

**Norbert Müller Ph.D.**

**Professor em. at Johannes Gutenberg- University Mainz**

**Senior Professor at Kaiserslautern University (TU)**

**Member of the IOC Commission for Culture and Olympic Education**

**Member of the Pontifical Council for Laity**

**Life Member of the International Olympic Academy**

## **“The World of Youth and the World of Sports: A Challenging Combination for Today’s Coaches”**

Eminence, Excellence, Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

### **Introduction**

Since my research topic proved to be especially comprehensive and multifaceted, exploring only some basic aspects could most likely fill a seminar throughout the course of an entire semester. Additionally, both dimensions included in the topic, namely “the world of youth” and “the world of sports”, are defined and represented differently in many cultural environments worldwide. Thus, participants of the World Youth Day in Rio 2013 and the approximately same-aged participants of the Youth Olympic Games 2010 and 2014 can hardly or not at all be compared. Let us look at the numbers: While we met one million religiously rooted youngsters praying and singing in Rio, 4.000 adolescents age 14 to 18 constituting the sporting elite attended in Singapore 2010 and Nanjing 2014.

Looking at attendance numbers of the Winter Youth Olympic Games, 900 participants from 40, mostly European coined countries in which winter sports are common attended, including many nations with a Christian-based tradition.

Now, let us focus on cultural circumstances and contexts. Every single one of us is influenced by the characteristic sports conditions and requirements, moral values, rules and norms – or simply put the ethos – of our native country.

In view of the sports conditions, there is, in most cases, a combination of physical training at schools, recreational sports oftentimes influenced by the respective geographical conditions, competitive sports which are often dependent on nation-specific traditions and societal terms. In addition, parents as well as friends and the socio-environment prove to be influential factors.

Are you aware that, according to a UNESCO-statistic, there are 60 countries in which no mandatory physical training in schools, much less a special program of sponsorship for competitive sports are in place?

Based on a 200-year-old tradition, there are 90.000 sports clubs with over 35 million members in my home country of Germany. Club memberships are affordable to adolescents, making it possible for every family to afford such. Elite confines, barring the way and hindering children to be physically active in a sports club, are nonexistent. Such access possibilities facilitating the engagement in collective sports are not to be considered a subsidiary but an essential matter for every human being and his or her development.

In its Fundamental Principles, the IOC demands for a reason: The practice of sport is a human right. And the UNESCO-Charter for sports and physical training calls for mandatory school sports as well as for adequate mass sports to be available for every single person, especially for youths. But, intention and reality oftentimes do not correspond. This demand, however, obtains my absolute approval.

Even though I was able to travel many continents and places as sports development worker, sports scientist, Olympics researcher or assisting in catholic missions, my knowledge about current situations in your countries in a deeper sense is not sufficient.

During numerous summer camps at the International Olympic Academy, I got the opportunity to discuss with young people coming from all over the world. Nevertheless, I cannot claim to really know the sports youth of those countries.

Now, considering the subtitle of the topic assigned to me, namely the “challenging combination today’s coaches are facing”, finding an answer or solutions to the issue appears even more difficult.

As basis of discussion, the only response I dare to give refers to my own home country of Germany. But certainly we are able to use this basis collectively, thereby, drawing a more complex picture and considering the specific situations in your countries as well.

The German adolescents’ world has turned into a world of youths engaging in sport activities. 60% of teenagers up to the age of 18 are active sport club members, not to forget adolescents working out outside of sport clubs, for example skateboarding or rollerblading in public places and enjoying sports collectively. An athletic youth culture influencing many youngsters also has its downside. In comparison to my own adolescence in the 1960s, such activities may also be attributed to church-based youth work and the dedication involved in such. At the same time, however, a decline in youths participating in competitive sports is apparent, leading to entire forms of sport to obtain a rather marginal position, e.g. the main Olympic sport of “track and field athletics”. Due to continuously increasing training demands, coaches face the new challenge of young people no longer being able or willing to meet such high expectations. Club and association boards are even more concerned since it is a matter of keeping their sport forms “alive”. Even German soccer is no exception since, especially in metropolitan areas, mainly children and adolescents with migrant backgrounds play the sport.

Furthermore, parents focus more on children’s academic success; cancelled sport lessons usually do not cause any protest or discontent, in contrast to cancelled lessons in subjects such as mathematics or languages. The professional carrier is clearly prioritized.

Hereinafter, let me introduce an analysis conducted by myself with the co-operation of Kristina Bohnstedt at the University of Mainz in 2004/5. The examination centralizes the topic of today's Vatican seminar. We surveyed 181 young high-performance athletes from nine Olympic sport forms at five elite sports schools.

It would please me greatly if you conceptually apply and transfer our findings onto your own home country and if we then share information in the following discussion.

## **0. The implementation of ethical and social standards in youth high-performance sport and the influence of trainers**

Resulting from numerous problematic developments, ethical issues are coming to the fore in our society.

In addition to doping and profit orientation, child and teenage high-performance sport is a recurrent focus of discussions about ethical responsibility. The people responsible, particularly leading members of sports associations and sport scientists must make their position clear and help parents to shed their fears.

In this connection, a specific ethic for trainers is increasingly being demanded. The German Sport Association responded to this demand by publishing the "Code of Conduct for Trainers", for the first time in 1997.

As early as 1984 and again 2002, the worldwide appreciate German sport pedagogue MEINBERG formulated ethical principles for child and teenage high-performance sport, which have lost nothing of their importance. In fact, they are more important than ever in 2015, as a result of professionalization and media attention.

According to MEINBERG, an optimum approach to training children and teenagers in high-performance sports depends on the following ethical principles:

- 1. using another person as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end,*
- 2. the principle of respect,*

3. *the principle of equality,*
4. *the principle of solidarity,*
5. *the principle of fairness,*
6. *the principle of suitability for children/teenagers,*
7. *the principle of reasonableness,*
8. *the principle of helping,*
9. *the principle of trust,*
10. *the principle of participation,*
11. *the principle of responsibility,*
12. *the principle of achievement – making no fetish of achievement,*
13. *a body ethic suitable for children/teenagers – not exploiting the body.*

## **1 Aim of survey and methods**

My paper investigates whether child and teenage high-performance athletes think that their trainers observe MEINBERG's 13 ethical principles for a humane high-performance sport. The young high-performance athletes were asked to evaluate the implementation of ethical standards during daily training situations.

Research data were collected through a survey using a standardized questionnaire, which was filled in under supervision. The interviewees, aged between 14 and 19, attend sport-orientated schools in five German cities. (Berlin, Erfurt, Kaiserslautern, Koblenz and Frankfurt)

## **2 Results and interpretation**

### **2.1 The sample survey**

Altogether, 181 young high-performance athletes participated in the survey, 80 of them female (44.2%) and 101 male (55.8%). 15.5% of the athletes belong to sports

with a young high-performance age (e.g. gymnastics, figure skating, swimming), 30.9% to team sports (volleyball, handball, basketball, football) and 53.6% to various other sports (athletics, cycling, table tennis, rowing ).

Training in their main sport starts at the average age of 8.7, and 11.2 years is the average age for the start of high-performance training (daily training, regular competitions and training camps). The young athletes train at different training centers. Approximately 40% train at two centers. About half of the athletes are members of training groups at their sports club, at the Olympic training centre and at their sport-orientated school. Thus, 52% of the athletes work with at least two different trainers, and 20.7% even with three. 27.6% of the athletes live in a full-time-boarding school, 11% attend a part-time-boarding school, and 61.3% live with their families. Irrespective of their living arrangements, 90.1% of the young athletes say that they have become more independent through high-performance training.

Before the survey, 65.0% of the athletes had already discussed practice-oriented ethical questions at school.

Given the age of the interviewees, it can be assumed that under normal circumstances they possess a sufficient capacity for ethical judgement. This would not be the case with children, but teenagers can be considered mature enough. Their involvement with high-performance sport may in the course of time affect their evaluation of trainer behavior and of their own situation.

The teenagers' answers show, however, that they are able to critically judge both their own situation and the behavior of their trainers. The fact that the majority of interviewees pursue sports with a late high-performance age positively affects the starting age for high-performance training.

## **2.2 Ethical values in youth high-performance sport**

The analysis focusses on the attitudes of young high-performance athletes. The questionnaire was intended to show whether the teenagers' values, including their evalua-

tion of trainer behavior, had already been influenced by their involvement with high-performance sport and the concomitant concentration on achievement. In addition, the teenagers' general value systems were compared with the values conveyed by their trainers, and the values perceived in competitions.

The majority of interviewees want above all their main sport to teach them achievement-oriented values. At the top of the hierarchy of desirable values are

- *ambition* (93.4%),
- *competitiveness* (90.1%) and
- *assertiveness* (75.7%).

While *fairness* (68.5%),

- *independence* (65.7%),
- *friendship* (64.6%),
- *health* (47%) and
- *willingness to take risks* (44.2%)

still play a fairly important role for the young athletes, they consider values like

- *happiness* (35.9%),
- *honesty* (27.6%),
- *justice* (27.1%) and
- *equal opportunities* (22.7%)

appear to be less important.

It can be observed from the athletes' answers that trainers tend to teach the achievement-oriented values much more frequently than the others.

An examination of correlations shows that – except for the values of *ambition* and *justice* – there is a statistically significant correlation between the athletes' desire to learn these values through their main sport, and the frequency with which these values are taught by the trainer.

The assessment of values in competitions reveals an even stronger emphasis on achievement-oriented values. Thus, 98.8% of the athletes hold *competitiveness* and

95% hold *ambition* to be very important in competitions, while values such as *justice* and *friendship* play a secondary role

Since the young high-performance athletes prioritize achievement-oriented values, which they expect their main sport to teach them, and which they consider even more important in competitions, we must conclude that trainer behavior may likewise be assessed on the basis of the principle of achievement. This tendency seems to be further strengthened by the fact that the athletes consider those values to be particularly important which are taught most often by their trainers. Accordingly, in their moral assessment of trainer behavior, the athletes may be following the ethical standards of their trainers. The close connection between the values of trainers and athletes casts some doubt on the young high-performance athletes' ability to judge their trainers' behavior objectively and critically. However, it is not clear whether the values held by the athletes are shaped by the trainers or by parents or other factors such as personality. The data suggest that the interviewees judge the behavior of their trainers as well as their own situation from an achievement-oriented perspective.

### **2.3 The implementation of MEINBERG's ethical principles using the example of trainer behavior**

Questions concerning trainer behavior were intended to show whether, in dealing with the young athletes, the main trainer (i.e. the trainer with whom the athlete works most of the time) follows MEINBERG's 13 ethical principles in order to ensure a humane high-performance sport. At the same time, the analysis examined possible connections between the implementation of these principles and factors such as the athletes' gender, their particular school, their age or their main sport.

The most important results of the survey are shown in the following table:



<b>Using another person as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end</b>	My TRAINER wants me to win so that I can enjoy success.	61.3 %
	My TRAINER accepts that my body cannot always achieve perfect results.	53.0 %
<b>The principle of respect</b>	My TRAINER is very often ready to listen to my wishes and fears.	52.5 %
	My TRAINER always respects my opinion.	48.1 %
	My TRAINER is sometimes ready to listen to my wishes and fears.	42.5 %
<b>The principle of equality</b>	My TRAINER sometimes asks me what I think.	54.7 %
	My TRAINER listens to my criticism and responds to it.	53.3 %
	My TRAINER very often asks me what I think.	30.9 %
<b>The principle of solidarity</b>	My TRAINER only reproaches me when there is a good reason.	82.3 %
	My TRAINER never reproaches me when I am not successful.	9.4 %
	My TRAINER always reproaches me when I am not successful.	8.3 %
	My TRAINER critically examines both his/her own work and mine when I am not successful.	79.0 %
	My TRAINER lays the entire blame on me when I am not successful.	14.9 %
	My TRAINER also blames himself/herself when I am not successful.	6.1 %
<b>The principle of fairness</b>	My TRAINER is equally happy for all when they do well.	81.8 %
	My TRAINER supports us all equally.	68.0 %

<b>The principle of suitability for children/teenagers</b>	My TRAINER knows how old I am and treats me accordingly.	84.0 %
	My TRAINER involves me in more decisions as I grow older.	54.1 %
<b>The principle of reasonableness</b>	I never feel afraid during training.	76.8 %
	I sometimes feel overtaxed during training.	68.0 %
<b>The principle of helping</b>	My TRAINER immediately tries to help me when I say I have a problem.	82.2 %
	My TRAINER always listens to me when I have a problem.	66.7 %
<b>The principle of trust</b>	I very often trust my TRAINER.	70.7 %
	My TRAINER makes all decisions together with me.	65.7 %
	I sometimes discuss personal problems with my TRAINER.	50.8 %
	I sometimes have a say in which competitions I enter.	40.3 %
<b>The principle of responsibility</b>	My TRAINER sometimes talks with my parents.	60.8 %
	I take part in both team and individual competitions.	59.6 %
	My TRAINER sometimes organizes activities outside training for us.	58.6 %
	My TRAINER reduces the training load when there are many exams and I have problems at school.	54.1 %
	My TRAINER sometimes helps me to make plans for school and for my career.	47.0 %
	My TRAINER never helps me to make plans for school and for my career.	44.2 %
	My TRAINER sometimes talks to my teachers in order to coordinate the demands of school and training.	41.7 %

	My TRAINER never talks to my teachers in order to coordinate the demands of school and training.	38.3 %
	My TRAINER never reduces the training load.	29.8 %
<b>The principle of achievement – making no fetish of achievement</b>	My main TRAINER is happy in competitions when I do well.	94.5 %
	Our training is achievement-oriented and fun-oriented.	59.7 %
	Our training is purely achievement-oriented.	40.3 %
<b>A body ethic suitable for children/teenagers – not exploiting the body</b>	When I am physically exhausted in training, I still have to carry on until the end of the training session.	44.2 %
	When I am physically exhausted in training, I am allowed a short break during training.	43.6 %

In general, while the majority of trainers are largely guided by MEINBERG's ethical principles in their work with the young high-performance athletes, a critical examination of individual principles also reveals some transgressions. The athletes noted incidences of behaviour on the part of trainers which fall short of their ethical expectations and have to be considered problematic or irresponsible.

Correlations between the kind of sport and the degree of conformity with individual principles are rare. Sport-specific differences only occur with the implementation of *the principle of equality, the principle of suitability for children/teenagers, the principle of participation* and *a body ethic suitable for children/teenagers*.

As far as these principles are concerned, ethical boundaries are transgressed most frequently by trainers in team games. But a disregard of ethical principles by trainers working with young high-performance athletes can be found in all kinds of sport. This indicates that adherence to ethical principles depends on the individual personality of the trainer rather than on other factors.

More detailed results could be obtained by examining the implementation of these ethical principles in all kinds of youth high-performance sport on an even broader basis.

### **3 Conclusion**

It has become clear that MEINBERG's principles, while very theoretical and general, have a practical application and can be used for critically examining the behaviour of trainers in different kinds of sport.

The teenagers' assessment of their own situation and of individual problems shows that MEINBERG's demands are realistic. The athletes most frequently criticize the disregard for individual principles on the part of trainers and coaching assistants.

The Olympic Movement must become more aware of its responsibility for the ethical and social conditions under which young athletes live and train. Surveys like the presented one should therefore be conducted on a large international scale.

It is a great progress that the IOC Athletes Commission understood the necessity to form athletes and trainers from different educational aspects with the first international programme under the name "MOOC" elaborated from different independent universities, and just published at the end of April 2015. Free Online access in French or English is given to every interested athlete and/or trainer. (<http://onlinecourse.olympic.org/local/login/index.php>)

This suggests that the IOC has realized the importance of qualified pedagogical work with high-performance athletes and acknowledges certain shortcomings. The target group, however, has to include the entire "entourage", not only athletes but also medical personal, physiotherapists and association functionaries.

Looking at the presented results of having analyzed 181 young high-performance athletes in 2004, the outcome seems to be satisfying or partly even beneficial. However, such results can vary, for example, whenever sponsors expect better performances or the government decides to promote only sports that are more likely to bring medals;

which is a current topic in my native country. The immense strain lying on the coaches to maximize performances is then passed on to the athletes or even results in coaches or athletes to quit.

The fact that in the 8-billion-US-Dollar contract with the IOC the US-NBC-Network demands concrete educational efforts to be installed by the IOC within the following four years, offering another 100 million US-Dollar to support the successful realization of such, cannot be regarded a perversion.

A “humane high-performance sport” just like social market economy, which prevailed in the 1980s West-Germany, no longer exists.

In order to assure athletic success, the global norm becomes the reference point. Let us look at China. Here, national prestige is prioritized and fostered by all means possible. Thus, it does not surprise that 100.000 Chinese girls and boys aged 5 to 10 are being systematically trained in artistic gymnastics, practicing 8 hours a day for five years. Who is supposed to keep up with that? Which country, which continent is able and willing to afford this? Where does such an attitude fit in other cultural contexts? Thus, only a few highly talented athletes from more liberal systems are going to be able and willing to keep up.

Having a total population of only 16.3 million, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) had 1.800 fully paid coaches employed, compared to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with a total population of 63 million, which only had 180 professional coaches during that time. Such numbers demonstrate impressively, what is considered valuable to a country, or more specifically, for what a country is willing to spend money on. Athletic success then becomes national success utilized to represent a successful political system and political regime structures.

In March 2007, I was able to teach *Olympic Values and Fair Play-Education* for four weeks at the Peking Sports University. After about two weeks a student asked me openly in the lecture hall: “Why are you teaching this to us? We want to win as many medals as possible at the 2008 Olympic Games in Peking. Therefore, we cannot have

consideration for such sporting ethics. Surely, Coubertin was influenced by European Christian traditions. These, however, do not apply to us.”

Nevertheless, the pastoral responsibility of the church should put children’s and youths’ (holistic) physical and mental development above all and should also oppose the exploitation of young high-performance athletes. (MEINBERG’s postulation 13) Relating to this matter, the Youth Olympic Games are not free of criticism, even though they are based on a positive Olympic educational program, including Fair Play-Education. Even though Coubertin demanded in 1925: *Ne troublez pas l’équilibre des saisons* (Do not let us trouble the equilibrium of our children’s development), he had already written anachronistically in 1900 that modern competitive sports lead to excess, which is its “nobility and its selection”. The Olympic motto „citi-us-altius-fortius“ (higher-stronger-faster) was stated by Coubertin’s fatherly friend, his Dominican colleague Henri Didon and is said to originate from his Christian-based educational attitude. Here, Coubertin appears to be torn between his Olympic and his sports-pedagogic mission, wanting to keep and eventually combine both. Thinking of the doping problem for example, Coubertin was hardly able to anticipate the future development of his movement.

Now, it is up to us deciding which aspect to tie on, which image of humanity we want to represent. In my opinion, there is one main point to be considered, namely, that each and every one of us should get the chance to become everything he or she is able to be. This can certainly not be realized by structuring our kids’ and teenagers’ entire upbringing solely on the basis of athletic success. Ultimately, they would be exploited by third-parties only to function as means to an end – to assuage the appetite for success.

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