



EURO 2004 Coaches' Seminar
during the
2004 Men's European Championship in Slovenia



THE SECRET OF SUCCESS:

Harmonisation of Mental and Motor Speeds

Any methodology is based on the following three crucial elements:

1. A few ideas
2. Clear ideas
3. Efficient implementation of the ideas.

My vision has always focused on the need of harmonizing handball players' mental and motor speeds. During a match the perception-associated part of the brain receives signals from the environment, whereas the operative part of the brain activates the muscles. I have always wanted to raise these abilities to a higher level since we need to train and practice the player's skills and fitness at the same time. If we have achieved this, we can say that the training process has been optimized. Preparations by top players have these days become very sophisticated; the body of a top player can be trained almost to perfection, but this will account only for 30% of the final success - the rest depends on mental training and preparation.

I decided to use a specific approach in the preparations for the World Championship in Portugal, because I realized that it would be a waste of time and energy to focus on those segments in which other teams were either better or even the best of all. I also came to the conclusion that we should not concentrate too much on those aspects of preparations, which will contribute only a few percentage points to the ultimate result. It goes without saying that the technique and tactics of the handball game remain of primary importance. The fitness training before a championship should raise both the technique and the tactics of the game of handball to a higher level. At the same time it should make the players more resistant to fatigue. This is how, generally speaking, we should understand the purpose of developing the fitness of the players. The objective is to make training exercises more efficient, more rational and tailored to an individual player's abilities and weaknesses. The players and the coach should be encouraged to adjust the new system of practice and exercises to the frequency of competitions.

The new approach towards training aims at reducing the time and energy spent and at increasing the quality of training. This is what the coaches and players who keep emphasizing the quantity of training should understand. Quantity can never be a substitute of quality, regardless the time and energy spent during training sessions.



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I chose to focus on preparations that will give us an advantage over the opposing teams. I think that my team was faster in adjusting to the defense used by the opposing players. Some national teams, such as those of Germany, Denmark, Sweden and France, were faster when transferring the ball, and started launch an offensive play immediately from the center of the court, thus going into offensive while the opposing players were showing them their backs. The Croatian national team however, prevailed in the position play based on our players' situational speed. We are not speaking of the s.c. athletic speed, but rather of a combination of mental and motor speeds. This was something quite new at the Championship in Portugal. Through a perfect collective tactics in the offensive play, especially by the wings that were assisted by the pivots, the central part of the opposing team's defense was regularly brought into a dynamic instability.

The future lies in the situation training during which the players simulate a section of the game, or a concept, in which they predominantly use the perceptive part of their brain. We should practice methods to quickly adjust to situations during a game, both in terms of defensive and offensive play. We also need to reduce to a minimum the elaboration time or the time to prepare a response. Through drills during training sessions we can improve the speed of a tactical response by up to 40%. If tactical thinking depends on the players' perceptive part of the memory, then we are here obviously developing their cognitive abilities that are important for the speed of action during a handball game; the cognitive abilities contribute up to 70% to the speed of action during the game.

If we want all this to make sense in practice, the players should master the ball, technical movements and the motor system involved in the game of handball, because this will allow them to enjoy in it. I am not an advocate of a large quantity of training sessions just for the sake of quantity, or just to cover longer distances while running or to become stronger. I believe we are involved in training to know more, to play better and to be more efficient in terms of the result we eventually achieve.

Zagreb, 12 December 2003

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