LATVIAN HANDBALL SCHOOL

First of all I want to say that the Baltic Handball School is not a uniform one. Estonian teams play more "northern/Scandinavian" Handball close to FIN and SWE style. Lithuanian teams play more "eastern" handball maybe similar to POL. Latvian teams play a kind of mixture – "eastern" and "northern/Scandinavian" handball. I think that this is the result of a very long tradition in taking part in the Soviet Union handball championships.

Now all Baltic states are changing their playing style because more players from our countries play abroad and take part in foreign national championships. For example, at the moment 22 players from Latvia play in Germany, Austria, Portugal, etc. The same holds good for other European countries. Former Yugoslavian players now play in German club teams and also in the Spanish League. It could mean that European Handball Schools become closely and closely. Of course, there will be always some difference between the "cold" Northern and the "warm" Southern playing styles.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND BASICS

In Latvia all sport systems are subordinate to the Ministry of Education. Olympic sports have support from the Latvian Olympic Committee. In handball we do not have support from other agencies, official clubs or private organizations.

We have selections in youth, junior and senior categories for girls, boys and seniors. Our youth, junior and senior teams have taken part in all European Championship qualification tournaments, since our country became independent in 1991. Only three times our youth or junior teams took part in ECh final tournaments.

We have a Sport Law in Latvia but financial support from the Government is not enough for success in our sport system. In our country sport games are very popular. The available money is distributed according to the following ranking system: basketball, icehokey, football are top team sports, followed by handball and volleyball, which are approximately on the same level. It means that from all financial support from the Government for sport games handball just gets 10%.

We have some support for teams playing in the National championship from high schools and some other institutions, but only for participation in the championship.

Little support from the Government is given to sport schools. Only if the regional municipalites can give financial support for their schools the education process in sport is on a good level.

We have only one national center for sport - Murjanu Sports school with 6 kinds of sports. In this center we have two handball groups with 22 boys – 16/17 and 18/19 age categories. We have 7 regional centers for boys and 5 – for girls. The education process ranges from the 11/12 to the 18/19 age category.

The support of youth coaches by the National team coach is not enough in my opinion, because it is confined to methodical seminars for the coaches only. We have a cooperation with the Latvian Sport Academy research centre, but the level of cooperation and support for youth coaches is not enough for a steady development.

TRAINING CONCEPTS

/INITIATION - TEACHING - TRAINING/

For cadets – up to the age of 12 - playing games and enjoying movement are more important in my opinion. I think that that the Scandinavian school concepts of Sweden, Denmark and Norway are very interesting. I hope that our coaches who work with the youngest groups also agree to these concept. For the 13 – 18 age group the teaching of physical skills and individual techniques is more important than positional and collective techniques.
In this age category, of course, the psychological training is very important, too, e.g. to make the players understand the aims in sport – to play better and better, to win the National championship, to play in the National selection, to win the European championship etc.

This is difficult for the coaches because it requires the teaching of a sensitive attitude to the young players.

TECHNICAL - TACTICAL TRAINING

In our country as well as in all other European countries there are more popular sport games than handball. We have a weekly selection method for sport school groups, but not every youngster is talented for sport games, especially for handball.

In Latvia we have a good education system for coaches and referees and also for school teachers, but it is not enough for a proper handball development. In my opinion our coaches must participate in seminars and symposiums in Europe, must go to the final tournaments for youth and junior teams, making contacts with coaches from other countries and learn all the time in their career.

I think that for our young players there is not enough competition experience. The young players must play in the international tournaments with club teams and only after their experience on the same level go to the National selections. Sometimes for players coming from the national selection qualification tournament in the European Championship are their second or third big tournament. In my opinion this is nonsense.

Our goal must be an increasing popularity of handball in our country, based on our regular participation on European level.

We must take part in the final tournament of a European Championship – then the popularity of handball in our country will go up and more and more young girls and boys would like to play handball.

It is a very bad situation that 22 of our players play in other countries/Germany, Austria, Portugal etc./but our National selection’s results are bad.

I hope that we can go up in handball with boys, juniors and seniors. The emphasis has to be laid on a proper education system for coaches on the European level.

There is a new challenge also for National team players – they come home 3-4 days before the competitions and we have very a short period for training before the game. But for National players it is normal – they must only understand one another before the collective actions work well on the playing court.

For youth and junior selections long term common training is necessary, but in my opinion not more than 10-12 days.

For National championship not necessary compacted competitions period, better that we play one game per week.

My opinion about selection team training before top events – we have a too short period of time before the games. Therefore the job must be done in the club teams.

For attack I think it is necessary to start with a good fast break, then the second wave of fast attack and then positional attack against defence. For defence my proposal are active defence systems with good players’ movements.

If there is only one coach, it is not enough time for a proper goalkeeper training. That is a very bad situation for the team. For goalkeepers it is necessary to have a special training with an assistant coach. In youth and junior teams it is necessary to have training camps for goalkeepers, too.

CONCLUSIONS

About foreign players in National Championships I do not want to say too much. About restrictions – it must be decided within the National Federations.

Maybe in the future it is necessary to organize European Championships for cadet teams. Individual technical training as well as physical training for young age categories are very important, because when players go to senior teams it is really impossible to change their playing
styles as well as to make corrections of mistakes in technique. Centralized trainings for youth team players are very important to help them to see other techniques, mistakes etc. Beach Handball should be only a kind of transition activity in summer time, therefore no training camps for national teams are necessary.

My opinion about the ways of developing European handball is to organize more and more seminars and courses for coaches and referees in all regions of Europe and learn, learn and learn…

Remarks

I have worked as a coach in Latvia for a very long time – since 1962. All the time I have worked with my highschool – Riga Technical University men’s team. From 1962 until 1974 I took part with the Latvian National men’s team in the old Soviet Union Championship first division. Our team won the Bronze medal in 1967. I worked also with the National junior team and participated in Soviet Union Championships.

I never worked with youth teams and only my long-term job as President and Secretary General in the Latvian Handball Federation allow me to discuss all these matters.

Thank you!

Harijs Cebrikovs
Latvian Handball Federation