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A Survey Among Youth High Performance Athletes at Different Coubertin Schools, Olympic Talent-Training Centers and at Other Spor

ISSN:
1543
9518

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INTRODUCTION

The high performance sport system of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) was based on a well organized and supported search and support for talents. The "Sport Schools for Children and Youth," which were invented in 1952 and extended into perfectly organized places of training for future Olympic winners, represented the main branch of this system. 80% of the Olympic participants of the GDR were "formed" in these 24 "Sport Schools for Children and Youth" and won the main part of the 572 Olympic medals reached by the GDR at Olympic Games.

After the German reunification this form of elite shaping was considered skeptically especially when it became obvious and public by Prof. Franke (Heidelberg, Germany) that the majority of the athletes training and living at these sport schools were involved – consciously and unconsciously – in a secret doping system. The scientific analysis of these schools revealed in spite of many positive aspects also a frequent disregard of ethical standards.

In the meantime sport high schools, again, have become one of the main institutions in training Olympic talents in Germany. It is now of interest if ethical standards are considered in the trainers' behavior and

if ethical standards and Olympic values play an important role in the pedagogical formation of the young athletes.

In 1984, Meinberg developed a set of principles for a humane high-performance sport for children in the wake of a public debate on the participation of children and teenagers in high-performance sports. Many institutions published different demanding catalogues of ethical principles but Meinberg's principles are of such a given broad-based character that these principles can also be taken as outlining an ethical foundation of other catalogues.

The following ethical principles were published by Meinberg:

1. The call for using the other person as a purpose of himself instead of using him as a means to an end,
2. the principle of respect,
3. the principle of equality,
4. the principle of solidarity,
5. the principle of fairness,
6. the principle of suitability for children (youth),
7. the principle of reasonableness,
8. the principle of helping,
9. the principle of confidence/trust,
10. the principle of participation,
11. the principle of responsibility,
12. the principle of achievement and the call for avoiding a fetishism of achievement,
13. call for a child (youth) suitable body ethic and the avoidance of the exploitation of the body.

The paper investigates which status Olympic values have for teenage high-performance athletes and in how far these values are taught by their trainer and their engagement in high performance sport.

In addition to that the paper is supposed to show whether the athletes think that their trainers observe Meinberg's 13 ethical principles and whether there is a correlation between their implementation and other factors such as the kind of sport, gender, etc.

METHODS

Research data were collected through a survey using a standardized questionnaire.

Under this survey, 181 students (age 14-18) of different sports high schools

(Coubertin-High School Berlin, Pierre-de-Coubertin-High School Erfurt,

Heinrich-Heine-High School Kaiserslautern, Karthause High School Koblenz

and the House of Athletes at the Olympic Centre Frankfurt-Rhein-Main)

in Germany replied to the questionnaire in writing. The replies were analysed

with the statistics programme SPSS 11.0.

RESULTS

The evaluation of values shows that the youth high performance athletes

consider those values to be more important which are closely connected

to the achievement principle (for example ambition, competitiveness, ability

of pushing through...). In addition to that the trainers teach those

values connected with the achievement principle more often than other

values like for example honesty, fairness, equal opportunities or luck.

The results regarding the implementation of ethical standards show that

the majority of trainers are largely guided by ethical principles in their

work with the young high-performance athletes. At the same time, however,

the athletes also noted incidences of unethical behavior.

In the implementation

of the individual principles, up to 40% of the trainers transgress ethical

boundaries. Only in isolated incidences, correlations between the kind

of sport and transgressions of individual principles could be found. As

no broader patterns could be observed, this indicates that the adherence

to ethical principles depends more on the individual personality of the

trainer rather than on other factors.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The survey results show that ethical principles should not be developed

and verified for specific kinds of sports. The general ethical principles

are flexible enough to adapt the trainer's behavior to the

individual athlete and the specific situation. In analysing the implementation of ethical principles, more attention should be given to a teleological ethic alongside the ethic of principles, as this allows for more focus on the individual athlete and the specific situation in the trainer's behavior.

The limitations of this empirical research are that the standardized questionnaire is not able to register situation-specific behavior. It was tried to counteract this problem by taking into consideration the teleological aspects at the interpretation of the results.

The partial disregard of ethical standards makes it obvious that the conditions and the situations of young high performance athletes have to be examined regularly and at all kinds of sports even at those institutions which are closely connected to Olympic values and the pedagogical emphasis of their work.

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