

## 4 . Sports Management and The Coaching of Sports in Germany and Japan – personal Experiences

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After a number of years of being involved in Japanese sports as a coach and teacher, I still do not fully understand why the Japanese sports system has not made significant gains from the hard work and perseverance of its athletes as well its coaches. Japanese society in general has embraced sports and encouraged its participation. Schools schedule activities after regular classes and in sports clubs on the weekends. Parents encourage their children and enroll them in the club system. The time spent for exercises and competitions far exceed the allotted time of 90 minutes many times over.

The crucial point appears to be the relationship between the *quantity* and *quality* of training. In Japanese sports and physical education, the traditional mantra of “The longer, the better” –still dominates. As we know from other efficient working systems and examples in Japanese technology companies, perseverance and endurance, are no guarantee for success. Thus, the question arises: How effective is the Japanese sports system? I want to draw some conclusions from an intercultural perspective and my experiences in Germany on the practical side of teaching and coaching sports. Although I have never managed sports, I have encountered how sports are managed in Japan. To be frank, I had to exercise patience and not rush any new initiatives.

To validate these conclusions, the framework of sports management in Germany should be examined first.

### ***Predictions and functions of sports management***

The population of Germany numbers about 82 million people. Nearly one-third, or 27 million, belongs to sports clubs and sports associations. In over 6,500 commercial fitness clubs are more than 86,000 members. Universities and other sports-related academic institutions now offer an increasing number of courses for sports management careers.

From the growing popularity of sports management, several positive changes have arisen:

- Increased awareness of body fitness, mental health, and nutrition.
- The values of “Sports and health” and “Fitness for daily life” have become important components of one’s quality of life.
- Health concerns dominate fitness activities.
- Fitness and wellness are boom industries with room for more growth with 780,000 employees in 2004.
- Tourism has created opportunities for people with the skill to manage sporting and tourist events.
- Increasing tendency of “Health Tourism”.
- Exclusive sporting events such as the German Soccer League are in high demand and fans will pay handsomely for tickets.

The following table shows the basic functions of sports management and organizational attributes.

<b>Functions</b>	<b>Features</b>
System Management	Future oriented sports association Effective administration processes
Marketing Management	Clear concepts for public sports service Effectiveness of public relations Seeks sponsors and partners
Resource Management	Coordination of material, personal, and financial resources Qualified employees and volunteers Seeks reliable financial sponsors
Cooperation Management	Cooperation between full-time and voluntary employees Fosters relationships between central and local sports associations

The main aspect of managing sports derives from the concept that modern sport organizations have to be operated like a for-profit business. However, the character of sports organizations does not match the corporate image. Sport organizations themselves do not want to be considered businesses. Yet, they require sports-specific management to operate well.

### ***Impressive sports management in Germany***

Almost 100 years ago, the Bayer Group started sponsoring sports clubs in the communities surrounding its production sites. The company wanted to support its employees constructive use of their leisure time. Today, the company supports 29 sports clubs, which bear the name "Bayer" in their emblem.<sup>1</sup>

Bayer counts approximately 50,000 members in its sports clubs in 50 different sports. Elite Bayer athletes have won over 350 medals at the Olympics as well as the World and European Championships. The company's sport management does not just support professionals and amateur sports. Bayer continues to show its social commitment to the community with a prominent role in recreational sports and sports for the disabled. The development of Bayer's sports management stems from the worldwide success of the Bayer Group's business. It represents an exceptional example of how a company's business can initiate effective organization of different areas of sports.

However, the greater part of sports management is under financial pressure to fulfill their members' needs. One of the most successful winter sport clubs worldwide with a rich 100-year tradition in the "runner sports on ice" is located in Oberhof – a small village in the middle of Germany. Established just 10 years ago with 280 members, it has vast experience in the professional organization of international sports events and the development of elite athletes. The BSR RENNSTEIG Oberhof<sup>2</sup> Club athletes have won 8 Olympic and 25 World Championship medals to complement 60 German Championship titles, including juniors in the last 10 years.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.sport.bayer.com>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.bsr-oberhof.de>

The management style of this small sports club allows promotion of its sport locally; nevertheless, it uses professional features such as an Internet listing of its club events. In contrast to BAYER, BSR RENNSTEIG Club has had to aggressively seek sponsors and they have established long-term commitments with over 30.

## ***Sledding Sports in Nagano***

Now we will explore the Japanese experience. Six years after the 18th Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, the city still supports winter sport associations with profits from the Games. The funding flows into youth sports mainly. Olympic venues in Nagano are still serviceable and can be used for public as well organized sports. However, depending on the sport, the venues are different whether spectators are present or they are used for training. With the popularity of speed and figure skating, those venues are more frequently used. On the other hand, the venue for sledding attracts fewer spectators, although almost every year it hosts international events. Unfortunately, the influx of new athletes that could be registered years before the Olympic Games has subsided. In addition, the pool of volunteers willing to support sports events shrinks yearly.

Decreased interests in sports post Olympics might be a common phenomenon for all Olympic cities. Nonetheless, the effort to commercialize and manage sports by local sports organizations and authorities plays a role.

Let's take a closer look at Nagano and one of its winter sport associations: The Nagano Bobsleigh and Luge Federation (NBLF), which is responsible for bobsleigh, luge, and skeleton from the youth division to the senior group. How this minor sport is organized, supported, and managed, in Nagano? How does it compare to its German counterpart?

### **System Management**

The elected board of NBLF consists of 28 members including one paid employee. The board members, especially those who are responsible for training, have other outside commitments. Despite its best efforts, the NBLF could not keep the momentum going after the 1998 Olympic Games. Due to the expensive upkeep for equipment, travel, and venue maintenance, the membership has dropped drastically. Only the discipline of skeleton notched an increase in membership. This was due to a successful, international athlete whose popularity spread over Japan. Yet, the challenge to increase members particularly younger ones who could become successful remains the domain of the NBLF board. As the experiences from Germany illustrate, closer involvement of local communities might be one way to succeed; Creation of an eye-catching homepage coupled with targeted advertising could yield benefits also. Perhaps the newly initiated community sports club ASAKAWA, which is open to a wider variety of sports activities, could help people to connect to sledding. Under the new slogan of Family- and Health-oriented Sports, the people's needs might be hidden in a better way.

### **Marketing Management**

The successful commercialization of sledding in Nagano is at a crucial point that is ignored by the board. They have no concept of public relations nor do they know how to court sponsors. They sorely lack leadership in sports management. Sports clubs in Germany are recognized and sponsored locally. Qualified and licensed sports management agents can support the athletes or teams.

Sports marketing in Japan seems to be very restricted. Only huge corporations are willing to sponsor sports. Even then, sponsorships are limited to already well-known individual athletes. The sensitivity toward national sponsoring and commercialization of Japanese sports must be overcome to prevent athletes from other countries from receiving sponsorships. The hierarchical structure of Japanese society and internal company rules, which do not allow multi-sponsoring if there a main sponsor is already present, are hindering the growth of sports in Japan.

## **Resource Management**

As mentioned above, in Germany the people who manage or work in sports have solid credentials. With a small number of personnel, they can still work effectively. One coach trains 20 athletes while three fulltime employees run the entire track facility during the winter. They understand and adapt quickly the coaches' and athletes' needs. Flexible training periods are possible from 8:00 AM until 10 PM along with 7-day availability during the peak season.

In Japan, the NBLF coaching staff is comprised primarily of volunteers who started to support sledding before the Olympic Games. Most of them were recruited from schools where they taught physical education. None were trained in the coaching of performance sports. The recently growing team of skeleton athletes does not even have a coach. Athletes train themselves or follow the popular senpai – kohai – principle. Making decisions alone in sledding has some inherent risk, because the athletes are racing at high speeds where the possibility of accidents abounds. The main training venue – Spiral – for sledding in Nagano is administrated by staff from the city, and they rarely have any sports knowledge much less knowledge of sledding. In addition, these employees are changed every 3 years. Training time is based upon the schedule of the office workers. Therefore, the best training time in the winter only lasts from 4 to 5 hours. It is not completely fair to bash the staff. They perform their duties according to the rules very well. However, how the management of sledding in Nagano permits little flexibility and effectiveness. When the athletes are asked about their personal goals, their response is to be a top-notch athlete. This goal however requires top sports management!

## **Cooperation Management**

Coaches in Germany are highly respected by both the public and the athletes. Their opinions weigh heavily in sports management and the decision-making processes. Coaches have the ability to plan their athletes' training as well to define the conditions necessary to reach training goals.

Coaching should be considered more of a process of cooperation and less as teaching. The Japanese style favors detailed technical explanations and overwhelming corrective information that sometime makes confuses athletes and impedes their progress. In addition, the traditional Japanese group -dynamics behavior prevents strong interpersonal coach-athlete cooperation.

The coaches who stand front and center in the management of sports should garner more social respect in Japan. They contribute tremendously to cooperation in sports. I propose the following criteria for coaches:

- They should be educators who are a valuable resource for athletes and their parents.
- They should be able to plan training as well to set individual goals thereby making them consultants at the level of sports administration.
- They should be qualified tutors who then become key persons to choose as sports volunteers.

Although the cultural traditions of participation and organization of sports differ between Japan and Germany, the lack of effective sports management in Japan needs to have attention to drawn to it. Measures should be implemented to integrate the Japanese style with a stronger sports management policy that will bolster the potential gains.