

TOP LEVEL SPORT IN SLOVENIAN ARMED FORCES - HISTORY, PRESENT STRUCTURE AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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Introduction

Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) was established during the independence war in 1991. Sport and top level sport were among the priorities of SAF leadership from the beginning. CISM was the first international military organisation that young independent Slovenia joined in 1992. Great emphasis is given on supporting top level sport in the present; SAF is currently employing 45 top level athletes, which is big support to the athletes, national sports federations and National Olympic Committee.

We will present current system of top level sports in SAF and look in future, especially on the base of facts that SAF is changing from conscript system to professional manning system in 2004, SAF joined NATO in spring of 2004 and budgets for sport in armed forces all over the world are decreasing.

History

SAF was established during the independence war in 1991, when Slovenia reached its independence from former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. Armed Forces were built practically from scratch, system of sports training of soldiers and support of top level sport was also built from nothing. By the end of year 1992 first top level athletes platoon was established at the Military Police Coy in Ljubljana also physical fitness training programs and handbooks for the SAF members were introduced. SAF manning system from the beginning was conscript system with professional officers, NCO's and some professional soldiers. There were three criteria in choosing athletes for top level sport platoon: they had to be professional soldiers (conscripts training time was so short, that it was a rule that they are not taken out from basic training to do top level military sport), they had to be top level athletes recognized by the National Olympic Committee and they had to be from military sports (shooting, parachuting, biathlon....)

CISM was the first international military organisation that young independent Slovenia joined in 1992. Slovenian military sport teams started to participate in CISM championships already in 1992 (skiing in Sodankyla – Finland) with first bigger successes – medals at Military World Championships already in 1994 (skiing, parachuting).

Sport platoon at Military Police Coy was transformed into independent Sport Unit in 1996 with already 25 athletes in different sports (skiing, shooting, parachuting, judo, athletics, triathlon..). Further development was trying to copy the organization in bigger well organised Armed Forces sport systems as France, Germany, and in 2001 SAF Military Sports School was established and placed inside the SAF Military Schools system. Top sport unit was part of the sports school,

task of the Sport school was to organize courses for army sports instructors, conduct PF tests, support organization of sports championships and provide logistic support to the Sport unit.

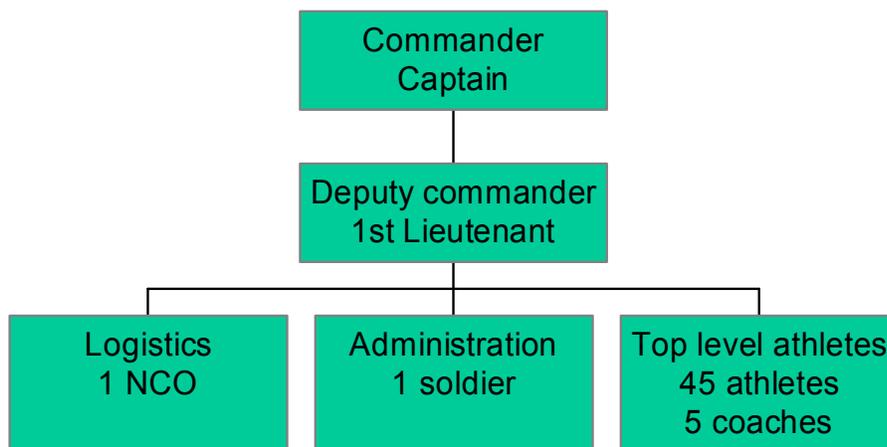
Present structure

In 2004 SAF conscript manning system is being abolished and SAF is changing into fully professional army with voluntary reserve. Current size of SAF is 6900 professionals and according to the official plans 2010 SAF should reach its full size with 8500 professionals and 5500 voluntary reserve members. Due to the facts that peacetime structure of the SAF is being increased with professional soldiers mainly and peacetime structure and number of territorial commands is being decreased also, already in this year some changes affected also structure of top level sport.

Sport School of SAF was divided in 2 parts: Sport Unit and Sector for sport at Command for Doctrine, Development, Education and Training (CDDDET) of SAF.

Sport Unit is still attached to the CDDDET and to its logistics. Current structure of Sports Unit is:

Sport Unit of SAF



Formation of the SU is up to 60 top level athletes which have to reach quite high criteria: recognition of the international top level categorization by the National Olympic Committee, practising CISM sport (no team sports with ball) and finishing 7 months basic conscript training (for men). Exceptions in sports quality are occasionally done for athletes in military sports (shooting, military pentathlon, orienteering, biathlon). Parachuting top level group (8 athletes) is an exception – it is attached to the aviation brigade, with task also to conduct parachuting training for soldiers.

Besides doing training and competition top level athletes are obliged to participate in:
regular refreshing military courses,
promotional activities
assisting in organization of PF tests and military competitions

Sport results of the athletes of the SU in international absolute level and military level are very good, especially in comparison to the size of SAF and Slovenia as a state. The biggest achievements of the SU athletes in past years are:

1 gold medal in Sydney Olympic Games 2000 (shooting rifle men 3x40)

11 participants in Sydney

13 participants in Salt Lake City OWG 2002

11 official candidates for Athens OG 2004

3 medals in 1st MWG in Rome 1995

15 medals in 2nd MWG in Zagreb 1999

6 medals in 3rd MWG in Catania 2003

SAF military sport national teams are organised in 10 sports (Track & Field, Skiing, Shooting, Judo, Parachuting, Military Pentathlon, Orienteering, Archery, Cycling, Triathlon) At the moment we are establishing also boxing team and we also participate with individual athletes in other sports (swimming, gliding, climbing..). Not only SU athletes are members of the teams – more than one half of team members (mostly in military sports) are soldiers on regular duty doing biggest part of training in their free time.

Support of Defence system through employing top athletes in “not money making sports” to the top level sport is acknowledged and appreciated from National Olympic Committee, national sports federations and civilian society in general in quite high degree. We are of opinion that it should be even higher, regarding to the fact that SAF is one of the biggest sport “sponsors” in the country and that we should reach higher level of cooperation between SAF and National CISM Delegation and NOC and sports federations.

Also top athletes employed in SAF are evaluating the opportunities for training offered through SAF as a great contribution to their performance and also pointing out that support in SAF system is better than similar in civilian police and customs sport units (inquiry by the Faculty of Social Studies, 2004) .

Future challenges

Reorganisation and professionalisation of forces and different security environment are influencing future development of top level sport organization its activities. Effective organisation and recruiting system for manning the SU should be established and we have to try to keep budgets for top level sport on at least the same levels as in the past.

Also cooperation with civilian sport structure (National Olympic Committee, national sport federations..) based on fact that SAF is one of the biggest sponsors of sport, partnership relationship between SAF and National CISM Delegation should be established.

Reorganization

Main challenge seems to be choosing general path of establishing Sport unit of SAF in new environment. In the “old days” all the top sport athletes have done there citizen duty and privilege and served to country as conscripts for 7 months with passing basing and special military

training. There are two directions which are on decision at the moment: what would be the future criteria to be taken in into “top level sport unit” of SAF since in future no young athlete before joining the SU will have no military education:

option (supported by most military experts and military sport experts) – everybody (every top athlete, also women) who wants to become a Sport Unit member has to pass basic regular 7 weeks military training and then be qualified to join the unit and also regularly every year do some real military work and refreshing courses

option (supported by National Olympic Committee, sports federations, some military sports experts) – top military athletes shouldn’t be bothered in their training with military skills – only very short special military basic course for the top athletes should be done. Athletes who would join serious military later would do the basic training after finishing with top sport.

First option definitely fulfils all aims of CISM – that real soldiers who on top of their military job maintain top level at their sport. There is certainly “danger” of having poorer results at the CISM championships due to – less training/more work and less possible lower interest in civilian sports federations to encourage their athletes to join the armed forces. We believe that this is the only way to follow the CISM principles and on the other hand help athletes to do top level sport and promote military.

The other option - that top level athletes put on the uniform two or three times a year and then they are called military athletes is of course more suitable for the sports federations and the athletes, also some military circles (not knowing the idea of CISM) who see only armed forces and ministry of defence promotion through good sports results and support to athletes.

Budgeting

Also organizing and financing the preparation of military teams was a huge contribution by SAF through past years. Budget of SAF is in comparison to past years because of joining NATO and professionalisation of forces increasing, but emphasis of spending the money is on more and more presence of SAF in crisis regions (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan..), fulfilling NATO obligations, modernisation and not on sports. Slovenian delegation to CISM has prepared 5 year plan of activities in top level sport and in CISM with aim to maintain at least this level of SAF support to top level sport (approx. 120.000 EUR/year). Level of activities with this budget is in average:

participation at 20 international CISM competitions (world and regional championships)

participation at 3-5 international meetings (General Assembly, Euro meeting, TC meetings, symposia..)

15 training camps for military teams in Slovenia or abroad in often in cooperation with other CISM delegations (Croatia, Belgium, Austria...)

organisation of 2 regional tournaments every year

Every 5 years organisation of a CISM Military World Championships with extra budget. The 5 year plan was approved by minister of defence for period 2002-2007. The following task is to prolong the approval until 2010.

Partnership with civilian sport institutions

SAF as a one of major “sponsors” of sports in Slovenia with: employing top athletes, organising training camps, supporting organization of major civilian sports events doesn't have enough influence and recognition from the civilian sports institutions. One of the aims is to establish a partnership relationship between SAF and civilian sports institutions in a way that SAF on one hand as a sponsor has certain influence in NOC and gets also some payback for support through different activities (free expert support, promotion activities, influence in NOC...)

Conclusion

Top level sport were in the past and also the present well organized and supported through Slovenian Armed Forces. Excellent results in CISM and also civilian championships were accomplished, giving SAF visibility in CISM in civilian sport society. Recent changes in security environment and ongoing reorganisation of SAF influenced on preparing necessary steps in securing continuity of successful top level sport system in SAF:

- maintaining budgeting of top level sports through 5 year planning with approval of highest ministry of defence authorities
- adopt new manning system in professional forces environment
- establish a partnership relationship with civilian sport institutions