



Anita Ahlstrand and Pekka Anttila (Eds.)

# KIDMOVE

## Athlete Centered Coaching Practices

Publications of Metropolia UAS



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# INTRODUCTION

The most common reasons for young athletes to participate in sporting activities are having fun, experiencing enjoyment, improving new skills, getting a sense of belonging and receiving the support needed. Sports coaches and parents should not lose sight of the fact that kids do sports for enjoyment. The relationship between the athlete and the coach, the atmosphere, and the internal motivation are important reasons for young athletes not to drop out from sporting activities. In fact, the coach's attitude, behaviour and coaching styles have been shown to affect the young athletes' success both in sporting activities and outside sports.

An athlete-centered coaching and athlete empowerment need an atmosphere where kids are seen and heard, and have opportunities to join the decision-making in the coaching process. Meaningful participation in sporting activities enable the enjoyment, feeling of relatedness and autonomy. The organized sporting activities ideally strengthen not only the overall physical activity of kids but support the comprehensive wellbeing by providing positive learning experiences and safe sporting atmosphere. Overall, there is a great need for good coaching practices to support empowering communication and relationship between the young athletes and the coaches. The aim of the KidMove project has been to put into practice and disseminate free and easily accessible, athlete-centered coaching practices for the grassroots junior sports coaches. All the project outputs are based on the good coaching practices of the project partners. The outputs can be used to build up a safe sporting atmosphere and better possibilities for young athletes to be seen, heard and respected.

The KidMove project collaborates internationally and brings together an exceptional combination of multi-field expertise from sports clubs, sports organizations and higher education institutions. Co-writing the blogs combines the coaches' grassroots experiences and knowledge with the Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) holistic understanding and theoretical background of child-centered and resource-oriented approaches.

KidMove dream team want to thank Erasmus+, Metropolia UAS, Icehearts, Special Heroes, Windesheim UAS, Sportunion Steiermark, Bulldogs Brno,

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Anita Ahlstrand and Pekka Anttila  
Metropolia University of Applied Sciences



# MOTIVATING AND EMPOWERING YOUNG ATHLETES



The empowering relationship between the athlete and the coach and the supportive atmosphere are important reasons for young athletes to continue sporting activities. Every young athlete has the right to be seen and heard, in every training session. Meaningful sporting activities give enjoyment and fun and increase the internal motivation. At its best, training gives everyone, both athletes and coaches, the opportunity to learn together, identify and use one's own and the team's strengths.

Franceline van de Geer, Special Heroes and Paul Verschuur,  
Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

# JOY! THE FUN-FACTOR OF MOVING

## Four tips to give most young people pleasure in sports

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**Fun to exercise for every youngster! With the accent on every youngster. You do not even have to understand much about motivation to know that young people who enjoy exercising together will probably continue to do so. It does not matter if the motivation comes directly from the youngster or more from the outside. If youngsters usually enjoy participating in sports activities, the motivation to keep on coming to the club will increase. Good to know that the coach probably has the biggest influence on this "fun factor"!**

What do we mean by fun or pleasure? Youngsters enjoy sports and will continue doing sports when they are allowed to be themselves, when they feel competent, when they have meaningful contact with their peers and the coach, when they have influence on the training sessions and usually also when they get better in the sport of their choice.

### ALWAYS FUN?

Should there always be pleasure? Preferably for the target group of young recreational athletes YES!!! This will not succeed always, but at least it should be the goal in every training. And, should it only be fun? No, this is not necessary. During the training, the athletes must work, wait, listen, watch, fail, mess around and more. This all will be very well tolerated when pleasure predominates and you, the coach, will achieve this with the help of the following four tips.

1. Create a learning environment in which by far the most succeeds
2. Facilitate a large 'arranging-area'
3. Show interest and give compliments
4. Offer small steps and give smart clues

These tips are not just about influencing motor learning. It is also about behavioural learning, "how we do things together at the club". Fun in sports and enjoying your club activities entail both behavioral and motoric learning.

## 1. THE LEARNING CONTEXT

"You can learn from mistakes, but by success you learn more." The art of properly choosing appropriate exercise activities ensures that young people can gain many success experiences during training sessions. Because of this, the youngsters keep moving by themselves and in this way, they get many turns to practice. Because you, the coach, have opted for promising and therefore successful activities, the youngsters (start to) feel competent: they trust they are able to enjoy good moving in the sport they have chosen. Because of this, they probably want and dare to take the next step more easily to more difficult or more exciting exercises. Sometimes it does not work out for a while – we would not want to call that a mistake right away – but because the youngster is competent in the basics, that is no problem. In combination with tip 4, you can probably succeed quickly again and therefore achieve happiness. The art of choosing well requires a great deal of knowledge of the methodology and technical aspects of sport and an eye for the level of movement of young people. There may be a problem in the latter, because the levels are likely to be different. Tip 2 can offer a good tool in this.

## 2. ARRANGING-AREA: TIP-CARDS

Youngsters can continue to work much more independently than we often think. Give them space to arrange a part of the training themselves and you will be surprised! If you organize the training smartly and give them the confidence that they can learn very well with and from each other, it will become clear that many young athletes can keep a part of the training going on independently and learn a lot from it too. This facilitates using everyone's abilities despite greater differences in level.

Almost all young athletes want autonomy and can handle this well if it is tailored to their possibilities. Of course, they cannot arrange everything themselves, but if the coach prepares a structure for this with so-called tip cards, the youngsters can continue to train effectively and with pleasure. Each tip card offers some different exercises or tasks, each with different options or levels. Once, a coach gave the following instructions on using five tip cards, each on three levels: *"we are going to do some free running*

*today. You can choose three of the five obstacles. You do this in pairs that I point out. You are working for half an hour and you can choose whether you want to run the obstacle at level 1, 2 or 3”.*

Observation tips can be added to the tip cards. This enables the youngsters to give feedback to each other. Working with tip cards must be learned in practice. It is not too difficult, but it will not succeed totally the first time you try. When everyone is used to it, it is much more effective than the coach-centered way of training. And, even more importantly, it makes use of the youngsters’ possibilities.

### **3. COMPLIMENTS AND SHOWING INTEREST**

In the introduction you read about the big influence your coaching has on the enjoyability of trainings. If committing youngsters to the club is important in the club’s policy, you must invest in the relationship between the coach and the club’s youth. Not everyone who is good at sports can easily communicate this to young people at the club. You must speak their language and understand why they do what they do and want what they want. Read about this also in the blog on over-excited youngsters.

However, the most important thing for them is to notice that you are positively interested in them. This means you recognize that every youngster behaves and learns differently and that you take this into account in your instructions. It is even more important that they feel your compliments are genuine. Just have a chat about other things than the sport, and the young athletes will feel they are taken seriously!

Why compliments? You will not approve of everything, because that would not always be realistic, but do not fail to give compliments if there is reason to do so. Compliment on a good sport performance or the proper execution of the exercise. Positive response, however, also stimulates the working atmosphere, if you pay attention to commitment, progress, perseverance, cooperation, helping others and so on. Young people just need to be seen, is that not logical? We hope it is!

### **4. SMART INSTRUCTIONS**

The finishing touch of good coaching on keeping fun in sports is giving the exactly right help. Of course, this depends on the way that the youngster learns, but there are a few golden rules.

## **SMALL STEPS**

Making it harder or more challenging in small steps works better than large jumps. Because young people mainly learn to experience success, small steps forward are the most effective.

## **THOUGHTLESS**

Because young people usually do not learn to move using cognitive skills but more "without thinking", it makes more sense at a young age to give tips and tricks that use the context (the real environment). If you must think too much about how to put down your legs or hold your hands, for example, it usually goes wrong. You probably recognize this as "trial and error" learning, or learning by doing instead of thinking. The environment challenges youngsters to move and act in a certain way. For example when they see a swing-set, they usually want to try it right away. So the coach should arrange the environment in such a way that it invites youngsters to experiment different ways to move. So give easy understandable instructions for the youngsters: "try to target the ball at the left back corner of the volleyball-court" instead of complicated instructions on how to move the body to reach this goal.

## **ANALOGY**

Tips that use familiar images work very effectively. If you want to teach young athletes for example a somersault, it is better to say "make yourself like a ball" than to say "put your chin on your chest, grab your ankles and stretch just before your head is up again. Maybe (!) the latter works with 20+ athletes, but it is not the way the body and brains of youngsters learn.

## **MOST YOUNGSTERS...**

With a lot of knowledge of the sport and the above four tips and with patience and compassion, every coach will be able to fascinate and stimulate most youngsters and keep them committed to the club. Most of them, but not all. Sometimes the chosen sport is simply not suitable for the youngster. In that case, it would be nice if the club for example would look for a different sports club with the youngster and their parents. There are good examples of sports clubs that offer the young athletes a mix of different sports together.

And if they do not want to practice sports anymore, but they want to stay connected? Read the blog *How to keep youngsters bound to the club?*

Anna Bachrata, Bulldogs Brno and Dagmar Heiland Travníková  
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# PATRON AS A MOTIVATOR

## How to motivate kids in sport through their older and more experienced sports teammates

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**It is natural for children to identify themselves with behaviour patterns of their sports idols. Children typically learn through observation from various agents of socialization within the sports club, such as coaches, older club-mates or famous sports idols. In Bulldogs Brno floorball team, we take it one step further and use the principle of “patrons”, in which more experienced club-mates influence and inspire the sports kids directly and face to face.**

Since our birth, we tend to imitate the behaviour of other people around us, either intentionally, or often subconsciously. In the first years of our life, we copy the movements and gestures of our family members, who play the most important role during our whole life. As we grow, peers and friends, along with teachers and other educators, enter the process of forming our personality and life values. Therefore, it is very natural to search for life idols or even heroes who we could identify with.

## CONCEPT OF PATRONS

In Bulldogs Brno floorball club, we aim to follow the common process of children identification with sports authorities or idols around them and we use the adult floorball players as “patrons” for the children and youth sports categories. This older peer cooperation and inspiration seems very effective. Patrons are active players (both male and female) of the junior or adult age top category who act as idols from both the sports and personality points of view. In most cases, the patrons come from the adult categories, and only exceptionally a junior patron is selected (especially if the young athlete plays for the national team). The selection of the patrons is quite specific, only those who can inspire the kids and youth with their behaviour, attitude or performance on the pitch can become a patron.

Our sports club mascot is a bulldog and that is why we emphasise the character traits of this very special dog breed. Bulldogs are reliable, devoted, faithful and lively. They are deliberate, rarely nervous and full of energy. With these personality traits, the patrons inspire the young members of our pack.

## WHAT DO PATRONS DO?

Patrons do not participate in each training session of children. A patron does not even act as a coach in every single game. Instead, we want the sports children to perceive this person as a diversification aspect of the training content. Before the training session, the coach informs the patron about the training plan and introduces the patron to the children. Patron works individually with each child and children are empowered to ask him or her any question they have. Our goal is to transfer the patron's influence on the kids also to non-sports areas, such as schoolwork or selection of suitable sports equipment and its maintenance.

*“It's amazing when the female players from our A team visit our training. They teach us some tricks with the floorball stick and ball that maybe even our coaches cannot do. I have my favourite female player and what I like about her is that although she is very small, she can fight in the field as a real Bulldog girl!”*

*(Eliska, 10 years)*

Besides visiting the training sessions, patrons also transfer their sports experience and support the children during games. Therefore, they often visit the children's and youth's weekend tournaments. For the Bulldogs club it is important to share the club values and work connected with the club functioning. Helping with the organization of the weekend tournaments or visiting the games of other age categories is thus desirable. On the other hand, the youngest club members get inspired during the games of the elite categories. They learn to respect opponents and authorities, such as coaches or referees. Children should also be aware of the importance of a proper post-game or post-training stretching as well as thanking the fans and parents for their support.

## OLDER TEAMMATES AND PEER INFLUENCE ON KIDS

Our concept of “patrons” is underlined by several authentic research results and theories which highlight the importance of the positive peer influence. Peers are defined as the most important relative group that often overtakes parents in the area of influence. For the youth, it is important to wear the right clothes, to listen to the right music or to behave in a certain trendy way, which may lead to a decreasing influence of coaches on the young athletes.

*“ When I was as old as the kids, I had some favourite players in our male A team, but they never visited us during our training. I think they weren't interested in us so much, which I was quite sorry about. I definitely don't want our girls and boys to have similar feelings and that's why I'm always happy to show up at the training of our kids and youth and take part in the training with them. During my last visit, I trained individual shooting only with three players and the coach was managing the rest of the team.”*  
(Matyas, 20 years)

In order to make a complex insight into the possibilities of motivating kids, we as coaches should also realize that not only the peer athletes, but also elite sports idols play an important role in the formation of our young athletes. Unfortunately, not always in the positive way though... Roles of the Olympic champions are important, especially in the context of sports and internalisation of moral values. The elite athletes are however not always aware of the fact that their behavior even outside of sports events is carefully observed by children and youth. Youth coaches, or the patrons in our case, should be thus ready to talk about this phenomenon with the kids and point out the positive or negative aspects for their healthy sports progress and development!

*“ For our boys and girls, it definitely is an attractive part of the training. They want to show their skills and hope that the patrons will see them and praise them. I can definitely see that the patron's praise has a stronger effect on kids than compliments from the coach.”*  
(Radim, 28 years)



Jacek Stodolka AZS-AWF Wroclaw, Kamila Czajka and Grzegorz Zurek  
AWF Wroclaw, Poland

## COACH! KNOWLEDGE IS 4U

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**The last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century was a period of creation and development of the information society, also known as the knowledge society. The knowledge of an individual is replaced by the ability to work in a team. By using the teamwork skills, various projects are being developed. One of such projects is the KidMove project, aimed at co-creating and supporting good coaching practices in the field of sport for schoolchildren; one of the most important good practices is to have an activator coach.**

What is the origin of the term activator and what do we mean by it? The term activator is of Latin origin and covers information on chemistry, physics, and genetics. Synonyms to the word "activator" are impresario, mentor, guardian, patron, promoter, protector.

The synonyms for the phrase "activate" are in groups:

- Activate, awaken, stir up,
- accelerate, gain speed, gain momentum, enliven, accelerate,
- generate, obtain, produce, create, induce, trigger,
- stimulate

### ACTIVATOR - TALENT OR SKILL?

By "talent", we mean a typically repetitive pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving. Talent can be used productively. Skill is an experience in some area, practical knowledge of something. When we use our strengths, potential, and key talents, we become more decisive in our actions and choices and more open to challenges. According to the Gallup Institute ([www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)), an activator is one of the 34 talents. Talent 'activator' helps in convincing, motivating others and influencing someone's decisions. People with an activator's talent simply act, realize ideas and turn thoughts into actions.

Activators like to start actions and initiatives. After deciding, the action starts immediately. They are not afraid of taking risks. Sports activators understand the expectations of the community and customers in terms of physical culture. They promote and apply activities that help entire communities to change their behaviour towards an active lifestyle (Buckingham 2017). So, is it a talent or a skill?

## **COACH ACTIVATOR – A NEW PROFESSION OR ADDITIONAL DUTIES FOR A COACH?**

In Poland, we have adapted many such terms from more developed countries and quickly moved on to the agenda. In sport, we have permanently established: a personal coach, a sports manager, a coach of movement preparation, coach statistician, an analyst coach, a scout, a fitness coach, and others. Among this group of trainers appeared an activator coach. This is a new concept in Polish sport and thus a new role to play. In the field of entrepreneurship, the activator is more widely known and increasingly sought after.

## **WHAT ARE THE DAILY TASKS OF THE ACTIVATOR TRAINER?**

Plans attractive training activities, sessions, and programs in a safe environment. Provides feedback on work efficiency and helps improve performance techniques. Collaborates with young people, schools, social groups, and sports organizations to promote sport. In collaboration with young people involved in sports, he develops fundamental training programs, works to develop more advanced techniques and tactics supporting performers during events and competitions.

At the national or international level, he designs difficult and diverse training programs, supervises the physical condition and mental attitude of the individuals he trains. He cooperates with sports experts such as sports scientists, nutritionists, physiotherapists, and program managers. He is a mentor to other trainers.

## WHAT ARE THE COMPETENCES OF THE COACH ACTIVATOR?

Competences are essentially a combination of three main components: knowledge, skills and responsibility. The competences of an activator coach are manifested in subsequent areas:

- ✓ Leadership – indicates directions and motivates others, influences the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups in order to achieve specific goals.
- ✓ Commitment and motivation – show personal support for the project and induces commitment and support for the project among interested.
- ✓ Assertiveness – formulates one's views and expectations in a convincing and decisive way.
- ✓ Creativity – thinks and acts in an original and creative way.
- ✓ Result-orientedness – focuses the team's attention on key objectives in order to achieve an optimal result for those involved.
- ✓ Effectiveness – uses time and resources efficiently.
- ✓ Credibility – fulfils his promises, is responsible, promotes appropriate behaviour, is trustworthy and self-confident.
- ✓ Values appreciation – understands personal, organizational and social values.
- ✓ Ethics – ensures that the trust of all interested parties and society is gained and maintained.

## CONCLUSION

An Activator Coach is a talent of influence and authority in strategic management that helps in

- interpersonal communication,
- passing on your ideas,
- convincing others to act,
- making quick decisions.

All these qualities should be considered as highly desirable in the realization of good practice in working with children and young people in a sports club. The recognition of the coach activator in the international team responsible for the KidMove project as one of the key coaching practices in the field of youth sports, the use of knowledge on this subject gained from foreign reports and national experiences from the labour market are to help define the role and tasks of the coach activator. It seems that the competences, responsibilities, and tasks of a coach activator perfectly relate to the synonyms for the phrase to activate.

We assume that the conclusions from the work of the whole KidMove team will contribute to the development of competences of the present training staff of young athletes and will become the foundation for the education of future coaches as activators.

We invite you to discuss the role and competencies of coach as an activator in sport, and to cooperate in the training (education) program of sports activators.

Miika Niemelä & Stina Kuhlefelt, Icehearts and Anita Ahlstrand & Pekka Anttila,  
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# KEEP YOUR FEELERS UP!

## Enabling coach

**What is a young athlete's joy made of? What does it take a young athlete to transcend themselves, believe in their own abilities, and be able to shine with their own strengths? Am I an adult that a young athlete finds easy to approach? This blog will unveil the polished diamonds of Icehearts, which make the coach an enabler.**

Every young athlete has the right to be seen and heard, in every training session. The coach has a big responsibility to consider how he or she meets each athlete, what issues he or she brings out and how he or she hears and goes through the issues with the athletes. At its best, training gives everyone, both athletes and coaches, the opportunity to work together, using their own strengths and resources.

*“The most important thing as a coach, in my opinion, is to meet the child, find the child's goals for the hobby, and understand the starting points and the reasons why the child has come for the hobby.”*

*“The most important element is that the child is always welcome to practice and play. When you are welcome, you also do not want to be away!”*

*“We need to understand the needs of each age.”*

*(Thoughts of Icehearts coaches)*

## HOW TO BE AN APPROACHABLE COACH FOR YOUNG ATHLETES?

One of the coach's key tasks is to find a connection to every athlete. When one youngster must be constantly encouraged to join, another must be calmed down. A coach with sensitiveness understands what is going on in the situation, notices the youngster's reactions and knows how to respond. An approachable coach is a safe adult who helps the young athletes to bring out the best of themselves as well as enjoy the sporting activities.

The coach's actions or omissions affect the young athlete and his or her perceptions of himself or herself.

In the beginning, many athletes have a feeling that they are not good enough. "I can't" or "not interested" may mean they do not dare to try. In the beginning, it is a good idea to try different sports, and to build up team spirit and confidence.

*“We are a loud and colourful team - we are noticed in the sports halls. We come in different colours and sizes, speak many different languages, and express our feelings by dancing and singing. However, the brightest feature we are known for is the real joy! We rejoice in successes, being together, and sometimes weird mistakes.”*

*“We don't bark, bully, or get angry about mistakes. At a moment of failure, there is always a safe adult who has known every member of the team for many years. He knows how these young people respond to frustration, pressure, or trouble with friendships.”*

*“You can even see it when a young athlete first overcomes his fears, tries and succeeds. That growth and the increase in self-confidence are visible.”*

### CHECKLIST FOR AN ENABLING COACH

- ☒ I value young athletes and notice their different strengths, even on bad days
- ☒ I praise them and emphasise their strengths
- ☒ I am interested in youngsters' life; what inspires them, do they have friends, how is it in school, what about home and leisure time?
- ☒ I give young people space and time in training sessions to also talk about other issues that are important to them
- ☒ I regularly ask them for their opinions, consider their wishes and we then make decisions together
- ☒ I understand that a youngster does not intentionally behave badly, but that there is often a fear of failure or pressure to perform behind the disturbing behaviour or lack of motivation
- ☒ I can apologize for my mistakes and learn from them
- ☒ I am the safe adult in challenging situations; I stay calm and positive, I emphasize the issues

## **HOW TO ACT WITHOUT CONTROLLING TOO MUCH?**

The coach's behaviour and attitude influence often the athlete's desire to join the training sessions. Athletes' confidence and motivation are created when the coach discusses, asks and negotiates with the youngsters. On the other hand, over-controlling and limiting behaviour, highlighting the mistakes or using force will increase the young athlete's anxiety, insecurity and fear.

The best way to ensure balanced development and motivation is to use power wisely and with respect for the youngsters. In doing so, the coach encourages the athlete to express his or her opinions, respects them as themselves and believes in their abilities. This supports the young athlete's courage to be spontaneous and able to cooperate with others. Through enabling, the coach also increases the young person's confidence in their own abilities, autonomy, and sense of appreciation. This creates a desire to be part of the team.

The coach is the enabler when she or he is a safe adult, not a "nice friend". An overly permissive atmosphere in training sessions or the fact that the coach demands nothing from the athletes, will add to the athletes' insecurity. In addition, in an overly permissive atmosphere, young athletes are not directed to understand the consequences of their actions for themselves or others.

In addition, the coach is always an example for his young athletes. She or he gives an example of acceptable behavior, that is why it is important to pay attention to how and what he says or leaves unsaid at that moment.

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# ENABLING PARTICIPATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES



Athlete-centered junior coaching is ideally based on the opportunity for the young athletes to participate by using their individual abilities and to have their needs and interests met. By providing young athletes with equal opportunities to participate, the coaches give them a feeling of belonging within the age group, support young athletes' self-esteem and development, and motivate them to maintain the sport.

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## JUST 4 FUN?

### Sports for all young athletes

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**How to make sports activities enjoyable for the youngsters, so that they keep coming back and want to be involved? How to maximize the fun part in youth sports? When we know the factors behind the “fun and enjoyment”, it is much easier to improve the quality of young athletes’ experience and keep them motivated. Sports for ALL -training lesson promotes the sport development of youngsters without pressure of competing in championships.**

In teenage, it is often necessary for a young person to make a decision concerning sports: do I want to continue in the performance-oriented way or in the leisure-oriented way. The performance-oriented path is usually associated with doubling the number and scope of training. Too many youngsters do not stand the pressure to perform this. A juvenile body cannot usually handle this change of training volumes immediately. Injuries, frustration and resignation can be the consequence.

For those youngsters, who still enjoy doing sports and like to play just for the fun, there might not be any space in the sports club anymore. Training times and spaces are reserved for the team that is competing in the championship. If young adults do not want to train in a club with the pressure of competing and a higher volume of training, they often leave the team and quit doing this sport or even quit doing sports forever.

### **SPORTS ACTIVITIES AS A VALVE IN A PRESSURED LIFE**

Youngsters in this age are already pressured by so many external impacts: school, family, friends, other leisure activities and social media. Physical activity and sport are extremely important valves to balance this pressure from outside. Sports clubs have a perfect opportunity to provide this valve for every age group, but they miss out to serve the youngsters. The lack of opportunity of doing sports just for fun is serious, especially

in this period of life that comes with a lot of pressure. Youngsters are growing up and managing life with all its challenges and need a balance for that.

That is why the sports club needs to start opening their minds to the idea of training lessons for young adults who just want to play for fun or for a soft competition. The competitive sport can just work in union with a broad base of leisure and healthy sports-oriented people. The sports club also needs a functioning sports club life with a high number of members who identify themselves with the sports club and function as a fan base. The sports club also has a social responsibility of offering something to all age groups and genders.

## **WHAT IS FUN AND ENJOYABLE?**

Youngsters' primary reason for participation in organized sporting activities is fun. Enjoyment means "a positive affective response to the sports activities that reflects feelings like pleasure, excitement, liking and fun". Fun is a general positive emotional state for youngsters, and it is important to take it into account in sports activities for young people.

How the training sessions are structured is another significant factor in youngsters' fun and enjoyment. It is very common that adults plan, organize and lead the training sessions and they might not be particularly fun or enjoyable for young athletes. Many traditional and common ways to coach actually diminish the joy that the youngsters experience in sports activities.

Studies have shown that youngsters like more games and game-like activities than the drills the coaches use very often in training sessions. The training session should foster desirable behaviour and also meet athletes' needs. The less structured and less performance evaluated the activity is, the more spontaneous fun is experienced, and the more socially accepted roles are learned. Winning does not seem to be the most important element for the youngsters of having fun in sports.

Therefore, we can offer two simple tips for coaches to enhance the fun and enjoyment in sports activities: maximize young athletes' involvement in planning and organizing the training sessions and be democratic!

### **HOW CAN A SPORTS CLUB OFFER A NO-PRESSURE TRAINING FOR YOUNGSTERS WHO JUST WANT TO PLAY FOR FUN?**

Create awareness of the importance of “just for fun” lessons in the sports club board

- ✓ willingness to give something back to the community; the sports club has a responsibility towards society
- ✓ knowledge about sport as a value, which is extremely important for teenagers
- ✓ willingness to invest in a team that is an important part for a fan base, part of social life in the sports club
- ✓ competitive sport needs a broad base of leisure and health sport

Find a coach who knows about the importance of the “just for fun team” and is also willing to coach this team:

- ✓ they need to coach the youngsters with the knowledge that they just want to have fun doing sports
- ✓ they also need to bring in a soft competitive part in order to keep it interesting and exciting for the young adults.

Reserve time, space and money for this team.

Communicate this offer and the possibility for ALL to join the team throughout the whole sport club, so that you can strengthen it as a fan base.

### **WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE “JUST FOR FUN” SESSION?**

- ✓ The experience that sport can be fun with soft competition that puts no pressure on the young adults in the long run. Sport can be seen as a leisure time hobby.
- ✓ a challenging technical and fitness part, that is not kept at an overwhelmingly competitive level, the youngsters can evolve their physical abilities but don't have to compete in championships

- ✓ Co-decision and the possibility for young adults to organise themselves to a certain extent. This gives the youngsters the feeling that they are an important part of the club and the team.
- ✓ In the training, the feeling of belonging in the group and the joy of moving together can be experienced.
- ✓ equal opportunity to join for all
  - all genders can do sports together
  - everyone, despite their physical fitness and technical skills, can join
- ✓ low pressure for the parents, that have to send the youngsters to training sessions and games
- ✓ youngster can choose if they want to go to the training without pressure: sport, other leisure activities and social responsibilities (family events, etc.) are equally important
- ✓ inner motivation to join the training is higher than the external pressure to join

## CONCLUSION

As many sports clubs as possible should expand their offer for all youngsters and create structures in the club that make this possible. An open training with all the success factors that are mentioned above would be the first approach. If sports clubs implement these “just for fun” sessions, the drop-out of the youngsters can be reduced and many youngsters will stay in the clubs.

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# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL YOUNGSTERS

## A collaboration model for sports clubs and schools

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**All youngsters should have possibility to participate in a pleasing hobby. New ways to build up the collaboration between actors and to reach the youngsters are needed. This blog describes how sports clubs, together with schools, can offer equal opportunities and low-threshold sporting activities for all youngsters and why it is a win-win situation.**

Sport is one of the most popular leisure-time activities among youngsters and one of the most important environments for youngsters' socialization. Sports clubs and young athletes have become an important target for different kind of societal interventions in relation to health. Inspiring hobbies can prevent exclusion and help marginalized youngsters.

Participating in sports club activities has many positive outcomes. However, not all youngsters have equal opportunities to participate in organized sports. There is a great need of easily accessible and low-threshold hobbies and activities. Equal opportunities to participate in sports activities give feeling of connection with the age group and support e.g. youngsters' self-esteem and development.

This model of cooperation between schools and a sports club provides an equal opportunity for EVERY youngster to participate in sport and it is widely used in Austria.

It represents:

- an easy and cheap way of finding a preferred sport
- a means of drop-out prevention from sports in general
- promotion of youngsters' personal health and comprehensive well-being



## WIN-WIN SITUATION

Bringing youngsters to do sports, keeping them motivated and preventing their dropping out of sports is one of the great challenges of today. School is an ideal setting to reach all youngsters.

Cooperation between school and sports club establishes a direct link between youngsters, school and sports club, and enables youngsters to get to know the coach and her/his range of sporting activities in a very easy and cheap way.

**The school**, as a building and community, plays a key role in providing sports activities.

- It is a safe, accessible and familiar environment for many youngsters.
- It has great facilities to organize sports activities in the afternoons.
- It is a place where the various actors, in good collaboration and with a shared vision, promote the growth, inclusion, well-being, and equality of children and young people.

**The sports club** is always a part of a community. To strengthen the community action, it is important for sports clubs to collaborate with schools. On the other hand, the other actors in the community should see sports clubs as possible partners through which to develop the community work of health promotion. At the same time, more opportunities appear for sports activities, both in and outside schools.

Some youngsters feel that hobbies cost too much and are too far away from home. There is also a great need for more groups for the beginners. Getting to know sports activities, for example during or directly after the school day, is one way to reduce young people's prejudices and make them more interested in sports activities.

In collaboration between a sports club and school, **EVERY** youngster has the equal opportunity to participate in sport and exercise. It represents an easy way to find a sports club and to feel comfortable doing sports.

*“ I like doing sports directly after school with my friends from the class and I do not even need to go far, because the coach is coming to our sports hall next to the school.*

*(Sarah, 11 years old)*

Sport, among other hobbies, combines friendship, self-development, discovering one's own strengths, or interacting with an adult. It offers a possibility to feel relatedness, to have the right to choose and make one's own decisions.

Friends are important to youngsters who have no previous experiences in hobby activities. Friends support and motivate youngsters in new situations. Targeting sporting activities to all youngsters is very important from the perspective of preventing early intervention and exclusion.

## **8 PRACTICAL STEPS FOR ORGANIZING THE WIN-WIN -SITUATION**

- 1. Get in touch with a school** near the headquarters of the sports club
- 2. Present your plan in the school;** is it going to be in the morning in a regular class (this requires more organizational effort in the class schedule) or in the afternoon after the school day?
- 3. Plan the weekly date and time schedule together;** sports activities should be available every week during the whole school year.
- 4. Agree on the size of the group and the costs.**
- 5. School sends out the information to the parents** and/or organizes a parents evening - this is a good opportunity for the coach to meet the parents as well.
- 6. Organize free trial sessions** and meet the youngsters, discuss with them and ask about their wishes.
- 7. Take the wishes into account** and plan the sports activities to be suitable, motivational and safe for all youngsters.
- 8. Ask regularly for feedback** from the youngsters, school and parents in order to develop more effective sports activities.

The key to successful collaboration between school and sports clubs is to create a safe and motivational network for the youngsters. The sports club organizes sports activities in the school and directly after the school in order to make it even easier for the athletes to continue doing sports. Attention should also be paid to the content and quality of coaching in order to motivate and engage youngsters in sports activities.

## WHO IS PAYING FOR WHAT?

Coaches do invest a lot of time into the sports lessons in the school and therefore they need to be paid to a certain extent. There are various possibilities depending on the financial opportunities of the school, parents, sports clubs and municipalities:

- parents
- parent council
- school budget
- municipal/city subsidized sports activities

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR A SPORTS CLUB?

- ☒ reaching all youngsters, also those who maybe do not want or have the possibilities to come to the sports club training sessions in the first place
- ☒ good possibility to promote the sport and the sports club's activities
- ☒ good scouting possibility for the coach
- ☒ building up a relationship and communication with the youngsters, school, parents and municipality

*“We cooperate with schools in order to reach as many youngsters as possible in a structured way and to keep as many young adults as active as possible. With this cooperation, we are building the ideal bridge to the school. Many youngsters find their way to the club and stay with us.”*  
*(Oliver, coach of girls' handball U13 team from the UHC Graz)*

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR THE SCHOOL?

- ✓ well-trained and highly educated coaches teach youngsters to have fun and enjoy sports together with other youngsters
- ✓ increase in number of sports activities - in addition to the physical education lessons that are mandatory at school
- ✓ if young adults do more sports activities, they are more balanced in a daily life, more stress resistant and they can concentrate better at school
- ✓ possibility of providing a variety of different sports is offered through collaborating with many sports clubs
- ✓ competitive advantage over other schools; more sports activities and collaboration make the school "more attractive"

*“Through this collaboration we get qualified and reliable coaches with a high emotional sports factor to the school, who understand perfectly how to inspire our youngsters to do physical activity and sport and to keep them in it. This additional offer enables us to regularly increase our youngsters’ exercise times and offers an attractive balance to sedentary lifestyle.”*

*(Mrs. Eder, school principal)*

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR THE FAMILIES?

- ✓ more balanced and stress resistant youngsters
- ✓ young adults are able to study more efficiently when they do more sports
- ✓ less driving time and distance to bring the youngsters to the training sessions
- ✓ safe environment of sports activities in the school
- ✓ highly qualified coaching for their children
- ✓ optional possibilities of different sports
- ✓ sports activities during school days increase the family time

*“My child is definitely more balanced. It helps us a lot that we don't have to drive our children to the training somewhere else, because it takes place directly in the school building.”*

*(Mr Trummer, father of a 13-year-old)*

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR THE MUNICIPALITY?**

- ✓ competitive advantage over other municipalities that do not have that many schools with a wide variety of sporting possibilities
- ✓ health promotion for young adults
- ✓ well-functioning and well-positioned sports clubs with a lot of members contribute to the social life in the community
- ✓ possible future career of “professional athletes” could be a good reputation for the municipalities

*“For me it is very important that the youngsters stay with sports and physical activity. It is important to set a milestone already in the early age in order to have a healthy life. Children are our future and can also function as role models for adults!”*

*(Mayor of Floing)*

# HOW TO KEEP YOUNGSTERS COMMITTED TO THE SPORTS CLUB?

## The importance of a culture of activity- diversity in sports clubs

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**To answer the question why young people come to a sports club and become a member is not easy. The participation incentives are as diverse as the young people themselves are. The image of the sport and the club undoubtedly plays a major role. In this blog, we describe three types of additional activities that are important to keep young athletes connected to the club.**

Young people want to experience success, be tough and strong, move well, be able to do something very well, win, be proud of themselves, belong, have fun, gain self-confidence, to mention but a few. How nice is it if you can gain all those experiences in a beautiful context? This context also first consists of fellow athletes, mostly peers and trainers, coaches, supervisors, parents and all other people involved in the club. For example, the atmosphere and look of all the facilities: the field, the clubhouse, and the changing rooms certainly are very important for the youngsters to stay connected to the club for a longer period.

Enjoying sports is much more pleasant if it is your "spot" where you spend many hours every week. Every sports club and everyone within the club pays attention to make young people feel themselves safe and comfortable. This should not be a new aspect in the club's policy. It is my experience and firm conviction that a rich offer of what I would like to call 'additional activities' is precisely what commits young people to the club, whose success in whatever form takes a little longer. Young people who are not immediately tough and strongly influenced by beautiful movement, young people who cannot or do not win easily. As a club, you are recommended that you also invest in additional activities.

## THREE TYPES OF ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

### 1. MULTI-SPORT ACTIVITIES

Many sports clubs are still so-called mono-sports clubs. You can do one sport only; all activity is specialized in and the facilities fully equipped for this particular sport only. In order to support the practice of this one sport, a gym and other exercise facilities are sometimes set up, but the main goal is that one sport: gymnastics, football, swimming, boxing, etc. This focus increases the level of sporting in many ways but also causes one-sidedness. Not only on the physical level, but also on the social and emotional levels.

### COMMITMENT.

The boredom and frustration can strike especially young people, when it takes too long until they can enjoy the feeling of success. Maybe there is no room for self-discovery, only the competition component is very important. For this reason, it is wise for every sports club to offer a wider range of sports and exercise activities, preferably within the training / practice hours. Multi-sport activities are preferable also in the training sessions of one specific sport and not just as a funny warm-up or as a fun end game, e.g. doing gymnastics in a football training session.

### WHY OTHER SPORTS?

Variety is more fun for everyone, but it is especially beneficial to the youngsters who may drop out of the club. Doing a variety of sports and exercise may also increase the level of performance and make one “a better athlete”, even if the main goal is having more fun. The offer must be chosen well because devising and offering suitable exercise activities is not easy, especially if it is outside the trainer's own preferred sport. A trained PE-teacher may be best equipped for such a wider range, especially if he or she has a specialty in specific sports that the club mainly offers. That such a highly educated staff for most associations does not fit within the available budget for recreational sport is therefore very unfortunate. I would like to call these first additional activities sport-oriented additional activities, because they utilise exercise activities that are derived from the (regulated competition) sport. This corresponds to factor 14 ‘Type of sport’ from the [keepyoungstersinvolved.eu](http://keepyoungstersinvolved.eu) project.

## **2. RECREATION- ORIENTED SPORTING ACTIVITIES**

The second type of additional activities is also best known within sports clubs but is less associated with the prevention of dropouts from sports clubs. Possibly this is therefore often less structured in the policy of club management. I would like to call these activities recreational-oriented activities. This is related to factor 3 'Relatedness' in keeping youngsters involved. eu. From years of experience within the gymnastics world, both from executive and policy perspectives at both local and national level, I dare to say with confidence that because of this type of side activities, many young people will stay involved with the club. This type of additional activities involves a huge potential of possible activities that the participants take part in to have a good time together.

### **QUALITY**

With - again! - well-chosen and well-organized activities that fit in with the experience of the young people, they will find the club even more meaningful to them. Depending on age, context, local youth culture etc. you could think of watching movies, a video game competition, geocaching tours, musical productions, water activities and so on. A large part of the success of the summer camps of sports federations is due to the recreational-oriented activities! Sporting clubs and associations that offer this type of activities in a structured way and that support this in policy and facilitate this with budget, have -as we say in Dutch- 'gold in their hands'. There is ample experience within sports associations in supporting framework formation precisely for this type of activities.

### **REALITY**

Unfortunately, this does not always seem to be given enough priority at the local level "because the sport itself is of course more important". Members of the board who make such statements would do well to investigate what the club's objective is. When it comes to facilitating life-time sports practice by members of the club, the above statement may need to be reconsidered. If these recreation-oriented activities are organized by the young people themselves, the extra is effective. They become even more involved with the club and probably know best what is attractive to their peers. One of the possibilities to shape the organizational talent of young people is the program I am P.A.



### 3. I AM P.A.

P.A. stands for professional assistant. This Good Practice was developed by Special Heroes Netherland (see [www.specialheroes.nl](http://www.specialheroes.nl)) and focuses on the somewhat youngsters between ages 14 - 19 years. The starting point is the conviction that every young person has talents and is entitled to a meaningful place within the sports club. Everyone is and can be part of the club! Sometimes this active participation is not directly related to the sport itself, but more the assistant positions within the club as an organization. Often in collaboration with a local or regional educational institution, the program I am P.A. prepares young people for a place or task within the club where they can act independently. Every club has something to offer, whether it is an assistant for the trainer, the catering in the club canteen, the landscaping of the site, material management, or media.

### IMPORTANT

The importance for the club is clear: many hands make the work better done and young people who might otherwise leave are hooked up to the club. The youngsters have great interest in the sports club. Doing something important for the club strengthens self-confidence because they can use their energy and creative ideas and thereby show courage and talent. This provides valuable experiences that will certainly come in handy later both in and outside the sport! The program I am P.A. from Special Heroes in Netherlands focuses on pupils from special education and practical education. As a member of the board or a committee, you do not need to have much imagination to see the opportunities for all young people and not just for members of the club who no longer see the challenge in the sport itself.

“ I obtained my diploma for the Sport PA course. At the end we organized a soccer tournament. I now know that I want to become a sports teacher.”

(Kyara)

# OVER-EXCITED YOUNGSTERS

Hey coach, time to play, isn't it?

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**Your job or voluntary work is performed in the area of sports and you spend a lot of time on the sports field, in the hall, in the forest or by the swimming pool. You try to pass and share your passion for sport with a group of young teenagers. You will certainly recognize this situation then: you are doing the utmost to help everyone improve and to have fun too. So, you try to explain that if you do this first and then that and you practice well, you should be able to do that and leave this and then later you will find that ..... Do you get it now? Probably not! That is what this blog is about.**

## DISCIPLINE?

The confusion mentioned above is exactly what happens with young teenagers who want to do nothing more than exercise, while at least you want to explain the basics of the training to them. Fortunately, many of these youngsters are able to focus their attention on what you have to say. To get back to practice as soon as possible! And then you just hope that something has changed about what you wanted to make clear. Often it is immediately clear whether you succeeded, to your great frustration or satisfaction as a coach.

Of course, the sports club can create an atmosphere in which the coach is in charge "and if you do not want to listen then ...", or you enforce discipline yourself. Maybe that is great for talents who are carved out of the right wood to become a top player, but the vast majority of young teenagers stay at the sports club because they experience that they enjoy training as well as progress in sport. For many young athletes, "having fun" means a lot of exercise and not having to listen much. The latter undoubtedly also has to do with puberty: long live the puberty time!

## **NOT EVERYONE!**

So far nothing new. These are the well-known bumps that you encounter as a coach of young athletes. Fortunately, the vast majority of coaches manage well and succeed in captivating and attracting almost everyone. Almost everyone? There are a few ‘opposers’ in every group of youngsters: the type of boy or a girl who apparently never listens, does not seem to understand things and, above all, keeps on talking while you are talking. Or always bouncing with the ball or himself while you just said that “he should finally be silent”.

There is a big risk that you always see the same youngster doing this, and that you will get irritated faster and faster. Maybe you react a little angrily, after which the ‘opposer’ will show more behaviour that you think is obstructive, and so on. This is no fun for anyone and with a bit of bad luck your entire team runs away! It is good to know that many athletes between 11 and 15 can hardly do anything about being over-excited and paying little attention. Besides this and above all, they just want to move as much as possible.

You do not have to stick labels like ADHD on them or point to parents who might not have taught their children to listen. Many of these athletes just have too much energy, are too motivated to exercise, have to sit still too much and suffer from their changing body (not just the hormones). A strict coach cannot change that. But what else is there to do?

## **THREE TIPS**

A lot can be done by the club, the parents and by you, being the coach. We suggest only three tips you can use tomorrow on the sports field, in the gym, in the forest or in the swimming pool. We assume that you have enough knowledge about your sport and about how to provide effective training.

### **1. COMPLIMENTS**

Include compliments in your instructions. Whatever happens during the training, make sure that you mention the positive things you see and mention everyone equally. You probably have to say something briefly about the things that are not okay, but limit this to the minimum. Give at least 10 times more compliments than negative comments. Even to those annoyingly busy children. Especially them!

## **2. QUICK AND VARIABLE**

Use short assignments and offer a variety of activities. Nothing fosters more fuss than complex assignments and longer waiting times. Boring exercises are "deadly." So, give assignments that are clear in one sentence. It helps enormously if you organise the materials you use in such a way that it is immediately clear what the youngsters should do. Make sure that the assignment can be completed quickly fairly successfully. Most coaches are sufficiently creative to ensure that repeating successful assignments a few times remains fascinating, but organize their training in a smart way, so that the youngsters experience a lot of variation in exercises.

## **3. LIMITS AND SUPPORT**

Set limits on the behaviour of the young athlete, but do not reject him/her as a person. Support the athlete by seeing him/her as a youngster that tries to do the best, he/she can. No matter how hard you try to do your best, it is natural there will always be things happening with an outcome that was not entirely intended. Then it is okay to correct the youngsters and make clear that not everything is possible. Always try to do this in such a way that the young athlete notices you cannot allow his/her behaviour, but you still see him/her as an okay person. This is probably the most difficult tip, because youngsters easily sense what you feel and think.

If you are regularly disturbed by the behaviour of the same athletes, it is terribly difficult to limit yourself to rejecting the behaviour you see. And yet, that is the best thing you can do! This is in very small things in your behaviour and it usually starts with the words you use. You probably tend to say, "What a misbehaving boy you are!" However, it is better to say, "Your behaviour is disturbing me at the moment" A small nuance that can have a great effect if you apply it consistently and believe in the difference. It may help keeping over-excited athletes involved in the training and the club. It truly is the art of coaching, and it is definitely worth it!

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## "SEEKING FOR THE IDEAL"

### Participatory practices for athlete-centered junior coaching

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**Athlete-centered junior coaching is ideally based on the opportunity for the young athletes to be heard and to have the opportunity to influence on matters that concern them in their sport. By enabling participation of young athletes, the coaches can enhance their motivation and inspiration to maintain in sports, take care of their health and wellbeing, challenge themselves to learn new skills and engage in team activities. This blog presents ethical principles and participatory practices for junior coaches to promote young athletes' involvement.**

#### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG ATHLETES?**

The athlete-centered coaching promotes the young athletes' holistic wellbeing, emphasizes their self-determination and autonomy, and targets to meet their individual needs. In recent years, a growing number of the research findings support the use of positive pedagogy and autonomy-supportive behaviour in junior coaching.

What parents and coaches wish for the young athletes is that every one of them is able to join the sport with enjoyment, feeling of appreciation and motivation and that the participation enables the children to develop their health and comprehensive wellbeing, self-esteem and self-perception, team and interaction skills. Overall, in junior coaching the learning of abilities that are beneficial in sports but also in all other aspects of the young athlete's life and future are considered important.

In recent years, many have realised the need to consider children's wellbeing and right to protection and participation in sports. For example, the growing number of children's overuse injuries and adolescents dropping out of sport club activities at early age have raised concerns about the

children's wellbeing in sports. At the same time, there is an ever-growing number of children who move inadequately to maintain their health.

Safeguarding the children's rights is the responsibility for all parents and adults working in the sport clubs. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children and youth have the right to give their opinions, and tell their views freely on issues that affect them. In addition, the child's views need to be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. This right needs to be considered also in sports. UNICEF published (2018) Children's rights in sports principles that emphasize the children's right to participate in sport in a safe and enjoyable environment.

## **SHOW INTEREST – DISCUSS – ESTEEM – ASK – LISTEN**

One of the key elements in creating a safe and enjoyable environment supporting youth participation in sports is the interaction between the coach and the young. The I-D-E-A-L- principle concretizes the basic practices for the junior coaches to consider in interaction with the young athletes. The I-D-E-A-L -principle guides the coach also to build open and respectful communication that enhances the young athlete's involvement, learning and self-confidence, and help the coaches to identify the individual needs of the athlete.

- I** = Show Interest in young athletes' views and opinions.
- D** = Discuss with young athletes and seek solutions that are in their best interest.
- E** = Esteem and show appreciation for the young athletes' point of views and tell how their views have had an impact on the decisions made. Reasons for decisions should be explained in a manner that the young athletes can understand them.
- A** = Ask athletes regarding the issues they consider important to have influence on.
- L** = Listen in respectful way what the young athletes are telling you and take the athletes' opinions and views into consideration when making decisions that will affect them in their sport.

### **It is important indeed that the athletes**

- ✓ have an active role in the decision making process
- ✓ have a variety of ways to express their opinions and their views
- ✓ have the right NOT to share their opinions or views regarding their sport
- ✓ are given information about the results of the questionnaire, group discussions
- ✓ and how the information is being used
- ✓ are consulted and discussed with how the results will affect their sport practices

When the athlete can trust the coach and the climate in sporting activities is safe, acceptable and encouraging, the young can rely to have their voices heard regarding the hopes, needs and worries about the sporting activity. Feeling of trust and acceptance also enables the athlete, parent and the coach to react and respond if something hinders child's wellbeing and motivation in sports.

## **PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES – WHAT AND HOW**

Participatory practices include a range of activities that the coach can use and modify according to the needs, timeframe and individual needs of the youth involved. The positive, respectful and safe atmosphere and interaction is the base for all participatory actions. In addition, the coach can ask the children and youth, how they wish to participate and what decisions they wish to have influence on.

Useful issues to involve the youth include e.g. common rules and practices in sports and in the team, factors that influence motivation in sport and ways to enhance enjoyment and learning in trainings and goals for the team and/or season. Also, the coach can ask the athletes to identify their own and team's strengths and areas of improvement. It is also useful to gather information about the atmosphere in the team on individual basis, identify how to enhance the learning, feeling of belonging and acceptance for the individual children.

## **STEP 1. CHOOSE THE MOST SUITABLE WAY TO COLLECT THE YOUTH'S PERSPECTIVES CONSIDERING THE CONTEXT AND TIMEFRAME.**

Before involving the young athletes, they need to understand that participation is voluntary and that they can safely express their views. If the coach suspects that the young might be afraid to express their views openly in front of the coach or team, or the issue is sensitive, then the young athletes' views can be gathered anonymously by using for example a questionnaire or an application.

### **Examples of participatory practices:**

- ☒ Individual and strength-based conversations with the athletes on regular basis
- ☒ Individual questionnaires (voluntary, anonymous if needed)
- ☒ Strength-based group discussions
- ☒ Workshops with creative and functional methods: planning of the upcoming season and goals together, identifying what needs to be done to achieve the goals.
- ☒ Questions written on the flipchart and an opportunity to answer them with post-it-notes
- ☒ Quick feedback round with positive notes and issues to develop after each training session for example during stretching etc.

**Food for thought!** Put into practice “Athletes in charge” week where athletes act as coaches: they plan and implement all the exercises and drills during that week. The youth feel empowered and the coach can have new ideas for the training sessions. Based on a lived experience, this is very worthwhile, a win-win situation for the athletes and the coach!



## **STEP 2. COLLECT THE VIEWS OF THE ATHLETES WITH THE CHOSEN METHOD.**

Remember to emphasize strengths and solutions in all discussions and information gathering!

### **Individual discussions or questionnaires (examples of themes/questions)**

- ☒ How many times per week do you wish to train? What is the optimal length of a training session for you?
- ☒ What is the best thing about taking part in the training?
- ☒ What do you wish to change in the training sessions or issues involved in sport participation?
- ☒ What would your dream training sessions be like? What would be the first step to achieve that?
- ☒ What motivates you to do sports and this type of sport?
- ☒ What are your strengths as an athlete/ team member? What are the team's strengths? What do you wish to learn to do better? What should the team do better?
- ☒ How do you wish me as a coach to support your learning and involvement in sports?
- ☒ Imagine the upcoming season and think about an enjoyable season – can you describe it to me? What would it be like?
- ☒ Is there something that you worry about? Have you noticed any teasing or bullying in your sport (in your team)? Would you like to tell more about it?
- ☒ Is there something else you wish to discuss?

### **Group discussions / Workshops before and/or after the sport season**

- ☒ A team or a group of individual athletes can for example plan actions or create shared goals for the upcoming season by discussing together with the coach. The coach can support the involvement of each athlete so that everyone can have their voices heard and influence the planning.
- ☒ The coach can use functional/creative methods for example drawing, photographing and writing on post-it-notes.

### **STEP 3. DISCUSS AND REFLECT THE MAIN RESULTS OF THE GATHERED INFORMATION WITH THE CHILDREN (WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ANONYMITY OF THE PARTICIPANTS)**

It is useful for the coach and the youth to hear and to reflect what changes and decisions are made based on the collected information. The children have the right to have information on how their views influence since it creates trust that the youth understand that their opinions are appreciated and considered. However, involving youth in decision-making does not mean that the children can decide by themselves. Adults are always responsible that the decisions are based on the best interests of the child. In the step 3, the coach can gather feedback about the chosen participatory practice and consider the needed changes for the next training session. The most important part for the coach in the step 3 is to **“Talk the walk, walk the talk”** – meaning that the decisions made together with the youth are put into practice, followed and reflected on how they work.

At best, the participatory practices enabling the active involvement of the youth are part of everyday interaction with the young and used in regular practices in the sport club. By fostering the youth involvement with the participatory coaching practices, the coach can create training sessions and team actions that meet the needs and interests of the youth and inspire the learning, motivation and empowerment for all.

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# CO-CREATING A SAFE SPORTING ENVIRONMENT



Every athlete should be safe, supported, and empowered in sports. Safe sports refers to actions, which provide a safe and positive environment for physical, emotional and social development. It promotes wellbeing with an atmosphere free from bullying and harassment.

The co-creation of a safe sporting environment needs every athlete's, coach's, sports club actor's and parent's commitment. All the actors should understand how the safe sporting environment is created and how it affects everyone's performance and collaboration positively.

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## SOCIAL BONDING AND TEAM BUILDING

**One of the key elements for young athletes to participate in sports activities is the sense of belonging. This blog opens up the topic HOW the coach can support the team building, create positive and safe training atmosphere and bring joy as well as good team spirit to the training sessions.**

The sense of belonging in the team is one of the main reasons why young athletes remain motivated and do not drop out of sports activities. A coach of young athletes has a big responsibility when talking about team building and social bonding among young athletes. Good team spirit and safe training atmosphere bring a sense of belonging and joy not only for the youngsters, but also for their coaches.

*“ In my experience, there are 3 main reasons why youngsters do not drop out:  
1: group dynamics and social environment, 2: coach as a trustworthy person,  
3: the geographic distance between home and trainings hall.*

*Well the last one I can't influence, but the first two are my duty to fulfil.”*

*(Coach Michael from the U14 Handball Girls team  
at the sports club UHC Graz)*

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS - BUILDING A TEAM

Participation in an activity does not automatically promote inclusion or a sense of belonging. Involvement develops into the relationship between the individual and the community, and the conditions are created by supporting both the individual and the community. Building coach-athlete and athlete-athlete relationship is based on trust and mutual respect. When the coach shows trust and respect to the athletes, the athletes respond in the same way. Sensitivity towards the needs of the team as well as a single athlete is a useful skill for the coach.



Knowing the athletes individually, taking the time to getting to know especially the new ones and making them feel welcome help to improve the team spirit and cohesiveness. The coach can observe signs such as changes in behaviour and feelings or fragmentary engagement in the activities. The coach should respond as soon as possible by asking whether there is something the athlete wants to discuss with the coach.

For young athletes, the sports activities provide an opportunity to develop their communication and teamwork skills. The coach acts as a model for constructive discussion, guides the youngsters to behave in a responsible and respectful way and engages everyone in the conversation and thoughts sharing.

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR THE COACH

#### During the training session:

- ✓ use **team building activities** at the beginning and end of the training sessions (see below)
- ✓ co-create **a welcome ritual** with the youngsters (cheering in the group)
- ✓ encourage and give **positive feedback** during the training sessions: it is encouraging and motivating to hear that you are good at something! However, consider that there are different ways to do so, and everyone needs a different approach.
- ✓ **switch pairs and use group rotation** to prevent the formation of small groups
- ✓ give the team the possibility to make **co-decisions** and bring in their ideas
- ✓ offer **fun activities** and freedom to choose from a variety of activities once in a while
- ✓ enable **moments of success for everyone** and challenge the athletes in a good way, by offering exercises that are not too easy and not too difficult
- ✓ hold **open and constructive discussions** and be interested in youngsters' life and things that inspire them

- ✓ use a lot of **“guiding questions”** to bring up the positive team spirit:
  - where did we succeed together?
  - what went well today?
  - how could we manage even better?
  - how did you help the teammates today?
  - how did others help you today?
- ✓ use **short feedback discussions** at the end of every training session to create possibilities for the athletes to express their opinions and feelings and learn how to give feedback to each other in an empowering way. The guiding questions will help you here too!
- ✓ in conflict situations, talk with the team right away and use the guiding questions again to ease up the talking and give a chance for everyone involved to tell his/her opinion and thoughts
- ✓ talk with a single athlete first and then together with all the athletes involved, then the whole team and the parents, if needed

#### **Before and after training sessions:**

- ✓ create **ground rules** together with the athletes
- ✓ ask for **regular feedback** of the training sessions, activities and the coaching
- ✓ take time to talk with the youngsters, also about topics that do not concern the training itself: How is school work going? How is the situation at home? What do you do with your friends outside the training sessions?
- ✓ give everyone a chance to feel as “the youngster of the day/the star of the team” at some point e.g.:
  - every birthday, a youngster could bring a birthday cake to the training session and sit together with everyone after the training to celebrate

### Outside the training sessions:

- ✓ organize common events also outside the training session (Christmas party, summer party, carnival training, parents-kids tournament...)
- ✓ member of the month event: once a month one randomly picked team member decide the special event they do in their regular place
- ✓ make the athletes feel part of the sports club (team photos, team wear, stickers, goodies)
- ✓ present the team members on the web page/social media
- ✓ once a month or 3 times a year with a special activity, e.g cinema, hiking, swimming, skiing, camping, baking together

“Whenever one of the girls in my team celebrates her birthday, we take 10 minutes of our 60 minutes training session to celebrate together and eat some cake. Every time I can see that this binds them together.”  
(Coach of a girl team)

## USING TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN TRAINING SESSIONS

There are many benefits from team building activities: higher perceptions of self-worth, enjoyment, better teamwork skills and athletic competence, social acceptance and physical appearance. Based on studies, also coaches have noticed that their motivational and communication skills with the athletes have improved by using the team building activities.

These activities include for example problem-solving tasks that require:

- engagement of each team member
- listening to each other
- sharing of ideas
- communication
- cooperation

Team building at its best gives the athletes and coaches experience of fun, trust and acceptance and opens the door for lifelong friendships and memorable experiences.

## **SAFE AND TRUSTING ATMOSPHERE IN TEAM BUILDING**

In a safe atmosphere, you can make mistakes and try again, without being afraid of a punishment or becoming an outsider. Promoting safe and supporting atmosphere during sports activities thus includes encouragement of trying new skills. Then the young athletes are not ashamed if they do not succeed. When the young athletes feel safe, they can express their feelings and thoughts and try to achieve new skills. They do not worry about what others might think in case of failure.

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# KEEP WARM AND ENJOY THE SPORT!

## Warm-up and team building

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**The basic element that occurs at the beginning of the training sessions is a warm-up. We all know the main purposes and importance of the warm-up. Have you ever thought that you, as coach, create a positive atmosphere already during the first minutes of the training sessions? Why not use the warm-up to involve the young athletes and build the team spirit together?**

The main aim of this blog is to encourage an innovative look at the warm-up as part of training. In addition to properly conducted exercises preparing the body for effort, there should also be room for team building activities, which is increasingly emphasized as a key factor in good training practices [more in the blog: Social bonding and team building].

What are the benefits of a good warm-up?

We asked experienced trainers what the benefits of a good warm-up are. Here are their statements:

“*A proper warm-up is a calm start and a progressive increase in intensity. This is a series of repetitive exercises. I start the warm-up with exercises for the upper limbs, then the lower limbs and the trunk. At the end of the warm-up, I apply a fun game that children choose, or I propose one.*”  
(Coach Magdalena, age 39; athletics)

“*A good warm-up, I think is: 1. preparing the body for the effort, increasing its capacity, 2. preventing injuries, 3. preparing mentally for competition and stimulating the nervous system accordingly.*”  
(Coach Michael, age 32; fencing)

## DON'T FORGET ABOUT EDUCATION ASPECT!

A good coach should strive to teach young athletes the right structure of the warm-up and the right exercise technique in the right order. If children are taught from an early age how to warm up properly before physical activity, this will become their good habit.

Did you know that a properly conducted warm-up increases muscle temperature by 2–4°C, which increases muscle strength up to 15–20%?

## WHAT SHOULD A GOOD WARM-UP LOOK LIKE?

Theoretical knowledge of many aspects of a good warm-up is an important background for every coach. However, in order to achieve success in the form of full involvement of young athletes in the warm-up, we needed to see their point of view.

We asked them a question: What should a good warm-up look like? Here are the answers we got:

*“ A good warm-up warms up the muscles before further training so that no injuries happen. A good warm-up is one in which I perform basic technical exercises in a certain order. I like to do them by myself, not in pairs or teams because I am satisfied that I can do them really well and precisely. I also like the warm-up to be fun, it's energetic, stimulating and fun”.*

*(Zuzia, 11 / athletics)*

*“ A good warm-up is a lot of different exercises that get us started. A good warm-up should start with some fun and not be too long”.*

*(Filip, 11 years old / football)*

*“ A good warm-up is a carefully repeated exercise in which muscles work fast and become flexible. The warm-up is done to warm up the muscles so that no injury happens. A good warm-up has some time for a game. The game is important and necessary for children, and it gives them joy and freedom of action in a group”.*

*(Max, 13 years old / fencing)*

From the statements of young athletes, it can be concluded that they have knowledge about the structure of the warm-up, its basic importance for training. They fully accept the scheduled exercises in the warm-up, but they also expect to have fun, which is an element giving them joy and freedom of movement.

## **NEW IN COACHING PRACTICES: WARM-UP AND TEAM BUILDING**

How to get young athletes fully involved in the warm-up? The key may seem to be to arouse their internal motivation both to perform the exercises and to cooperate in the team. How to achieve these goals? The knowledge of team building can help; it requires adding theoretical and practical activities to the warm-up.

### **Examples of theoretical activities for coaches:**

Awakening of internal motivation

Carry out conversations aimed at increasing involvement in the warm-up.

Ask questions:

- Why do we warm-up?
- Why do we do it together?
- What are the benefits of teamwork?

It is best to do it as part of the introduction to the training – before the warm-up.

### **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COACH ON TEAM BUILDING DURING THE WARM-UP**

- ✓ Add a game or task in the warm-up that will bring the members of the group closer together. Praise or encouragement for good cooperation will have a positive effect on the willingness to co-create a team, and act in its favour through involvement in the tasks performed.
- ✓ To build trust in the team members, include warm-up tasks like exercises in pairs, smaller and larger groups. Change the members of the pairs and groups where the exercises are performed during the warm-up.

- ✓ Arrange for the children to wear sports clothes with the club logo or make sure that the participants in the sports activities are dressed in the same way, which will cause:
  - Creation of a bond and feeling of being part of the team.
  - Elimination of socio-economic disparities among children, giving everyone an equal opportunity to participate in sport.
  - Improving the quality and effectiveness of training.
- ✓ Identify people in the group who want to be leaders, and assign them additional tasks. Show them their place in the team - explain to the group what their role in the team will be.
- ✓ If you have observed weaker people in the group (with a lower level of motor skills or communication skills), take appropriate actions to help them to fully function in the team, e.g.:
  - Talk about the fact that everyone is an important part of the team.
  - Assign the person a task/tasks for which he or she will be responsible.
- ✓ As a coach, set a good example and get actively involved in the warm-up by doing the tasks together with the group. This will translate into a stronger sense of community and increase the internal motivation of the young athletes to become more involved in the tasks performed during the warm-up.



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# HOLISTIC CARE OF A YOUNG ATHLETE

How to do sport with children and youth  
in a healthy, safe and enjoyable way!

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**It is generally known that regular physical activity leads to a healthier and happier kid. Progressive coaches and parents realize the complexity of positive impacts of sport on their children in physical, psychical and social areas. Unfortunately, not all grass-root level sports clubs respect the needs of the young athletes and often emphasise performance, drill and extensive training load over the general motor skills development, joy of movement or a healthy physical activity. If you want to learn which crucial aspects should be taken into consideration within the holistic care of young athletes, this blog is exactly for you!**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MOVEMENT IN A HEALTHY LIFE

Physical activity plays a very important role in the health of any individual, as a prevention means of serious diseases or as a solution for already existing health troubles. The generally known diseases that may be influenced by physical activity are cardiovascular diseases or diabetes, among others. World Health Organisation has defined insufficient physical activity as the fourth leading risk factor of premature death and disease emergence on the global level. It is not easy to admit that older generations still had much more active movement in their lives in comparison with today's children and youth.

Kids miss the fundamentals of athletics, gymnastics or ball sports games that were common in the past, not only in courses of school physical education. The interest of children in sport and physical activity is unfortunately declining, along with the interest of many teachers.

The lack of natural movement is often replaced by structured leisure time clubs, where the coaches often have to work with kids who miss the above-mentioned motor fundamentals, related to a wrong body posture

or problems with motor apparatus during movement coordination. Very often kids get injured and their imbalances get even worse.

## PREVENTION OF INJURIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

In the Czech Republic, every young athlete that is registered in the sports union has to go through a yearly basic sports medicine check-up. The child is examined by means of load diagnostics in sport. With this testing, the doctor can diagnose the performance of the child and his or her heart functioning. During this check-up, the motor apparatus is examined as well, but unfortunately, we do not think this examination is sufficient.

## DIRECT COOPERATION WITH A PHYSIOTHERAPEUTIC CENTRE

In the Bulldogs Brno floorball club, we are aware of the fact that some sports disciplines are quite one-sided, including floorball. That is why we started a direct cooperation with a physiotherapeutic centre. Our sports kids may see a physio specialist (voluntarily) and in case of problems with motor apparatus, they get prescribed group or individual exercises, rehabilitation, galvanism therapy and so on.

*“ Our club is aware of the positive impact of sports physiotherapy not only on the elite sportsmen, but also on children and youth, within systematic increase in their sports performance. Besides the injury treatment, we focus especially on injury prevention and regeneration during preparatory and competition periods. Kids doing sport under the supervision of physiotherapy specialists thus leads to a healthy way of spending their leisure time in our club”.*

*(President of Bulldogs Brno)*

Furthermore, compensation exercises and proper stretching are included in each training session. Like this, our kids have regular monitoring and our coaches can develop their skills in a proper and healthy way. The coaches also have regular schooling with the physiotherapists. Sometimes the physiotherapists even visit our training personally during the main season and evaluate the condition of children as well as the work of the coaches. They also check whether there is a child who needs an individual approach. If there is such a kid, we consult this issue with his or her parts and recommend a subsequent specialised doctor care.

*“It would make me very happy if sports kids and youth automatically considered stretching and compensation exercise a normal part of training, and thus decreased the risk of muscles damage or injuries. With proper muscle preparation and decrease of muscle imbalance, the players will reach better sports performance, and they will be quicker and more stable in personal duels. The parents’ support and home checks of the given exercise are needed as well. The particular exercises are selected by the coach, after consulting with our physiotherapists. However, if a muscle or joint is injured anyway, the players may go through a therapy at our specialized rehabilitation ambulance.”*

*(Iva, the physiotherapist)*

In this form of cooperation, we also see a great advantage in case of possible injuries. If our youth player is injured, we can exchange the information with movement specialists in a more effective way and we know how long the convalescence should last. Both coaches and the doctors know exactly whom to address for more necessary background information.

## NOT ONLY PHYSICAL ASPECTS MATTER

When talking about the holistic care of a young athlete, we definitely cannot miss the area of the psychological aspects that also have a great impact on healthy and enjoyable kids and youth sport. Nowadays, we can see a great shift in thinking of the importance of sports psychology, not only on the elite sport level. Experience shows that athletes who consult regularly with a sports psychology expert tend to score better in their sports discipline and report greater well-being and basic psychological needs to be satisfied.

*“We realize that sometimes sport may bring injuries or pain resulting from the training overload. We are happy that the care of children athletes in the Bulldogs Club is done the way it is. Our daughter started having problems with her knees recently but thanks to the existing cooperation of the club with a physiotherapist, we knew immediately who to address. After the physio check-up she was unfortunately informed she needs to take a break from running during training. But our daughter’s coaches shared the information directly with the physiotherapist and therefore she can continue going to training sessions, just with a bit of adapted training plan.”*

*(A parent)*

What should we as grass root level coaches take into consideration then? In Bulldogs Brno, we think kids and youth sport is a long-term mutual teaching and learning process. Therefore, we recommend a lot of empathy, mutual respect and proper communication, above all!

When children come to our sports clubs and teams, their identity is formed and comparisons between an individual child and his or her peers are very common, which may lead to the feelings of superiority or inferiority. Participation in sport provides a chance for the children and youth to express themselves and develop independence eventually. At the same time, it can be very difficult for the kids to depersonalise comments from peers, coaches, parents and other adults. Negative comments, related to a particular skill or activity, may be understood incorrectly as a sign of disfavour or even hatred by the feedback provider.

Coaches and adults must therefore choose carefully the comments and phrases they use to express their support. It is useful to use phrases that mention the effort, the attempt and implementation rather than just the achievement or success. It is also advisable to find one's one way through the balance between too much praise and too much criticism.

## **MAKE THE KIDS' SPORT MORE ENJOYABLE!**

If we are able to meet the young athletes' basic psychological needs and provide them with a motivational climate within our training sessions, games or even common moments after the training, we can expect a deeper love and adherence to our sports discipline.

In the kids' sport, we can often see two coach / parent approaches based on two extreme points of view. Some believe that sports help children develop **teamwork** skills, **self-confidence**, resilience, moral character, and other personal strengths. Others are convinced of the dark side of youth sports, believing that young athletes develop aggressive traits like **bullying** and the need to dominate their opponents on and off the field.

Generally, studies indicate three important aspects of sports participation that affect positive youth development and fun during sport - intensity, continuity, and balance. A combination of all three offers the greatest benefits to our kids!

### **1. INTENSITY**

Kids who spend more time in sports activities have greater benefits than youth who participate at lower levels or not at all. With greater time commitment, children master the skills and superior knowledge of tactics and strategy much better!

### **2. CONTINUITY**

The stability and duration of how children participate across their adolescent years is also important. Studies have shown that continuous dedication to a sports discipline is more beneficial than intermittent participation during the youth sports stage. Kids who visit sports clubs regularly also have more opportunities to interact with their teammates, which is great for learning to cope with the interpersonal challenges of working with others.

### **3. BALANCE**

Not easy to achieve, but very important. Try to achieve a balance between the kid's sports and other activities. Not only sport is a suitable leisure time activity. Try to find some present real-world challenges that encourage youth to develop a civic **identity** and see a world beyond a game of winning and losing.

### **FINAL TIPS!**

Communicate with your kids and ask them questions. Show them that you care not only about their sports skills and about techniques, but also how they are! Physically and psychically! Maybe they are just not having a good day and a spontaneous icebreaker, or a funny movement game can be a better solution than a planned technique drill based training session! Do not be afraid of experiments! We wish you good luck and many happy kids devoted to your sport!

Stina Kuhlefelt & Miika Niemelä, Icehearts ry and Anita Ahlstrand & Pekka Anttila, Metropolia UAS, Finland

# HOW ARE U DOING?

## A mentoring model to support the sports coach

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**Who has the responsibility for the coach's coping and the methods they use to coach? How can a sports club support an individual junior coach and why is club support important? This blog launches the Icehearts' mentoring model and the importance of peer support in the work of their educators. Only a wellbeing adult can make young athletes feel well!**

The purpose of the mentoring model, created by Icehearts, is to support the educators, as they call their coaches. The mentor is another coach who is also a member of the Icehearts' support team.

Each Icehearts team is led by a full-time educator who also plays the role of a coach, when it comes to exercise. Educator is an adult alongside each youngster, also when the growing up is challenging for the youngster.

### **THE MENTORING MODEL WORKS AS A SUPPORT FOR COACHING IN ANY SPORTS CLUB**

Regular meetings between the mentor and the coach support the coach's confidence in his / her potential and ability to interact with young athletes. It helps the coach to be for example approachable for the youngster.

The mentor's job is not just to give instructions, but to act as a listener who helps the coach to be aware of and evaluate his or her own behaviour. In addition, the mentor acts as a peer support who encourages and builds faith in the coach's own strengths and ability to coach young athletes in a respectful way.

## 6 FACTS ABOUT ICEHEARTS' MENTORING MODEL

- scheduled meetings take place every 5 weeks
- mentoring is pre-calendared to ensure realization
- appointment lasts about 60–90 minutes
- the same mentor is available in every appointment for strong trust and uninterrupted process
- the meeting is carried out in a relaxed and purposeful conversation, for example over a cup of coffee or in the open air.
- the checklist serves as a basis for discussion

## CHECKLIST

- ☒ How are you doing?
- ☒ Your wellbeing 4–10? Is it better or worse than last time? What have you done in a different way?
- ☒ What does your year plan look like? (games, camps, events)
- ☒ Is there any need for education?
- ☒ Do you get enough support to your coaching?
- ☒ Do you feel that you are self-directed (= do you consider the needs of the young athletes first, consider individually each athlete's needs and start acting) or do you expect guidance from the sports club?
- ☒ Any wishes to the sports club/sports organization?
- ☒ Anything else you want to discuss?

## HOW ARE YOU DOING?

In Icehearts, the feeling of empowerment is closely related to the conversation between the educator and the mentor. Empowerment always starts with considering one's own goals and starting points, and the moment of discussion is a personal experience. The casual question "how are you doing?" is in fact the most important question and the honest answer to that is the essence of the mentoring moment. It is also important to discuss how the educator is doing in his or her daily life and outside of sports club activities.

*“ I felt I had been seen and heard. I got some good tips on where I can find information about my job / job responsibilities. I also received feedback and spiritual support for a small "not-so-nice event" that happened to me. I had to deal with a lot of things that I wouldn't want to share with the whole team. This is good to go on!”*

*(Icehearts educator)*

Empowerment is a process that requires regular meetings and reflecting on the issues that the coach thinks are important. Being heard has a positive effect on the coach's self-esteem and acting. It is important to highlight the strengths of the coach and to face them as a valuable and unique person.

## **HOW DO I FACE YOUNG ATHLETES AND WHAT WORDS DO I CHOOSE?**

The coach's feeling that he or she is valued comes from small things like the mentor's way:

- ☒ focus on the conversation: put the phone away and choose a peaceful place
- ☒ show genuine interest: expressions, gestures, genuine and enthusiastic comments
- ☒ give feedback: first, give positive and encouraging feedback, say out loud where the coach has been successful
- ☒ give the coach time and space in conversation
- ☒ rely on the process: there is no immediate solution to everything
- ☒ use your own personality and strengths in the conversation
- ☒ look into the eyes and smile



## WHAT THOUGHTS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED OF MENTORING?

*“ You get to know yourself when you see repetitions in your own activities or when it's time to breathe.”*

*“You learn to recognize the signs of exhaustion ... where I can get help with anything.”*

*“Awareness and utilization of one's strengths is a bridge to working with others.”*

*(Comments from Icehearts educators)*

## REGULAR MENTORING WORKS IN MANY WAYS

- a more holistic view of one's own behaviour and operating environment
- a better understanding of the effects of one's actions and behaviour
- the desire to share their knowledge with others
- desire to interact with others and listen to others
- better acceptance of different kind of people, diversity and different approaches

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## ROLE OF PARENTS IN SPORT

How to include parents in the sports club activities and share the same goal  
- a happy and motivated moving kid!

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**Do you have to deal with passive parents with no interest in their children's sport? On the contrary, do you have to ask parents to stop interfering in your coaching job? In this blog, we will introduce different methods of including parents in the Bulldogs sports club community so that they feel important, useful and supportive.**

### PARENTS AS MODELS FOR THEIR KIDS

Family is the basic element of a kid's successful professional life or sports path. The parents can very specifically contribute to the fulfilment of the meaningful learning needs of their kid. Parents act as a behaviour role model and as an idol to be imitated and followed. They are the natural authority for their kids. They have a great impact on their kids' attitude to movement and sport. Undoubtedly, parents comprise a major contributing factor in children's sport.

Movement is a biological need of children, which decreases along with age. This may often be caused by an inappropriate parent model. In the best case, parents can teach their kids positive habits and attitudes important in life. One of these areas is definitely a healthy lifestyle, nutrition and physical activity. If parents are not used to spending their free time actively and doing sport, it is very likely for their kid to have the same lifestyle in future. Parents are recognised for their important role in providing the necessary financial and logistical support to enable sporting opportunities for their kids.

It is generally known that parents should go for walks with their kids, ride a bike, ski, swim or hike. Even if we are not talking about a top sports performance here, the result is very similar in the area of the

kid's development. When did you last go cross-country skiing or build a snowman with your kids?

## **PARENTAL COMMITMENT TO THEIR CHILD'S SPORT**

Parents are often the primary socializing agents for getting children involved, often teaching the first steps referring to sports skills, and many young elite athletes emphasize the supportive influence of their parents during their career. Parents who are or have been active athletes themselves may initially act as the child's first coach and are highly committed to their children's careers. They invest money, time, and emotional support into their kids.

## **TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE INTEREST?**

The parental involvement in their child's sport ranges from under involvement through moderate attitude to over involvement. Whereas moderate involvement seems to facilitate a sport career, both under involved, disinterested parents and, at the opposite extreme, overly engaged parents, may play a disruptive role.

As youth athletes with disinterested parents may lack the necessary instrumental and emotional support at home that would enable them to pursue a sport career, they are more likely to drop out from sport and need more support from other authorities, such as teachers or coaches. On the other hand, children with over involved parents do not complain about a lack of interest, but instead may perceive high levels of parental pressure. More active parental involvement may also suggest to children that they need to repay the investment of time, effort, and money made by parents.

You as a coach may kindly inform the parents of your sports kids, that if they want to encourage without pressuring, they need to refrain from becoming so involved with their child's sport that they take on responsibility for, or even interfere with, the training of the young athlete. During our training sessions or games, we often have to manage problems with emotional parents who are yelling at their playing kid from the stands of the sports hall. Sometimes the parents express negative comments even to the referee of the game. It is always a very uncomfortable moment both for the playing kid and the coach.

## PARENTS WITHIN THE SPORTS CLUB COMMUNITY

In our sports club, together with the parents, we focus on raising good athletes and good people in general from our sports kids. Therefore, we need to cooperate. For the coach, the trust and support of parents is very important. We want to create a friendly community together with the parents, where we do not see the parents only as those who pay the fee for their kid, who bring the kid to the training and take him home again. On the contrary, the parent is a crucial link in the child's motivation and an active member himself or herself. We support the parents to push our club - the place where their kids spend a lot of time - a step further.

## PRE-SEASON MEETINGS

At the beginning of each season, we organize pre-season meetings of coaches and parents of the kids of each age category. They are introduced to each other; the coaches evaluate the past season and training work and introduce their goals for the up-coming season. The coaches also explain the rules, requirements and principles of communication with the parents and the kids. Afterwards, a discussion follows that leads to the unification of common ideas and plans.

*“Regular activities and events (training sessions, parent council, etc.) are an ideal opportunity to build and support positive attitude of the parents to the Bulldogs Club and also to generate new ideas to improve the functioning of the club. During our discussions, we often talk about topics that primarily lead to one goal - creating motivating environment for the sports and social development of our kids. Speaking for myself, I'm very happy to be a part of this community and I think it's great that our community lives a floorball life together!”*

*(Tonda, a parent of a Bulldogs Club sports kid)*

## PARENT COUNCIL

Selected representatives of these parental meetings are then elected in the parent council that meets the club delegates several times per year. President of the club, head coach, marketing specialist and an assistant who are responsible for the law issues, propagation issues or group orders of sports equipment for the children, etc. join this meeting as well. The

club representatives present important issues to the parents and collect feedback. Thanks to these meetings, new projects, such as pre-Christmas team creating a new bags design or a club outlet session of second-hand floorball equipment, were organised.

## SPECIAL TRAINING SESSIONS FOR PARENTS

Besides the information sharing, we also organise special training sessions for parents several times per year. Coaches invite the parents who can thus experience a training session together with their kids. For the children, these training sessions are unique. They want to show their skills and they are much more motivated than during a normal training, when parents just sit on the stands of the sports hall. These special trainings usually take place twice a season, e.g. shortly before Christmas or at the very end of the season. By participating in these trainings, the parents show their kids their interest and active approach to sport and healthy lifestyle.

*“I have two daughters, aged 10 and 12 and they both play floorball. I enjoy recording the floorball games and sending the videos to the coaches. It's been the second year of my participation in the parent council. The first meeting of the council was quite emotional as it was the first opportunity for the parents to give feedback, especially on stuff that we are not happy about. Since then, many things have changed positively, and parental meetings are much calmer now. My wife and I, together with our daughters, come regularly to Friday training sessions.”*

*(a parent of a Bulldogs Club sports kid)*

We organise extra training sessions for active parents who are especially fond of floorball sport. They take place every Friday and focus directly on parents and friends of the club. We are very happy to see the kids joining these Friday trainings as well. Sometimes they take part in the game or they may work on their individual skills besides the floorball field.

## SEASONAL EVENTS

We realize the busy lifestyle and lack of time of the parents of our sports kids during the sports season. That is why we also want the parents to get to know each other in a non-formal environment before or after the season. Therefore, at the beginning of the new season, before Christmas

or as a closing of the finishing season, we organise special seasonal events, where they can meet each other and the coaches in a non-formal setting. Typically, we would organise a bowling tournament or barbecue party for them.

## **INFORMATION SHARING, SOCIAL NETWORKING**

This active parent community even has its own Facebook fun page called @bulldogsbrnolife. The parents themselves create and share the content of this page. Parents usually post photos from tournaments or joint events, videos or game results.

Grzegorz Zurek & Kamila Czajka, AWF Wroclaw and Jacek Stodolka AZS-AWF Wroclaw, Poland

# SPORTS CLUB AND SPORTS UNIVERSITY - COEXISTENCE AND COOPERATION

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**What are the benefits for the sports club of cooperation with university? How can the academic studies help the coach to understand the young athletes, meet their individual needs and prevent the sport related injuries? This blog tells how sports club AZS-AWF Wroclaw has built the cooperation with university AWF Wroclaw.**

## **MISSION OF THE SPORTS CLUB RELATED TO PARTICIPATION IN THE SPORT OF YOUNG ATHLETES**

A sports club is a place where healthy lifestyle, which is particularly important for a modern society, should begin and develop. If we remember that the foundation of maintaining health is physical activity (Harvard Medical School), which develops the body and supports intellectual development, it is impossible not to take into account that the sports club is the ideal environment in helping to achieve health and to prepare well for future life.

A sports club is also of great importance in building good attitudes that help an athlete to become involved in society and learn to function in it. In the club, the young athlete meets her/his peers who, like her/him, want to win and who want to feel good among others. Here she/he also meets coaches.

## **MISSION OF THE SPORTS UNIVERSITY RELATED TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH**

The Polish system of higher education includes sports universities. The university's sporting character is aimed at providing its graduates with knowledge and skills concerning sport and all that it entails. Therefore, it can be said that one of the key tasks of a sports university is to broaden

and spread knowledge about health, but also to use the knowledge of specialists in the field of medicine, physiotherapy, dietetics, sport or physical recreation to increase the level of health in the society.

This mission can be realized on different levels: education, research and relations with the environment. Among the various educational tasks of the university, it seems that one of the most important tasks is to develop in the student the ability to think critically, gain knowledge on their own and supplement it throughout their professional life, including the ability to adapt to changes taking place in the surrounding reality and respond to them quickly enough.

An obvious task of the university is to conduct scientific research. However, it is not only about the academic value, but the more important result is also the possibility to use it in practice. It is a particularly important task in a dynamically changing world where there is a lot of information available online that is often not scientifically verified.

## **SPORT CLUB – UNIVERSITY: EDUCATION OF COACHES IN THE METHODOLOGY OF TRAINING**

The most obvious field where the missions of the university and sports club overlap is the education of coaches. What is the difference between the knowledge passed on to coaches during their education at a sports university and the knowledge passed on after graduation, i.e. while working at the club?

In the first case, there is a significant amount of theoretical knowledge, which is enriched with practice (in a sports club, sports organizations or other forms of work in sport). It should be noted, however, that the scope of this practice is limited, because, as a rule, the knowledge transferred at the university is the basis for further self-education and self-development. Thus, the sports university gives the coach the necessary knowledge, which he/she must improve. The verification of his knowledge and competence is the good contact with the athletes and in the sports dimension - the results obtained by his charges.

What area of education does the coach get from working in a sports club? In this case, the emphasis is on practical solutions. In the case of a coach working with a team participating in competition between clubs, the essence of further education is to answer the question of how to conduct training to achieve success in sport. Therefore, the knowledge passed on



during training in a club or sports association is focused not on keeping the small athlete in the club and giving him/her a pleasant training form, but rather on the result that he/she will achieve individually or as a team member.

“*A poorly methodically prepared coach can cause a lot of damage, from physiological to psychological aspects. Methodically well conducted activities make participants happy and allow them to achieve their health or sports goals*

*(Olgierd, 50, experienced manager in the sport club)*

## **SPORT CLUB – UNIVERSITY: PEDAGOGY / PSYCHOLOGY**

For the average population, psychology and pedagogy are areas of knowledge, which at first glance are not directly related to sports training and participation in sport. Only when we stop for a moment to think about their role and meaning, we can see that they are important at every stage of work with the athlete. They refer to e.g. motivation, the way of conflict management, ability to cope with stress, building the right image of oneself, support in difficult moments or the way of building a team and relations. These two areas of knowledge are constantly evolving and they both need to be applied in the training of a young athlete according to their age and development phase.

Building trust between coach and athlete is one of the foundations of success. Showing the young athlete the value of participation in a sport seems to be the most important task of a coach at this stage of work with an athlete. It is a much more important task than the result, which in the case of young athletes must play a secondary role.

Cooperation between the club and university in terms of knowledge of human behaviour seems particularly important. While at the university the knowledge is highly theoretical, giving the basis for gaining further knowledge, in the work with a young athlete, this knowledge is constantly emphasized by the existing interpersonal relations and situations. However, in club work with athletes there is a risk that the result will become so important that it will dominate or even obscure what is a condition for obtaining it, such as a mutual trust or team strength.

*“ I was very lucky to have a great coach at the club, who additionally worked with people from the university and spent a lot of time to find the best way to make a team of us working together on the way to the goal”*

*(Marek, 23, student of sport)*

## **SPORTS CLUB – UNIVERSITY: HEALTH AND INJURIES**

Another area of the university-club cooperation concerns both theoretical knowledge and specific practical activities. In terms of passing on the theoretical knowledge to the future coach, the role of the university is obvious, because it is its basic task. In the contrast, the practical activities regarding the prevention of injuries take place mainly in the club, similarly to the treatment process, for which the club or the child's parents/ caretakers in consultation with the club are also usually responsible.

So where is it possible to cooperate between the university and the club? If the club is located on the premises of the university or uses its facilities, the student of sport learns to know the facilities, familiarizes himself/ herself with them, which gives a better chance to predict potential risks and thus reduce the risk of injury.

In modern sport, no one questions the role of a physiotherapist in work with an athlete anymore. Student of physiotherapy also plays an important role in the cooperation between the university and the club; they can practice in the club not only in the field of therapy when their patients during their studies are the club's players, but also in the field of preventing an injury by conducting educational activities among coaches, athletes or their parents.

The role of coach is also important in injury prevention and treatment. A coach who contemplates his work, considers the individual abilities of the athlete's body and tries to use this knowledge in such a way that it not only translates into sports benefit but also minimizes the risk of injury.

*“ For me, the most important thing was to acquire knowledge about injuries characteristic for a given discipline, boxing, it was equally important to learn about circumstances, limitations and possibilities of our work during sports competitions”*

*(Maciek, 24, student of physiotherapy)*

## SPORTS CLUB – UNIVERSITY: INTERNSHIP SUPERVISED BY PRACTITIONERS

A very good example of close cooperation between the club and the university is the possibility for students learning to work as coaches. Such an internship, supervised by an experienced coach, is a valuable experience allowing to prepare well for future professional work. It is even more valuable if the coach has managed to work out his work model, resulting from his professional experience. The interface of such knowledge combined with theoretical preparation for the profession of a coach can be very fruitful if there is a systematic exchange of thoughts between the trainee and his mentor in the club.

The club practice also provides an opportunity for the future coach to conduct independent reflection. Of course, there is a risk that the trainee will try to do the internship without reflection, reproducing the working methods he learned e.g. from the books. That is why the coach has a special role to play, as the wisdom of guiding the work of a junior colleague will allow the coach themselves to develop a model of work that is extremely valuable in every profession, i.e. self-reflection on their own work. Such self-reflection, in which one analyses the effects of one's own work taking into account its strengths and weaknesses, is open to constructive criticism and the search for new, unconventional ways of doing things is the best way to develop players entrusted to the coach.

“A coach for an apprentice in a sports club is like a lighthouse for a ship. Without his guidance, the trainee acts in the dark, does not know what to put more emphasis on and what is less important when working with the athlete”  
(Wiesław, 58, coach, judo coach, European champion)

The fields of close cooperation between the university and the sports club presented above do not limit other possibilities. Good preparation for the work of coaches depends to a large extent on how much both institutions will be convinced that they are dependent on each other, that their close cooperation serves the mission they carry.

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# COLLABORATION IN DEVELOPING THE ATHLETE-CENTERED COACHING PRACTICES



At best, the good practices are co-created in collaboration by combining different expertise-  
theoretical and practical knowhow and experiences of  
all stakeholders. The Kidmove's good coaching practices  
were developed together with coaches, athletes and  
their family members and professionals from different  
fields. Take a closer look at the co-development process  
of the Kidmove-project.

# ENHANCING JOY, MOTIVATION, EMPOWERMENT AND SAFETY IN JUNIOR SPORTS

The Kidmove project's collaborative  
development process

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**The Kidmove project's purpose was to identify, describe and disseminate good practices for junior coaching in order to support youth participation in sports. The good coaching practices enable young athlete's joy, motivation and empowerment in a safe sporting environment. This article presents the theoretical background and the international co-creation process behind the good practices.**

## WHY ARE GOOD PRACTICES FOR JUNIOR COACHING NEEDED?

Children and youth are entitled to have the possibility to participate in play, leisure activities including sports<sup>1,2</sup>. Active lifestyle and participation in sports have numerous benefits for children's overall development and wellbeing creating the basis for lifelong mobility and health<sup>3</sup>. Physical activity also supports the prevention of health risks resulting from sedentary lifestyle<sup>4,5</sup>. Thus, physical activity and involvement in leisure and sporting activities should be an integral part of daily life for all children and youth with different abilities and backgrounds.

The government sports policies in EU member countries emphasize the promotion of health and physical activity for children and youth<sup>6</sup>. A significant amount of children and young move, however, inadequately to stay healthy<sup>5,7</sup>. Daily habits of youngsters have changed because of new inactive leisure patterns (such as mobile phones and video games). Physical activity and involvement in organized sports decrease especially in adolescence.<sup>7</sup> Reasons behind the dropouts include factors such as: lack of motivation, poor relationship with coach or peers, pressure from



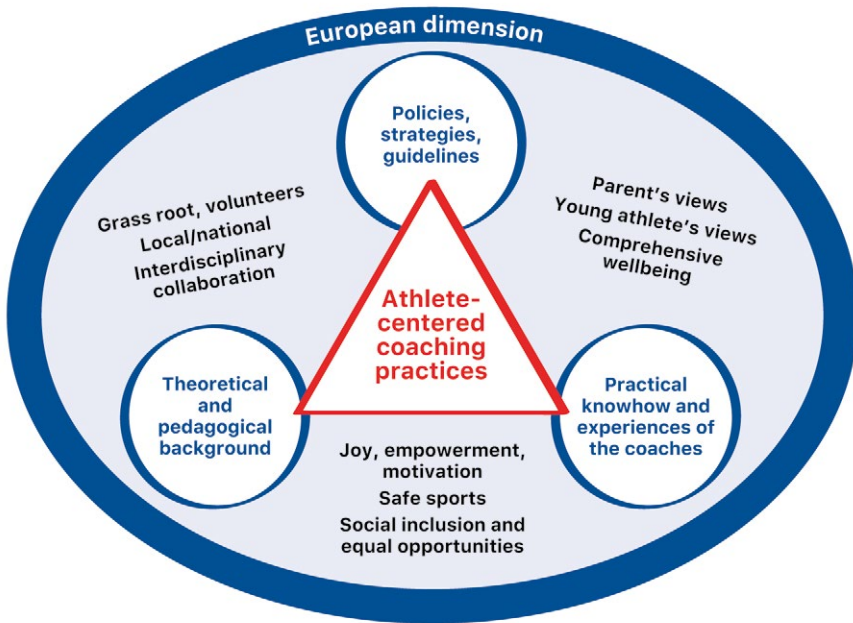
coach or parents, too much competition or fear of failures, weak sense of competence, too hard or monotonous training, sports related injuries<sup>8,9,10</sup>. In recent years, the number of overuse injuries in junior sports have grown<sup>11,12,13</sup>.

In many countries, the junior coaching is based on voluntary work and the contribution of these coaches on youngsters' active lifestyle, development and health is remarkable. The coaches in junior sports have the inspiring and challenging task to enable young athlete's participation, enjoyment and development in sports by providing a safe learning environment and guidance. Literature shows that the used coaching practices, relationship between the coach and the young athlete and overall sporting atmosphere in the sport club has influence on youngsters' participation in sports<sup>9,14,15</sup>. The coaches are in a central role in maintaining adolescent's interest and motivation towards sports involvement. Therefore, it is essential to identify and describe good coaching practices that enable the joy, empowerment and motivation of the young athletes and creation of safe sporting atmosphere and trainings.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND BEHIND THE KIDMOVE'S COACHING PRACTICES**

Recent literature for junior coaching emphasizes the use of athlete-centered coaching practices, positive pedagogy and autonomy-supportive behaviour<sup>16,17,18</sup>. These approaches were utilized as theoretical background in the good practices that were developed in the Kidmove project. In the Kidmove project's good practices for junior coaching integrate the coaches' practical knowhow, views of the young athletes and their family members, interdisciplinary theoretical and pedagogical background, strategies, guidelines and policies (see picture 1).

In the good coaching practices, the coach is an educator that fosters enjoyable and safe sporting environment, identifies strengths and abilities in each young athlete and promotes their self-esteem<sup>17</sup> and self-determination<sup>18</sup>. Athlete-centeredness and autonomy-supportive behaviour promotes youngsters' empowerment in sports; the coach listens to adolescent's perspectives, enables the young athlete to make choices and to have an influence on matters<sup>17,19,20</sup>. Fostering each person's feeling of belonging and team interaction skills enables the creation of trusting and accepting atmosphere among the young athletes<sup>14</sup>. Creativity and learning in sports is enhanced when mistakes are understood as steps towards learning and everyone's succeeding is celebrated together. The young athletes and the



Picture 1. The Kidmove's athlete-centered coaching practices integrate multi field expertise, literature, guidelines and practical know-how (Kid-move project application).

coach can solve together challenges and create new ways of practicing and consequently enabling the young athlete's empowerment and inspiring new ways of training, team building and sports skills development<sup>17</sup>.

The athlete-centeredness means that the individual needs and comprehensive wellbeing of each young are taken into account in coaching<sup>16, 21</sup>. The Kidmove's coaching practices underline that every kid, in spite of their different needs, abilities and behavior, are included in sporting activities. Equal opportunities for learning are enabled through coaches' knowhow and sport club's inclusive policies. In addition, the athlete-centered coaching practices protect young athletes by focusing on the safety of the trainings and emotional and physical sporting environment<sup>21</sup>. Safe sporting environment is free from bullying and misconduct<sup>2</sup>.

Safe coaching practices prevent sports related and overuse injuries by applying training that take into account children's age, individual developmental level, athlete's own perspectives and experiences and optimal workload with focus on the quality of the movement patterns

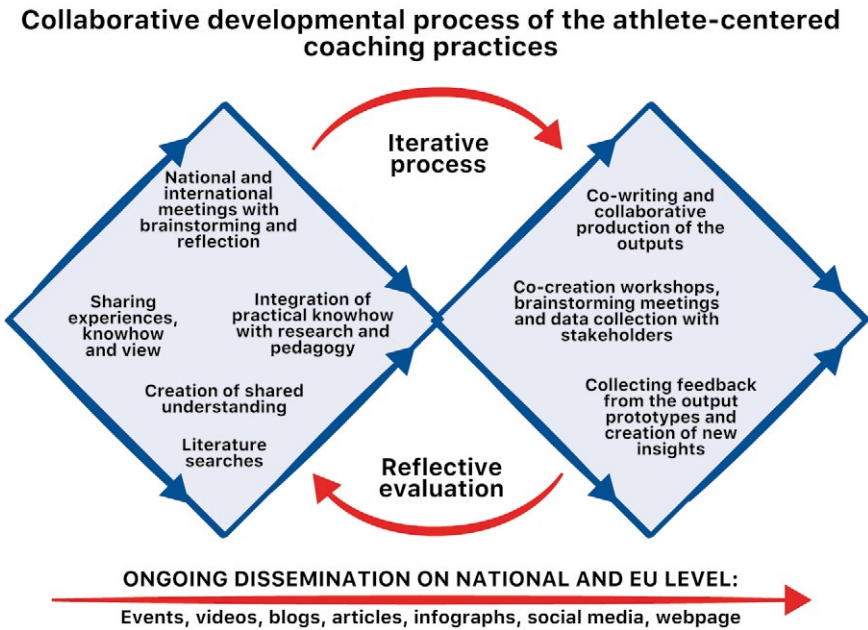
<sup>22</sup>. In addition, safe coaching practices enable variety of sporting activities for children and young and avoid too early specialization<sup>22</sup>. Interdisciplinary collaboration between sport clubs, coaches and professionals such as physiotherapists, podiatrists and psychomotor therapists enable the identification of youngster's individual needs and prevention of sports related injuries. Collaboration with experts of children's health and wellbeing also support the use of inclusive practices enabling the participation of youngsters with different abilities in the sporting activities.

## **DEVELOPING TOGETHER: HOW**

The Kidmove project included partners from five different European countries (Finland, Netherlands, Austria, Czech Republic and Poland). The project team represented multi field and cultural views and brought together 16 experts from the field of children's sports and wellbeing: coaches from different sports, sports club coordinators as well as teachers and professionals from the fields of psychomotricity, physiotherapy, podiatry, kinesiology, sports education and science, occupational therapy and adapted physical activity. During the project, the network of participants and collaborators have increased and stakeholders with different experience, background and expertise have actively commented and participated in different phases of the project.

Kidmove project builds on the existing good coaching practices by identifying what athlete-centered practices the coaches of the partner sport clubs already use. Based on the good practices of the grassroots sports coaches from five partnering sport clubs, the Kidmove project co-created, described and disseminated the coaching practices. The collaborative development process of the Kidmove's athlete-centered coaching practices is described in picture 2.

The Kidmove project's co-creation process included collaborative workshops, brainstorming meetings and many types of data collection with different stakeholders. The collaborative nature of the data collection enabled the formation of multifaceted understanding of the good coaching practices. All in all, over 300 participants took part in the creation of the athlete-centered coaching practices in different phases: coaches, young athletes, students from the fields of sports and health, teachers/educators, parents, sport club staff members and other professional.



Picture 2. Kidmove project’s collaborative development process (Kidmove project application; Service Design Vancouver).

All of the 15 good practices and project outputs were discussed, reflected and brainstormed in Kidmove’s national and international team meetings. In addition, each of the practices used other participatory methods (such as co-creation with learning café, active feedback collection of project’s outputs, co-writing, questionnaires and participatory workshops) to engage different stakeholders’ views. These methods varied between practices. Therefore, all practices are based on the shared understanding of athlete-centered coaching practices, but also reflect the different cultures and aspects unique to each participating organization and sports club.

Kidmove project’s team members collected theoretical and pedagogical background from literature. The results were applied in the creation and description of the good practices. The project outputs, blogs, videos, infographics and articles, aimed to offer concrete guidance for the use of athlete-centered coaching practices by answering the questions what, why and how.

## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

The Kidmove project, as all development processes with ongoing reflective collaboration, evaluation and feedback, have facilitated rich learning experience for all members of the Kidmove project team. Collaborative workshops and brainstorming in national and international teams including participants with different backgrounds, experiences and expertise enabled the formation of new insights and understanding of different circumstances and cultures. At the same time, the different perspectives challenged the formation of shared understanding of the good coaching practices and took time.

Project's team members and sport club's personnel assessed that they have gained not only new insight into the athlete-centered coaching practices, but also new ways of collaboration and co-creation by using participatory methods, inventive dissemination methods and practices, collection of feedback and perspectives with digital applications, co-writing and co-production of outputs. These skills can be used also in the future in the Kidmove partner organizations to develop practices together with youngsters, family members, coaches and other sport club members and/or professionals.

All people have the basic need to feel included, to have an influence on matters, and to feel competent and appreciated – these principles are visible in the Kidmove's good junior coaching practices, but also in the collaborative development process of these practices. By developing the athlete-centered coaching practices together with coaches, athletes and their family members, and professionals with different expertise, we were able to co-create new insightful practices that motivate, empower and give joy not only to the athletes, but inspire and encourage all the stakeholders that participate in the valuable work of the sports clubs.

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## INTRODUCTION OF THE KIDMOVE TEAM

**Anita Ahlstrand** is Senior Lecturer in Sport Sciences at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland. Meeting new people, learning new things and long walks in the nature inspire her. Her strengths comes from endless curiosity, co-creation, innovative thinking and positive pedagogy.

**Pekka Anttila** is working as Senior Lecturer in Podiatry at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland. He is interested in applying research to grassroots activities. Pekka is motivated by the development and implementation of new innovations and operating models through collaboration. He takes care of his own well-being by mountain biking and by playing football and disc golf.

**Anna Bachrata** is trainer and coach in Bulldogs Brno sports club in Czech Republic. She has been responsible for girls categories aged 13–16 since 2015. She studies at the Faculty of Sports Studies, Masaryk University and aims to deepen her knowledge concerning sports psychology.

**Kamila Czajka** is assistant professor at the University School of Physical Education in Wrocław, Poland. She enjoys giving lectures and workshops, especially on the human anatomy of the motor system and human motor skills. She is interested in physical activity and healthy lifestyle. He loves spending her free time being active; she runs and swims a lot, in the winter season he skis and skates.

**Franceline van de Geer** is coordinator of program Special Heroes in the Netherlands, and has experience in keeping young people involved in sports clubs by leveraging their specific talents.



**Radim Kominek** is trainer and coach in Bulldogs Brno sports club in Czech Republic. He has been playing floorball in Bulldogs Brno since his childhood and achieved a lot of success with this team as an active player. Nowadays he collects achievements with young boys as a trainer. He studies at the Faculty of Sports Studies, Masaryk University where he gains experience in the field of teacher of sports and physical education.

**Stina Kuhlefelt** is project coordinator in Icehearts ry in Finland. She focus on bilingual matters and sports on a grassroot level, especially girls competing in floorball. Stina is very keen on creative learning, in both language learning and sports. Getting her batteries recharged by yoga or some outdoor activities.

**Mira Lönnqvist** is pediatric Occupational Therapist and Senior Lecturer at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Finland. She promotes The Rights of the Children and Positive Pedagogy by teaching, training and participating in projects regarding wellbeing of Children. Based on the “talk the walk – walk the talk” principle she does also part-time clinical work as a pediatric O.T. and voluntary work on regular basis e.g. by participating in junior coaching as an assistant coach in HJK junior football team.

**Miika Niemelä** is team mentor in Icehearts ry in Finland, and responsible for the intern education and recruitment. He is very social and loves to get to know new people sharing the same ideas and thoughts about sports, mindfulness and everything in between. Miika plays hockey as a goalie, thinking he is a forgotten star :)

**Cor Niks** is teacher of psychomotor therapy, sports teacher and ortho-educationalist (Pedagogy) in Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. His specialties are experience and know-how of therapy for empowerment, joy and internal motivation, experience and practical know-how of working with clients with special needs. Working as researcher and integrating the good coaching practices from the grassroots level with the evidence-based theory co-writing the publications

**Stefanie Peichler** is project coordinator in sports organisation SPORTUNION Steiermark in Austria. She gets inspired by working for the bigger goal; help people to find their favourite

sport and bring them to the sports clubs. Her strengths come from living her prayers – work life balance and sport help her to be creative and focused at the job and excite others with her optimism.

**Jacek Stodolka** is professor at the University School of Physical Education in Wroclaw in Poland. He is also President of the Academic Sport Club AZS-AWF Wroclaw, master class coach in athletics, author and co-author of several dozen publications, monographs and two academic textbooks on physical culture.

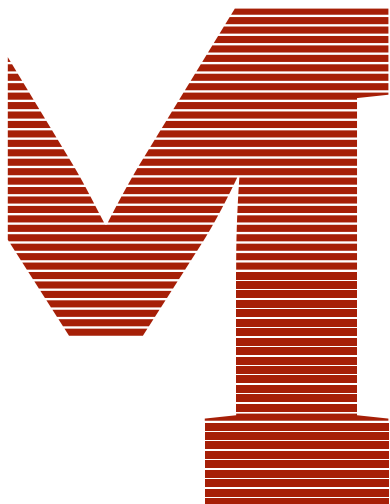
**Dagmar Heiland Travníkova** works at the Faculty of Sports Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. Dagmar's areas of pedagogical and research interest include adapted physical activities, psychomotor games or social circus techniques. She gives workshops and seminars for national and international target audiences of a different age and background.

**Paul Verschuur** is teacher of physical education and psychometrician in Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. As a lecturer and supervisor he coaches students to tune in to people who need more attention. Paul has a lot of experience in gymnastics being teacher physical education, gymnastics trainer and organizer & influencer in recreation-oriented additional activities on local and national level.

**Nea Vänskä** is Senior lecturer at the master's degree program in rehabilitation and the bachelor's degree program in Physiotherapy at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland, department of Rehabilitation and Examination. She has many years of experience in multidisciplinary research and development projects as well as in pediatric physical therapy and rehabilitation. Nea is especially interested in promoting children's participation and wellbeing. She believes that the best practices and solutions are created in collaboration with children, families and professionals.

**Grzegorz Zurek** is professor at the University School of Physical Education in Wroclaw, Poland. He conducts classes in mental training, neuroscience and human anatomy. He is interested in contemporary history and economic changes in the world; he is physically active, swimming and cycling.

**Arne Öhlknecht** is project coordinator in health and recreational sports organisation SPORTUNION Steiermark in Austria. He is inspired by the energy of working with different people together to make people move. He sees it as a call to give EVERYONE the possibility to benefit from the health enhancing effect of sports.



# KIDMOVE

## Athlete Centered Coaching Practices

The most common reasons for young athletes to participate in sporting activities are having fun, experiencing enjoyment, improving new skills, getting a sense of belonging and receiving the support needed. This publication provides free and easily accessible athlete-centered coaching practices for the grassroots junior sports coaches. Feel free to use what we have learned and the tips and tricks that we share in your own organisation.

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