

PROBLEMS OF THE EDUCATIONAL COACHING AND COMPETITIVE PROCESS IN FOOTBALL IN HIGHER SCHOOLS IN BULGARIA

Notes

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Abstract

The purpose of the conducted research is to study some problems of the training and sports-competition process in football in higher schools in Bulgaria. The research was carried out in March 2023 with 122 students from the representative football teams of seven universities in Bulgaria, distributed as follows: 18 from Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ (SU), 18 from National Sports Academy „Vasil Levski“ (NSA), 16 from University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), 17 from Technical University – Sofia (TU), 18 from Plovdiv University „Paisii Hilendarski“, 17 from Ruse University “Angel Kanchev” and 18 from Veliko Tarnovo University „St. st. Cyril and Methodii“. The conducted research provides us with the necessary information about the accompanying problems of student-football players: on the one hand, in their training and competition process, which must be taken into account by the heads of the sports departments and departments at the higher schools and, above all, by the coaches- football teachers to increase the quality of the work with the representative teams of the Universities, thereby raising the level of student football in general in the Republic of Bulgaria and on the other hand regarding the accompanying problems in the organization of the meetings of the National University Football Championship by the Association of University sport „Academic“.

Keywords: student football, training process, competitive process, coaching recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Sport has established itself as a specific motor activity in modern society, which is characterized by high dynamics of its development (Atanasov (Атанасов), 2013). Sport is often seen as a hobby, an enjoyable pastime or a way to improve physical fitness and have fun with friends, and for some, it is a profession. However, it is actually much more (Stoilov (Стоилов), 2018).

Within the immense diversity of sporting activity and the sporting preoccupations of people across the planet, football represents a phenomenon that, with its extraordinary spectacle and attractiveness, sustains the interest and enthusiasm of millions of fans of different ages and genders around the world (Dimitrov (Димитров), 2019).

Football is the world's most popular and grassroots sport. The great popularity and mass practice of the game of football is no accident. The explanation for this fact must be sought in its accessibility, originality, dynamism and diversity. Soccer is a successful combination between the originality of form, the specificity of content and the emotionality evoked by the skill, creativity and fantasy of the players in the realization of individual and collective game actions in the creation of scoring situations, in the realization of the ultimate goal of the game – scoring a goal (Angelov et al. (Ангелов и кол.), 1987; Shishkov et al. (Шишков и кол.), 1992). According to K. Naydenova, football is in its essence a collective ball game based on individual capabilities, teamwork and victory over the opponent, united by the principles of fair play (Naydenova (Найденова), 2020), and according to E. Atanasov (Atanasov), football is part of the physical culture of humanity and

has some hardly explainable magical power to captivate people (Atanasov (Атанасов), 2013).

Even today, football training occupies an unchanged, leading and prestigious place in the physical education of students. The main direction of work is the efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of training students who chose to engage in football in higher education (Ignatov (Игнатов), 2010).

Physical education in higher education institutions is an integral part of the overall educational and training process. Universities are natural environments that offer rich opportunities for meeting the diverse needs of young people, including sports (Antonova (Антонова), 2017). The organization of the process of physical education and sport, and in particular football, in all higher education institutions in Bulgaria is implemented in the following forms: optional-compulsory (sport optional), optional (optional) and sport improvement (Gavrilov (Гаврилов), 2004; Ignatov (Игнатов), 2012; Colov & Ivanov (Цолов & Иванов), 1998). Students themselves choose the forms of their football-oriented training. Training in the elective-compulsory form takes place in profiled groups with a football focus. Students who have not played organized football participate in these classes. Here some basic technical-tactical elements, rule knowledge, etc. are studied. In the optional groups, the emphasis is on dosed functional loads, which have a predominantly toning and health-prophylactic effect. These groups are open to all students wishing to attend PE and sports classes with a football focus. However, they are outside of their teaching load. The sports improvement groups are formed by students with pronounced football skills who have passed through the junior schools of the football clubs. They represent their

respective university in competitions at different levels. In their case, the training is more intensive and more complex technical elements and tactical combinations are studied. It is the students placed in the sports improvement groups who represent the student football teams of the respective university participating in the National University Football Championship. Student football in Bulgaria has a long history and is a major unit of amateur football and part of the pyramidal structure of Bulgarian football, namely: football in kindergartens, football in schools, children's and youth football in football clubs, student football, amateur football, professional football (Gavrilov (Гаврилов), 2004).

The Student Football Championship is one of the best-organized student championships and is administered by the Technical Football Committee of the Academic University Sports Association and the Bulgarian Football Union. Only students with amateur status are eligible to participate (students playing in professional clubs are not eligible), with no age limit. Each year, between 18 and 24 university teams participate in the competition, divided into three groups: Group A – Sofia city, which is the most numerous – between 12-16 teams; Group B – Plovdiv city – between 4-7 teams and Group C – encompassing higher education institutions from Northern Bulgaria – between 4-7 teams (Ignatov (ИГНАТОВ), 2017, 2019, 2022; Ignatov & Dimov (ИГНАТОВ & ДИМОВ), 2018).

The factors outlined above led us to conduct this multi-component study to characterize in detail the educational training and sport-competition process of football in higher education institutions in Bulgaria.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the problems in the training and competition process of football in higher education institutions in Bulgaria.

For the realization of the aim, we set the following tasks:

1. To investigate the attitude in the educational and training process of the students participating in the representative football teams of the studied universities;
2. To investigate the problems in the competitive process in football of the students participating in the representative football teams of the studied higher educational institutions;
3. To analyze the studied problems and to propose ways to optimize the work with students: on the one hand with their teachers-coaches, and on the other hand with the Association for University Sports „Academic“ (ASU) – the only licensed federation that organizes student competitions in Bulgaria.

METHODS

For the aims and objectives of this study, we analyzed student opinion as a prerequisite for optimizing and generating managerial solutions to improve the organizational work of AUS „Academic“ and the coaching work of football teachers with the students of the representative teams of the 7 universities studied. We used the survey method – a questionnaire was developed, including 15 questions, composed according to the nature of the study.

The study was conducted in March 2023 – in the middle of the summer semester of the academic year 2022/2023, just before

the playing of the finals of the National University Football Championship 2022/2023 with 122 students from the representative football teams of seven universities in Bulgaria, distributed as follows:

18 from Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ (SU), 18 from National Sports Academy „Vasil Levski“ (NSA), 16 from University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UASEG), 17 from Technical University – Sofia (TU), 18 from Plovdiv University „Paisii Hilendarski“ (PU), 17 from Ruse University „Angel Kanchev“ (RU) and 18 from Veliko Tarnovo University „St. st. Cyril and Methodius“. In other words, the questionnaire was completed by 122 male students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age of all 122 students studied was 22.1 years.

The students studied were distributed from 1st to 5th year as follows: 1st-year students were 21.2%, 2nd-year students were 24.6%, 3rd-year students were 23%, 4th-year students were 19.7% and 5th-year students were 11.5% of the students studied.

To the question „Before joining the football team of the university where you study, were you actively involved in football?“, 100% of the respondents answered „YES“.

The mean of the surveyed students' practice of the game of football was 9.4 years.

Students passed through youth schools as follows: 53.3% through schools of professional football clubs, 29.5% through schools of amateur football clubs and 17.2% through schools of private football clubs. There were no respondents through school sports clubs (at the school level) and self-organized, informal (by residence).

To the question „Have you been active in any sport other than football?“, 77% of the students answered „NO“ and 23% answered „YES“. Volleyball and Athletics – five students each, Swimming – four students each, Tennis and Basketball – three students each, Table Tennis and Karate – two students each and Skiing, Boxing, Karate, Badminton and Handball – one student each.

To the question „Are you satisfied with the methodology of your coach teachers training process?“, 95% of the students answered positively, and only 5% answered „Yes, but there is room for improvement“. The answers to this question are explained by the fact that five of the coaches are between the ages of 40-50, one is over 50 and only one is under 40, which indicates a fairly solid experience on the part of the teacher-coaches of the university football teams.

To the question „How do you determine your participation in the football training and competition process?“, the students responded as follows: 59% answered that their participation „Develops their motor skills and has a good impact on their functional state (increases their physical fitness)“ – (C), 16% answered that their participation „Helps to unload the daily chores they do“ – (D), and 25% answered „It makes my studies more difficult, but football is my favorite sport and it is worth the compromises on my part“ – (E). No respondents answered „It interferes with my study process“ – (A) and „It interferes with my preparation in other subjects“ – (B), (Figure 1).

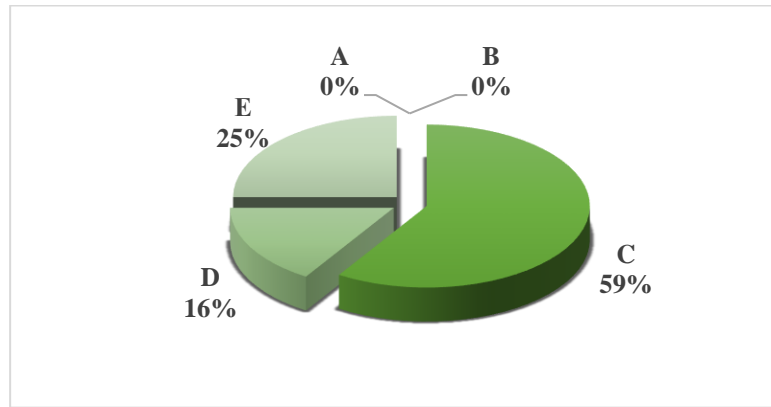


Figure 1. Participation in educational training and competition process for students

To find out where changes are needed in working with students we asked the following question: „Which of the following difficulties do you encounter in relation to your teaching and training process?“. The results of answering this question show that „Inconvenient training time“ is a problem for 43% of the respondents. For 24%, „Poor quality pitches“ are a problem in conducting the training process. 17% think that „The number of

training sessions in the weekly cycle is small“, 8% respond that during training „They do not have the opportunity to use the whole field“, 5% think that there are „Inadequate hygienic conditions“ and 3% are of the opinion that „The qualification of the coach is insufficient“. No respondents answered „Insufficient quality of equipment – balls, training cones and jerseys, training teams“ (Figure 2).

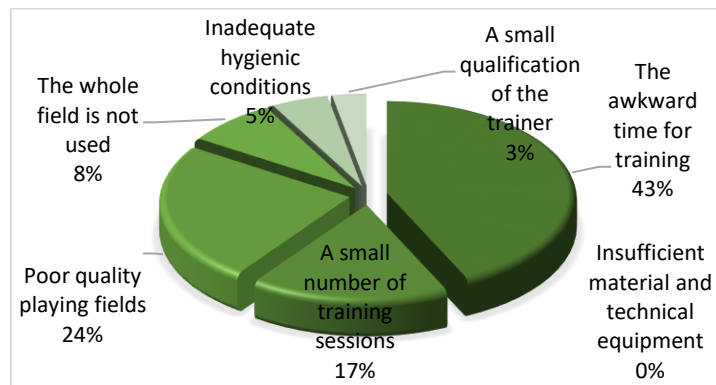


Figure 2. Difficulties in terms of the educational and training process

To the question „In your opinion, which of the mentioned material and technical conditions needs the most improvement in the organization of your training process?“, the students answered as follows: 46% think that the most urgent is the improvement of the „Material facilities (training grounds)“, 38% think that the „Training

equipment“ should be renewed, 9% are of the opinion that the „Hygienic conditions in the locker rooms“ should be improved, and 7% think that the number of „Training aids“ should be increased (Figure 3.).

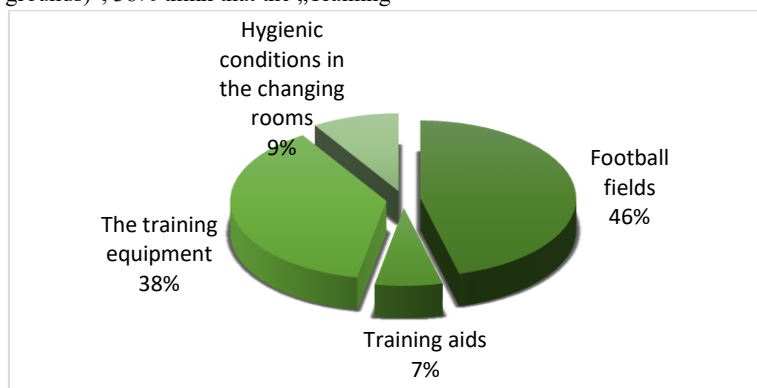


Figure 3. Improvements needed in the training process

To the question: „Of the following conditions, what needs the most immediate change or improvement in the organization of the National University Football Championship?“, the surveyed students give the following answers: 43% think that the most pressing change should be in the „Material facilities – pitches for the competitions“,

30% think that it is the „Inconvenient timing of the matches“, 19% think that there should be a change in the „Refereeing of the matches“, and 8% are of the opinion that the „Official equipment for participation in the competitions” (Figure 4.).

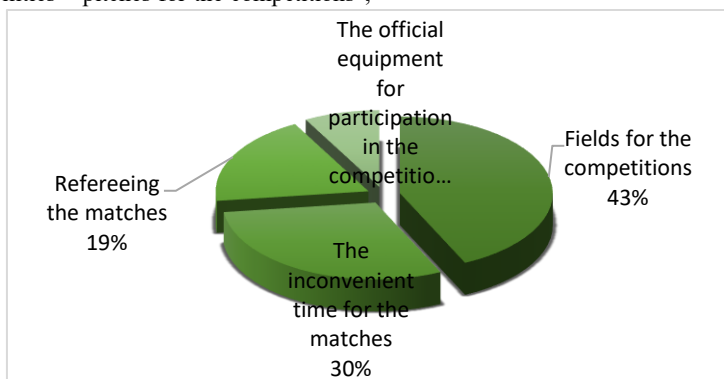


Figure 4. Improvements needed in the competitive process

When asked the indicator question: „Share your opinion on the number of competitions you participate in per school year with your high school team?“, 53% felt the number of competitions was

„Too few“, 33% said it was „Not enough“, 10% felt the number was „Enough“, and 4% „Can't decide“. No respondents answered „Too busy“ (Figure 5.).

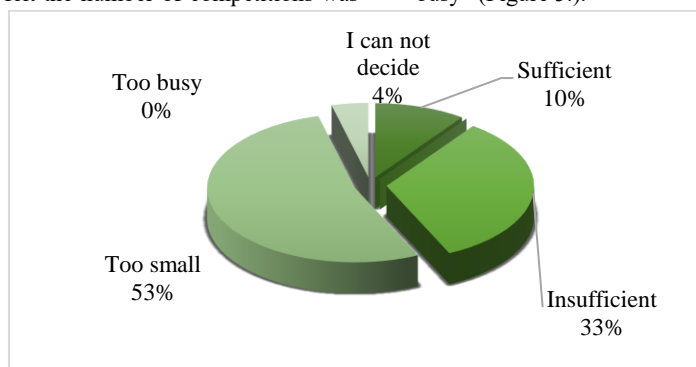


Figure 5. The number of races opinions

To the important question for us: „Do you believe that the Covid-19 pandemic, has had an impact on the overall attitude towards the training and competition process of students competing on college football teams?“, as many as 71% were of the opinion that „Yes, the

Covid-19 pandemic changed the attitude of students in a negative way towards the training and competition process“, 24 were of the opinion that „The Covid-19 pandemic did not have an impact on students“, and 5% were of the opinion „Unable to judge“ (Figure 6.).

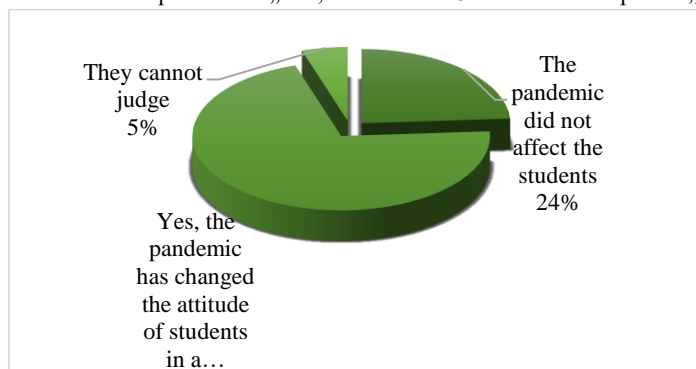


Figure 6. Opinion on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

To the question „What incentives could the management of the university or academy where you compete provide to motivate you even more in your performances on the football field?“, 52% of

the respondents or more than half thought that „Sports scholarships“ – (A) should be provided, 21% thought that „Free participation in international tournaments and competitions“ – (D) should be

provided, 12% thought, that „Free participation in sports camps“ should be provided – (C), 8% said that „Named prizes“ should be provided – (B), and 7% thought that „Inclusion in the representative

team is a sufficient incentive for my active participation“ – (E), (Figure 7.).

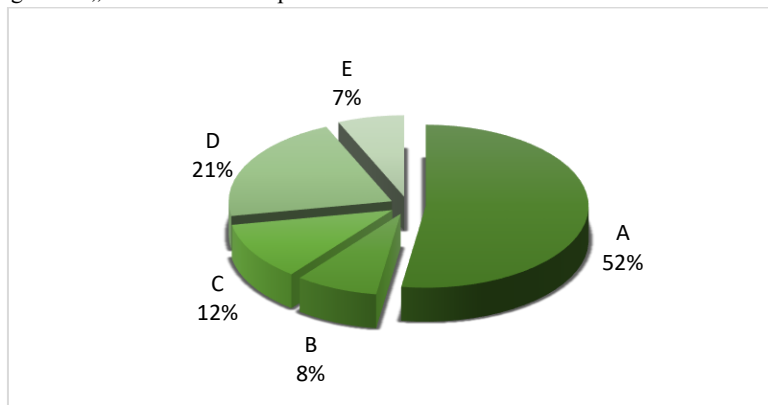


Figure 7. Incentives motivating the performances of students

CONCLUSION

1. In the current academic year (2022-2023) 14 universities and academies from all over Bulgaria are participating in the National Student Football Championship. In the present study 7 of them or in other words, half of the participating teams are included, which is a prerequisite for the objectivity of the answers to the questions posed to the 122 participating students.

2. The average age of the 122 soccer players studied was 22.1 years and the average number of years of practicing the game of soccer on the part of the participants was 9.4 years. 53.3% of the youngsters went through schools of professional soccer clubs, 29.5% through schools of amateur soccer clubs and 17.2% through schools of private soccer clubs. 77% of the surveyed football players did not actively practice other sports, and the remaining 23% were involved in other sports.

3. 95% of the surveyed students are satisfied with the methodology of the training process conducted by the trainer-teacher. The remaining 5% answered „Yes, but there is room for improvement“. The answers to this question are explained by the fact that only one of the coaches has less experience, while all the others have great teaching and coaching experience.

4. A large number of students participate in the training and competition process of football because it has a good influence on their functional state and through it they develop their motor skills (59%). Others participate because it helps to unburden them from the daily chores they perform (16%), and another part feels that it hinders them in their studies, but football is their favorite sport and worth the compromises on their part (25%).

5. The most encountered difficulties experienced by students regarding the training process are inconvenient training times (43%), poor quality pitches (24%), a small number of training sessions in the weekly cycle (17%), inability to use the whole pitch during training (8%), inadequate hygiene conditions (5%) and insufficient qualifications of the coach (3%).

6. According to the respondents, the greatest need for improvement in the organization of the training process in terms of material and technical conditions

are the training grounds (46%), the renovation of training equipment (38%), the improvement of hygienic conditions in the locker rooms (9%) and increasing the number of training aids (7%).

7. According to the students, the most urgent improvement in the organization of the National University Football Championship should occur in the facilities – fields for the competitions (43%), inconvenient time of the matches (30%), refereeing of the matches (19%) and official equipment for participation in the competitions (8%).

8. 53% felt that the number of competitions held was „Too few“ and 33% said it was „Not enough“, suggesting that AUS „Academic“ should take urgent action to increase the number of competitions organized.

9. As many as 71% of the football players surveyed are of the opinion that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the attitude of the students in a negative sense towards the training and competition process, which gives us a reason to recommend that football teachers to try by all means to restore the lost training rhythm with the students after the Covid-19 pandemic.

10. The management of higher education institutions should attempt to provide various incentives to their athletes, which would further motivate participation in competitions in the form of sports scholarships, free participation in sports camps and international tournaments and competitions.

11. A number of valuable conclusions can be drawn from the study, which will be useful in the work of football teachers in higher education institutions and will be a prerequisite for optimizing and generating managerial solutions to improve the organizational work of the Technical Football Committee of the University Sports Association „Academic“, which is the only licensed federation organizing the National University Football Championship in Bulgaria. More efforts need to be made to restore the lost rhythm of sporting participation by students after the Covid-19 pandemic, both by the Academic Association and by the management of higher education institutions, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of education for students who choose to engage in sport, and in particular football, in sports improvement groups.

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