for improvement and development of handball in working with younger categories of players from children and young cadets to cadets and juniors.

With a new and modern methodically-didactic approach we will be able to raise far greater numbers of excellent young male and female players in the future and considerably improve quality and attractiveness levels of the handball game.

Likewise, I am convinced that by making changes we will reduce the time needed for young players to mature and to make a quick transition to the senior team.

Experimental psychologists, cognitive neuroscientists and evolutionary biologists all agree that it would be pointless to apply the methodic and didactic models used for decades to successfully teach pupils on new generation of children.

Naturally, this applies to sport as well.

Present times ask for a new model of teaching and training on a high competitive level, suggesting an interactive and cooperative model that develops competences with the aim of achieving personal power and efficient cooperation, not competition.

This creative approach avoids the clash of the individual and collective interests and develops interdependence.

Interdependence is crucial today for achieving success in society, marriage and sport games.

It is only by affirming the cooperation model that the success of the individual is seen as the success of the team.

However, the coach, as the professor, needs to give up a part of his power and distribute it on the players, pupils or students.

This interdependent relationship between the coach and the players becomes a creative one between two subjects which cooperate mutually, but who also mutually respect each other.

Today, as suggested by a famous scientist, we must recognize in the selection phase the talents of character – players of a quick mind (reason and memory), of fast thinking and reasoning and of a divergent opinion.

I believe that it is not good to raise children so that tomorrow they may be egocentric, scared or fastidious.

If in as early as in the first grade of elementary school the children in their study curriculum are able to creatively master subjects such as design and technology, writing of basic internet programs and critically analyzing the human impact on climate change, then I do not see why we should not begin with introducing children of that age into the handball secrets and skills through workshops designed to teach through play. A first grader is quite curious, creative, imaginative and thinking a lot, as well as reasoning: How? Why? Because of what?

Up to the age of ten, the slogan of an interdependent methodical from "Learning handball through playroom and workshop" should be the dominant one.

If handball is a thoughtful process already at an earliest age, there are three key words: See, decide and act.

If we understand the training with young teams in such a way, rest assured that our player will be equally fast on his legs and with his thought once he reaches senior age.

Coach teachers – by encouraging all cognitive activities, the children will attain a high understanding of the game very fast.

Therefore, let's allow the children to play, jump and to run around, because in doing so they develop their potentials.

We know now more than ever before in the past how our brain works thanks to neuroscience. If neurons in children are developing, responding to stimuli and retaining the information the fastest in the neural system at the age of seven, we should allow these children to develop their intellectual and other potentials.

The unused period in children from the ages of six to fourteen is the one when the concentration, memory and creativity are developed the best.

Of course, in my thinking, the technique is always in the spotlight, because it is crucial.

Without a technique (which lasts for a lifetime and not for a single day), no tactical idea can be optimally carried out, which is the reason why we train them simultaneously.

Without technique, there can be no enjoyment in the game and the game cannot be enjoyed by the ones watching us.

To conclude my thoughts, I wish to tell you that in spite of all, I am fully convinced that there is a bright future ahead for the game of handball.

It will be the handball as a global European sports event.

Yes, handball – the Event.

I wish you all luck!

Thank you for your attention!

Krakow, January 17, 2016