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THE BALANCE BETWEEN MILITARY TASKS AND SPORT

INTRODUCTION

Slovenian Armed Forces has been employing top-level athletes since 1991. The basis for extending the program is the agreement between ministries of defense, interior, finance, school system and sport and Olympic Committee of Slovenia from 1996. At the moment 53 athletes from eighteen different sports are employed by SAF in the Sport Unit.

Since the introduction of the top level sports unit in the SAF it became noticeable that on one hand the results of the top level athletes of the SAF in the international field (Military World Games, Military World Championships, Olympic games...) are reaching expectations. On the other hand due to the not balanced time for training and competitions and time for military tasks and especially military education and training it is very difficult to integrate top level athletes into "real" military structure when they finish with top level sport career. At the moment emphasis is much more on the sport tasks; military tasks are mostly limited on basic training and PR activities for the Armed Forces. Due to the lack of military education and training it is very difficult to find new assignments after leaving the Sport unit and a lot of them are leaving the Armed Forces after finishing with top level sport.

In order to find the solution we tried to investigate theoretical cornerstones, different solutions of other armed forces of CISM members analyze current situation in the sport unit and questioned the athletes about their opinions on more balanced distribution of military tasks and sport. The aim of the study was to find a more balanced solution and to bring up a proposal for the reorganization of the top-level sport in the SAF. My hypothesis was that: "current organization of the top-level sport in the SAF doesn't fulfill interests of the athletes and on the other hand doesn't bring solutions from the viewpoint of the later integration of the athletes in the SAF professional structure.

Appropriate physical activity is one of main components in reducing global increase of chronic diseases in world population, which consists also from contemporary soldier. World

Health Organization in its Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health from 2004 suggests at least 30 minutes moderate activity daily.

Military is from the viewpoint of its activity specific organization for the needs for the physical fitness. Militaries have from the antiquity on dedicated special attention to physical fitness (Kragelj, 2002: 7-11). Also contemporary American military theorists and historians agree on keeping the significance of physical fitness also in the modern technological battlefield environment (Strong, 1999, Nash, 1972). We can find general confirmation on value of sport in the modern military in the Directive for sport in the SAF and in US Army FM Physical Fitness Training 20-21 as well. Both write on direct impact of physical fitness on combat readiness of the soldier and the unit.

Psychological characteristics of the top-level athletes were intensely researched by Maks and Matej Tušak. In *The Sports psychology* (1994) they stated that most significant psychological characteristics of top level athletes are: motivation, established system of values with wish of self confirmation, certain level of instrumental aggressiveness, capability of functioning in group and psychological stability / low anxiety. All those are the characteristics we would expect also from the military leader /commander. We have lots of role models of top-level athletes becoming trainers, businessmen and military leaders.

Human resource strategy is not only personnel strategy dealing with operative tasks any more and it's oriented to company strategy now (Treven, 1998:52). Human resources are significant factor of companies' competitive advantage. Extroversion, emotional stability, precision, favor for learning, are the personal characteristics that can predict professional success. Those are also the characteristics we can find in top-level athletes. Adecco, world leading personnel management company is developing programs for employing ex top-level athletes since 1999 and it's working closely together with International Olympic Committee. Nevertheless, Adecco and Cecić-Erpič (2002) emphasize importance of athletes preparing for employment after the sport, already before finishing the top-level sport career.

Successful military athletes can on top of that that they are in the highest level of physical fitness excellence provide expert help to their colleagues in the units in sports activities as well as inspiration and motivation with their shining example.

Military profession is group of technically and organizationally trained experts for managing with violence, which are linked up by common education, common corporate praxis and professional ethics (Abrahamsson, 1972:12). Military profession is more than just an ordinary profession in civilian life it's a mission. Good psychophysical characteristics of top-level athletes from physical, psychological and personnel management point of view are only the base for a development of a military professional and his integration in military organization.

SAF as many other militaries are employing top-level athletes. System of employing top-level athletes in the armed forces was designed in 1995 and based on experience of conscript armies in Austria, Germany and Italy. Situation with professional manning of the forces is now quite different. Huizinga (2003) presented well-balanced and successful system in small professional armed forces in the Netherlands, which seem to be suitable also for SAF.

SAF top-level sport unit current tasks are mostly oriented in ensuring good training conditions for the athletes and their social security and that brings very good results in a CISM military competitions. Only in 2006 SAF military athletes have won 8 gold medals in military world championships (skiing, cycling, shooting, parachuting and judo). On the other hand SAF athletes are not involved enough in military activities so they are having problems to be more integrated in the military. Also their education and average age are not enabling them to have a successful military career after finishing top-level sport.

Also National Olympic Committee of Slovenia is encouraging development of top-level sport system in SAF in a way that would enable athletes to integrate themselves professionally into the SAF after their sports career.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to find general opinion on more balanced approach and integration after the military career we have designed a questionnaire with 15 questions measuring levels of opinions on different questions measured by Likert scale 1-5. Questionnaire was looking for answers on wishing to have a military career after finishing with top level sport, acceptance of getting more military tasks and attending more military training.

45 athletes members of the Sport Unit of SAF, filled up questionnaires. In the first part of the questionnaire we were looking for answers on demographic data of athletes; age, sex, level of civilian education and military education.

Table 1: Age

	N	minimum	maximum	arithmetic mean	standard deviation
age	45	20	45	29,80	5,341

Average age of athletes was 29.8 years; youngest was 20 years old, oldest 45 years. Standard deviation is 5.341 years. Average age of the unit is relatively high, from the viewpoint of later military career.

63 percent of athletes were male, 37 percent female. That shows much higher percentage of the female population than in other units where is the ratio 85:15. One third of the athletes have university degree education, what is over average education of the entire SAF population and good foundation for further military career.

Only 44 percent of the athletes have gone thru regular basic military training (most of them female) that is not good and can hinder further integration.

In second part of the questionnaire we were looking for interests and opinions regarding their acquaintance with military system, interests for later professional integration in the SAF and readiness for more time devoted to military tasks, training and education.

Questionnaire had 15 questions evaluated by Likert scales from 1-5. Answer 1 had a value – I TOTALLY DISAGREE, answer 5 had a value – I TOTALLY AGREE (with proposed answer) and levels between 2-4 were giving different levels of agreement.

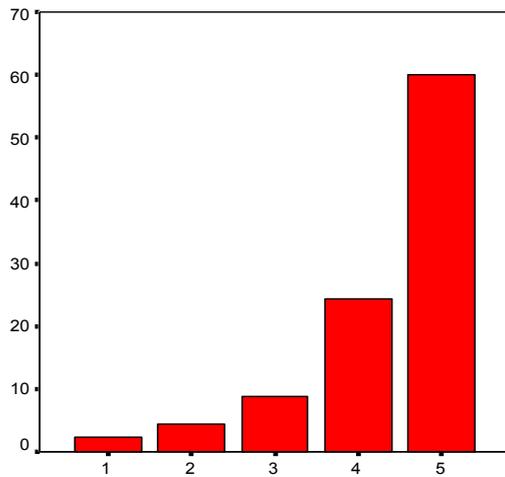
Table 2: Viewpoints regarding military profession

	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation

Acquaintance with SAF mission	1	5	4,13	,991
Acquaintance with SAF career system	1	5	3,27	,986
Professionally career suitability of SAF	2	5	4,09	,925
Wish for further military career after sport	1	5	4,36	,981
Willingness to do more military tasks if necessary in general	1	5	4,20	1,036
Willingness to do more military tasks to keep employment	3	5	4,71	,626
Interest for military profession	1	5	3,89	1,112
Interest for a military career after top level sport	1	5	3,56	1,391
Interest for further military education	1	5	3,71	1,160
Interest for officer profession	1	5	3,51	1,121
Interest for military specialist profession	1	5	4,02	1,118
Interest for NCO profession	1	5	2,62	1,386
Interest for civilian profession inside SAF	1	5	4,07	1,136
Opposing military tasks for athletes	1	5	2,16	,999
In SAF just for social security	1	5	1,71	1,079

In table 2 we have done the basic descriptive statistics of answers, minimum and maximum value, arithmetic mean and standard deviation for single answer. We have found highest arithmetic mean and highest level of agreement has answer on willingness to do more military tasks to keep employment. It is interesting that this question has also the lowest standard deviation, which means that athletes show unity here the most. Lowest arithmetic mean has the question on being in SAF just for social security – it means that the athletes do not agree with that.

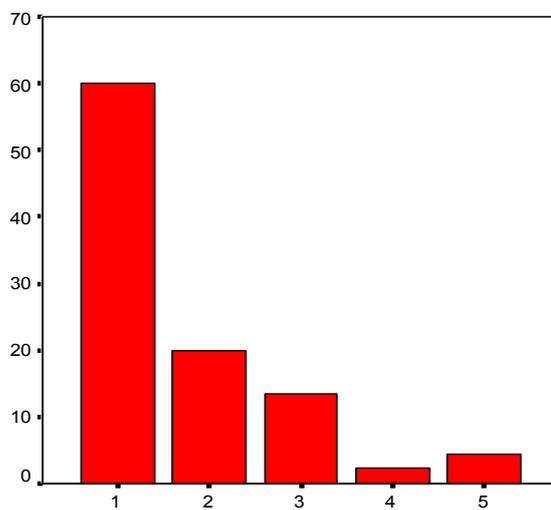
Graphic 1: Wish for further military career after sport



želja po redni zaposlitvi v SV po športni karieri

84 percent of athletes declared that they wish to continue professional career after finishing with top-level sport. This result is really high and is encouraging developing the system in a way that would enable that.

Graphics 2: In SAF just for social security



v SV samo zaradi socialne varnosti

In that answer we tried to find what part of athletes is in the SAF just for social security reasons and is not interested in military in general. Answers were a little bit unexpected. Only 10 percent of the athletes declared that as a positive answer.

We also tried to define what can athletes and sport brings to the SAF. In short, that is healthier way of living and higher level of physical fitness thru promotion of sport inside SAF and promotion of the SAF in the society and also abroad.

CONCLUSION

Answers of the inquiry were really positive from the point of view that athletes would like to be more integrated in the armed forces; they are willing to do more military tasks, training and education. Also the role model of Netherlands Armed Forces show that it is possible and it is bringing positive results as well theory is supporting the idea that military top level athletes should do more military tasks already in time when they are focused to their top – level sports career.

The model we propose for the reorganization after this study should task the sport unit with:

- bringing inspiring sport results,
- executing PR activities in civilian society,
- doing sport-expert and motivation tasks in the SAF units,
- and enable permanent military training and education of very unit member.

To achieve that we should

- Reform unit command
- Have individual approach to every case
- »Invent« positions for »retired athletes«

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