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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: The Role of Coaches in Society
- Presidency discussion paper

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned Presidency discussion paper for preliminary consideration and discussion during the Working Party on Sport on 5 July 2017.

The Role of Coaches in Society

Introduction

Sport¹ and physical activity and their role in society have changed a great deal during recent decades. Sport has become an important economic sector, employing many people and providing ever more products and services. Society is becoming more and more aware of the benefits of sport for the resolution of issues related to working ability, well-being, education, health and social inclusion, such as integration, gender equality, participation of people with special needs, and community consolidation. Today, sport and physical activity are seen as important elements of a healthy lifestyle, which can have a positive impact on quality of life and life expectancy. Therefore, to successfully accomplish the objectives and to avoid serious damage, coaching should be acknowledged socially highly valued work.

Taking into account Art 165 of the fundamental agreement of the European Union, according to which EU contributes to the promotion of sport-related issues, taking into account their specificity, voluntary structures and social and educational functions and the third EU Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020)², which identified sport and society as one of the priority themes and declared the role of coaches as one of its key topics of the EU cooperation in the field of sport, Estonia during its EU Presidency has chosen to explore changing role of coaches in society.

The coach is the key figure

Coaches are the key people in the field of sport, who have a central role in supervising sports and mediating the sport experience to participants of all ages and at all levels, regardless of their background and based on their objectives and abilities. In traditional sporting role, coaches are experts who possess practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive abilities, behaviour and values, all of which are necessary for productive work in the field of physical activity and sport.

¹ based on a broader application of Vilnius Definition 2.0

² OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 5

The characteristics, occupational titles and accessibility to the work of a coach vary from country to country, so the Presidency prefers to define coaches by their work and impact. Coach is a person who, by shaping behavioural habits and with the help of physical and mental exercises, provides guidance for the achievement of people's well-being, fitness and health goals, and who is tasked with the healthy, productive and safe development of sport and physical abilities. Coaches train both performance and participation oriented populace, encompassing all demographic and social groups. Coaches are employees or work voluntary and have recognised licence or not.

The changing role of coaches in society

Although the principal sporting role of coaches has remained the same, the backdrop of sport within society has changed. This has caused a significant expansion of coaches' field of activity. Today, the focus on sporting achievements is only one of a series of expectations placed on the coaching community. Nowadays, coaches make significant contributions to the following:

- personal development
- society more broadly
- sport itself

1. The contribution of coaches to personal development

1.1. Coaches as teachers of values, skills and attitudes

Coaching focuses on the physical ability, multifaceted development, and maintenance and restoration of bodily functions. Training is most productive and safe when supervised by coaches. Training also plays an important role in the shaping of positive values, behaviour and transferable skills. Coaches have an initial inspirational role to play in their involvement with children, young people, and indeed adults in the field of sport and physical activity, and also in the teaching of values and social skills and habits through sport, which has a positive impact on people's development. Coaches help people to acquire many skills that are important in their daily lives, such as teamwork, consideration and respect for others, leadership, sense of initiative and responsibilities.

2. The contribution of coaches to society more broadly

2.1. Coaches as promoters of HEPA

Today, physical activity is a prerequisite for good health, active social participation, and high quality of life. Coaches have a central role to play in the mediation of sports experiences and the development of exercise habits among people of all ages and at all different levels, depending on their objectives. Coaches can contribute to the promotion and popularisation of healthy lifestyles and to increasing people's physical activity. The impact of this activity is also felt in healthcare.

2.2. Coaches as relevant shapers of cohesive communities

These days, social involvement, the sense of cohesion within and between communities and active citizenship are more important than ever in our society. Coaches are people whose consistent daily work unites people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds through professional and amateur sport. Therefore coaches play a significant role in integration within and between various communities. Increasingly, coaches are promoters of community spirit, initiators of new undertakings, and organisers of activities for young people, adults and the elderly. Coaches set examples and are social enlighteners who contribute to the well-being of society with their actions and words.

2.3. Coaches as participants in resolving social challenges

Sport provides ways to resolve various social challenges, such as obesity, physical inactivity, escapism, decline in the capacity for work, and the unequal treatment of people. Coaches have the knowledge and skills needed to face these problems. This list of challenges shapes coaching jobs and the corresponding training today and will continue to do so in the future.

3. The contribution of coaches to sport itself

3.1. Coaches as defenders of integrity in sport

Sport is an indivisible part of human culture thanks to the unique benefits and values inherent to it. The crucial role of a coach is to maintain and transmit the culture of a sport, including to uphold integrity, especially in the battle against the use of banned substances, the fixing of sporting competitions and the exploitation of minors, which have all become topical in recent years.

3.2. Coaches as developers of sport services

One characteristic of a developing society is an increase in the number of people involved in physical activity, which results in increased responsibilities for coaches, in connection, for example, with the development and availability of services. Coaches have an important role to play in ensuring that sport remains an appealing form of leisure activity and that people take up and keep practising sport and physical activity.

Coaches' responsibilities

The status of coaches differs from one country and society to another. Coaches can operate as volunteers, as salaried employees or as self-employed professionals. Regardless of their means of employment, a coach's activities are accompanied by responsibilities, which today are significantly greater than just teaching sport-specific skills and promoting sport-related achievements. In professional and amateur sport, coaches are responsible not only for the safety of athletes' training, but also for supporting the multifaceted development of each person, upholding sport's values and taking into consideration the challenges facing today's society.

In order to achieve this, coaches must of course have sport-specific skills, but also the skills and competences that correspond to modern social challenges. This in turn places importance on training that corresponds to the changing role of coaches.

Different approaches and forms are employed in different countries for training coaches: formal education (acquiring coaching qualifications, e.g. through university studies); non-formal education (sport-specific refresher courses and training to supplement coaches' general skills); as well as informal learning on the job (training experience acquired by coaches on site or through sharing experiences with colleagues in various forms of peer learning). These acquired competences are recognised through qualification certification, which are mandatory in some countries. Generally, in the field of sport, occupational qualifications and the qualification systems of both national and international sport associations are used to prove that coaches have the necessary skills. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)³, the implementation of which is voluntary, is used to compare the qualifications of different countries in the European Union.

³ OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15

Plans for the Estonian Presidency

Coaching activities impact millions of people and have a significant influence on other fields of activity, beyond sport. The Presidency wishes to make people aware of the many opportunities that exist for implementing coaches' potential within society, and together with the other Member States, to shape a new way of thinking about a more significant role for coaches in society. In order to make better use of their potential and the benefits of sport, coaches' skills and training should keep step with social changes. The Presidency also wishes to highlight the necessity of implementing the EQF to make it possible to compare the skills and competences of coaches from different countries and to promote the free movement of labour.

Coaches are a new and topical subject at the European Union level. Therefore the Estonian Presidency wishes to explore it while holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In order to receive input for draft conclusions, delegations are kindly asked to reply to the following questions:

1. Do you agree that coaches in society have much wider role than sport-related elements?
2. Are coaches in your country aware that they have a responsibility beyond their own sport?
3. What are the issues and challenges related to coaching and coaches that should be focused and highlighted in the conclusions?
4. What can the Member States or the European Union do to highlight the social benefits of coaching and how a greater importance on the role of coaches in society could be promoted?