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Segregated Training Courses for Female Coaches - just goofy classes?

Today at the turning of the century there can only be found a few women who are in leading coaching positions. And it is still true that the higher the coaching level the less female coaches are involved - and it is still an exception when a woman is responsible for the success of a men's team.¹

In European handball a program was developed and evaluated in cooperation with the State Sports Association (LSB), the State Handball Association (HVN) and the University of Hannover in order to provide more coaching positions for women. I will look upon the experiences and problems involved into the process to install segregated training courses for female coaches in cooperation with the State Handball Association (HVN).

The project, the first segregated course for women, took place in 1993 and two more courses followed in 1994, 1995. The following years (1996 until 1999) these centralized courses were opened up to men, i.e those places not taken by women were completed up with men. I am especially referring to the first accomplished group which was investigated during and after the program with a questionnaire and interviews, the second one year later. In early 1998 another questionnaire was sent to all women and men who took part in the centralized coaches education since 1993.

1. General information

Training coaches on the different levels can only be done by the individual Sport Activity Association according to the guiding principles of the German Sport

Association DSB. (DSB 1991,11) This means that all initiatives that are focused on the recruitment of more women for coaching positions need highly motivated and enthusiastic officials within the Sport Activity Associations. As long as these voluntary people in leading sport positions do not see the necessity of supporting and motivating women to become coaches there will not be a change.

The coaching career is determined by continuing training courses starting with the first step, the c-level. This part of the training program includes 120 lessons and ends with a 'practical standard assessment' - the guide lines do not speak about examination. After two years of coaching the second level (B-License) may be reached, this training comprises of 60 lessons and an examination including a teaching practical as well as a written or oral test. Another two years of coaching of teams in higher divisions and with the recommendation of the State Sport Activity Association the A-License courses (160 lessons and an examination) are offered by the National Associations. To become a professional coach with a 'Diplom' one has to study at the coaching academy in Cologne.

In order to obtain more women in the leading coaching positions we have to start educating and encouraging women in their specific sport activities from the beginning, the c-level. This project will focus on strategies to overcome resistance toward segregated training courses designed for women experienced in the field of handball.

2. Experiences in installing the program for female coaches

The training of coaches is part of the educational program within the Sports Associations. Therefore, the responsibility for female training courses is in the hands of the educational board. These persons are fully responsible for the quality of the educational program, they organize the courses, they recruit the lecturers, they structure the contents of the program, they observe and control the required standards and so on. For this project intensive discussions led to the following principles guiding women's training courses. The content of the discussions is not very special for women, these principles should be implemented in all training courses in order to reduce the authoritarian structures within the training system.

2.1 Responsibility of the Sport Activity Association

¹ this just happened in the German Volleyball Association where a female coach reached the first

As stated earlier the different Associations are responsible for educating coaches. In this context all steps to promote female coaches need special motivation and enthusiasm from the officials. As long as these honorary persons do not support and encourage women to become coaches and as long as women do not get leading positions in administration or coaching the image of a coach will be that of a male person. (In German, the word for 'coach' is a masculine noun and therefore the association is that of a male coach.) Even within the sporting activities that are attractive for women (like European Handball, Volleyball or Tennis) there are almost no women coaching on higher levels. (WILLMANN/ZIPPRICH 1995; GIEß-STÜBER 1995). In installing the program for female handball coaches two facts were necessary:

1. **support by the chairman of the educational board** ('strong man'). If there is someone within the Associations hierarchy who really wants to implement segregated women's training courses, she or usually he can use all his power to do so. In this case with the State Handball Association (HVN) the chairman used the project in some part for his own reputation to climb up the career ladder within the National Handball Association (DHB). We always have to keep in mind that the officials within the Associations are still men who can influence decisions in either way. Therefore why not use these 'strong men' to bring competent women on the way?
2. **foundation of the women's council** of the Handball Association. This council is represented in the executive committee to take part in all decisions and to transport ideas and results between women and the chairpersons. One task of the women's council was to accompany the women's training courses. One of the women has to be permanently present to interact with the participants, to manage the child care program, to smooth up occurring problems, and so on.

2.2 Courses designed for women only

The announcement of the courses 'for women only' was published in the usual Handball news. The fact 'women only' led to the circumstance that within the clubs the information went down to Handball interested women who for example were very

division with her team.

motivated players or already coaching children's teams without any certificate. Until that day the information within the clubs was usually transported to male players to educate them to become future coaches. Just by the fact that the program was only offered to women led to the increase in the number of females, because these women would never have been asked by the club officials for participation.

2.3 The organization of the courses.

The regular courses are organized under the principle of a "box of bricks". Every participant chooses the different courses that are offered and announced by the Association, according to the individual time table and to the town where it will take place. In order to pass the required 120 lessons, every one has to undertake the program over a period of about two years.

The female courses are

1. centralized, which means that all courses take place at one location easily accessible for the participants with a good infrastructure of housing, gyms and lecture rooms as well as children's facilities;
2. structured in a way that the group itself stays together and the courses will take place during two weekends and two weeks – one within school holidays - so that not more than a maximum of 6 months are between the beginning and the end of the program. The dates are fixed when the courses are announced so that the time span is easy to undertake and to complete.

Altogether this education is well planned for women especially for those with children. All courses include child care, or mothers may organize family members or friends to supervise their children during their absence.

2.4 Female lecturers

The engagement of female lecturers was a special demand from our side to the head of the educational board. In order to promote more self-confidence and to strengthen the women's position as a competent coach it is necessary to have competent women as role models. So far no women were among the lecturers. The educational board of the State Handball Association (HVN) had to look for and employ female lecturers, and succeeded in that 50% of the lessons were taught by women. By their ability and competency these women represent a certain level within

the Association's hierarchy and may serve as role models to develop the self-consciousness among the female coaches.

2.5 Methodological Procedures

At the present time there are no more discussions going on about the methodological procedures of the courses. However, before the project, intensive discussions took place. Now, all methods required for adult education are supported and we do stress that the contents and teachings have to be directed to the participants' needs, in particular to the women's needs. The German Handball Association (DHB) developed as his central theme within the c-license education, the teaching and coaching of children's handball. And this was the perfect motivation for the women being interested to train children's handball.

In the practical work the needs of women may be met by stressing the qualitative aspects of kinesiological elements and tactical systems always closely linked to specific applications. Quantitative treatment of the various movements and playing situations do not correspond with the experiences and later coaching aspects of women.

2.6 Examination Requirements

The guidelines of the German Sports Association (DSB) state that at the end of the c-license education an assessment of the teaching ability has to take place. This means no examination is required consisting of an oral or written theoretical test and a teaching performance which very often is practiced within the State Sport Activity Associations. Women do have less self-confidence in their knowledge, they are afraid of taking examinations (men as well), but women talk about that fear (ZIPPRICH 1995, 137). Most of them are not used to learning any more and the last examinations were passed a long time ago. They are not used to evaluative procedures and to competitive situations except in their sport.

Since this 'practical standard assessment' is a requirement of the educational board it should be offered in a way that suits these women in that it is closely related to the present or future coaching area i.e. with children or female teenagers. To discuss this topic with the educational board involved a lot of intuition in order to install a procedure which was adequate to meet the requirements and also gave a lot of security to the women. However, we always had to stress that the changing of the

examination procedures that had been made, ought not to be interpreted as being of less worth or being the 'women's exam'. The now established procedures are valid for all c-level training courses within the State Handball Association (HVN).

2.7 Child care

A joint child care program helps mothers to participate at these training courses. Within the first model course 7 out of 11 women² urgently needed the child care program. A maximum of 13 children within the age span of 3 month up to 10 years had to be looked after at the same time. Because of the success of the first model course the State Sport Association changed its rules and is now supporting the child care programs within the training courses of all different Sport Activity Associations with monetary means. – One more result of the segregated courses for women.

2.8 Continuing Education

The interviews after one year as well as the questionnaire in 1998 showed that all women prefer the coaching of children or female teenagers (Tab. 1). However, some showed problems appreciating the female teenagers during their critical stage between puberty and adolescence. This led to a continuing education program by the State Sport Association (LSB) who designed courses to help strengthen and reinforce the female coach in the particular needs for the everyday job in the gym. This offering helps to build within the female coaches more rhetoric security, self-confidence, and self-consciousness in the competent coaching of female teenagers. In addition it is necessary to create some sort of exchange programs. The female coaches wish to receive professional sports – handball specific - advice and information. The Sport Activity Associations are asked to develop special courses meeting the demands of the women and which serve for further validation of the license (required every two years). In order to be able to decide for the next step - gaining the B-license - information has to be offered concerning the demands of those courses and to eliminate the barriers.³

3. Success of the program?

² 3mothers with 4 children, 5 mothers with 2 and one with one child

³ In the moment discussions start concerning segregated courses on the b-level within the HVN

The reservations within the State Handball Association (HVN) toward the demands for special courses for women were immense. On one side the centralized courses as well as the time structures were easily accepted. Female lecturers were hardly found but eventually excellent ones were discovered - one being the national head coach of 18 year old female teenagers. However, demands concerning teaching methods and the way of realizing the final controls led to intensive discussions. There was a fear among the lecturers who now had to meet new conditions and to change long established means of teaching, like lecturing along prepared overhead transparencies, This fear resulted in the lecturers seeing the training courses for female coaches just as '**goofy classes**'. The head of the educational board, the 'strong man', was able to convince the involved lecturers by training them for one weekend in different teaching methods. The women themselves clearly wiped out the last resistance in that they undertook the course program and were motivated and involved in every part. In the gym no one sat on the bench watching the others demonstrate the tactics or exercises as seen very often in mixed courses. In the theoretical classes every one contributed to the topics.

The difference between mixed training courses and the segregated course for women will be illustrated by the (female) lecturer (and handball head coach of female teenagers) who is very often involved in teaching handball training courses: She stated:

"They [the women] are much, much more ready to articulate themselves and to perform during the practical work because in such a group atmosphere they feel much more comfortable. During the other courses I was teaching, the amount of women was between 5 and 20%, the female participants were not willing voluntarily to involve themselves during the practical exercises – except may be those who were playing in higher or highest divisions. During discussions they were inhibited to speak, they did not ask questions because they were afraid to be called 'stupid' by the male participants."

"I evaluate such a course [for women only] very positively, since women who are strongly involved in their family work have the possibility to take part in these training courses. And, as I stated earlier, they are not confronted with certain barriers in that they feel comfortable just from the beginning. These experiences should be brought to other Associations, because these principles surely help to find many qualified female coaches for our children' and juvenile's teams and to motivate them in their coaching."

The success of the program can also be seen by the fact that after one year all but one were coaching children's or female teenagers teams. In addition the investigation of 1998 also showed that the female coaches were strongly involved in basic coaching work.

Advantages of segregated courses for women only can be summarized in that:

- ◆ The atmosphere and the interaction is easy going, unaffected, and relaxed.
- ◆ The heterogeneous group reflects very little of the individual differences in the standard of both movement or cognitive behavior.
- ◆ The women are very active and participate intensively during the lessons.
- ◆ Women do not feel any sexual harassment.

4. Problems in continuing the program: Hopes and disillusion

Altogether the amount of female coaches has increased but not yet reached the 50% mark. The course program continued with its structural, testing and methodological demands, even some of these principles were administered in the regular (mixed – men dominated) courses. However, a slight shift in structural conditions, led to the fact, that after three years, the places (24) not taken by women were filled up with men⁴. For example, in 1998 the relationship between women and men changed disadvantageously for women because of a different timing structure of the individual courses which did not meet the needs of women. The supervision of the courses finished and no evidence is now available to how the interaction and involvement of women within these mixed courses continues. Still these courses are designed for and advertised for women, including the child care program and the supervision of the women's council. More women are still needed for coaching positions requiring their expertise, competency and commitment in their sport.

To me however another critical point emerges. The high motivation needs in working with children or teenagers may occur as a dead ended way in the coaching career for women. There is no need to become better qualified by reaching the B-License which opens up coaching positions to higher, better recognized levels. In the clubs these women with the c-license fulfill a wonderful job, but when the teenagers get older, the male coaches reclaim the coaching of the successful adult teams, gaining all the appreciation and prestige. Even on the State or National level in most of the sport activities male head coaches are responsible for the girls or female junior teams although women are highly competent in coaching these age groups. Yet, their formal qualification does not correspond with the position they could reach - and, what often occurs as argument is that women themselves do not want to deal with this stress of high competition in their sport. But hopefully these women will grow

⁴ 1996: 17women/7 men; 1997: 16 women/ 10 men; 1998: 9 women/13 men

with their handball children and teenagers and continue on to the adult coaching, and become achievement orientated and successful.

Segregated courses for women only are the first step educating female coaches. It is necessary to train women to become qualified to take on further tasks. It should not remain self-evident, that male coaches are the only competent persons to work with women's teams, and that female coaches are not respected the same way (MEININGHAUS 1995).

Women are interested in climbing up the coaching career. Training courses for women are not odd, not just goofy, but sportive, powerful, and intensive. They help to strengthen women in order for them to 'survive' in the male oriented surroundings of the (handball) sport so that some or at least one vision may become true: that of female coaches within national levels.

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