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ANALYSIS OF SLOVENIAN WOMEN'S HANDBALL – TWO WORLDS IN A SMALL COUNTRY

1. Introduction

The main goal of present study is, to analyse Slovenian women's handball, which has in past achieved good results with clubs and national teams, but nowadays (except one club) general success and general condition are slowly slowing down. From year 1992, when Slovenia became independent senior national team was 5 times playing on World championship, with 8th in the year 2003 as the best ranking; furthermore, junior national teams have permanently qualified for the major competitions. Unfortunately, in the last few years national teams experienced the stagnation and demise in the results. Reasons for digress are to be found in various areas. It is generally thought that there are considerable reserves in organisation and work of clubs and the management of national governing body. Slovenian handball needs strategic management. A process of strategic management can be defined as dynamic process, consisting of four parts: formulation of assumptions for strategic planning, development of strategies, realisation of strategies and control of the realisation of strategies (Pučko, 2006; Pučko, Čater, Rejc Buhovac, 2006).

The subject of the study is an analysis of clubs in Slovenian women's handball. Importance of strategic management for future success in sport has been emphasised. The research problem is current situation of Slovenian women's handball which is sliding down and is dividing on two poles. The purpose and goals of the study are to examine current situation of Slovenian women's handball through theoretical findings from the area of strategic sports management.

2. Methods and data collection

Theoretical review defines terms in order to make it easier to understand the research subject. Within the theoretical research, mainly used methods are description and comparison, whereas throughout the study whole- and part-methods are used. Deduction method is used to analyse current situation. In formation of theoretical part of the study, mostly domestic and some foreign professional literature from the field of strategic management has been used. In the second, practical part, current situation of women's handball has been analysed with the help of SWOT analysis, which represents a key approach to complete analysis within strategic management (Pučko, 2006). Basic activities of SWOT analysis are therefore studying the information from outside and inside the organisation, setting the opportunities and threats in the environment and defining strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. Data were collected with the method of interviewing (two former president of Expert Council,

tree coaches), by studying available and accessible written sources and certain statistical data from official websites (all clubs, Slovenian Handball Federation (INFOSTAT system) and European handball federation -www. Eurohandball.com), some of the work is also based on the personal observations of authors.

The mission of an organisation defines its area of work, it expresses certain future directions of functioning and purposes of acting towards business environment. It also represents the way of fulfilling long-term business definitions of organisation (Fred, 1995). Beside its mission, a key strategic document of any sports organisation should be a logically defined vision, representing a projection of the envisaged future of organisation (Bon, Čater, 2010). In this study, we try to involve those theoretical findings in analyses of Slovenian women's handball.

3. Results

At present, there are 26th registered women's clubs in Slovenia, which play in national and lower regional leagues. Also organised are national championships for all younger categories, who participate in national leagues or elimination tournaments (Slovenian Handball Federation, 2008). In the new ranking list, issued by the European Handball Federation, Slovenian women's handball dropped to 24th place (European Handball Federation, 2010), whereas in 2004 it has been ranked as 10th. The latter information, in addition to empiric reasons, is another proof that women's handball requires long-term, systemic approach.

Slovenian Handball Federation as a national governing body has not publicly disclosed its mission, vision or goals. It seems as if the goals are being set more or less blindly, most often aiming for a success of individual national team at a major competition. The goals of women's handball have been set only in a document of Expert Council and some professional articles (Bon, 2008) and have later never been revised or published. It can be generalised from the answers of some of the interviewed subjects that in the last few years Slovenian Handball Federation did not show any interest to act in a planned and long-term way (Bon, Čater, 2010)

SWOT analysis of Slovenian women's handball presents opportunities and threats as well as strengths and weaknesses through an analysis of various sub-environments of Slovenian women's handball. Analysis of environment has been divided into wider and close environment. Wider environment has been analysed with the help of tendencies in different sub-environments. An analysis of current and future spectators of matches and an analysis of competitive and partnering organisations have been used to analyse close environment. Data from interviews have been used to generalise common opinions about the current situation of women's handball (Bon, Čater, 2010).

In studying the economic sub-environment, an analysis of current and potential sponsors and donors and the buying power of the population are particularly important. Current economical situation is getting worse in line with the world's recession. Simultaneously, unemployment is increasing whereas the sponsorship money for sport is decreasing. Slovenian Handball Federation has sponsors divided in several groups

according to the resources they contribute (gold, silver, bronze set and eighth player). Additional opportunities for RZS in acquiring sponsors are the companies, which are already supporting handball teams in Slovenia. Unfortunately, the majority of Slovenian women's clubs does not have strong sponsors and are therefore facing financial problems; consequently better conditions for work are unobtainable.

Some opportunities and threats can be identified in the external environment of RZS and handball in Slovenia, which the RZS will have to consider (Bon, Čater, 2010):

Some basic OPPORTUNITIES:

- Systematic emphasis of positive influence of the game on bio-psycho-social development of children and youth
- Marketing the activities on renewed basics
- Attractiveness (handball on the outside courts and beach handball)
- Promotional activities
- Methodical guidance of young people into handball
- Handball as a free time (leisure) activity
- Improving the appeal of the game
- Systematic encouragement of media attention, emphasising the values of handball as a team sport
- Better cooperation with partnering organisations

Some THREATS:

- Financial difficulties of women's clubs and lesser possibilities for acquiring sponsors
- Smaller amount of public funds (government, local councils)
- Recession and continually smaller sponsorship possibilities
- Inclination of young people for other sports
- Progressively smaller female population
- Inability to progress in the game due to decreased competition
- Parents enlisting children into other sports due to supposed roughness
- Higher membership and training fees
- Unsystematic approach of the RZS

Main strengths of the RZS and Slovenian women's handball according to the analysis of internal environment are: Successes of junior and youth national teams; low average age of senior national team, possibility for progress; organisation of qualification tournaments by the RZS; some new women's clubs; in Europe competitive club Krim M; current ambitions of some of the clubs; cooperation of clubs, better selection; several new and well-equipped sports halls

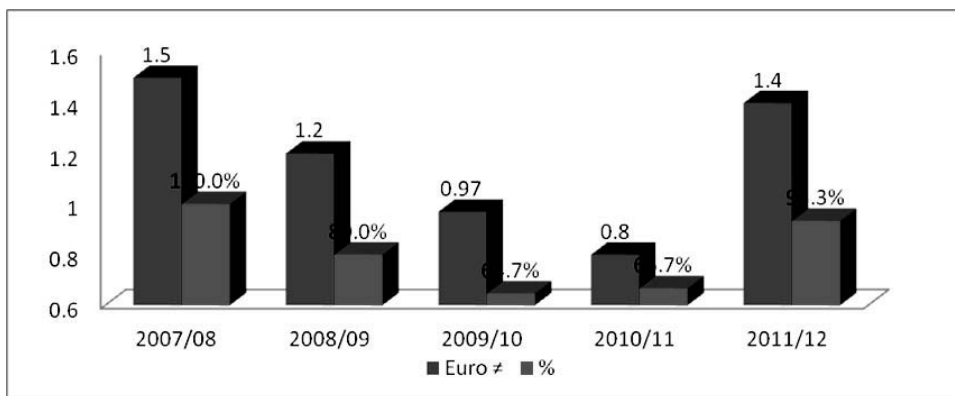
Main weaknesses: senior national team has to play pre-qualifications in order to qualify for major competitions; poor financial situation and organisation of the majority of clubs; small number of registered senior players; too many junior and youth

players in senior teams; unsystematic approach to national selections; unsettled payments between clubs - players ; unfulfilled previous strategies; too many partial interests

The strongest weakness is probably the absence of competent knowledge of management and marketing.

RK Krim Mercator : In general in European women's handball, RK Krim is known as one of the strongest and best organizing Club in Europe. Till 1992 Krim was 16 times playing in champion's league and among that, 5 times playing in final and Krim was twice on the top. After year 2006 or after important changes in management leading structure, RK Krim slowly slides down, in organization stability and also in results (till 2008)). The team was not able to play modern model of handball; leading players were relatively old (cca 35 years); fans were not satisfied; team was with many players from other countries. In years 2008 RK Krim became new general manager (ex player Deja Doler), and it was clear that Krim needs changes in general. From 2009 till 2011, Krim has strategy to build young team and to involve Slovenian players in team. Team RK Krim was younger (average years 22) with involving four most talented Slovenian handball players (Mavsar, Vidic, Jankovič, Gros, Koren, Šoberl, Guberinič, Prebil). In transfer politic RK Krim decided to recruit most talented young players without international reputation, most from area from ex Yugoslavia (Lekič, Cvijič, Damjanovič, Golubič). RK Krim managed to build good time spirit with experiences players with long contract and special status (Bodnieva, Vergeljuk, Cerar, Stefanisin, Oder). Playing model of "new Krim" was very fast, attractive, modern, interesting for public -and many young Slovenians was playing important role. Among this, RK Krim managed to qualificat to main round every season. Nowadays - in year 20011/12 Krim is leading with new manager and new coach and strategy is quite differer again. In last season (2011/12) RK Krim have 19 players in the team, 10 Slovenian nationally, and 9 foreign players, all with Champions league experience) - four from Croatia, one from Denmark, Hungary, Ukraine, Austria and Rusia) (<http://www.eurohandball.com/ec>). In Champions league till now only one player was playing important role (Mavsar).

In organization and financial conditions nowadays iz could be speculate, that only around 5 clubs in the world are one the same level or stronger as RK Krim in budget and organization. Among first (professional) team, Krim is leading and managing also 5 youth teams.



Graph. present 2: Budget or cost estimate (euro (in million) and in %): Krim from 2007/08 to 2011/12 (data are collected from different mass media).

“All others”: RZS organises a national competition for female categories, which is divided into two quality categories. 1st national league consists of 12 clubs and 1st B national league of 9 clubs. In addition, RZS organises national competition for younger age categories, together including 26 clubs (junior, youth, younger and older A and B girls, little handball) and Cup competition for women.

Women’s clubs also face large problems and are financially inept. Majority of clubs do not have sufficient financial resources for all the costs of competitions. As a result, some of the clubs cancel their participation in European club cup competitions and consequently the possibilities for the progress of players are reduced.

Half teams (6) in first league carrying a name of the sponsor in their titles. It can be concluded that their financial situation is healthy due to sponsorship money (Mercator, Krka, Celjske mesnine, Tenzor, Euro Casino, Gen-I); nevertheless, the majority of clubs have large organisational financial problems. In the second quality league (1b league), nine clubs are entered, two of them having a name of a sponsor in their titles.

Badges are from 140 000 euro to 200 000 euro.

People working in clubs in general are not satisfied with cooperation with Krim; they are not satisfied, that in Krim are playing so many non-Slovenian players; they are not satisfied, when Krim takes one player from their club; they are sure, that strategy in Krim is bad for Slovenian handball. In general it seems to be problem, that “all others” - they do not have any idea (don’t understand?; don’t see?), what can they get from Krim.

In interview it was impossible to feel general guideline to create a systematic approach with the use of tools and practices of strategic management at various levels and in all sub-environments.

4. Conclusion

The problem of the present study was an analysis of Slovenia handball. First conclusion is that two poles of functioning are characteristic. One pole is being success of the only professional women's team– RK Krim Mercator. Second pole are “all other” women's clubs in Slovenia, with some local special feature but with similar problems. Women's clubs face large problems and are financially inept. As a result, some of the clubs cancel their participation in European club cup competitions and consequently the possibilities for the progress of players are reduced. The analysis could be used as a starting-point for setting balanced future strategic development of this sport. Setting of goals and strategies requires a strong individual, who can achieve unification of different sides and who possesses managerial and implementation competencies.

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The purpose of the study was to analyse the situation in Slovenian women's handball with the use of theoretical findings from the area of strategic sports management. Two poles of functioning are basic characteristic of Slovenian handball. One pole is the only professional women's team– RK Krim Mercator. Club was twice the winner of Champions League (2001 and 2003). Second pole are “all other” women's clubs in Slovenia.

The basic methodological tool used was SWOT analysis; whereas methods of description and comparison have been mostly used within the theoretical part of the study. A purpose is to contribute to fulfilling a goal of reinstating Slovenian women's handball among the ten best European national teams. One club belongs to professional, well organised club in Europe (budget cca 1,4 mio €; 7 -10 training s./week), on other hand are clubs which face large problems and are financially inept (budget from 150000 to 200000€; 3 – 5 training s./week). Majority of clubs do not have sufficient financial resources for all the costs of competitions and consequently the possibilities for the progress of players and clubs. Cooperation and synergy between subjects in Slovenian handball is missing. In general, it can be concluded that strategic management will have to be introduced at all levels of Slovenian women's handball.

It is generally thought that there are considerable reserves in organisation and work of clubs and the management of national governing body. Temporary, to make a progress, handball sport in Slovenia needs clear vision. The strongest weakness is probably the absence of competent knowledge of management and marketing.

Key words: *women's handball, club, SWOT analysis, strategic management*