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### ABSTRACT

In the school year 1988-99 the first «Classes of Athletic Facilitation» were established in Greece. These Classes were for young prospective athletes and were established in certain schools in addition to ordinary studies. The purpose of these Classes was to contribute to the development of the elite athlete in order for Greece to achieve the best possible performance in the Olympic Games of 1996 which it was then thought would be staged by Greece. The aim of this study was to examine whether the Classes of Athletic Facilitation actually achieved their aim. This study was carried out with the case study methodology. From our findings it may be concluded that these Classes failed to meet the expectations of their proponents, since only 9% of the Greek Olympic team of 2004 participated in them. The main reasons of that are: a) the unwillingness of the most talented athletes to attend these Classes because of their low academic standards, b) the lack of official connection between these Classes and athletic clubs and athletic federations, and c) the serious problems concerning the appointment of the teacher-coaches.

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**KEY WORDS:** *Athletic Schools, spotting athletic talent, Classes of Athletic Facilitation.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1986 the idea of staging the Olympic Games in 1996 in Athens was officially discussed at the deputy Ministry of Sports in Greece. It was thought at that time that the International Olympic Committee would honor Greece by delegating it the staging of the 1996 Olympic Games, since that year would be the one hundredth anniversary of the first modern Olympic Games staged in Athens in 1896. This wish as we know now was never fulfilled. However, with that incentive, the Greek athletic authorities decided to take a series of measures in order for Greece to be prepared for the Games in the best possible way.

One of the measures which were proposed at that time was the establishment of Athletic Schools. So it was decided that a small committee should visit the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Hungary, countries which were considered very advanced in athletics at that time, in order to study how Athletic Schools were organized there. A number of studies concerning the eastern block countries have shown the supremacy in the organization of their athletic system (3, 4, 5, 7). Athletic Schools appeared originally in the former Soviet Union and became well known because, along with other measures, they enabled the Soviet Union to be outstandingly successful in sports during the period of the cold war. These schools spread to the other socialist countries and were also imitated by many other countries around the world (2, 16). There were a lot of variations in each country where these schools were established, depending on the political system and the organization both of the educational and the sports system (9, 10, 12). But in general it can be said that there has been a «flow» of athletic practices from Eastern block countries to the West, (8, pp. 248).

Because of the difference between the political systems, it was apparent that practices followed in these eastern socialist countries could not be followed in a democratic country like Greece. These practices mainly consisted of forcing young athletic talents to live apart from their families in boarding schools. Even though that practice was maybe the best one in order to attain high athletic performance nevertheless it created psychological problems for the children in later stages because of the isolated and deprived way of life, which prevail in these schools (6).

In the face of these findings, it was decided that the best practice for Greece would be the establishment not of specialized Athletic Schools but Athletic Classes in the ordinary Secondary Schools (Gymnasia 13-15 years old) and Lyceums (16-18 years old). It was decided that these classes would be called «Classes of Athletic Facilitation» (CAF) because it was considered that their aim was to facilitate these children to train in order to become elite

athletes. Under this practice the pupils-athletes would stay with their families and would follow the same curriculum as the rest of the pupils, the only difference being that they would train every morning, five times a week, before the commencement of school, (later reduced to three times per week). The pupils-athletes who would be qualified to enroll in these classes would be chosen after achieving a certain level of performance in special tests which would be conducted during the spring of the previous school year, i.e. when these pupils were in the sixth grade of Elementary School.

In 1988 the Ministry of Education issued the Ministerial Decree (G4/902/29-9-1988) which established the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. Subsequently the Directorate of Physical Education and the deputy Ministry of Sports issued Decrees G4-1186/12-10-1988 and 9118/4-1-1989 respectively according to which the first six Classes of Athletic Facilitation were established in Greece. Later parliament passed law 1894/1990 (FEK 110/27-8-1990 τ.Α´) concerning the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. Subsequently a number of Presidential Decrees were issued which helped this institution to grow year by year in order to serve finally the staging of the 2004 Olympic Games.

Shortly after the establishment of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation one more institution was established, which was called «Athletics Talent Spotting». This started from the age of nine when the pupils were at the third grade of Elementary School. Pupils showing talent were trained in after school hours as a potential source for the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. It was supposed that most of those pupils, would pass the tests of the last grade (age 12) of the Elementary School in order to enter the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. But, as will be shown later, this was not the case.

Two years after the 2004 Olympic Games (this study was conducted in 2006) and twenty after the establishment of the Classes it is time to draw up an account in order to estimate whether the aim of these Classes was met. I.e. to contribute to the development of the elite athlete in order for Greece to achieve the best performance in the Olympic Games. Table 1 summarizes the situation of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation as they were in the school year 2005-2006.

66% of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation are in the rural areas, 15% in towns with more than 50.000 inhabitants and 19% in the two main cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. The cost of running these classes in the year 2005-2006 was about 16.663.300 euros. The Ministry of Education pays 12.793.300 euro or 77% of the total cost and covers the salaries of the teachers and other expenses concerning the running of these Classes. The deputy Ministry of Sports pays 3.870.000 euros or 23% of the expenses and covers traveling expenses, athletic equipment, expenses of organizing athletic meetings etc.

**Table 1.** *Quantitative data concerning the Classes of Athletic Facilitation (CAF) in the school year 2005-2006.*

	Number of Classes of Athletic Facilitation	Number of Secondary Schools and Lyceums	Towns and cities	Sports	Number of pupils	Working Physical Education teachers- coaches	Cost of running these clas- ses at the school year 2005-06
<b>CAF Secondary level (13- 15 years)</b>	439	111	106	22 Individual 5 team	8.043 5.048 2.995 girls	724	Ministry of Education 12.793.300€
<b>CAF Lyceum level (16- 18 years)</b>	73	19	13	12 Individual 5 team	1.003 631 372 girls	124	Vice ministry of sport 3.870.000€
<b>TOTAL</b>	512	130			9.046	848	16.663.300€

## METHODOLOGY

This project was carried out in accordance with the case study methodology recommended procedure (17). It was decided: a) to send out questionnaires, b) to interview people and c) to collect statistical information from the administration, i.e. the Ministry of Education, the deputy Ministry of Sport and from local authorities involved in the running of these Classes.

It was decided that the questionnaires were to be sent to: a) the pupils-athletes attending the final grade of Secondary Schools (15 years old) and the final grade of Lyceum (18 years old). The final grades and not all three grades were chosen for two reasons, (i) in the final grade the pupils' athletes have gone through the school so they have an all - round knowledge of its functioning and (ii) they have reached their highest level of athletic performance while in that school. b) Teachers - coaches working with the final grade of these Classes in Secondary School and in Lyceum. c) The 412 Greek athletes who made up the Greek national team which participated in 33 sports at the 2004 Olympic Games.

**Table 2.** *Sports fostered in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation, and the questionnaires received from the final grade of these Classes in Secondary Schools and Lyceums.*

	Sports	Returned questionnaires from the final grade of Secondary School (15 years old)			Returned questionnaires from the final grade class of Lyceum (18 years old)		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1.	Soccer	411	6	417	37	—	37
2.	Basketball	110	80	190	8	2	10
3.	Volleyball	66	126	192	1	—	1
4.	Handball	34	27	61	3	—	3
5.	Swimming	35	36	71	4	2	6
6.	Water polo	29	5	34	4	—	4
7.	Rowing	20	24	44	1	3	4
8.	Sailing	4	1	5	0	1	1
9.	Canoe-kayak	5	7	12	—	—	—
10.	Syn. Swimming	0	3	3	0	1	1
11.	Diving	4	0	4	—	—	—
12.	Athletics	136	182	318	5	9	14
13.	Wrestling	56	3	59	6	1	7
14.	Weight lifting	19	4	23	1	4	5
15.	Judo	3	1	4	—	—	—
16.	Tae kwon do	12	1	13	1	1	2
17.	Boxing	1	0	1	—	—	—
18.	Gymnastics	13	16	29	4	4	8
19.	Artistic Gymnastics Rhythmic	0	17	17	0	5	5
20.	Tennis	13	18	31	0	1	1
21.	Shooting	13	10	22	—	—	—
22.	Table tennis	3	7	10	4	1	5
23.	Cycling	2	1	3	—	—	—
24.	Fencing	3	2	5	—	—	—
25.	Archery	2	1	3	—	—	—
26.	Skiing	8	6	14	—	—	—
27.	Badminton	1	1	2	—	—	—
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1.002</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>1.587</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>114</b>

The questionnaires concerning pupils-athletes of the final grade of Secondary School and Lyceum and their teachers-coaches were sent officially through the Ministry of Education Directorate of Physical Education. Before the final questionnaires were constructed a pilot study was conducted by sending 200 questionnaires to the pupils-athletes and the teachers-coaches. The questionnaires to the pupils-athletes were distributed by their teachers-coaches and

they were asked to fill them out during a coaching session. 1.587 questionnaires were collected, 1.002 from boys and 585 from girls out of a total of 2.308 distributed, 1.414 boys and 894 girls, who were enrolled in the final grade during the 2005-2006 school year. The percentage of returned questionnaires, 69% of the total population can be considered very high (15, 17).

114 questionnaires were collected from the final grade of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation of the Lyceum, 79 from boys and 35 from girls. The total number of pupils-athletes enrolled in the final grade of these Classes was 246, 171 boys and 75 girls. The percentage return of 46% can be considered satisfactory. Table 2 contains details of the sports fostered in these Classes in Secondary Schools and Lyceums and the returned questionnaires.

**Table 3.** *Questionnaires sent and returned to the teachers-coaches working in the final grade of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation in Secondary Schools and Lyceums.*

Sports	PE teachers-coaches of the Secondary School				PE teachers-coaches of Lyceum			
	Men	Women	Total	Returned	Men	Women	Total	Returned
1. Soccer	81	0	81	79	8	0	8	6
2. Basketball	37	7	44	42	7	0	7	5
3. Volleyball	30	5	35	33	3	1	4	4
4. Handball	12	2	14	13	1	0	1	0
5. Swimming	14	8	22	20	5	2	7	6
6. Water polo	6	1	7	6	—	—	—	—
7. Rowing	7	7	14	13	0	1	1	1
8. Sailing	2	0	2	2	1	0	1	0
9. Canoe-kayak	2	2	4	4	—	—	—	—
10. Syn. Swimming	1	3	4	4	—	—	—	—
11. Diving	1	0	1	1	—	—	—	—
12. Athletics	69	36	105	102	8	1	9	7
13. Wrestling	20	1	21	20	1	0	1	1
14. Weight lifting	10	2	12	11	4	0	4	4
15. Judo	0	1	1	1	—	—	—	—
16. Tae kwon do	3	1	4	3	1	1	2	2
17. Boxing	1	0	1	1	—	—	—	—
18. Gymnastics Aristic	5	3	8	6	2	1	3	3
19. Gymnastics Rhythmics	0	7	7	6	0	1	1	1
20. Tennis	5	3	8	7	1	0	1	1
21. Shooting	7	1	8	7	—	—	—	—
22. Table tennis	2	1	3	3	—	—	—	—
23. Cycling	5	1	6	5	—	—	—	—
24. Fencing	1	0	1	1	—	—	—	—
25. Archery	1	0	1	0	—	—	—	—
26. Skiing	3	1	4	4	—	—	—	—
27. Badminton	1	1	2	2	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>

Out of the 420 teachers-coaches who were working in the final grade of the Secondary Schools 326 were male and 94 female, while out of the 50 teachers - coaches working in the final grade of the Lyceums 42 were males and 8 female. Table 3 summarizes information concerning the teachers-coaches working in the Secondary Schools and Lyceums. Out of 420 questionnaires sent to secondary school teachers-coaches 396 were returned and 41 out of 50 from these working in the Lyceums, i.e. 94% and 82% respectively, which can be considered very satisfactory.

The athletic Federations were asked to help in distributing the questionnaires to the 412 Greek Athletes who made up the Greek National team which participated in the 2004 Olympic Games. Unfortunately the athletic federations were not particularly forthcoming with some exceptions. So the research team tried to locate the athletes in various other ways: sending questionnaires to their place of residence, locating them through their coaches, or at their training grounds. Out of 412 athletes who made the Greek Olympic team 235 questionnaires were collected, that is 57% of the total population,

**Table 4.** *Participation of the Greek athletes in the 2004 Olympic Games and the medals won.*

Sports	PE teachers-coaches of the Secondary School				PE teachers-coaches of Lyceum				
	Males	Females	Sum	Metals	Sports	Males	Females	Sum	Metals
1. Badminton	2	—	2	—	18. Weight lifting	6	4	10	<b>1</b>
2. Trampoline	1	—	1	—	19. Gymnastics A.	2	2	4	<b>1</b>
3. Equestrian	3	5	8	—	20. Gymnastic R.	—	3	3	—
4. Sailing	11	6	17	<b>2</b>	21. Basketball	15	15	30	—
5. Canoe-kayak	4	2	6	—	22. Swimming	15	12	27	—
6. Diving	4	4	8	<b>1</b>	23. Rowing	2	2	4	<b>1</b>
7. M. Pentathlon	1	1	2	—	24. Wrestling	14	4	18	<b>1</b>
8. Baseball	16	—	16	—	25. Volleyball	12	12	24	—
9. Beach volley	2	4	6	—	26. Soccer	16	16	32	—
10. Fencing	4	4	8	—	27. Athletics	26	38	64	<b>5</b>
11. Cycling	4	1	5	—	28. S. Swimming	—	9	9	—
12. Boxing	6	—	6	—	29. Tennis	2	2	4	—
13. Shooting	6	4	10	—	30. Table tennis	2	3	5	—
14. Softball	—	12	12	—	31. Archery	3	3	6	—
15. Tae kwon do	2	2	4	<b>2</b>	32. Water polo	11	11	22	<b>1</b>
16. Judo	7	7	14	<b>1</b>	33. Handball	12	12	24	—
17. Triathlon	1	—	1	—					
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>10</b>

which can be considered satisfactory. Our intention with these questionnaires was to find out mainly two things: a) how many of these athletes studied in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation, and b) To what extent did these athletes consider that the Classes contributed to making them top athletes. Table 4 shows the sports of the 2004 Olympic Games, the number of Greek athletes who participated in them, and the medals they won.

Interviews were conducted with the people who have played a role in the establishment and functioning of these Classes. These were: a) members of the Classes Central Organizing Committee, b) Physical Education Advisors, c) Local Sports Organizers and d) Headmasters of those schools where these Classes were running. Also the opinion of some parents who chose not to send their children to the Classes was considered. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted after the end of the 2004 Olympic Games, namely in the autumn of 2004. Each interviewee was asked the same questions, which were written down in the interest of uniformity. The questions invited the interviewee to express his/her opinion about the function of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation, identify what was wrong with them and what should be done in order to improve them.

The statistical information about the Classes, concerning their cost of running, the number of pupils-athletes enrolled in them and the number of teachers-coaches working on them were collected by personal visits to the appropriate places.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

### **Questionnaires received from the pupils-athletes studying in the final grade of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation at the Secondary school (15 years old)**

63% of the pupils are male and 37% female. About half (47%) of the pupils-athletes live very close to their schools (1-2 kilometers), 26% live at a distance of about 3-5 kilometers, 19% live at a distance of about 6-10 kilometers and 8% live at a distance of more than 10 kilometers away. The great majority of the pupils who live far away from their schools come from the big cities of Athens and Thessaloniki.

To the question if they belong to any athletic club or not, 79% answered yes and 21% no. Also 27% of these were selected by the Talent Spotting Program at the age of 9. Even though 73% were not chosen as talents they were still enrolled in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation because either they did well in the athletic tests during the final grade of elementary school, or perhaps because they were substitutes for these who had done well but had chosen not to be enrolled.

To the question whether they had participated in athletic competition between athletic clubs 66% answered yes and 34% no. From those who had taken part in athletic competitions between clubs, 20% took part in Pan-Hellenic games and 1% in international games. The rest participated in minor local competitions.

The average mark these pupils-athletes attained passing from the second to the third grade was 13.40 with the top mark of 20 and the mark to pass 10. The average mark of the rest of the pupils was 15.50.

### **Questionnaires to the pupils-athletes studying in the final grade of Classes of Athletic Facilitation at Lyceum, (18 years old)**

69% of the pupils-athletes are males and 31% females. 17% of them live at a distance of about 1-2 kilometers from their school, 43% at a distance of 3-5 kilometers, 19% 6-10 kilometers and 21% more than 10 kilometers. The great majority of the pupils who live far away from their schools come from the big cities of Athens and Thessaloniki.

To the question if they belong to any athletic club or not, 94% answered yes and 6% no. Also 19% of these were chosen as talents while in elementary school, at the age of 9, by the Talents Spotting Program.

To the question whether they had taken part in any athletic competition between clubs 79% answered affirmatively.

The average mark these pupils-athletes attained passing from the second to the third grade was 11.80 with a top mark of 20. The average mark of the rest of the pupils was 14.10.

### **Questionnaires to the teachers-coaches working in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation of Secondary Schools**

78% of the teachers-coaches were males with an average in age of 35 years while the females were 22% with an age average of 34 years.

To the question whether they work in addition to their school hours as coaches in athletic clubs, 89% answered positively (59% males and 30% females) while 11% answered negatively (6% males and 5% females). To the question as to how many years they had worked in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation 24% answered that they had worked more than 6 years and the remaining 76% from 1 to 6 years. 7% of them (males 5% and females 2%) work there on a permanent basis while the remaining 93% (61% males and 32% females) work part time.

To the question as to how many of their pupils-athletes they consider to be promising talents, 6% answered none. The remaining 94% answered that between 10% and 40% of the pupils are real talents. To the question as to how good they consider their work in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation is, 59% answered very good, 34% good, 6% satisfactory and 1% marginal. Also 39% answered positively to the question whether they had any collaboration (help) from the athletic federation and 61% none.

### **Questionnaires to the teachers-coaches working at the Classes of Athletic Facilitation at Lyceum**

84% of these teachers-coaches were male and 16% female with an average age of 37 (males 38, females 33).

To the question as to whether they do additional work as coaches in an Athletic Club, 88% answered yes (76% males and 12% females) and 12% no (8% males and 4% females). 30% of them answered that they had worked in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation for more than 6 years and the remaining 70% from 1 to 6 years. 8% (8% males and 0% females) answered that they work on a permanent basis and 92% (76% males and 16% females) answered that they work part time.

To the question as to how many of their pupils-athletes they consider to be promising talents, 10% answered none. The remaining 90% answered that from 10% to 20% are real talents i.e. one or two out of ten. To the question as to how good they consider their work in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation is, 50% answered very good, 40% good, 10% satisfactory and 1% marginal. Also 54% answered positively to the question whether they had any collaboration with the athletic federations and 46% negatively.

### **The participants athletes in the Olympic Games of 2004**

54% of the athletes who answered the questionnaires were male and 46% female, with a mean age of 22.4 years. They belonged to 168 athletic clubs. 12% of them have taken part in previous Olympic Games and 88% had not.

At the Olympic Games 37% of them took part only in the preliminary round, 15% in the quarter final, 29% in the semi-final and 19% in the finals.

To the question as to whether they as pupils-athletes had studied in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation 9% answered yes whereas the great majority, 91%, answered no. To the next question put to these who answered yes, if their study in these Classes contributed to making them top athletes, 29% answered positively while 71% answered negatively.

## DISCUSSION

### Questionnaires concerning the pupils athletes both of Secondary Schools and Lyceums

From the analysis of the questionnaires of the pupils-athletes studying both at the Secondary School and the Lyceum, the main points which became apparent were the following:

The male pupils-athletes at Secondary School are a little less than double (63%) than the females (36%). Also 79% of the pupils-athletes belong to athletic clubs. Even though belonging to an athletic club is a precondition for a pupil-athlete to remain in these Classes, 21% of them did not fulfil this precondition which shows that they are not really interested in sports or they do not have the abilities to be top athletes. Also only 27% of these pupils were chosen as talents in the Talent Spotting Program at the age of 9.

66% had participated in athletic competitions between athletic clubs but only 20% had participated in competition at a national and 1% at an international level. It can be concluded from this question as well that only that top 20% are promising talents and all the rest are either not competent to compete at all or only at a regional level. The combination of these answers leads to the conclusion that only a small percentage of these pupils-athletes (maybe 20%) who study at present at the Classes of Athletic Facilitation are real talents and the rest are there for other purposes.

It is also apparent that the pupils-athletes studying in these Classes are of a lower academic level, since their average mark at the end of the second grade was 13.40 compared to 15.50, the average mark for the rest of the pupils.

When the pupils-athletes finish Secondary School, if they pass the final grade they can enrol in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation at Lyceum. It seems however that a lot of those opting for these Classes in Secondary School did not choose to do so at Lyceum. Table 1 shows that there are 439 Classes of Athletic Facilitation all over the country at Secondary Schools, while at Lyceum there are only 73, which mean a reduction of 84%.

There has been discussion since the commencement of these Classes as to whether bonuses for entering tertiary education should be given to pupils-athletes finishing Lyceum in order to act as an incentive for them to stay at Lyceum and even more to attract more pupils-athletes to study in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. That was rejected because actually Greece is one of these countries which gives bonus - points to athletes in order to enter university. These bonuses are given to those who achieve performances from an Olympic level down to Pan-Hellenic one. So bonuses are actually also available to those pupils-athletes who study at the Classes of Athletic Facilitation

not because of their participation in these classes but according to the standard they have reached.

At the Lyceum 69% of the pupils-athletes are males which mean that as we go up more females drop out. Also it can be seen that 94% of these belong to an athletic club, which means that nearly all of them are athletes, but that does not show how good they are. Only 19% of these were identified as talents when they were 9 years old and, as in the case of Secondary School it shows that the great majority of those studying in these Classes are not actually talents. 79% of them seem to have taken part in athletic competitions between athletic clubs.

It is apparent that these pupils-athletes continue to be of a lower academic standard than the rest of the pupils since the average mark achieved in the previous grade was 11.80 out of 20 and 10 to fail, while for the rest of the pupils studying in ordinary classes the average mark was 14.10. It can be seen that the difference actually increases from Secondary School to Lyceum which means that academic standard actually deteriorate as pupils progress from Secondary School to Lyceum.

### **Questionnaires concerning the teachers-coaches both of Secondary Schools and Lyceums**

It is apparent that the coaching profession in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation is dominated by males at a percentage of 78% in the Secondary Schools and 84% at the Lyceums. One positive thing here is perhaps that the great majority of them (89%) work as coaches in athletic clubs. This means that they are either highly skilled, since the clubs usually employ the best, or they are employed by the clubs in order to bring to the clubs the best talents of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation, or maybe for both reasons.

Another point which was raised was that only about 7% of these coaches work on a permanent basis with the remaining 93% having to reapply each year. Even though theoretically the tactic of reapplying each year may be considered to have some value since it forces them to be as good as they can, practically this is not the case as they are not evaluated. The negative thing about this tactic is that even though the great majority of the teachers-coaches are reappointed each year it sometimes happens that some coaches have to change school nearly every year and have to train high level athletes who they do not know at all. This makes the whole system inefficient. It also forces some athletes to drop from the Classes in order not to change coach every year.

The question that perhaps bears the most weight was the one put to teachers-coaches as to how many of their pupils they consider as promising talents. 6% of the coaches at the Secondary School and 10% of these at the Lyceum answered that none of them were. The remaining answers were that

real talents were between 1 out of 10, 2 out of 10 or 4 out of 10. This shows, along with the rest of the findings, that very few of these pupils-athletes studying in these Classes are promising talents, maybe no more than 20%.

With regard to the collaboration of the teachers-coaches with the athletic federations it seems that Lyceum coaches collaborate to a higher extent (54%) than those in Secondary School (39%). This is to be expected because, as has been shown, nearly all of the pupils-athletes in the Lyceums belong to athletic clubs and as a result they have taken part in more competitions which perhaps forces the coaches of the Lyceum to collaborate in greater number with the athletic federations. But, in general, the degree of collaboration is not high as would be expected since only half of the teachers - coaches collaborate with the federations despite the fact that the whole of the Greek athletic system is based on athletic clubs and athletic federations.

The satisfaction of the teachers-coaches working both in Secondary Schools and in Lyceums seems quite high since more than 90% of them find the work at these Classes very satisfying or satisfying.

### **The replies of participant athletes in the 2004 Olympic Games**

The question which seems to have the greatest value for the purpose of our study is the one as to whether they as pupils studied in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation. The answer to that question is very disappointing since it shows that only 9% answered positively. In other words that means that only 1 out of 10 of the athletes of the Greek Olympic team have studied in these Classes. This statistic, in itself, is perhaps sufficient for us to reach the conclusion that these Classes failed to fulfil their aim. The answer to the next question, even though it is based on personal opinion, is equally disappointing. 71% of those athletes who had studied in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation answered that the Classes had perhaps made no contribution to their top athletic performance, while only 29% answered positively.

### **Interviews with athletic officials associated with the establishment and function of the Classes of Athletic Facilitation**

As mentioned earlier, these people have been involved with these Classes since their establishment and know the problems from inside. What they considered as the main obstacles to the proper functioning of these Classes are the following:

1. The unwillingness of the parents to send their children to these Classes because they were considered to have a low academic standard. When the most talented children refused to enroll in the Classes less talented ones were accepted for various reasons, the main one being to maintain employ-

ment for teachers-coaches. As a result the Classes not only failed to produce Olympic winners but even athletes at a regional level.

2. The lack of connection between these Classes and the athletic clubs and athletic federations which in Greece are the main vehicle of sports. As a result the people who are the real power behind sports in Greece were not only indifferent to the Classes but sometimes even hostile towards them.

3. The training problem. Swimmers for example who enrolled in the Classes refused to be trained by the Physical Education teacher - coach who was appointed by the Ministry of Education preferring instead to train with their own coaches in their own athletic clubs.

4. The lack of central coaching planning. Even though the system had been centralized, which meant that everything concerning the function of these Classes was supervised by a committee appointed by the Minister of Education and the deputy Ministry of Athletics, at the school level every coach was working on his/her own independent of central planning and evaluation.

## CONCLUSION

Taking into account the weaknesses of these classes, the criticism that they have been facing and the prospect of the administration of closing them down, a number of studies were initiated which tried to establish their weaknesses and make recommendations about their future, (1, 13, 18).

These studies firstly argue that even though the Classes fell short in their formation of the Greek Olympic team, their contribution to the Greek athletic system should not be undervalued because: a) a lot of valuable experience has been gained from the functioning of these Classes, b) the teachers-coaches who are involved in spotting athletic talents, the teachers-coaches who are employed in these classes, along with the whole organization of the system at a local and national level have made a positive contribution to Greek sports, c) even though most of the best pupils-talents that were spotted did not enrol in the Classes of Athletic Facilitation, nevertheless since they had been marked out representatives of clubs were able to get in contact with their parents and enrol them in the athletic clubs, d) they made a minor contribution to the solution of the problem of unemployment of Physical Education teachers since thousands of teachers-coaches found a permanent or part time job there.

Secondly these studies make certain recommendations for the reorganisation of these Classes so that the institution can survive. In short all of them recommend the closing down of the Classes and so that they can be replaced by specialized Athletic Schools. The process will start from the major cities and if it proves successful be expanded to smaller towns. However even though those studies seem to make a positive contribution to the solution of the problem, they see the problem only as a «technical» one, ignoring the

wider issues associated with it. It seems that they are lacking a broader theory concerning the process of implementing changes in athletics.

Every proposed change aiming at the improvement of the Classes has to take into account at least three parameters. a) The weaknesses of the Classes as has been mentioned above, b) the existing climate in athletics in Greece in the post Olympic era, and c) the impact of what is called in the literature the «multiple streams framework» (14, 19). i.e. (i) the changing values, beliefs and ideas, (ii) the changes in organizational infrastructure and response dependency, (iii) the relative strength of lobby/interest group activity, and (iv) the significance of influential individuals (11, p.81). So an in-depth research on the above variables «b» and «c» is needed in order for a new, comprehensive and viable plan to be created which will give the Classes a chance to survive by making them more attractive for the pupils in order to meet the expectations of the people who established them twenty years ago.

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20. G4/902/29-9-1988.
21. G4-1186/12-10-1988;
22. 9118/4-1-1989,
23. 1894/1990 (FEK 110/27-8-1990 τ. Α´).

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