

Limits and risks in sports performance practice

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Specialists note the presence of three important *limits* that involved in sports performance practice, which require corrections in order to avoid subsequent risks (Epuran, 1989).

One of the limits is caused by deficiencies in the selection process, which is still empirical. Scientific selection based on multiple criteria is a laborious and rather difficult to apply process. This is why the application of a minimal three-link selection is desirable, which can lead to increased predictability in sport. The third criterion, which is usually missing in the practice of selection, is the psycho-pedagogical one, extremely important for later sports training.

Another limit observed in sports practice consists of a contradiction between the early selection and the relatively late maturation of the personality, which is due to the application of the selection process before sports orientation, unlike in other fields of activity. This is why there are difficulties in the early identification of basic cognitive qualities, which are extremely important in the process of learning, including motor learning. There are also difficulties in the identification of personality traits, seen as an attitude complex, an effect of the relatively late maturation of the personality or of “frequent changes in slope” in terms of motivation. This limit might be overcome by the orientation of selection and activities during the initiation period towards the formation and development of a creative personality and the identification of the intelligence level as a component of creativity and superior gifting. We draw attention that in this case the competition system will have to be revised, particularly in children, as it is known that in order to stimulate a creative climate, competition as an aim in itself should be avoided over a determined time period, and motivation should be oriented towards competence, not performance.

A third limit in sports performance practice is related to the child's voluntary adhesion to sports performance activity and its gradual transformation into a compulsory, highly responsible activity. As a result, few athletes are up to this challenge, due to the fact that at an early age, the system of values is not yet formed, because of a highly unstable emotional balance.

The high proportion of top performance athletes who have difficulties in social integration at the end of their sports career brings again to discussion the problem of educational risks that must be solved. Sports performance activities are part of the vocational area, benefiting from scientific methods and means for the identification of specific skills, and are recognized at international level among the 6 areas of over-gifting. However, unlike the duration of a career in other areas of over-gifting, a sports career is shorter, usually ending around the age of 29-30 years or sooner, in the case of sports initiated very early.

The problem of educational *risk* in the case of sports performance practice is seen differently by different specialists, who either reject or accept its practice. The majority of non-sport institutions and organizations that declare to protect the children's rights condemn the dysfunctions and risks that may have a negative influence on the child's perspective (Kaminski, quoted by Hahn).

The arguments *against* sports performance practice in children are the following: sport is “work for children”, and this should be eliminated, because it is in contradiction to the Labor Code that allows work for children starting with the age of 16 years; the children's rights are disregarded; their real needs are not taken into consideration; sport endangers the children's future; it manipulates them, then abandons them to the large pool of adult sports performance practice, exposing them to intense stress from overtraining; their family life is destroyed; social contacts are limited; they are physically, mentally and intellectually put in danger by sports performance practice, they are abandoned; there is a risk for their desocialization; from a pedagogical point of view, children and their development needs, not their sports achievements, should be the first concern; records and medals are “short duration values” (Paschen, Dietrich, Crum, Funke, quoted by Gruppe).

The following arguments are provided *in favor* of sports performance practice: sports performance practice in children can determine initiatives and incentives that can help in the formation and development of certain behaviors necessary in life; sports performance practice causes no prejudice, provided that it is adequately controlled; children take more advantages from sports performance practice than from being inactive or involved in sport for all; children can develop experience for their own benefit through sports performance practice; unilateral intellectual development can be avoided by adequate

guidance and good medical care; children grow up in a tough world of work and competition, and sports training is a good way for them to adapt to the present and future society (Oerter, quoted by Hahn, 1996).

In favor of sports performance practice is also the fact that high performance athletes, in spite of their average or mediocre results in high school or university (which can be explained), obtain very good results in their profession after they give up sports performance practice. This is due to the fact that high performance athletes have moral volitional qualities that are clearly superior to those obtained in the classical education system, as well as an acquired reflex tendency to obtain high performance. Thus, they are able to compensate for their initial professional lag (Belous, 1995).

The risks due to *methodological errors* in the process of training of athletes are the following (Hahn, 1996): the time allocated to training is much too long, potentially to the detriment of the other school duties; the harmless character of training in children from a psycho-pedagogical point of view is questioned: limited social contacts, absence of freedom etc.; there is a risk for the appearance of secondary phenomena in the development of the personality: the development of exaggerated ambitions, a tendency to consider themselves "stars" etc.; reactions specific for certain moods can occur: anxiety, disappointment, depression; the manifestation of personal behavior problems: the hiding of worries and uncertainties instead of their elimination, the obsession with performance etc.; disturbing social behaviors may occur as a result of the imposition of responsibilities from the part of the parents, coach, club, federation, which exceed the children's capacity; asking for high performance at national and international level at increasingly younger ages (gymnastics, skating, swimming); the competition system of children reproduces that of adults; the too early specialization of children and the desire of coaches or parents to obtain success at any cost; the planning of training, using adult parameter values; an excessive volume, intensity and duration of training; disregard of playing as a method of training.

One of the major educational risks due to *selection errors* is *sport and school drop out*. An inconsistent scientific approach of selection may result in inaccurately identified aptitudes for the obtaining of sport success in some children. The direct consequence of these selection errors appears in the next stage, when the obtaining of sport success in the case of individuals with an average biomotor value requires a huge volume of work, which affects their educational process as well as their school and social integration. Insufficient attention is paid to educational problems, the choice of profession, life outside sports activity, which is why young athletes may have serious social integration difficulties later in life (Orlik, quoted by Fischer and Borms). Activity for the development of sports skills involves, in addition to some benefits, many risks that are presented in the form of a principle: "The aim of selection is not only to seek excellence", but to develop it without "destroying the child's life" (Orlik, quoted by Fischer and Borms). The avoidance of these effects is possible by the accurate identification of really over-gifted individuals, capable of obtaining both sport and school success.

Part of the risks involved by the training of athletes is due to *parents* (Hahn, 1996).

The stimulating role played by parents is based on the following considerations: most of them practiced a sport discipline when they were young; most of them show interest in the obtaining of high performance by their children; parents know how to organize the first contacts of children with sport; parents pay attention to the development of the results obtained in training and competition; parents reward the results obtained by their child, they are willing to support the child morally, financially and organizationally.

The inhibitory role of parents generates educational risks and is based on the following considerations: parents overprotect their children, who are no longer assigned any tasks or responsibilities except those related to sport; they postpone the problems related to the training for life by school, taking advantage of sport prestige; they oblige the child to participate in training (participation in training and competitions at any cost); they always expect the child to be successful; they organize the sports activity of the child, without allowing the child to take any initiative; they plead for their own child's interest so that the coach can obtain high performance as soon as possible.

A great risk caused by the practice of sport is *sudden death* on the sports ground. Induced by sport, directly or indirectly, this is a great failure of sports activity. The duty of the sports movement is to find and apply all the necessary means in order to effectively fight this terrible scourge (Calmat, 2010).

We aimed our efforts for the optimization of the methodology of selection at identifying, in addition to exceptional biomotor skills, which are highly heritable and consequently difficult to perfect, superior intellectual skills. Thus, in order to obtain both sport and school success, we consider it necessary to identify superior intellectual and personality skills: the presence of an IQ>100, an above the average level of concentrated attention and visual memory, a predominantly sanguine temperament characterized by the rapid and correct acquisition of the basic technique, and a superior level of creativity.

It is also necessary to identify individuals with a strong motivation for the practice of sport, as well as the presence of a strong family support (Bocu, 1997, 1999).

The causes of quitting a sport career are based on four factors: *age*, *deselection* (periodic withdrawal from sports activity due to the exigencies of successive selection stages), *the consequences of prejudice* (severe injury), as well as the *freedom to choose* (the choice of withdrawal from sports activity). These factors influence a wide variety of psychological, social, physical problems that appear at the end of a sport career, which result in a difficult social integration after the withdrawal from sports performance practice (Taylor et al., 2006).

Knowing these limits, risks and causes present in sports performance practice, we consider that the structures necessary for the reduction or even the elimination of educational risks due to the mentioned errors can be created, ensuring a rapid social integration at the end of sports performance practice. We propose two solutions. The creation of sport selection, orientation and counseling Centers, and compulsory injury insurance for all the young persons involved in an organized sports activity, as well as compulsory life insurance for all elite athletes. The problem of the conclusion of work contracts for high elite athletes can be posed.

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The editorial is based on the syntheses published in translation by the Sportul la Copii și Juniori collection, in the period 1992-1996, under the auspices of CCPS. Their content brings to attention papers of a number of researchers on sports performance practice in children and juniors from an educational point of view (Fischer and Borms, Grupe, Hahn), who quote in their turn researches performed by Paschen, 1980, Dietrich, 1980, Crum, 1982, Funke, 1983 Oerter, 1970, Kaminski, 1982.