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HANDBALL CAMPS



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In America, what seems to be a "normal" part of the school holidays, children and young people visiting a camp, has yet to gain a foothold in Europe. The first sport camps, modelled on the American design, had already been established more than 20 years ago in basketball - in the meantime, handball followed and in Germany, there is a succession of Handball Camps based on different concepts.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE & CAMP PHILOSOPHY

Handball Camps take place, as standard, during the school vacations, with exception of winter holidays. Camps are operational during the Easter period, summer and autumn holidays. Camps scheduled during these particular holiday times, in order to be able to act independently of the weather, are organised to make use of indoor halls. In the summer, open spaces or beach facilities can be used.

The largest organisational differences depend on the institution hosting the camp, the organisational structure and the philosophy behind it: Handball associations offer so-called "internal association" camps, in which the participants are from teams and the recruitment is made through the club. These camps take place at the "home" clubs main training hall; the participants arrive in the morning, train into the afternoon or early evening and return home; during the lunch break, the participants are catered for. This concept is economical, since two meals and overnight accommodation are not required. The main point about the "internal association" training camps are, the players know each other. At most, a maximum of two external coaches are invited to the camp; the association supplies all other staff members. The advantages are a simple and economical organisation plus the familiar (environment, fellow players and coaches), on the other hand this means that only a small number of new suggestions can be undertaken, which is quite often the appeal of the camp.

Camps with overnight accommodation are usually organised by either a federation (DHB, regional organisations) or a private institution. Subsequently, an open invitation is issued, this means that participants can register from all over Germany. The locations vary; sport schools are rarely used (because of financial reasons), camps are normally carried out in sport halls that are in close vicinity to youth hostels or youth guesthouses. The meetings in summer can be found in appealing locations (e.g. The North or Baltic Sea). This means that interesting fringe events can be incorporated into the schedule. The emphasis of these camps lies in creating a balanced programme of Handball training and leisure activities.

Alongside the new players, new coaches and new surroundings, there are also new social relations that have to be built. It is interesting to see them develop. The participants must finance their stay (accommodation, food, and travel) at this type of camp.

The camps have also developed a third model, which can be described as combination of the two models presented before: Children and young people can register freely to participate in a camp for up to several days with overnight accommodation. The locations are distributed around the country; the organising sport halls supply accommodation and food. Handball training is clearly the focus of the camp. The goal is mainly to enhance the participants sporting abilities. These camps are primarily organised by private institutions. The camps aspire to follow the example as set by handball-akademie.de, whose offers are tailored to incorporate different ages and performance levels:

- Basic School: Meeting duration 3 days, age group 8-11 years
- High School: Meeting duration 4 days, age group 11-14 years
- Handball college: Meeting duration 5 days, age group 14-17 years

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- Top performance: Meeting duration 6 days, only for selected players starting from 13 years.

A basic method endorsed by handball-akademie.de is that all handball players, whether they are beginners or advanced, need a good technical, tactical and athletic training. This is a fundamental requirement for a successful game. The training programme within the association cannot always satisfy the talented and those with a strong desire to achieve advancement - additional training is necessary. The camps organised by handball-akademie.de also aim to promote individual development.

Dedicated and talented youngsters train together. At the start of the camp, the individual performance level is determined. In different groups, the individual strengths are developed further; weaknesses are managed with a clear view to improvement. During training, the emphasis is placed on:

- Basic techniques: catching/passing, throwing, dribbling, deceptions;
- Individual attack behaviour;
- Special goal keeper training;
- Offensive defence play.

A routine day at a camp organised by handball-akademie.de begins with a collective warm-up session, with all participants, in the morning. Afterwards they divide into their individual groups to train at the "activity stations". Each Station is different and has specific aim as outlined by the head coach. A team coach works alongside the head coach. The team coach is a permanent staff member within a trainings group. At the activity stations, the groups work for approximately 45 minutes; afterwards, following a break of 15 minutes, the group moves on to the next station. In the afternoon, the groups are divided into "team training" units, and in the evening matches are played.

The experiences from the camps prove that the particular atmosphere in the camp - new players, other coaches, varied activities to offset the training programme, individual consultation and encouragement, co-ed groups, residential care and overnight accommodation - remains highly attractive. It is common to find that the children and/or young people return to the training camps the following year and over the course of subsequent years. Another aspect is the intensive work undertaken by the coaches, who in close collaboration define the key points of the training stages. For the head coaches

the challenge exists in adapting their respective goals for the different groups (i.e. dealing with different requirements of the participants). The team coaches also profit from the camp, because in this short period, they are able to observe and learn from a string of qualified coaches, whose important role, they have been supporting, within their groups.

HIGHER GOALS

Handball Camps offer an attractive framework (dependent on the local infrastructure) for leisure activities, not only for the sole purpose of sporting achievement. In addition, it offers further educational goals, which can be achieved in the context of a camp:

- Building a positive self image within the sport and beyond;
- Enhancing creativity and communication skills; Striving for improvement;
- Development of risk management;
- Handling criticism and pressure;
- Role assumption in a new team.

THE VISION: EUROHANDBALL ACADEMY

Due to the increasing demand for Handball Camps in Germany, www.handball-akademie.de has organised 14 events during 2004, with over 800 participants. The prospect of a European Handball Camp in the summer 2005 seems an ambitious and attractive project. In particular, the opportunity to bring students together from all the various European Handball Schools, with qualified coaches to impart their talent and experience on participants from across the whole of Europe. The intercultural exchange between the coaches and the participants should be incentive enough to take such a project to another level.

