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TEAM PSYCHOLOGY AS A FACTOR IN THE FORMATION OF RESILIENT SPORTS TEAMS IN YOUTH HANDBALL

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of team psychology as a key factor in the formation of sustainable sports teams in youth handball. The purpose of the study is to identify psychological mechanisms that ensure the sustainability of youth handball teams and establish the role of the coach in the formation of an appropriate team psychological culture. In the course of the scientific study, general scientific methods of cognition were used: analysis, synthesis, systematization, comparison, as well as content analysis of scientific publications and structural-logical generalization of empirical data. The results of the study showed that teenage handball players who have developed resilience resources – in particular, self-acceptance and a sense of their own competence – cope much better with pre-competition excitement and prevent it from turning into destructive anxiety. It was found that somatic and cognitive anxiety decrease in proportion to the increase in resilience, and this effect increases with increasing sports experience. At the same time, it was found that the level of group cohesion during the season is a statistically significant predictor of the intention of players to continue playing for the same team – and this connection is relevant for both older and younger age groups. Six psychological characteristics that together form team spirit in youth handball are separately systematized: group cohesion, motivational climate, intra-team communication, psychological safety, team identity, and self-efficacy. Each of them is connected to the others through specific mechanisms: for example, the leadership of the coach, aimed at forming a common "we", increases the team identification of the players, which, in turn, creates an environment of psychological safety, where athletes can openly admit mistakes and seek help. It is through these chains of influence that coaching becomes a key factor in team resilience, and not just in the technical improvement of players. It is emphasized that the psychological literacy of the coach is a necessary condition for the conscious management of these processes. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the obtained results in the development of psychological training programs for youth handball teams and advanced training of coaching staff.

Keywords: team resilience, team psychology, handball, motivational climate, the role of the coach.

Introduction

Handball is one of the most dynamic and psychologically demanding team games. The modern level of competition requires young athletes not only to be physically fit, but also to be able to act effectively under stress, maintain team spirit, and recover quickly from mistakes. Although physical fitness has traditionally been the focus of attention for coaches, more and more research is emphasizing the crucial importance of psychological factors for team success. This problem is especially acute in youth sports, where the player's personality is still being formed, and failures and competition pressure can significantly affect further sports development.

In parallel with global trends in sports psychology, there is growing interest in how the psychological climate within a team affects its long-term performance and ability to maintain stability in critical situations. In youth handball, this issue becomes particularly acute: young athletes do not yet have stable emotional regulation skills, and therefore the team's reaction to a defeat or mistake can either strengthen a common identity or destroy trust between players. The coach remains the central figure in this process – not as a dictator of the result, but as the architect of the environment in which the psychological stability of the group is formed or not. It is this aspect that is the subject of this study.

Literature Review

The issue of psychological foundations of forming resilient teams in youth handball is not sufficiently systematized in the scientific literature, despite the presence of a significant number of studies on individual components of this topic. As for the resilience of youth sports teams and its relationship with anxiety, this issue was studied in detail by J. González-Hernández, M. Gomariz-Gea, A. Valero-Valenzuela and M. Gómez-López [6], who established an inverse relationship between the level of resilience and competitive anxiety in adolescent handball and basketball players. Team behavior and its relationship with goal achievement and competitive anxiety in handball players were studied by X. Wang, Z. Sun, L. Yuan and D. Dong [10], who showed that team cohesion acts as a buffer against anxiety through the mechanism of goal orientation.

The role of identical leadership in shaping team functioning and well-being of athletes was studied by K. Fransen, D. McEwan and M. Sarkar [3]. The study showed that psychological safety mediates the relationship between leadership and team resilience. This issue was further explored by G. S. Schei, R. Høigaard, M. K. Erikstad, A. Ivarsson and T. Haugen [8], who found that intra-team communication plays a mediating role between identical leadership and task cohesion in elite team sports.

Regarding the motivational climate and its impact on the psychological characteristics of handball players, this direction was developed by A. Granero-Gallegos, M. Gómez-López, N. Rodríguez-Suárez and other authors [7], who established a positive relationship between a skill-oriented climate and satisfaction, goal orientation and reasons for players' success. The importance of group cohesion for retaining players in the team in the following season was longitudinally investigated by M. Á. L. Gajardo, J. J. Pulido, F. M. Leo and T. García-Calvo [5]. A comprehensive review of the factors of individual and team performance in handball was carried out by H. Wagner, T. Finkenzeller, S. Würth and S. P. von Duvillard [9], focusing on social and cognitive factors along with physical ones. The role of the coach and the relationship between the coach and the players in the development of psychological characteristics of young athletes is a separate area of research. G. L. M. Freire, L. D. Cronin, S. Jowett et al. [4] in a prospective study of Brazilian handball players showed that the quality of the relationship between the coach and the player is a key predictor of the development of their life skills. Motivational climate and its impact on youth team cohesion were investigated by M. A. Eys, E. Jewitt, M. B. Evans and other researchers [2], who found that a task-oriented motivational climate initiated by the coach is positively related to cohesion. The impact of coach methods and leadership profile on the positive development of young players in team sports was investigated by L. R. de Albuquerque, E. M. Scheeren, G. C. Vagetti and V. de Oliveira [1], who found a connection between democratic leadership style, social support and positive development of young athletes.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the systematization of psychological criteria for team resilience in youth handball and the establishment of specific areas of the coach's work with team psychology, which has not been considered in an integrated manner before. To achieve the goal, methods of theoretical analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, content

analysis, comparative analysis of empirical data, as well as systematization and generalization were used.

Problem Statement

The aim of the article is to identify and systematize the psychological factors that shape the resilience of youth handball teams, as well as to reveal the role of the coach in this process. To achieve the goal, the following tasks will be performed during the study: to reveal the essence of the concept of resilience of a handball team and outline the problems it solves; to determine the criteria of psychological characteristics that form team spirit in handball; to describe the areas of work of the coach in the development of team psychology and resilience.

Methods and Materials

The study was carried out on the basis of analysis and generalization of scientific publications in the field of sports psychology and team dynamics in handball. The information base was articles published in peer-reviewed journals for 2013–2024, in particular Journal of Sports Science and Medicine, Frontiers in Psychology, Psychology of Sport and Exercise, Heliyon and others. The methods of content analysis, theoretical synthesis and comparative analysis of data from 10 scientific sources were used.

Results and Discussions

Handball is a complex coordinated team game in which success depends on the simultaneous interaction of physical, tactical and psychological factors. As noted by the study by H. Wagner, T. Finkenzeller, S. Würth and S. P. von Duvillard [9], team handball is a multifactorial phenomenon, where cognitive, social and psychological components are no less important than the physical form of the players. That is why team resilience is not limited to physical endurance, but encompasses the ability to maintain unity and efficiency under competitive stress.

Resilience in a sports context is considered as a dynamic process of positive adaptation in adverse circumstances. J. González-Hernández et al. [6] understand it as a set of cognitive aspects and behavioral reactions to acute or chronic difficulties, which includes self-acceptance and a sense of one's own competence. In youth sports, resilience is of particular importance, as it coincides with a critical period of cognitive, physical and social development of adolescents. A resilient team is able not only to endure defeats, but also to learn from them and return to effective play. The higher the resilience, the lower the level of competitive anxiety demonstrated by players at key moments of the competition [6].

Team resilience solves several key problems, which are systematized below (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Handball team resilience: essence and problems solved

Problem	Manifestation in the team	Role of resilience
Competitive anxiety [6]	reduced quality of decision-making and mistakes under pressure	resilience reduces cognitive and somatic anxiety; athletes with higher resilience are better able to control their state
Decreased self-confidence [6]	a series of mistakes undermines players' self-esteem, especially among younger athletes	a resilient team creates a supportive environment: players find support within the group and regain confidence in themselves
Risk of player dropout [5]	an unfavourable climate leads to decisions to leave the team	high group cohesion is associated with a stronger intention among players to remain with the team for the following season

Lack of coordination in stressful situations [10]	players' actions become inconsistent under game pressure	team resilience develops stable behavioural patterns that make it possible to maintain tactical coordination despite difficulties
Loss of motivation after defeats [7]	a negative response to failure reduces interest in training	a resilient team views defeat as part of the learning process rather than as evidence of limited ability

Note: compiled by the author based on sources [5; 6; 7; 9; 10]

As can be seen from Table 1, team resilience is a systemic resource that simultaneously solves psychological, social and tactical problems of team interaction. This directly leads to the question of what kind of psychology should be within the team so that resilience is formed naturally.

Resilience does not arise in isolation: it is the product of a certain psychological atmosphere that develops within the team. Team psychology in handball encompasses a set of attitudes, norms of interaction, ways of experiencing difficulties and mechanisms of mutual support. K. Fransen, D. McEwan and M. Sarkar [3] convincingly demonstrate that an effective team functions not as a set of individually strong players, but as a community where everyone shares a sense of "we". It is this common "we" that is the basis of psychological resilience.

For a systematic understanding of what kind of psychology a sustainable youth handball team should have, it is advisable to identify key psychological characteristics and criteria for their manifestation (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Criteria for psychological characteristics of a sustainable youth handball team

Characteristic	Criteria of manifestation	Source
Group cohesion [5; 8; 9]	players remain united in pursuing shared goals/task cohesion and maintain friendly relationships/social cohesion; the intention to stay with the team is stable	
Motivational climate [2; 7]	players are focused on improving their skills/mastery climate, rather than only on winning; mistakes are perceived as part of learning, not as grounds for punishment	
Intra-team communication [8]	messages of support/acceptance and messages of shared identity/distinctiveness are common within the team; communication is open and constructive	
Psychological safety [3]	players are not afraid to express opinions, acknowledge mistakes, and ask for help; there is no culture of condemnation for failure	
Team identity [3; 8]	players identify themselves with the team/"we" rather than "I"; the team has clear shared values and a distinct style of interaction	
Self-efficacy and self-acceptance [6; 10]	players maintain confidence in their own abilities even after mistakes; competence is perceived as a changeable rather than fixed characteristic	

Note: compiled by the author based on sources [2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10]

The characteristics listed in Table 2 are interrelated. Research by G. S. Schei et al. [8] shows that identical leadership enhances task cohesion precisely by improving the quality of intra-team communication. Psychological safety, in turn, is a mediator between team identity and effectiveness – teams where players feel safe demonstrate higher resilience even in difficult competitive situations [3]. A motivational climate focused on mastery helps players who

experience defeat not to sink into apathy, but to perceive failure as information for improvement [7]. Thus, team psychology is a holistic environment, not a set of isolated characteristics.

The coach is the central figure through whom the psychological environment of the team is either consciously formed or spontaneously formed - not always in a favorable way. As noted in the study by L. R. de Albuquerque, E. M. Scheeren and others [1], the choice of pedagogical tasks and the leadership style of the coach directly determine the quality of the psychological development of young players. A coach who combines instructional guidance and social support gets a team with qualitatively higher motivation and commitment.

In order to work purposefully on resilience and team psychology, the coach pays attention to specific aspects of his work. Let us list the main areas to which the coach's attention is directed:

- Formation of a motivational climate oriented towards skill. The coach builds the training process so that players evaluate their own progress, and not just compare themselves with others. A. Granero-Gallegos et al. [7] found that handball players who perceived a climate oriented towards skill demonstrated a task-oriented goal orientation, a higher level of satisfaction and confidence that success is achieved through effort, not innate abilities;

- Democratic leadership style and social support. The coach involves players in making decisions about tactics and team goals. Based on the study by L. R. de Albuquerque et al. [1], it was found that coaches with a democratic behavioral profile, who provide positive feedback and demonstrate social support, receive a higher level of positive development of young athletes;

- Building coach-player relationships. G. L. M. Freire et al. [4] in a prospective study of Brazilian handball players showed that the quality of the coach-player relationship (closeness, commitment, complementarity) during the season positively predicts the development of teamwork, social interaction and leadership skills in players;

- Identical leadership and building a common team identity. The coach creates a sense of "we" in the team, emphasizing common values and the uniqueness of the group. K. Fransen et al. [3] show that leaders who demonstrate identity leadership strengthen team identification, which leads to psychological safety, resilience and better indicators of athletes' well-being;

- Managing the motivational climate and achieving goals. The coach monitors which goals dominate the team: task-oriented or ego-oriented. M. A. Eys et al. [2] found that a perceived task-oriented motivational climate is positively related to team cohesion, while an ego-oriented climate has the opposite effect.

Specific areas of the coach's work in the development of team psychology and resilience are systematized in Table 3.

Table 3 – Areas of the coach's work in the development of team psychology in youth handball

Area of work	Content of the coach's activity	Expected psychological effect
Formation of team identity [3; 8]	shared rituals, symbols, team meetings, and discussion of the team's values and principles	increased team identification, reduced social loafing, and improved psychological safety
Development of communication skills [8; 9]	role-playing games, feedback after training sessions, and exercises in active listening and expressing support	improved quality of intra-team communication and increased task cohesion
Management of the motivational climate [2; 7]	emphasis on personal progress rather than comparison; learning from mistakes instead of punishment for them	greater enjoyment of the game, reduced stress after defeats, and stronger commitment to sport

Support for coach-player relationships [1; 4]	individual conversations, consideration of the player's opinion, demonstration of care, and positive feedback	development of players' social interaction, teamwork, and leadership skills
Work with stress and anxiety [6; 10]	psychoeducation for players, pre-competition rituals, and maintaining positive internal dialogue within the team	reduced competitive anxiety and increased self-confidence and self-acceptance among players
Support for group cohesion [5; 9]	team activities outside the game, democratic goal setting, and attention to each player's role	increased willingness of players to remain with the team and improved team performance

Note: compiled by the author based on sources [1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10]

Table 3 allows us to see coaching work with team psychology not as a set of disparate techniques, but as a holistic system, where each decision – from the method of providing feedback to the choice of team activities – forms a specific psychological effect. It is fundamentally important that none of the listed areas is autonomous: the development of communication is necessarily reflected in the quality of team identity, and the stability of the motivational climate lays the foundation for psychological security, without which players do not dare to take risks and make mistakes.

At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that the effective work of the coach in the psychological dimension is possible only if he has his own competence in this area. The study by G. L. M. Freire and co-authors [4] indicates that the coach's skills, in particular the ability to care for the player and actively listen, directly shape the quality of relationships, which, in turn, determines the psychological development of athletes. This means that the coach's self-education in the field of sports psychology, participation in specialized trainings and advanced training are not an optional addition, but a necessary condition for high-quality coaching practice. Coaches who systematically develop their psychological literacy are able to consciously choose the style of interaction with the team depending on its needs, and not rely only on intuition or their own sports experience.

Conclusions

The analysis confirms that the ability of a youth handball team to withstand competitive pressure and recover from defeats is not automatically laid down in the process of physical training. Players who have developed self-acceptance and a sense of their own competence are much less likely to demonstrate destructive behavior after mistakes, more effectively support team interaction in the final minutes of the match and remain loyal to the team longer. In practice, this means that the training program should include targeted exercises for the development of psychological resources - not in parallel with physical training, but as its organic component. The six psychological characteristics identified in the study form not just a list, but a hierarchy of mutual influences. Team identity and psychological safety are basic conditions, without which the remaining characteristics - cohesion, motivational climate, communication, self-efficacy - cannot develop stably. Therefore, the primary recommendation for youth team coaches is to create a sense of "we" among players and an environment where mistakes do not cause fear of social condemnation. This task requires systematic efforts throughout the season, rather than situational measures before important games.

Coaching's influence on team psychology is implemented through six specific areas: forming a team identity, developing communication skills, managing the motivational climate, the quality of the coach-player relationship, dealing with stress, and maintaining group cohesion. Among these areas, the most systemic effect is provided by the motivational climate:

focusing on skill, rather than on winning at any cost, creates stable internal motivation in players and reduces the risk of early dropout from the team. At the same time, a democratic style of interaction and positive feedback are the tools that allow maintaining this climate even in losing streaks.

Finally, none of the described directions can be implemented by a coach who does not understand the basic mechanisms of group dynamics and motivation. Intuition and personal sports experience are valuable resources, but they do not replace knowledge about how psychological safety is formed, why an ego-oriented climate increases players' anxiety, or what signals indicate the destruction of team identity. Improving the psychological qualifications of youth team coaches is not an optional addition to technical training, but a condition without which the entire described system simply does not start.

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