

# TALENT MANAGEMENT BASED ON THERAPEUTIC WORK WITH A PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL TEAM

**Keczelei Danica**

*Debrecen Sportcenter LLC*  
keczelei.danica@cts.hu

**Abstract:** All athletes regardless of their age should get mental skills development that could be integrated into their normal training. Psychological training is essential for better performance because in sports the psychological factors play a very important role.

The aim of this presentation is to show the therapeutic work of a professional men's handball team and demonstrate the nature of the social environment and how it can have an effect on their performance. The author examines how a team forms, develops and works and what factors contribute achieving the optimum performance. The functions, structures, dynamics and goals of an adult team were analyzed and on top of that the focus was on the a three-month long therapeutic process and its results as well. In order to improve the self-awareness and team building, the players were asked to fill out following questionnaires: psychometric questionnaire of Keczelei1, Keczelei2 questionnaire about roles, tasks and responsibilities within the team and player-coach relationship and attention questionnaire (Pieron).

The conclusions of this work can be useful for further talent management and development.

**Key words:** handball, management, talent management, mental training

## Introduction

Talent identification and development is extremely important in those countries where the natural resources are poor and the economic potential is relatively weak. It can be said that our country is an example for that. We hear a lot about the importance of sports talent however we rarely read or hear about successful trainings. It must also be said that a successful talent management at young age is not a guarantee for an successful adult sport career. Like with other areas of talent, sports talent is also depending on many factors. In most of the cases the theorists determine the talent in the connection to the performance. Sports talent care is something that never can be fulfilled.

The study describes a therapy work within a team and its influence on the team development and performance. The study focuses on the psychological factors that can also affect the performance. A handball team works as a closed group with unique rules. Social connections, common values and communication could help or suppress players performance.

According to Berczik (Lénárt, 2002) a team has to go through four main stages of development: forming, storming, norming and performing. The coach plays an important role in carrying the team through the first 3 stages before their competitions (preparation time). Therefore the performing stage could happen during the time of the competition. Team

members should get the chance to get to know each other better because the performing phase and the competition happens at the same time. This can last for several months. It is necessary during the period of the competition that athletes achieve some common goals instead of focusing on their own. It is important to consider the basic aims and the principles of a talent care: supporting both talent related strength, weaknesses and other aspects (Balogh–Mező 2010).

According to Gabler and Ruoff 'those athletes who are considered talented in their sports, who have good enough physical and psychological conditions in the different stages of their life have more chances to reach high level of performance'. (RÉVÉSZ, 2008)

In the Havlicek, Komadel, Komarik és Simkova (Van Rossum – Gagné, 1994), a Czechoslovakian talent selection model, a multidimensional aspect of sport talent is emphasized. According to the model, revealing sports talent is influenced by: stable non-compensated factors (e.g. height), stable compensated factors (e.g., speed) and non-stable compensated factors (e.g. motivation). The motivation as a psychological factor can be the main key to the success of a team. Specific factors such as height cannot be modified but motivation can be improved.

Many external factors play a role in either supporting or breaking down talents. In many cases talent management is

identified by strength development which is though only one aspect of the talent management. The practice proved that the development of a complex goal system is a good way for talent development and management.

According to Piros (2002), the definition of human resource management refers to those activities and management methods that deal with the selections, developmental workforce, performance measurements and the career management in the organization. It deals with human resource operations for rational and efficient use in order to achieve individual and organizational goals. (Hajós-Berde, 2007)

We can easily see from this definition that expression of human resources is mainly used in the working environment however it can be applied as well to a successful adult sports performance. The task of the management team is not only to set the goals for the organization but also to provide the material and financial resources for them without forgetting the needs of the employee. The therapeutic work was based on: performance measurement, workforce development and effective use of these results in order to achieve the goal of organization - and through it the individual goals.

During our life, we are all members of different groups, both big and small (e.g. handball team). Characteristics for a small group: *relative permanence* of the human relations; *continuity*, which refers to its performed activities, *group member's ideas about the group* which enhance the togetherness and tradition; *organization*, refers to task distribution and hierarchical relationships in a group (Bodnár, 2006).

A group is considered as a small group if the number is between 3 and 20 people. In a small group the members can make personal contact and mutually depend on each other. (FORSYTH, 1990)

The handball team works as a primary group. A type of a group is characterized by direct contact between the members. Each member can communicate easily with the others, their relationships are usually stable, they actively co-operate with each other and different kind of friend groups are formed. When these groups start to spend free time together, it will have an effect on their work and performance (Bodnár, 2006).

The structure of a team gives useful informations. Jacob L. Moreno Romanian-born American psychologist developed a method that can determine the status and the relations of an individual within a group. Basic assumption of *sociometry* was that the integration of the individual into a current group does not depend on the personality but the social status (Merei, 1996).

Within the informal groups, a formal groups are created. The author calls this a hidden network that is affected by both choices and personal feelings towards one another. Creating sociogram is based on sociometry. When analyzing the sociogram it became visible there are players with central and peripheral positions. Probably those who are on the peripheral positions have no connection with the team and therefore get no informations. It shows the positions of individuals within a group. In an interactive team sport, players count on their team mates (including the substitute players and the coach).

If players can not find right position within the team, it can cause poor performance on individual level and the team level as well. All kind of groups can face this problem and therefore it is important to spread our experiences. Focusing on that could become a relevant field for the talent development at a young age. Children have more potential to acquire different kind of techniques that are essential for adequate cooperation and communication in a community and to find the balance between their own common goals. Learning how to cope with communication problems, stress, dealing with failure and success should be taught to children and should not be a problem in adulthood.

The sample of the study and therefore the test results can not be considered representative, but (cautiously) conclusions can be drawn from-about the talent and resource management.

## Methods

The study describes a therapy work of a professional men's handball team. External circumstances of the team were reasonably good. The leaders of the team ensured the necessary conditions for the operation and the team's financial situation was stable. If we consider the talent model of Gagné, stable non-compensating factors were given (team composition, height) as well as non-stable compensating factors (knowledge about the game, physical, technical preparation, attitude, motivation, etc).

In the beginning of the procedure it was necessary to define the starting point of the team. This was measured with different kind of questionnaires and by the team meetings. The focus of the therapeutic work was on the team's atmosphere, motivation, attitude towards the game and the issue of self-confidence. One of the crucial goals was to teach players the importance of monitoring and evaluation of their own performance and to show the relevance of their self-esteem.

Most coaches tend to see the team work as a mechanical formula: we had group x and added another group y as a motivational technique and result was z. However the practice has shown that the most effective way to unite a winning team is to make the players find the way to their common goal which is attainable and accepted by everyone.

The aim of therapeutic work was to explore the current situation and solve the problems in order to achieve the goal. The treatment plan was divided into three parts: the period before the playoffs (group exercises, testing, feedback of results, individual therapy), playoffs (group and individual therapy) and in the end of the year. The team completed the following tests:

- own sociometric questionnaire (Keczelei1);
- own questionnaire about roles, tasks and responsibilities within the team and player-coach relationship (Keczelei2);
- self-assessment test what was filled out after the games
- attention questionnaire (PIERON)

## Results

The Kecze11 sociometric questionnaire shows the sociogram of the positions of the members in the team. The focus is on the person's connections (mutual choices), the pattern of his position (star, chain, pair, isolate) and the center-periphery structure. Individuals who choose each other in one question are known to have made a Mutual Choice. Choices can be single, double and triple.

The focus is on cohesion index which refers to how strong the cohesion is between the players. It represents the number of players with a mutual connection within the team (in percentage terms). A higher number refers less lonely players. Figure 1 shows 66–67% cohesion rate which is not considered stable enough for a sport team. Five players have no connections.

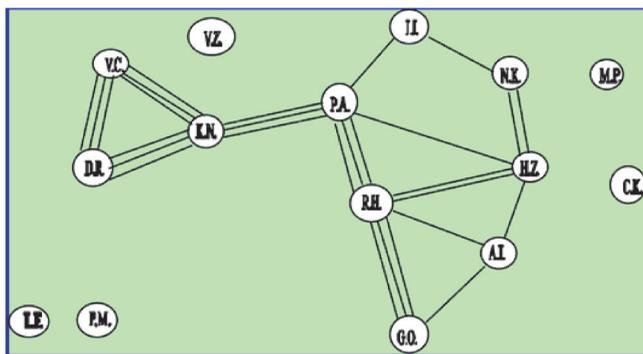


Figure 1. Sociogram of the team in the social aspect

Two players, G.O. (the captain) and A.I. (who speaks on behalf of the team) are peripheral and are not considered as the team leaders according to the other players. There is a member (P.A.) who (socially and functionally) achieved the team assumption as a leader without having the role. The danger of a situation when the wrong person is the leader, the team can only perform on an average level. Therefore the leader should be chosen by the team.

Based on Kecze12 questionnaire, our doubts got confirmed about the roles, tasks and responsibilities within the team and player-coach relationship.

When evaluating the content of the questionnaires it became clear which players are the most effective and the most popular according to the team. Comparing the results of these two aspects, there are big differences in the ratings. Six players are professionally recognised by most of the other teammates. However only two of these players are actually popular and are situated between the top six players. We kept this fact in our mind during the therapeutic work in order to assist the otherwise well-performing players to be more accepted in the team.

Other important thing is that few players performed well functionally but their social rate within the team was very low.

That could cause mixed feelings within the team and therefore the group could have passive resistance and reject everything that those players represent, even victory.

Another really important fact is that there are three players are neither socially nor functionally good enough for the team. They only got negative evaluation from the team.

The communication between the coaches and the players was very bad and therefore they had problems with their relationship as well. The players admitted the coaches' professional quality however they had some personal problems with them. These conflicts were unsolved and there were many the misunderstandings between them. This lead to a resistance of the team towards the coaches. The players ignored both the coaches expectations and their advices. The players were more busy analysing and criticizing the coaches' comments and actions than focusing on winning the game.

Attention has an important effect on the performance. Performance of a team can change from game to game and even during one game as well. We considered to complete an attention test with the players (PIERON) due to their unstable performance.

The Figure 2 indicates that the attention of the team is appreciably decreasing in different phase of the game. There is an analogy between our results and the coach's analysis. Since today's handball game is characterized by a very fast game, several minutes of low performances could be crucial.

During the therapeutic work it became clear to us that the team has a lack of self-knowledge and self-observation. Therefore one of our main tasks was to develop a criteria for the team. With the help of this criteria, players can evaluate their own performance during the game.

Coaches and the team management often evaluate the handball team performance but generally the players do not evaluate themselves. We believe the self evaluation is very important in many aspects.

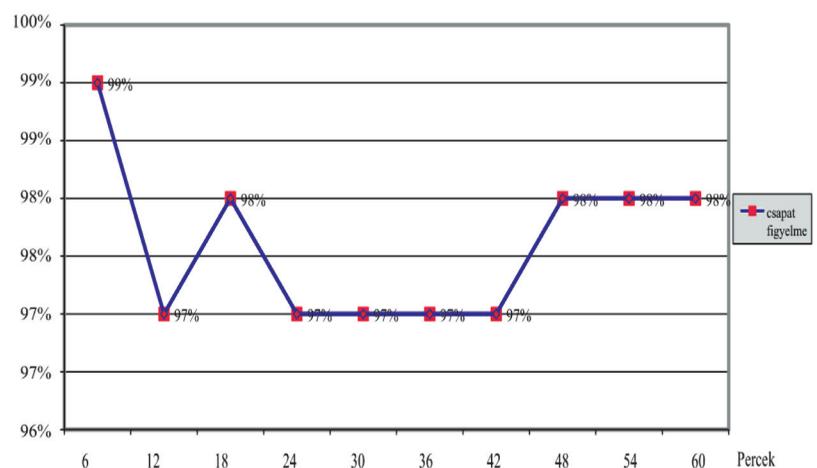


Figure 2. The team attention during one game

Figures 3 and 4 show how the players evaluated their own performance after winning and a losing. The aspects of the self-evaluation were the following: shape, tactician, technical

execution, motivation, concentration, confidence, composure, fighting skills and cooperation.

The Figure 3 illustrates player's self-evaluation after winning an important away game.

Figure 4 presents the self-evaluation of a losing game. The Players knew the opponents were very tough and the chance of winning was little.

By showing the two different self-assessment test results to the team, we could demonstrate the importance of faith and attitude before each game. When comparing the self-confidence and motivation of the players between the two games, a significant difference was recorded.

It has been shown what happens to the player's self-esteem, self-evaluation and other psychological factors affecting their performance when winning or losing a game.

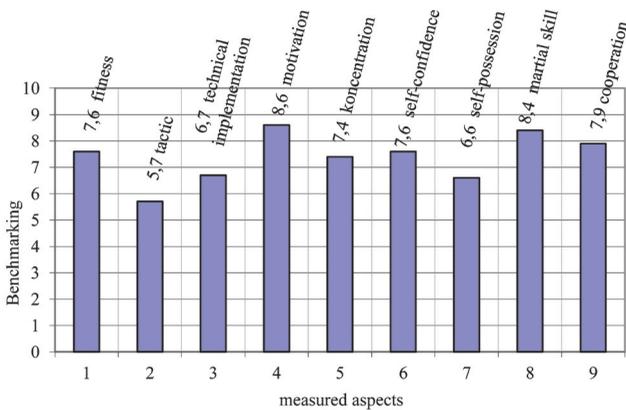


Figure 3. Self-evaluation of the team after winning

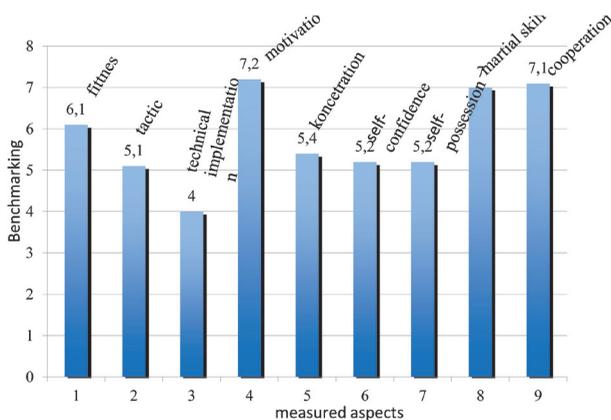


Table 4. Self-evaluation of the team after losing

## Summary

The therapy work was based on filling out questionnaires and gathering information. The aim was to build up the team, develop self-awareness and gain better understanding between the team members. Team building is a complex work and the attitude of the individuals and the team itself is very crucial. It is hard to change an adult personality because they tend to stick to old habits, models and roles.

First important objective was to improve the relationship between the players and the coach but it was only somewhat successful. The team understood however the importance of the concentration required to fulfill their tasks. They learned to keep their feelings and thoughts under control and they understood the fact that they should primarily focus on their own tasks.

Also another important task was the question about the of leadership within the team. It was solved with the help of the coach after interviewing the players. The most qualified player accepted to become the captain of the team and accepted also our help to become a better team captain.

The analysis of the therapeutic work shows the importance of the feedbacks about player's behavior and attitude. It is really important to clarify the goals and to know exactly who is responsible for the different tasks and roles in the team. Constant support, encouragement and giving realistic picture about the performance of the team has a crucial effect on the success. Finally it is very important to define the future goals as well.

## Conclusion

All athletes and teams should need sports psychology training. Psychological functions and characteristics building up athlete's personality play very important role in the sports. If their regulation is adequate then it has positive effect on the sports performance.

With mental training, young talented athletes could handle failures. Low self-knowledge, unidentified and unsolved problems are considered difficulties in talent development and management. Talent management cannot be successful unless the children believe in their own talent. The impact on children when they fail could make them loose their motivation in something they are extraordinarily talented. That could be considered as a waste of resources.

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