

**Professional paper**

## TACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN SPORTS DANCING

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**Abstract.** *Tactics in sport dancing include all the means that are used at a particular competition for the sake of achieving as good a standing as possible. They are manifested in some particular actions of the dancer and the coach in regards to the other participants at a competition. Dance tactics are characterized by the following elements: motor ability (movement), knowledge of motor abilities, experience (awareness) and sports achievements. Tactics are always connected with practical experience, i.e. with a practical application of anthropomotorics. When in a competition, dancers use individual tactics in regards to the other dancers, the judges and the audience. A tactic plan arranges the application of any available abilities during a particular competition. It includes: using the information about the abilities of other dancing couples, proper use of one's maximum abilities in all the rounds of a competition, creating appropriate choreographies, using new technique elements and 'acrobatics' and an adequate response to the dancing of the opposing dancing couples. General tactics in sports dancing can be classified into: tactics in the conditional training of dancers, tactics in creating choreography, tactics used during a competition and tactics in "building" a career.*

**Key words:** *tactics, sports dancing, experience.*

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of each sporting activity is to achieve certain sports results. The main and immediate aim of each sport dancing is to achieve a certain ranking in a competition, i.e. to score a particular number of points for the overall placement, in the sense of making progress on qualitative levels. In order for a dancing couple to win a competition, they have to possess certain dance techniques, to be fit and choreographically ready to affect the judge's senses and thus to "thwart" the opponents' identical intentions.

The fact is that in sport dancing, theoretical and tactical training is neglected in relation to the technical, choreographical and, to a certain extent, the conditional one.

Only an organized training process and a maximum effort at a competition can lead to the achievement of that goal. Neglecting training for the purpose of achieving the highest sport results, sport dancing coaches primarily apply their own tactical knowledge to a particular competition.

In a broader sense, the strategy represents activities that are undertaken by the International Sport Dancing Federation (IDSF), national dance associations and dance clubs for the sake of achieving certain results within the organization of sport dancing. In a narrower sense, strategy is a skill used to prepare dance couples to leave the best impression on judges and to beat other dance couples.

Tactics are planned, learned and improved by training. Also, they include adequate intuitive and creative solutions adapted to various competitive situations. In order to understand tactical problems, tactical training is necessary. It is necessary to reveal the essence of tactical training as a theoretical and practical problem.

Tactical training refers to a performance in a competition, which to a great extent affects the final result. Primarily, it is the tactic of an individual, and then of a dancing couple. A high level is achieved when a team, a couple or an individual is able to carry out a tactical task several times, while at the same time, spontaneously and in accordance with the current competitive conditions, including various combinations in the basic tactical plan (Ušaj, 1996).

The main aim of tactical training is to show how to perform in a competition. Since the performance often affects competition success, dancers must pay more attention to preparing for it (Zagorc & Jarc-Šifrar, 2003). In practice, the application of particular tactical ideas is reduced to "making tactical moves" from competition to competition, without having made a tactical plan in advance.

The problem that this paper deals with is the explanation of the basic rules of dancing tactics on the basis of personal experiences of the authors and other coaches.

#### THE THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM

Defining various problems is the main precondition to understanding tactical problems. Since tactical training is primarily connected with practical experience, the experience of dancers and coaches plays a great role in solving particular problems. This can be accomplished only if there is feedback, i.e. if all the participants approach the solution to the problem critically, and if both parties go through certain stages of tactical development.

The first stage is characterized by an elementary training of tactics, techniques, choreography and the existing abilities. During the second stage, new abilities are trained (developed). During the third stage, training is carried out by activating new abilities, and in the fourth stage, the new abilities are used in particular competitions.

Taking into consideration the type of competition (a QV tournament, a cup, or a national championship), the choice of judge and the place where the competition is to be held, a coach or an expert team (if there is one) determines the tactics. The tactics are based on the evaluation one's own qualities, the qualities of the other dance couples participating in the event, and also on the possible sympathies of the judges and the audi-

ence. The audience acts as a separate phenomenon since they can have great influence on the mood of a dance couple, not to mention an important psychological effect on the judges.

A tactical plan is a well thought-out means of using the existing abilities and the means of their implementation in a particular competition. It should include the following:

- the use of the information about the abilities of the other dance couples,
- the appropriate use of one's own maximum abilities in all the rounds of a competition,
- creating new and suitable choreographies,
- the use of new technical and acrobatic elements and
- an appropriate response to the dancing of the opposing dance couples.

A coach plays an important role in the dancers' tactical development. He determines and defines the amount of physical strain, models the problem and helps the dancers to overcome it, analyzes the opposing dance couples and judges their advantages and disadvantages, gives and controls information, models the level of tactical training, carries out the training in practice, and relates his own knowledge to the dancers' practical training.

Dance tactics are characterized by the following elements:

- motor ability,
- knowledge of motor ability,
- experience (awareness) and
- sport achievement

Tactics are always connected with practical experience, i.e. with the practical application of anthropomotorics. Dancers use individual tactics in regards to other dancers, the judges and the audience. Tactics or applied anthropomotorics are connected with a particular individual and his or her knowledge. Both male and female dancers possess certain knowledge. In order to act as a unit, the knowledge of one partner must be in correlation with the knowledge of the other one. In sport dancing it is necessary that both dancers represent unity and harmony.

Each movement represents a certain aspect of knowledge. In turn, knowledge points out to the movement. These two processes contained in one, show that it is a matter of dialectics.

"Anthropomotoric action in sport, work and art, directs an individual towards knowledge. Each new piece of knowledge directs an individual towards an action; therefore, knowledge and action should be considered as one process which is, in essence, dialectical" (Kostić, 2000, 38).

The problems that this paper deals with are connected with tactical experience. Experience as a phenomenon in sport practice hasn't been scientifically explored yet. Actually, it has not yet been determined where this "centre for experience" is located.

It is indisputable that by physical activities and by observing the physical performance of others, somewhere in our nervous system we store the information that can later be used in solving certain problems. It is essential that the experience should be connected with anthropomotorics. Anthropomotorics with its experience is "manifested in:

- the anthropomotoric practice of sport, recreation, work and art,
- the anthropomotoric practice that is always related to an individual who lives and works in a particular life situation

- the anthropomotoric practice that is always related to anthropomotorics" (Kostić, 2000, p. 39).

A sport achievement represents the aim of each sport, one which is achieved with the help of sport anthropomotorics. Depending on the kind of sport, a sport achievement can be a result of team work or the result of an individual effort. Therefore, unlike in other people's activities, in sports, the participant is a sport creator, an element of a creation, a symbol, an interpreter and a spokesman.

A sport achievement must be understood as being different from the product which is made by workers as a result of the production process. It is also a part of a process, but it differs in its material essence. "A sports achievement is an action because it contains in itself signs of actual physical performance, which are the signs of a sport activity" (Kostić & Kostić, 1997, 18)

By physically acting, a sports person turns a dance into something material, i.e. into a creation-a sport achievement. Their union is part of the field of performance, i.e. it lasts as long as the "acting" itself lasts.

Actually, tactics in sport dancing can be classified into:

- tactics in conditional training;
- tactics in technical training;
- tactics in creating choreography;
- tactics in a competition;
- the tactics of building a career

### **Tactics in the conditional training of dancers**

General and specific conditional training of the dancers ought to be carried out during a training period by each dance club.

Since tactics are connected with a period of competition, conditional training is carried out prior to important competitions in order to ensure that a good sport condition is gained. The choice of tactics depends on the type and importance of the competition it will be used in. In order for the dance couples to receive adequate conditional training it is necessary that the following information be obtained:

- the programme of the competition,
- the number of registered dance couples,
- the number of dance rounds,
- the qualities of the registered dance couples and
- the desired result.

It is important to be familiar with the programme of the competition in order to know the duration of the breaks between the dancing rounds. This information could be used to plan training sessions in the morning and in the evening as the dancer will be competing at that time.

The number of dance rounds depends on the number of registered dance couples. If the number of the couples is large, there will be more rounds and vice versa. It is important to know whether the dance couples are competing only in the semifinals, the final or in other rounds. The number of rounds determines the overall time spent on the dance floor (dance time).

The qualities of the opponents will determine whether the dance couples will do their best or whether it will be possible to "rest" during a round, thus saving energy for the maximum exertion of strength in the finals.

The time spent on physical training will depend on the desired results. If the highest rank is desired, then it will be necessary to properly carry out the conditional training.

### **Tactics in the technical training of dancers**

The aim of the tactical training is to make someone a "master" of a dance technique. Its main objectives are to introduce the rules of dance techniques, to train the dancers to learn a particular dance technique and perform it when needed, to learn a certain number of steps and figures of all dances, to ensure stability in performing dance techniques, to match the way the dance techniques are performed with the individual qualities of dancers. Carrying out technical training will depend on whether the compulsory or the free part of a dance programme is to be performed.

In case of a free dance programme we must pay attention to:

- the type of the competition (LA, ST, COMB),
- the developed choreography,
- the qualities of the opposing dance couples and
- the individual qualities of dancers.

Depending on the type of competition, certain dance elements and figures of particular dances will be practiced.

The choreography will determine the dance figures to be practiced.

In order for a couple to achieve better results, the level of difficulty and the expression of dance figures will be determined by the qualities of the opposing dance couples.

The individual qualities of the dancers determine which dance figures will be practiced. Whichever dance figures are chosen, they must be performed precisely, correctly and in an expressive manner. It will be unproductive to choose effective, complex dance figures if they cannot be performed due to any bad qualities of the dancers. For that reason it is necessary to "test" the dancers and to know their existing qualities before planning the technical training.

### **Tactics in creating choreography**

"The aim of a choreographer's tactics is to emphasize the qualities of the choreography and the dancers and to cover up any weaknesses. It is a part of the dancers' training and depends on their optimal abilities.

Choreographers should:

- determine the dance structures and their place in space, and the order of dance structures by choosing those figures and steps which the dancers can carry out successfully both in the technical sense and in the sense of style;
- choose dance structures that reveal the individuality and creativity of the dance couples who are able to "tell" the imagined "story" by means of a sound movement and motion culture, as well as by expressing the desired emotions;
- teach the dancers orientation in space by keeping in mind the location of the judges and the audience;

- pay special attention to individual "postures", which are part of the story, as well as to the place where they will be performed;
- know that the logic of the chosen structures should be based on the dancers' knowledge of how to perform dancing figures properly" (Kostić, 2001, 501).

Judges at a competition cannot see the choreography in its entirety, but only some parts of it. Therefore, complex structures should be avoided, effective and logical ones should be used to enable the dancers to show their ability to express themselves successfully at any time.

### **Tactics used for a competition**

Tactics in a competition are certainly the most important element and have several aspects.

**The start of the dancing** must be chosen on the basis of the quality of the choreographic start. It refers to the corner on the dancing floor from which the dancing will start. Experience has shown that dancing couples who have a good choreographic start usually start dancing from the corner opposite the judges and vice versa. If we use the effective first 'length' it is carried out across from the judges. At the beginning of a competition, the judges usually do not look right in front of them. Therefore, the start of the dancing is used as a tactical element. Various corners are used for each dance in order to avoid stereotypical starts.

If the choreography is not at a high level, **effective starts** are used so as to attract the judges' attention at the starting point. Also, they can be used when the choreography is satisfying, but the dance couple wants to win the judges' sympathy at the very beginning. The same circumstances apply even when dancing on 'neutral' ground. These effective starts are usually performed directly in front of the audience over which a couple wants to have influence. By leaving an impression on the audience, couples indirectly influence the judges.

The audience, i.e. winning the audience's sympathy is of great importance in a competition. On the podium, the judges sit directly in front of the audience, so that the audience's, as a rule, has great influence on them. It is, in fact, psychological pressure on the part of the audience to ensure that the judges treat their favorites kindly.

Depending on the number of participants and the number of categories, the dancers spend an entire day at a competition. In fact, it can be said that they dance the whole day. It has already been mentioned in the section on the tactics of conditional training that special attention should be paid to this particular point. Coaches usually want their dancers to save their energy for the final dance which must be performed with "full strength". Although the rules state that a dance couple is to be marked during each round individually, dancers usually opt for the tactic of imposing themselves in the first round by dancing their best, and then continue to "conserve" their energy in the following rounds. In the jargon of dance this is called getting by on your previous achievements.

The problem that occurs with using these kinds of tactics usually appears in the semi-finals. The question that arises then is whether to dance with full strength in the semi-finals or to save energy for the finals. In such a case there is a real threat that by conserving their energy, the dance couple proves to be worse than their opponents and, therefore, loses the right to compete in the finals. This decision must be made by a coach

right after the first dance of the semi-finals. Since the dancers do not have an insight into the qualities of the opposing dance couples, they cannot speculate about their chances of qualifying for the finals. Depending on the qualities of the opposing couples, the coach makes a decision whether the dancers can be allowed to invest themselves less, or whether they will be asked to do their best. If a coach decides to save his dancers' energy, he will have to rely on some other tactics for the rest of the competition.

Right before the dancing in the finals, a dance couple must be isolated from the audience and the other competitors. The dancers will need to be left alone since they must concentrate on the upcoming dancing. A dance couple will appear on the dance podium right before the announcement, i.e. before the announcement of the couples that will compete in the finals.

There are certain elements of the tactical training for a competition which one should pay attention to:

- the very performance, which includes a great deal of preparation, a well rounded performance, and tactics in between particular dances;
- the right choice of a competition in accordance with the physical, mental and emotional level;
- the appearance of the dance couple (Winkelhuis, 2001, according Zagorc & Jarc-Šifrar, 2003).

Also, there is another tactical element, which refers to the couple's performance in the finals in a completely different costume, maybe even with different hairstyles, a completely different image, etc. Although it is not of crucial importance for their placement, it has a psychological effect both on the judges and the audience, and together with all the tactical elements, can contribute to the couple's winning the competition or, at least, achieving a new personal best.

Zagorc and Jarc-Šifrar (2003) point out that fashion trends determine the way that the dancers will be dressed (regarding style, colors and designs). Most of the dancers adapt to new styles and trends, but the question remains whether or not what is in fashion is suitable for everyone. Dance costumes, hairstyles and make up are elements important for success. Neatness and ingenuity of appearance are things that additionally motivate the dancers for their performance. It is necessary to change the costumes, but one should be careful not to go too far and thus become sidetracked. The dancers' appearance should be emphasized in such a way that it "speaks" to us, along with the dancing.

### **The tactics of building a career**

The tactics of building a career are actually a strategy since there is no connection with a particular competition. This refers to making progress from lower qualitative levels to higher ones, in relation to various elements:

- the previous age category,
- the financial status of a dance couple or each of the dancers individually,
- becoming fed up with dancing,
- education,
- dance seminars and
- the role and importance of a tournament.

1. Physical predispositions in making a career represent the estimation of a dancer's present condition and the possibility of his or her making progress in dancing. Since physical predispositions are changeable, especially during an unstable developmental period, one should be very careful when setting final objectives and planning development. According to this factor, a choice of a tournament is made ("easier" or "more difficult" one), so that a dancer could show his top qualities and in that way gain physical stability.

2. Great attention should be paid to planning the transfer from one category to another and one level to another. A dancer should not be allowed to change both his age category and qualitative level at the same time. If that should happen, a dancer would immediately be handicapped by placement, which could badly influence the physical stability of a dance couple. A solution should be sought in competitions with weaker opponents. On one hand, the problem of gaining experience in a new category or level would be solved, and on the other, the dancers would score more points.

3. The financial aspect of an education in dance refers to the dance education itself, dance seminars, and the choice of tournaments. Progress in a career cannot be expected if the dancers can afford only elementary dance classes, i.e. training in groups. In such cases, an individual approach to dance classes is made impossible, and dancers cannot progress adequately. This kind of education can be good only for keeping up the competitive form. This problem is solved by organizing dance seminars, where additional information is given to a group of dancers in case that they cannot afford individual lessons. Also, competitions in which the dance couples will participate should be chosen. In the case of a poor material situation, competitions that cost less will be chosen, which can even contribute to a dancer's development. On one hand, a competition can be a sort of training, one that 'tempers' the dancers and, on the other hand, it can offer opportunities for making rapid progress (rating tournaments). Some competitions are important both for the competitors themselves and for club affirmation and advertising.

4. Becoming fed up with dancing occurs if a couple spends several years in the same category, dancing a compulsory programme. Since there are no innovations to the programme, the training become boring, the competitions lose their charm and the dancers simply do not want to dance any more. This may happen to women dancers after changing partners and "dropping" from upper to lower qualitative levels. Actually, it is a question of moments of morale and willingness, which determine the psychological stability of a couple, without which the tactics of building career lose all sense. The only solutions to a problem of this kind are innovations in training and new information. The tactics of "building" a career are a factor of survival for dancers, dance couples and therefore a dance club itself.

#### CONCLUSION

In their broadest sense, dance tactics encompass various steps and procedures that both dancers and coaches use in a particular competition for the sake of achieving as high a placement as possible. Their characteristics can be connected with movement itself, knowledge of the movements, experience and sport achievements.



Tactics always correlate with practice. They are connected with particular individuals and certain knowledge. Each of the dancers possesses certain knowledge. There must be certain interaction between the knowledge of both dancers so that they both could benefit.

Tactics in sport dancing can be classified into: conditional training, technical training, creating choreography, competitions and building a career. Each of these branches contributes greatly to the creation of the overall tactics for particular competition and at the same time to achieving certain sport results.

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## TAKTIČKO ISKUSTVO U SPORTSKOM PLESU

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*Taktika u sportskom plesu obuhvata sva sredstva koja se preduzimaju na konkretnom takmičenju ne bi li se ostvario što bolji plasman. Izražava se konkretnim postupcima plesača i trenera u odnosu na ostale učesnike na takmičenju. Plesnu taktiku karakterišu sledeći elementi: motorika (kretanje), znanje o motorici (kretanju), iskustvo (svest) i sportsko delo. Taktika je uvek vezana za praksu, odnosno za praktičnu primenu antropomotorike. U takmičarskoj situaciji plesači koriste individualnu taktiku prema drugim plesačima, sudijama, publici. Taktički plan osmišljava primenu raspoloživih sposobnosti na konkretnom takmičenju. On sadrži: korišćenje informacija o sposobnostima drugih plesnih parova, dozirano korišćenje sopstvenih maksimalnih sposobnosti u svim takmičarskim kolima, kreiranje odgovarajućih koreografija, korišćenje novih elemenata tehnike i "akrobatike", adekvatni odgovor na plesanje protivničkih plesnih parova. Generalna taktika u sportskom plesu se može podeliti na: taktiku u kondicionoj pripremi plesača, taktiku u tehničkoj pripremi plesača, taktiku u kreiranju koreografije, taktiku na takmičenju i taktiku "građenja" karijere.*

Ključne reči: *taktika, sportski ples, iskustvo*