

Social, Educational and Sports Character of Football Academy in Malbork

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Abstract

The main sports aim of Football Academy is teaching and improving soccer skills of talented players from Malbork administrative district and the nearby areas as well as creating a two-stage sports training system targeted at young juniors (middle school – 3 years) and juniors (high school – 3 years). The main socio-educational aim is to support young players with a desirable set of values and create appropriate educational conditions for them to study at middle and high school.

Judging by the three-year period of sports training and general educational activity in Football Academy in Malbork this practice can be described as systemic in terms of the second level of local government administration in Poland. Moreover, combining school education with sports training in the form of sports classes increases the effectiveness of soccer training and social integration. The main purpose of this paper was to present the organization and structure of Football Academy in Malbork.

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Introduction

According to Czerwiński and Jastrzębski [1, p. 14] soccer is a game which enables a multidimensional influence on a young player. It shapes his personality and life attitude. Furthermore, it helps to gain new experience and skills. The combination of school education and sports training seems to pose an ideal solution. Together with athletics and swimming, soccer is the best form of physical development of young people. Team games greatly influence players' personality development, which can be seen in:

1. enthusiasm for rivalry
2. keeping to the acknowledged organizational rules in the team
3. self-discipline
4. gaining self-confidence during the training process
5. self-control in stressful situations
6. submissiveness to the team
7. permanent pursuit of self-development (personal and sports)

This situation is reflected in the government document "**Sport development strategy in Poland until 2012**" – aims and objectives – the paragraph regarding professional sport, where it is stated: "on account of interests, development of team games should be given serious consideration" not only at the national team level but also in terms of the second level of local government administration [2].

In developed countries sport has become a common good, available in a variety of forms – according to the possibilities and needs of aware society. It has simultaneously become the factor of various aspects of development: health, healthy habits, desirable attitudes and profitable ways of spending free time. These are also significant components of educational systems.

Principles of the above-mentioned "Strategy" are part of the European Parliament Resolution from 29th March 2007 regarding the future of professional soccer in Europe (2006/2130 (INI)), which states the social, cultural and educational role of soccer. It mentions the significance of educating children through sport and shows the opportunities of soccer for preventing youth from the threat of social marginalization. The Resolution asks countries-members, national associations, leagues and clubs for an exchange of the best solutions in this province. Moreover, it appeals to the Commission and countries-members to support the realization of the projects regarding social integration by soccer clubs and adds that young players should be given an opportunity of general education and job training simultaneously with the sports development in clubs.

The effectiveness of the educational process in professional sport depends on such factors as: home, sports club and school. Practice to date has revealed how difficult the synchronization of all these components is. Bearing in mind all the benefits, any difficulties hindering this cooperation should be overcome [3, p. 44]. According to Panfil and Paluszek [4], it seems to be obvious that combining school education and sports training is the factor conditioning the recognition of a great talent. The basic feature determining an outstanding player is the number of training units during which he deliberately repeats the movements and achieves fluency in their use while competing. Therefore, the increase in the amount of training units requires organizational submissiveness of school education to the sports training process. The solution to the problem is creating a unified institution combining both aspects of education: sports and the general one, in the form of sports classes in middle school and sports high schools functioning together with sports clubs or associations as an implementation of joint undertakings. Joining general education with a sports training process improves social perception of practicing sport (parents, teachers and peers' growth of respect for sports practice). On the other hand, the player treats his training as a form of gaining his job qualification and no longer leisure activities or a hobby.

Football Academy in Malbork might be a good example of connection between the school and the club. Therefore, the main objective of this paper was to present the organizational structure of Academy.

Aims and Objectives of Football Academy in Malbork

The main aim of the Academy activity is teaching and developing soccer game among talented players from Malbork administrative district and the nearby ones, creating a two-stage soccer educational system comprising middle school (3 years) and high school (3 years) as well as promotion of the players after completing this two-stage education period in Poland and abroad.

The main objectives to be achieved are:

- selection of players for Football Academy based on tests of motor skills
- development of young soccer players' technical skills and teaching them new tactical behaviour
- introducing individual training workloads for the players of different general and sport-related preparation levels
- creating desirable attitudes and social skills during sports competitions and training units
- gradually introducing and accustoming the players to playing on higher levels: junior, senior (amateur, professional).

The organization system of the Academy is tightly integrated into the players' education in the Sports Middle School founded as part of N^o 4 High School complex in Malbork. It is a state school working according to the middle school curriculum. The main aim of the school is to create favorable conditions for talented youth for their gaining knowledge and skills stated in the curriculum together with sports development of their talent.

There are some similarities in the organization of the Academy and the German system built in the shape of a pyramid and controlled by the German Football Association DFB (Deutsche Fussball Bund), whose main objective is to search for talents among 11- and 12-year-old players. Providing players with technical skills is the aim of this lowest level of organized selecting activities. Next the most talented 11–12-year-old players are selected and at the age of 13 they join licensed clubs in order to be intensively trained.

In Football Academy, like in the programme "Talente Fordern Und Fördern", trainings are run by specialists in identification and education of talented soccer players. They are highly qualified soccer coaches. While employing the coaching staff, three factors are mostly considered: qualifications (university degree of physical education, second class coach certificate), a considerable standing as a former high class player (first league participation) and educational experience in work with students [5]. Apart from gaining soccer skills the players also learn desired attitudes and behaviour, hygiene habits and social skills.

Football Academy also cooperates with Gdansk University of Physical Education and Sport, which provides academic support in terms of training process control. Firstly, it regards physical capacity control and technique skills control in the subsequent year-long training cycles. Secondly, physiological indexes and motor skills tests help to determine training workloads. Thirdly, these tests are used to select members for the Academy and within it. Moreover, anthropological measurements are taken three times a year to assess and track the players' biological development and describe their body proportions and body components changes under the influence of training loads.

The Academy cooperates also with the Rehabilitation Centre, where all the necessary treatment is provided to the players in order that they faster recover from any injury.

Organization Chart

The organization structure of The Football Academy in Malbork is shown in Figure 1.

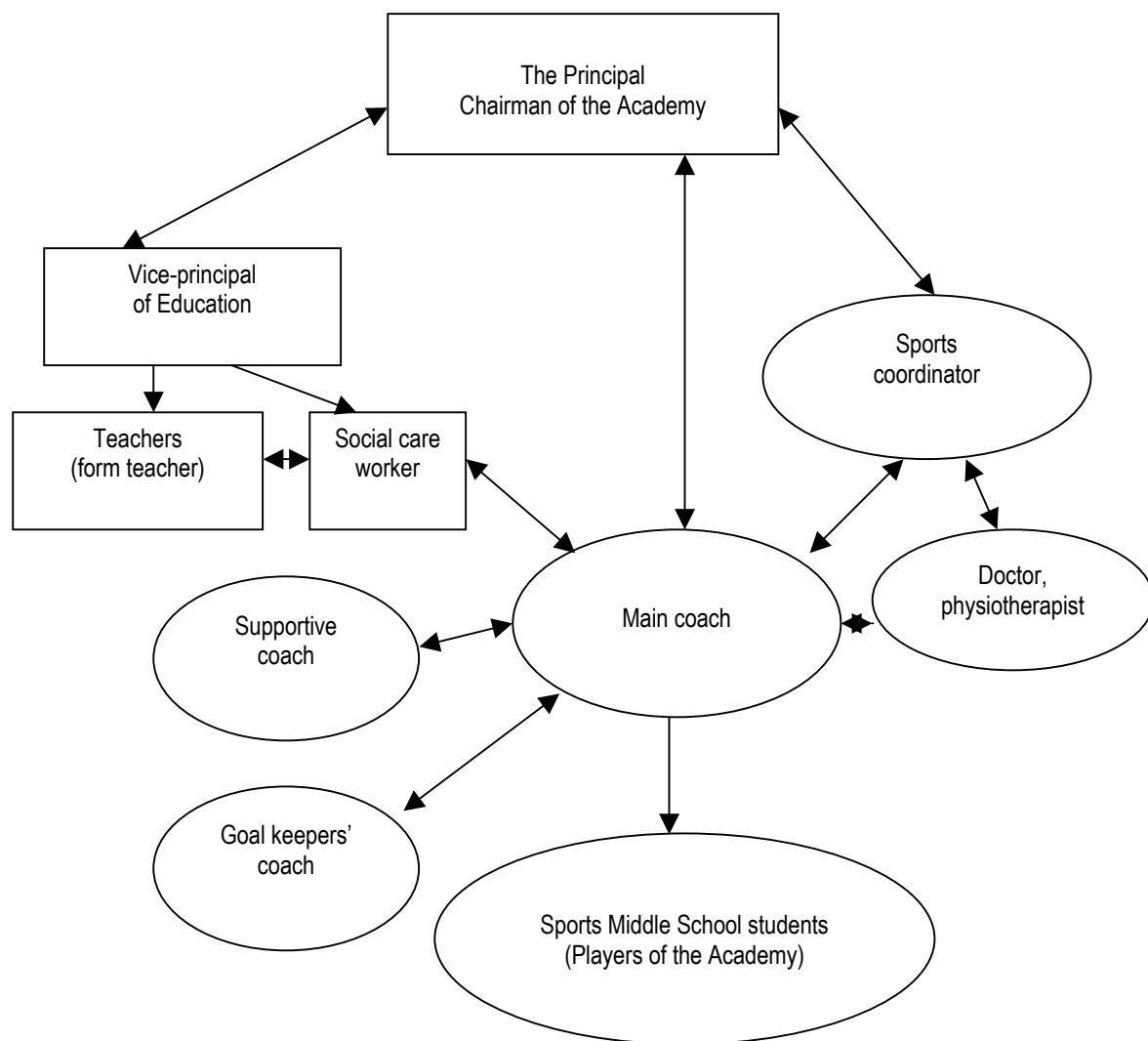


Fig. 1. The organization structure of Football Academy in Malbork

Facilities

Football Academy cooperates with the High School complex in Malbork and uses its facilities:

- a football pitch with artificial surface built within the programme "A Close Sports Field"
- a gymnastic hall
- a fitness hall
- a swimming-pool.

The Academy also makes use of facilities belonging to the Local Sports and Recreation Center in Malbork:

- four full-size football pitches with natural grass surface
- a full-size football pitch with artificial surface
- local park area (perfect for cross-country running).

Selection

Choosing candidates for the Academy is based on a three-stage selecting procedure among primary school pupils in Malbork, administrative district of Malbork, nearby towns and the area distant up to 30 km.

Stage 1

Observing children and their movements during physical education lessons and interview with the PE teacher regarding the pupils' motor skills and psychological features. Gathering information about talented children from club coaches.

Stage 2

Laboratory tests: Wingate test (15 sec. version), running speed at 5, 10, 15 m distance with electronic measurement (photocells) and the agility test (envelope run combined with the forward run and slalom).

Stage 3

Specialist assessment of the field game made by three independent coaches (assessment of technique and tactic).

As a result of the entrance tests, about twenty new candidates are accepted to the Academy every year. They represent different levels of physical capacity, general fitness and soccer-related fitness which are often caused by the differences in biological maturity.

After the three-stage selecting process each group contains some players with several-year soccer training experience, some who have been practicing other sports (e.g. athletics, volleyball, swimming) and some who have not been practicing sport at all. As Kapera and Śledziwski noticed in *Unification of educational process of children and youth* [6, p.122], choosing a (long term) talented soccer player is a significant aspect of selection.

Selection regards boys from primary schools from Malbork and nearby administrative districts, from where public transport allows students to commute easily to school and return home after the training session. This plays an important role in the training and educational process, as family, teachers, form teachers and coaches all participate and influence the process. In exceptional circumstances there is a possibility of accommodating the player in a school dormitory.

Training in the Academy starts at the beginning of August (while the school year begins on 1st September). The aim of this initial period is to integrate the group, accustom to the training routine and prepare legal documents necessary for Sports Middle School and Academy membership. The first one-year training period is devoted to the levelling of differences in technical and tactical skills as well as physical capacity levels.

Basic objectives

1. Social and organizational integration of the group
2. Levelling of technical and tactical skills as well as physical capacity levels
3. Gradual increase in the effectiveness of trainings combined with a proper choice of training workloads
4. Conducting monitoring tests of physical capacity, motor skills and anthropometry
5. Introducing individualization in the training process based on tests results.

Sports objectives

1. Participation in Junior B League tournaments and achievement of best possible sports result
2. Qualification for a higher level competition

The number of training units is determined by one-year school work schedule: its holiday breaks, winter break and other free days.

A typical training microcycle (one-week period) comprises five training units and four PE lessons (including 1 lesson of swimming) and one league match on Saturday or Sunday. The time of a training unit (total time) fluctuates from 45 to 120 minutes.

Nowadays 55 students participate in sports trainings, among whom about 30 live outside Malbork – mainly in Lisewo, Lichnów, Dziergoń, Stary Targ, Waplewo, Prabuty, Tczew and the surroundings. The players are of different social backgrounds, often troublesome or impoverished, which do not provide them with full development opportunities and do not ensure equal access to physical education. Thus sports activity in Academy creates opportunities for their development, creativity, improving their physical skills, and modeling desirable life attitudes. Young players learn social skills, conscientiousness and self-discipline. Furthermore, organizational combination of school education with sports practice in a club enables not only soccer skills development but prevents social pathologies, helps troublesome and impoverished groups especially those of highest level of unemployment and areas lacking sports facilities.

Sports education in the Academy is conducted according to the progressive training idea, which optimizes the process of a full sports development in adulthood, though without spectacular achievements in adolescence. There is one aim – development of the highest sports abilities simultaneously with increasing capabilities of biological potential of the organism which reaches its peak in adolescence [7, p. 7].

A process of control is an integral part of education in the Academy. The players undergo monitoring tests three times a year. They are physical capacity tests, sport-related fitness tests and anthropometric measurements:

1. running speed test on different distances measured with photocells,
2. anaerobic performance – Wingate test [8],
3. aerobic performance - PWC₁₇₀ test [9],
4. general fitness – INKF test [10],
5. sport-related fitness – technical skills test of German Football Association (Deutsche Fussball Bund-DFB) [11] based on 7 trials:
 - trial 1. rotational kick of the ball from the corner of a penalty area at the goal line
 - trial 2. dribbling
 - trial 3. ball juggling
 - trial 4. striking the ball against the bench
 - trial 5. heading to the goal
 - trial 6. centering the ball
 - trial 7. precision of striking the ball from the penalty spot.

Results

Registration of training loads in the first training macrocycle (2006/2007) started on 5th September 2006 and finished on 29th June 2007. After this date the players had summer holidays. The total training load (TR) within this training period was 298hrs and 3min covered during 275 training units.

During the next training macrocycle (2007/2008 season) the registration started on 1st August 2007 and finished on 18th June 2008. After this date the players again had summer holidays. Within this period the value of the total training load (TR) was 288hrs and 11min. covered during 317 training units (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. The example results (mean values) of physical capacity tests and soccer skills tests of Football Academy in Malbork players (players born in 1993, n=16)

Test number Kind of test	I 09.2006	II 06.2007	III 09.2007	IV 11.2007	V 02.2008	VI 06.2008	VII 09.2008
Test DFB (points scored)	267	301	296	304	305	307	322
Peak Power (W/kg ⁻¹)	9.4	9.9	10.0	9.1	9.6	9.9	9.7
PWC ₁₇₀ (kgm/kg ⁻¹ /min ⁻¹)	15.5	16.1	16.6	17.2	16.9	18.1	16.2

Sports results

The players born in 1993 during their first year of education in the Academy participated in spring season tournaments in 2006/2007 with 8 wins and 1 draw. In the second year they took part in Junior C1 League tournaments. The footballers played 22 matches and scored 58 points (19 wins, 1 draw, 2 defeats). The team was classified in the first position of the final ranking.

The players born in 1994 in their first year of training in the Academy participated in Junior C2 League tournaments, Malbork group II (local district class) and played 24 league matches (22 wins, 1 draw and 1 defeat). The team was classified in the top position of the final ranking and was promoted to the higher class of rivalry (Junior League of Pomerania). In the second year of education the players took part in Junior C2 League of Pomerania (season 2008/2009) autumn round and played 12 matches (8 wins, 4 defeats).

At present six players are appointed to the Pomerania province team in the junior age group.

Education results

As mentioned above both educational and sport results are crucial factors in players' development. During the first two years fifty students were accepted to the Academy. The school curriculum was applied according to all subjects. The level of school attendance was 90%, which is an indubitable organizational success. Due to injuries the level of training attendance was at a lower level of 80%.

Moreover, 100% of the Academy students were promoted for the next year. An average school grade in the first year was 3.52, in the second year 3.66, which is an unsatisfactory result. Therefore, individual lessons for the players with educational problems were initiated. The selection process included mainly the evaluation of the players sport competences. That might be a reason for a low level of school marks as well.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to present the principles of functioning and the structure of the Football Academy in Malbork. The three-stage method of selection practiced in the Academy allows searching out the most talented players in the region in each age group. After being accepted to the Academy young players start to practice a special training process. A systematic control of physical fitness, soccer skills level and educational development is an indispensable component of the philosophy of Football Academy in Malbork.

According to Jaskólski et al. [12], sports education of children and youth is effective only in the form of a system of mutually linked elements. There are key factors and supportive ones in all the systems. The key factors are as follows:

1. assessment of individual abilities and choice of the appropriate kind of sports activity,
2. educational and training process, competitions and rehabilitation,
3. lifestyle allowing a combination of sports practice with intellectual and spiritual (emotional) development of a sportsman,
4. control and correction of the whole sports educational system and its components.

According to Chmura [13] some attempts to organize a systematic training process for football-talented children and youth have been made in the last several decades in Poland. Nevertheless, all the efforts were unsatisfactory. Foundation of Sports Master Schools, state sports training centers, football schools, sports clubs brought no effective training system in organizational or practical terms which could be recognized as complete, satisfactory and worth implementing. To provide an effective training process, as Panfil and Paluszek [4] claim, sports training and general education must be combined in one organizational unit like e.g. sports classes of the football profile in middle school or football profiled high school classes cooperating with sports clubs or associations.

Although the effectiveness of Football Academy in Malbork seems to be accurate, there are still many features needing improvement. The quality of facilities is crucial to ensure the efficient training process as at present the lack of natural pitches is a serious inconvenience.

Combining general education with sports training provides higher social prestige (parents', teachers' or peers' recognition for physical effort). On the other hand, a player perceives the training as a form of gaining qualifications for future profession and not as additional hobby lessons. Such a system is a prerequisite for revealing talented players thanks to the quantity and quality of coaching practice.

According to Panfil [14], there is no clear concept of coordinated action of educational and sports authorities at different levels necessary to create modern sports education.

There is no consistent central system to assess physical capacity, sport specific skills or control training loads, which makes coaches' work intuitive and based on subjective observation. This province of sports training gives vast opportunities to develop and improve the training process and control in football.

Judging by these views, it can be stated that organizational and educational activities taken within Football Academy in Malbork reveals the features of systemic sports education.

Conclusions

1. Although presented in this paper system of training and education in Football Academy in Malbork cannot be considered as a pattern, it might be an inspiration for many soccer coaches working with talented youth.
2. Activity of the Academy in terms of socio-cultural and sports development accomplishes its objectives.
3. The introduced system of selection and education in the Academy is effective which is proved by the players' sports results.
4. Combining general education with sports one in sports classes increases the effectiveness of soccer training process.

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