

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE PERFECTION OF HIGH LEVEL SWIMMERS. THE CASE OF GREEK CHAMPIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the basic external factors that affect Greek champion's swimming perfection. Specifically it refers to government, Club, Coach, Family, School, Other Sex, Fans, Media, Somatotype, Physical Condition, Temperament, Anxiety, Nutrition of swimmers. When these factors analysed, Government play a catalytic role, in order to solve serious problem and support swimmer's progress, to establish athletic school and more swimming center. The primary aim of swimming club excellent organization and training planning in effort to active the desirable goals and eliminate swimmer's possibility for failure. The coach plays an important role in swimmer's daily life. The role of the coach has three dimensions, primary he is a teacher, the other he is motivator and third one he is leader. The family constitutes the most important factor to shape the personality of children and their future attitude and behavior toward sport. The young swimmers is developed and shaped psychologically, ethically and spiritually in school. An equally important degree of influence on the athlete's performance derives from their sexual relationship and the opposite sex's behavior toward them. Fans who in their own way influence athletic attitudes either positively or negatively. The power of media is generally acceptable. The daily press gives special case to the sports pages which provoke the viewer's interest. More over the physical, physiological and psychological factors like somatotype, physical conditions, Athlete's temperament, anxiety and nutrition effects the performance of swimmers.

Key Words : Greek Swimmers, physical conditions, anxiety, nutrition, club, coach.

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ELİT YÜZÜCÜLERİN MÜKEMMELLİĞİNİ ETKİLEYEN FAKTÖRLER. YUNAN ŞAMPİYONLARIN DURUMU

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Şampiyon Yunan yüzücülerin performanslarının mükemmelleşmesini etkileyen temel dış faktörleri belirlemektir. Bu faktörler özellikle şunları kapsar: Devlet Yönetimi, kulüp, antrenör, aile, okul, karşı cins, taraftar, basın, somatotip, fiziksel kondisyon, mizaç, kaygı, beslenme. Bu faktörler incelendiğinde Devlet Yönetimi, önemli problemleri çözmede, yüzücülerin gelişimini desteklemede, spor okulu ve yüzme merkezleri kurmada önemli rol oynar. Kulüplerin birinci görevi, sporcunun istenilen amaçlara ulaşabilmesi için, mükemmel organizasyon ve antrenman planlaması yapmaktır. Antrenör de yüzücünün günlük hayatında önemli rol oynar. Antrenörün üç yönlü rolü vardır; öncelikle öğretmendir, sonra motive edicidir ve bir liderdir. Aile ise çocukların kişiliklerinin ve gelecekteki spor eğilimi ve davranışlarının şekillenmesinde önemli rol oynar. Genç yüzücüler okulda psikolojik, ahlaki ve ruhsal yönden gelişir ve şekillenirler. Seyirciler davranışlarıyla sporcuları negatif yada pozitif yönde etkilerler. Basının gücünde kabul edilmelidir. Günlük baskılarıyla özellikle spor sayfalarındaki yazıları ile okuyucuların ilgilerini provoke ederler. Bunların ötesinde sporcunun somatotipi, fiziksel kondisyonu, mizacı, endişesi ve beslenme gibi fiziksel, fizyolojik ve psikolojik faktörlerde kişinin performansını direkt olarak etkiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Yunan yüzücüler, fiziksel kondisyon, endişe, beslenme, kulüp, antrenör.

Introduction

Sport and high level competition is a part of the life Each of them ⁽¹⁾ of all countries in the world. makes an effort to develop its own athletic forces to assure her prestige when it comes to competitions with other countries. Sports are fully embodied into Greek's national life. Although a great number of children are engaged into this activity, only few swimmers participate in International Competitive level. The purpose of this study was to identify the basic external factors that affect Greek champion's swimming perfection. Specifically, it refers to governmental and social parameters, the team executives, the coach and the athlete himself.

Government's Bodies

Swimming has an educational as well as survival value ⁽²⁾, but the latter is becoming increasingly important as an increasing number of people are pursuing water-based leisure activities. Of the children drowned each year, a high proportion cannot swim and therefore one of the best antidotes to drowning is for children to learn to swim. The government here plays a catalytic role. In order to solve this serious problem and support swimmer's progress, athletic schools and more swimming centers must be established.

Although authorities recognize the educational values that swimming can offer and realize its importance as an essential component of the physical education program, in Greece there

aren't any swimming hours in the basic education as in other countries, for example G. Britain. For this to happen, the government should proceed to athletic schools establishments, that will combine appropriately the basic education with the swimming practice, with goal to prepare champions for great records and to reduce the restraining factors, like transport, attending at preparatory schools, the physical and emotional distress. The raising of the basic standard swimming in sport school education should contribute positively to the dynamic competitive swimming evolution, if we want to confront champions as gifted individuals. The government's bodies like the Ministry of Education, the Ministry Of Sports and the Swimming Federation must cooperate and organize swimming training camps all over the country as a way of checking out the swimmers progress. Considering youngster's desire to engage into swimming, it is beyond one's power not to notice that swimming centers do not exist in a lot of Greek regions. Even when this is possible the perfect training situations are absent, with primary the space lack for a great number of swimmers dissimilar in potentials and abilities, the lack of using an open or closed swimming pool depending on the weather, the false water temperature, the lack of a gym into the swimming center. As champions come into adulthood, the government organization should provide them with motives, like training in national swimming centers, scholarships abroad, financial support, professional reestablishment in order to minimize the early retiring swimming phenomenon because of high life demands. Another remarkable motive could be the enactment of Universally and Military athleticism in order to prevent the withdrawal phenomenon on behalf of capable athletes because of the above obligations.

The Swimming Club

Although a swimming club is a common factor all over the world nevertheless swimming in Greece is based exclusively in swimming clubs. Its primary aim is the excellent organization and training planning in effort to achieve the desirable goals and eliminate swimmer's possibility for failure ⁽³⁾. The swimming club executives should be dynamic and active, responsible, with characteristics of patience and persistence, as well of determination. Executives in Greece are responsible for the team consumption, which is covered partly from the government and partly from the swimmer's parents. The collected amount of money is invested to the coach's salary, the purchase of the necessary swimming equipment and the athlete's consumption when they compete abroad. Therefore, it is an irreplaceable factor. Recently in Greece, swimming clubs have started to provide financial motives to champion-swimmers as a reward for their daily effort and their successes in national games. Successes are very important to swimming clubs

because they determine the space and the training hours of the athletes. The clubs are also responsible for the existence of a well-qualified scientific team for the selection of skillful children and the maximization of champion's swimming progress through medical support and ergometric tests. The above in swimming is in a preliminary stage and has a long way to go.

The coach

The coach plays an important role to swimmers daily life. A specific code communication is often developed between with linguistic peculiarities that indicate a closer relationship ⁽⁴⁾. The role of the coach has three dimensions. Primary is the teacher: the one who will transfer his knowledge to the athlete in order to achieve his goals. Others claim that his basic role is the one of a motivator, a factor that sets in motion the whole dynamic system of the athlete. He is also considered to be a leader, the person who gives orders, takes decisions, planes etc. Furthermore, he acts in the highlights of sports where parents, athletes, fans and the mass media watch out every movement he makes. He has often been blamed for his athlete's failures. Therefore, some of them stick to the idea that those winnings are the only desirable goal and push the swimmers to their limits through exhausting training programs or high goal settings. But swimmers are also human beings with personal problems that are usually transferred into the swimming pool and need a solution ⁽⁵⁾. Coach's role here is catalytic to swimmers carrier. He is the friend, the psychologist, the one who will try to solve the problem and often the motivator for getting over difficult periods. In Greece, there are coaches- graduates of the Greek University Department of Exercise and Physical Education, and there are coaches who used to be championing-swimmers and their education were impossible for some reason. Anyway, both categories are responsible for their athlete's swimming perfection, which means that they have to stay informed in order to make easier the way to the top.

National and social environment of swimmers The natural surroundings play an important role because they influence the physical, spiritual and psychological growth of the person and affect the modulation of his personality. The conditions of climate, such as wind, heat, altitude, oxygen and sun affect the person's health and also the soul. The geophysical environment however must be examined, as ar as the life developed within it, and it's effect on the sport of swimming. In Greece there is a deficit of such facilities, not only in cities, where they should exist because of the population, but especially in mountainous territories. Therefore, lots of talents are wasted as training facilities are not existent and the possibility of discovering new talents is undermined downgrading thus once more the athletes of the mountain regions. The social environment consists of numerous constitution factors each contributing separately to

the athlete's personality like the family, the school, the other sex, the fans, the media. Coming into the field of swimming we can see that the athlete's worth is linked to their performance. Their image, good or bad consists of numbers, meters, centimeters, seconds and minutes. As this leads to a very eclectic choice of athletes it has a negative vibe due to the disqualification of people who do not meet the standards.

The family

The family constitutes the most important factor, which shapes the personality of children and their future attitude and behavior toward sport. Specifically in the sport of swimming, parents hold the leading part in the child's whole swimming career, from it's beginning till their adulthood. However, due to the high emotional charge created in professional sports, we often observe the somber phenomenon of intervening in the coach's work and further conflicts with the team's executives. Parents often come into the role of second coach and often guide during the course of training, from the stands. The solution could be found if there was a way to keep these people busy during coaching practice. In other countries they have organized libraries in the swimming centers or added swimming hours for the parents. These where what distanced parents completely from the field. This isn't the case in Greece ⁽⁶⁾. One usual added mistake on behalf of the parent's attitude is the causing of stress before the start of the swimming game. The great desire for a swimming distinction leads parents to adopt a "stressful" attitude which they transfer to the child and disrupt its mental peace.

The school

The school is the most important factor after the family, because it is in that, that the young person is developed and shaped psychologically, ethically and spiritually. The school friendships created, which also exist outside of it, constitute factors that influence an athlete's performance. The demands of training, the constant pressures of their own selves to match their tasks, the pressures of their close environment weigh psychologically on the swimmers and lead them to exhaustion. By wanting thus to escape from these, they give more importance on the social group (their company) and they are often led to picking up bad habits such as smoking and alcohol considering them as a sign of adulthood. They are therefore led away from professionalism, which requires personal sacrifices and invest time in their recreation and social life, which they consider more important.

Another problem is created by many teachers who accept only studying as a means of progressing for the person and a correct way of spending free time and are in contradiction to professional sports. You also have those who constantly mount papers on athletes in order to

prove to the class that this combination of tasks is not successful. In contrary, the heads of the school environment need to inform and urge children toward sports with their attitude by rewarding the effort of those already in sports, especially professionals, while simultaneously urging many other children to test their strengths and become a part of the majestic world of sports and of course swimming.

The other sex

An equally important degree of influence on the athlete's performance derives from their sexual relationships and the opposite sex's behavior toward them. Of course, swimming is a sport that demands discipline and dedication of a high order, involving long hours of daily training with the object of reaching a high level of performance, and continual striving to beat one's personal best performance. That is why plenty of times the other sex feels neglected and creates problems in order to earn swimmer's attention. A more patient and supportive behavior would be a lot more helpful to athlete's daily effort.

Fans

In the sphere of professional sports, there often appears a group of people, the fans who in their own way influence athletic attitudes either positively or negatively. This mass of people often appears fanatic, however swimming fans must be distinguished from fans of ball games that vandalize. They are driven by dynamic enthusiasm and have the ability to transfer their support to the athletes. They do this either with slogans or by stating their personal opinion to the athletes either before or after the race. Equally important is their support during failure. Surely, there are those who out of spite aim at the mood of the athletes by saying humiliating things, degrading their character and their performance, thus causing them stress and disrupting their peace. Fans in Greece are very supportive to swimmers.

Media

The power of media is generally acceptable. The daily press gives special care to the sports pages, which provoke the viewer's interest. The phenomenon that is observed is that even though they watch the swimming races on the television, swimming fans are looking forward to buy athletic newspapers the next day wanting to compare their own opinions with those of sports correspondents, to be informed about something more than they saw. The athletic report as an upgrade of athletic journalism, adds to the field of sports, and therefore the sports correspondent needs to be well informed so as not to transmit unclear events which may lead to erroneous impressions. Many times especially during important meeting (events), athletes

fall victims to what is said and written, invalid sources and faulty information. It is certain that when they read or see something about themselves, there will be a lessening of their psychological mood while many times organic symptoms appear when criticism is hard and aims to humiliate them. On the contrary it would especially please athletes to have good written reports, positive criticism, encouraging comments making them try for the best. Television also, along with Greek radio, carries out in turn their own role by contributing to the achievement of a high attainment. Television however was the one to actually revolutionize sports in the public's conceives. With her broadcasting in the courts, the sport of swimming became known, its importance was pointed out and thus contributed to the engagement of many children in swimming from which new talents constantly sprout. This is a basic reason for media to work correctly, be subjective and serve society. Finally, the last but the most important factor for a high level swimming performance is the swimmer himself ⁽⁷⁾.

The swimmer

Somatotype

The somatotype can affect a performance and some characteristics are of great importance like body composition, feature, and hydrodynamic capacities of the athlete. The level of swimmer's speed into the water correlates to his hydrodynamic capacities and especially to propulsion in the water. An effort has been made to classify body types and relate these to athletic performance ⁽⁸⁾. Sheldon noted three types of body features: the endomorph, which correlates to the body fat percentage, the mesomorph, which correlates to muscle growth, and the ectomorph, dealing with the length of skin surface ⁽⁹⁾. Cureton who examined Olympic Swimmers, concluded that swimmers with a high mesomorphic component have broken world records, though ecto-mesomorph swimmers have also competed successfully at Olympic and National Levels, particularly in the longer distance events. Compared to sprint swimmers, endurance swimmers are slightly higher in endomorphy, have greater subcutaneous fat thickness and have lower specific gravities. Of course differences in body shapes are depended on the age, the sex, the height and the limb ratio, the percentage of muscle fibers, the muscular power and the joint flexibility. It has also been found that the type of sport and the type of swim training can affect the body shape. Evidently, the body characteristics should be taken under consideration for creating a worthy selection system of talent-swimmers as well as for the planning of training units.

Physical condition

Apart from swimming practice, a generally physical condition is necessary ⁽¹⁰⁾. A well-known basic form of exercise is also running. There is no doubt that other activities as well, like cycling, tennis, soccer during the rest period result positively in the existence of a general physical condition by a creative and amusing training variety. Gym training also affects the champion's performance. Researchers from NSCA have shown a 40% improvement in the swimming records, 1/3 less injuries, and spent 50% less time to recover comparing to athletes who didn't exercise with weights at all. The matter in Greece is the lack of a gym in the swimming center, which creates further difficulties in swimmers life.

Athlete's temperament

A swimmer who sets high goals proves his will for hard work and desire to be a winner, and is a very ambitious personality ⁽¹¹⁾. He devotes at least 4 hours per day to swimming while he spends a lot more less time for his personal life and his amusement in order to manage the demands of his sport ⁽¹²⁾. Kane (1964) reports that the desirable characteristics for a successful athlete are the persistence, the control of emotions, the mental health, the extroversion attitude, the strong willing and the realistic behavior. People think that swimmers are isolated and have egoistic personalities, but these are characteristics of athletes who participate in individualistic sports. This may come from the nature of this sport, which force athletes to swim without the capacity of communication with others as the head is in the water. Finally, ⁽¹³⁾ Ogilvie (1968) has indicated some changes in swimmer's character with the passing of time. Results have shown that after four years of participation in competitive swimming games, 10 to 14 years old swimmers were more stabilized emotionally and their attitude was extroversive. The researcher concluded that as years pass by there is an increase in control of anxiety and in self-esteem, in the swimmer's determination to win.

Anxiety

In sports like swimming, the social dignity is important and that is why swimmers feel more stress and have to deal with the fear of a failure - race. Reactions like exit from the swimming course or abandoning the race are common. Of course, the primary feeling of stress comes during the practice. The amount of stress that a body can adjust to controls swimmer's progress. If it is high enough then the body cannot make adjustments because of the temporary exhaustion and not because of limited swimming efficiencies. This is a crucial point in someone's career during the competitive period. A high amount of training units can "burn"

the athlete and prevent him from reaching the top. It is up to the coach to recognize the anxiety signs and modify the practice ⁽¹⁴⁾. A stressful factor also could be the teasing between swimmers during practice. These situations must be confronted with humor and the coach should firstly calm down the swimmers and then provide them with motives to exercise harder. The emotional life also affects the mood of the swimmer. Stress, depression, lack of appetite and desire to swim, boredom, absences, are the most common signs that can ruin his effort and cause a lot of injuries with slow recovery. So, if an athlete learns to control his stress then he immediately creates positive chances to reach the highest level of his performance. Nutrition Champion-swimmers should follow a correct nutritional diet and avoid an unhealthy style of living. Often enough we see swimmers that smoke and drink alcohol. Of course there isn't a medical indication that encourage them to this behavior. On the opposite, both habits affect negatively the swimming performance. The swimmer must also have medical support. It has become a rule nowadays the intake of high demand food, in order to maximize the performance, which makes the cooperation between the doctor, the coach and the athlete a necessity. Because of the great progress in swimming performances, athletes must be nutritioned with proteins, low fat foods, carbo-hydrates, vitamins and amino acids in the correct ratio. Of course the nutritional diet to be followed must be made with reference to sports duration but also to intensity and duration of every day swimming training program ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Conclusion

Swimmers in every country of the world need special treatment. The last decade, Greek swimming centers are very crowded of young children trying to learn to swim and there is a lot of "good material" for future championing. Yet, the circumstances are not always ideal for high level competition as the lack of swimming in the school basic education is absent and the other factors are still limited. Greece tries to find her way up to competitive swimming games with hard training in swimming centers and supportive behavior from all the above external factors that influence swimmer's perfection. Of course there is a need for further improvement and dynamic decisions to be made in order to see athletes compete among the top-level world swimmers. Therefore, we are obliged to improve the existing athletic status, to promote the athletic spirit to youngsters and guide them into competitive games.

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