

Assessment of Coaches' Knowledge Regarding Their Legal Duties toward Athletes

Abstract of PhD Thesis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Risk is an inseparable part of sport, and its total removal from sporting activities is impossible. Thus, some injuries might occur even when the risks had been identified and all logical precautions had been taken. While many injuries result from the inherent risks of sport, occasionally they are the result of careless or thoughtless attitude or behavior by other persons, above all by the coaches. Various duties are imposed on coaches regarding their liabilities. When the coaches are not aware of their duties, they might put their athletes in unsafe conditions, and also expose themselves to legal consequences.

Student-athletes are more exposed to injuries than mature adults since they do not perceive hazards and risks in the same way as the latter do. Their young age and the lack of their experience influence their ability to recognize hazards and hazardous situations and to perceive in advance the likelihood of accidents and the consequences of their irresponsible behavior with which they can cause harm to themselves. These are the coaches who can reduce the risk of the students' injury but only if they have the appropriate knowledge and perform their legal duties in a correct way. Therefore, studying the university coaches' knowledge about and the awareness of their legal duties toward the students participating in sport has special importance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To determine what specific legal duties a coach has and to properly educate coaches on how to perform them, Schwarz (1996) found 13 legal duties which have been derived from the court precedents and legal literature. In the rich international literature this issue was studied mostly from the perspective of case law and the majority of the researchers stated that most

coaches do not have sufficient knowledge, do not completely perform their duties toward athletes and consequently they are legally liable.

Highlighting just a few examples, Bezdicek (2009) and Gurchiek et al. (1998) reported that a lot of coaches do not completely fulfill their risk management related tasks. Singh and Surujlal (2010) as well as Wolohan and Gray (1998) revealed that a great number of coaches do not regularly examine their athletes' sport equipments and facilities to ensure that they were safe and they would not cause injury and they do not warn their athletes of potential risk. In a research Cooney et al. (2000) about the knowledge of school rugby coaches found that the coaches lack vital knowledge in the prevention, recognition and management of neck injury. McGrath (2012) evaluated the knowledge of secondary school football coaches regarding sudden death in sport. He discovered that many coaches were unaware of the potential causes of sudden death in sport and symptoms prior to it. Ransone and Dunn-Bennett (1999) assessed high school athletic coaches' knowledge about first aid and medical care. The results of his investigation showed that only a third of the coaches passed the first aid exam.

Albrecht (2008) discovered that just a few coaches for youth sport were formally trained in connection with basic first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Similarly, Castro (2010) reported that only one tenth of youth soccer coaches earned a passing score on the first aid assessment test. Cooney and his colleagues (2000) revealed that although most coaches had qualification in first aid, they did not have vital knowledge in the area of injury prevention and management in emergency situation.

Even these few instances demonstrate sufficiently how essential it is to examine, evaluate, and describe the existing knowledge of athletic coaches (Barron, 2004; Zimmerman, 2007).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this study the coaches' legal duties regarding the athletes are categorized in seven major groups. This classification is based on various recommendations from legal authors and different relevant court precedents (Schwarz 1996, Hensch 2006, Figone 1989). These seven major duties include: *supervision, instruction and training, facilities and equipment, warn of risk, medical care, knowledge of player, and matching players*, which are mentioned (separately or together with other duties) in most related literatures and used as the theoretical framework of this study.

3. OBJECTIVES

While the international literature is rich, there is little scientific evidence in terms of assessing the Iranian coaches' knowledge about their legal duties toward their athletes. In Iran sport law and coaching science have not yet been in the focus of the researchers' interest. The connection between the coaches' legal knowledge and their social position (recognition, salary, prestige, etc.) has not been discussed either. Since Iranian sport in general and sport at the Iranian universities in particular have made good progress recently; it seemed to be relevant to examine these issues. Therefore, in the recent past a research was carried out about these questions by the author who directed her interest to the coaches employed at universities. On the basis of this empirical investigation, *the objective of this thesis is to reveal the degree of the knowledge to which the Iranian university coaches are familiar with their legal duties and to discover the major factors which have an impact on their knowledge acquirement.*

3.1 Research Questions

The aim of the investigation was to give answers to the following research questions:

Q1 What is the level of the coaches' knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes at the Iranian universities?

Q2 To what extent their demographic and social circumstances influence their knowledge about legal problems?

Q3 To what extent their previous championship history, their coaching experiences, their coaching certification levels and the type of sport they are involved in affect the level of their knowledge?

Q4 To what extent their profession and the quality of their activity are recognized at the universities and in a broader social context?

3.2 Hypotheses

It was assumed that:

H1 The Iranian university coaches have sufficient knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes.

H2 Their age, gender, the level of their education and the field of their study affect the Iranian university coaches' knowledge about legal issues related to sport.

H3 The university coaches' championship history, coaching experiences, coaching certification levels and the type of sport (individual or team sport) they are involved in have a significant impact on the level of their knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes.

H4 The coaches' profession and the quality of their activity are recognized at the universities and in a broader social context.

4. METHODS

The method of this thesis includes quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part was survey method and in-depth interviews were selected as qualitative methods.

4.1 Survey

4.1.1 Sampling

This research was designed for the population of coaches employed at all public universities in Iran (N=1863) in 2013 academic year. The method of sampling was gradual. First the universities were selected by random sampling based on the five main geographical locations of Iran. Secondly, all coaches employed at the selected universities in various sports were invited to participate in this study (n= 322). The answering rate to the questionnaire was 55.9% (n= 180).

The coaches were categorized according to the *gender, age, level of education, study field, coaching experience, level of certification, championship history, and type of sport (individual, team) with which they worked*. On the whole the research sample represents well the total population regarding age, gender, type of sport, and the region of the university.

4.1.2 Data Collection

The revised and developed scale (Gray and McKinstrey's, 1994) were employed for measuring the coaches' knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes within seven dimensions: *supervision, instruction and training, facilities and equipment, warning of risk, medical care, knowledge of player, and matching players*.

4.1.4 Statistical Analyses

To obtain means, percentages, and standard deviations descriptive statistics were calculated. For an inferential analysis of the data about the coaches' knowledge, one sample t-test was used. For finding the differences between the coaches with different characteristics multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used ($p < 0.05$). For analyzing the data, IBM SPSS Statistics 19 was employed.

4.2 In-depth Interviews

In order to get a deeper insight, the results of the survey were completed by in-depth interviews with coaches from both genders, from all sports practiced at the universities and from all selected universities ($n = 40$). The coaches were asked about various topics: their attitudes towards and their motivations for choosing the coaching career, their attitudes towards improving the level of coaching, their financial situation and its effects on coaching, the coaching education system in Iran, the coaches' knowledge acquisition in Iran, their awareness of the legal issues in sport, their legal duties towards the athletes and the factors influencing the social recognition regarding their profession.

5. RESULTS

The results of this research discovered that the university coaches in Iran do not have sufficient knowledge about their legal duties toward the athletes. More precisely, they reported to have proper knowledge only in connection with two elements of their legal duties (matching players, instruction and training). They admitted not to have enough knowledge related to five elements of their legal responsibility: *supervision, facilities and equipment, warn of risk, medical care, and knowledge of player*. According to the research findings the order of the level of the

different components of their knowledge is as follows: *matching players, instruction and training, facilities and equipment, knowledge of players, supervision, medical care and warning of risk*, respectively.

The results showed that the system of the coaches' training has a lot of weaknesses in Iran, including the negligence of legal issues, the consequence of which is that the university coaches are unlearned about legal liabilities in general and they are not aware of their duties toward their athletes in particular.

It was found that their age, gender, the level and the field of their education have a significant impact on the level of the university coaches' legal knowledge and behavior. It turned out that the older coaches have higher knowledge than the younger coaches regarding their mentioned duties. It was also revealed that the level of the male coaches' knowledge and awareness regarding their legal duties toward their athletes is significantly higher than the female coaches'.

The results showed unambiguously that the level of coaches' education also influenced to their knowledge and awareness about their legal duties toward athletes. According to the research data, the university coaches whose educational level was the highest had the best knowledge and they were aware the most of their legal duties compared with other coaches. Similarly, it was found that the coaches with PE degree had better knowledge and were more aware of their legal duties than coaches who graduated in other fields of study.

The findings of the investigation discovered that the coaches' championship history, their coaching experiences, the level of their coaching certification and the type of sport (individual or team sports) they were involved in also affected the level of their information about legal issues. The coaches who had sporting successes at national or international levels reported to have

higher knowledge about most elements of their legal duties related to sport than other coaches. Similarly, the coaches with longer coaching experiences stated to have higher knowledge regarding their duties toward their athletes than coaches with shorter experiences. Also, according to the research data, the coaches who worked in individual sports and who had higher level of coaching certification stated to have more knowledge about their legal duties related to sport than other coaches.

The findings also revealed that coaching is not considered in Iran as a prestigious occupation; the coaches' profession and their activity are appreciated neither at the universities nor in the society at large. Although the university coaches are the employees of the universities, their colleagues who teach theoretical subject disdain them, and their salary is lower. They are also treated scornfully in the broader society where their social prestige is low; they are not regarded as university persons but as sporting people with low qualification. By birth many of them came from the lower middle class and in spite of their college or university degrees, relatively few of them were able to upgrade their social status.

6. DISCUSSION

There are wide-ranging reasons to explain the results of my research; partly they are similar to the causes published in the international literature, partly they are specific to the Iranian situation. In this chapter the explanation pertaining to the subject is presented along three major dimensions: at first the reasons given by the coaches themselves for their insufficient knowledge about legal issues are shown. Then two actual hindering factors the coaches referred to the most frequently, namely the weaknesses of the coaching education system in Iran and the university coaches' unsatisfactory social recognition are discussed.

Many coaches confessed that they were not motivated at all for improving their knowledge and having the higher coaching levels. Some of them admitted that they were lazy; some others blamed the objective circumstances for the lack of their ambition. Most interviewed coaches criticized heavily the system of coaching education in Iran; they argued that it is not efficient. They emphasized that the coaching classes are generally too crowded. The curricula are almost the same at the highest and at the lowest levels (level III, II, and I). The teaching periods are too short; there is not enough time for learning the lessons. Moreover, some important topics are missing from the coaching education programs.

Another main reason why most coaches, sports officials and managers involved in Iranian sport (and even athletes) do not have adequate knowledge about their rights, duties and about the legal aspects of sport in general is that there are very few experts in the field of sport law in the country who could teach this subject properly.

In part the coaches' performance concerning the prevention of injuries and death cases is not as good as it should be because their low social prestige led to a non desirable consequence. More and more young people chose this profession who were unsuited for the job. There is a vicious circle: on the one hand, the lack of the university coaches' social recognition led to an increased heterogeneity of their young generations, on the other hand, the heterogeneous composition of the coaches often rightly strengthens and sometimes justifies the underestimation of their profession.

Another serious problem is that there is not a clear written policy in Iran identifying the coaches' legal duties toward their athletes; their knowledge about legal issues is not a criterion of their employment, and the existing knowledge, not even if it is at the highest level, is not appreciated either morally or financially. Since most coaches are underpaid at the universities,

and their salary does not depend on their qualification, they are not motivated to broaden their knowledge on an individual basis. In order to increase the coaches' legal knowledge they should have much more opportunities for learning about it.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 *Checking the Hypotheses*

Regarding the fact that the student-athletes are young and they have little experience, they would need special attention; the university coaches working with them should take special care of them. They can reduce the likelihood of the occurrence and the frequency of their students' injury if they are aware of their legal duties and act accordingly. The findings of my investigations showed a contradictory picture in this respect.

The first hypothesis according to which the Iranian university coaches have sufficient knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes had to be rejected for the most part, namely the coaches were ignorant about five components of their legal duties (facilities and equipment, knowledge of player, supervision, medical care and warning of risk), and were familiar only with two of them (matching players as well as instruction and training). In the latter context the first hypothesis is justified.

Based on the results the second hypothesis is accepted. It was assumed that the Iranian university coaches' age, gender, the level of their education and the field of their study affected their knowledge about legal issues related to sport and the research findings fully supported this supposition.

Based on the results the third hypothesis is also confirmed because according to the research data, the coaches' championship history, their coaching experiences, the level of their coaching certification and the type of sport they are involved in influence significantly the level of their knowledge regarding their legal duties toward their athletes.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis is denied since on the basis of the research findings the coaches' profession and their activity are not recognized either at the universities or in the broader society.

7.2 Recommendations

The detailed analysis of the Iranian case shows that, in the first place, not the coaches themselves but their educational, social and economic circumstances can be blamed for their insufficient knowledge about sport related legal issues. The following recommendations made on the basis of the results on how to improve some elements of these circumstances, and thereby to promote indirectly the coaches' knowledge acquisition, can serve as modest contributions to solving this group of problems in university sport.

- It could be and probably would be an efficient step to supervise the curricula of the coaching courses in all sports and at all levels, and to complement them by the necessary subjects and topics.
- The coaches should have much more opportunities for learning. Special courses, including legal topics, should be offered, and some of them should be compulsory to the coaches. In addition, informal (e.g., interacting with older and peer coaches) and special learning situations (e.g., attending seminars outside the official systems) should be available to the coaches.
- One of the most effective ways of developing the young coaches' knowledge would be a close co-operation with highly experienced, older colleagues; this could function as a kind of mentoring system.
- Sport newspapers, magazines, radio and television channels could also contribute to the coaches' informal learning in this area if they devoted separate programs to sport related legal issues.
- A clear written policy should be introduced in Iran identifying the coaches' legal duties toward their athletes; their knowledge about legal issues should be a

criterion of their employment, and the existing knowledge should be appreciated both morally and financially.

- The coaches' salary should be increased depending on the level of their qualification. In this way they could be motivated to broaden their knowledge also on an individual basis.

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