«Safeguarding» in sport – the coaches’ perspective

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Abstract
No one should have to experience violence, discrimination, bullying or abuse in sport – not athletes, coaches nor officials. No one!
Zusammenfassung


In 2023, the Federal Council created binding guidelines in this regard with the following wording: “The Federal Council strengthens the protection of young athletes in particular against violence, discrimination and psychological personality trauma. In the future, financial support to sports organizations will depend on their efforts to promote fair and safe sport…” It followed that various measures were taken and of course we, coaches, stand and stood behind this important decision. It is disconcerting that we, coaches, are usually not mentioned at all and the topic of discrimination is mainly limited to athletes. We are repeatedly assured that this is not the case, and yet the public perception is clear and our professional image is unfortunately often negatively perceived.

Where do the Swiss coaches stand?

Working with athletes is fulfilling and it is wonderful to accompany and support them. Coaches are companions, usually for the foreseeable future. Those who choose this profession feel called to it. Contrary to what many people think, professional coaches do not pursue a hobby, but a profession and make a living from it to a greater or lesser extent. The vast majority of them are aware of their pedagogical and ethical-moral responsibility – and always have been. There are cases of discrimination and violence that should be clearly condemned and have no place in sport. It is astonishing that cases where coaches have been the victims of bullying and discrimination are not even discussed or barely appear on the radar. We too (just like athletes) want protection from violence or discrimination.

The majority of coaches in the performance area are satisfied in their specific professional field. However, there are a few issues that need to be addressed, and they are not insignificant. We are in constant competition with foreign coaches, who are often hired at dumping wages. Not to be misunderstood; the exchange between coaches from other nations is important and promotes the sport, and we need and want them too. However, in order to be able to offer our national coaches some perspective, it is imperative that we solve the following problems:

– Career planning and professional perspective: what are the career options after a career as a trainer?
– Employment contracts, wages and benefits: wages that are enough to live on and reasonable
pension benefits. Currently, there are almost only fixed-term employment contracts, no regulations for overtime or night work. Huge pay gaps between the various sports and the level are unsightly.

– Compatibility of family and career and modern working models: If we want more women in the workforce, pregnancy must not lead to an automatic drop-out. Men also want to take more family time. We have a duty to introduce new working models. In the knowledge that it cannot work the same way as in the traditional labor market.

Figure 1: Yearly salary comparison between Olympic and non-Olympic Sports

**Education and further training**

Swiss Coach supports the decision of Swiss Olympic that more professional coaches are needed in elite sport. This is because, in addition to their wealth of experience, they enjoy a solid and broad education. Pedagogical, social and professional ethics issues are constantly reflected in Youth and Sports (J+S, the nation's central youth sports program) and coach education. Coaches feel that they are being listened to and are given the confidence they need to find sensible solutions, even in difficult situations. We are convinced that lifelong learning is important and are pleased that more specific education courses are being planned and that regular continuing education is being demanded. This is a quality enhancement for our profession and strengthens us massively.
Why do we need the professional association Swiss Coach?

When we talk about “safeguarding”, we are talking about protecting and supporting our coaches. Knowing that like-minded people are behind you when you have problems and questions is valuable and has a positive impact on your well-being and ultimately your mental health.

We are the first point of contact for coaches’ concerns in competitive sport. We triage these and support members together with our partners (Swiss Olympic and Coach Education Switzerland). We offer legal support and help with salary issues and the drafting of employment contracts. We are networked with sports policy and other professional associations.

We would like to become even stronger so that we can achieve more. It is therefore obvious that we are aiming for a seat on the Executive Board of Swiss Olympic, just like the athletes. It should be a matter of honor to belong to this network and benefit from it. It is not about shaking hands, but about actively using the network, supporting common interests and benefiting from renowned personalities. Membership of a professional association is not just about personal growth. It is about being part of something bigger. An association stands up for its members on important issues such as standards, ethics and diversity. If you are a member, you become a driving force and help shape the future of the profession.

We are also happy to come into contact with organizations such as Sport & Exercise Medicine Switzerland (SEMS) and make use of synergies. Together we stand up for fair and performance-oriented sport.

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