

# Table tennis Germany needs an important coach-update - now!

Corona changes a lot. And reveals many previous alibis and weak points. With the tools of yesterday, the problems of today and tomorrow in our sport can no longer be solved. The previous thinking in clubs and associations is a large part of our problem - because it is not changing. Time to take a critical look at the things that should change urgently. And the question of what the future of our sport is worth to us. Especially with regard to our coaches, who are mainly responsible for training the next generation.

by  
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(Part 3)



Unusual times require unusual measures. The third and last part of my article on the need for change in our sport is about the recognition of professionally qualified training as urgently needed support and as the basis for structural change in our sport. A delicate subject. However, one with many relevant and plausible aspects ...

## **The situation of "professional or semi-professional table tennis trainer" in Germany ...**

First I would like to take a look at the situation of full-time trainers and take a closer look at them. If I explicitly mention the voluntary or part-time paid work of trainers here, this is initially due to the fundamentals that separate the two areas (professional and part-time). It specifically does not mean that they are not of the same value. But on the contrary. The full-time work of trainers in Germany should therefore be preceded by examples, because it can best show which points are lacking despite good and high-quality expertise and where there are friction losses that would not be necessary. These problems certainly also arise in voluntary or part-time work. While independent decisions can be made there without major loss of income, this is hardly possible with professionally organized and full-time trainers.

For a long time I have been promoting the need for cooperation between professional and particularly voluntary/part-time trainers at the grassroots level, in small and medium-sized, large and well-known clubs in Germany. This is still missing today, but it plays an extremely important role in the sporting development of clubs (mass sport) and associations (competitive sport). We all have a responsibility for the (technically good) work on the grassroots - if it should be part of our own club and association philosophy. And if one can agree that this is an indispensable prerequisite for a clear trend reversal in the continuing loss of members and an increase in quality in the performance work of the young generation.

This would mean that two target groups in particular would be responsible: honorary board members from regional associations and / or clubs as well as full-time colleagues. Everyone would have a responsibility to take care of the volunteer and part-time colleagues who work on the grass-roots level, to ensure their up-to-date further training in associations and to work with them.

## **“What do we need a trainer for? We have never had ...! ”**

If you ask successful players to whom they owe their success in the first place, the answers are almost identical. At the beginning and in the first place of the sporting success are the relatives, in the second place without any competition there is the most important functional role in the system of high-performance, competitive or popular sport: the role of the trainer. The trainers - all experts agree on this - are the indispensable foundation for (top) sporting performance. Certainly there are some players who can be successful without the help of a coach. This applies in particular to experienced athletes who often do without coaching towards the end of their - career. However, it should not be overlooked that they owe everything they are, ultimately and primarily, to their coaches. Point.

Table tennis trainers - regardless of the level and scope and possible professionalisation structure they work at - always play a prominent role; provided that they do a good to very good job professionally, pedagogically, psychologically and socially. Let's take a look at the importance that the profession of table tennis trainer has in the working world of our society and in the overall structure of our own club and association structures.

On the one hand, it moves in problematic discrepancies in requirements in the system of high-performance, competitive and mass sports (“We need coaches, but who should pay them - appropriately?”) In very often at the same time outdated structures in our clubs and associations. On the other hand, as a qualified table tennis trainer, you are subject to a not inconsiderable "professional flaw" - namely, being a trainer in a hardly recognized sport and being a "pure cost center". Otherwise, objections such as “we don't need, we have never needed” or we had, didn't help! ”Or“ we can't pay! ”Could hardly be explained. At best with envy. Even in some well-organized clubs in Germany there is a suspicion that a (good to very good) coach only produces costs and the benefits are disproportionate.

The professional profile of the table tennis trainer is not only unclear, his quasi-professional activities are therefore extremely risky in his own sport structures, the reward for the service rendered is often unjust and undervalued, and the future of this profession is highly insecure.

To make matters worse, there is little solidarity within the coaching community in our sport; between volunteer and part-time as well as part-time and full-time colleagues. Social inequality and injustice often characterize the coach's social

relationships. In some cases, association trainers can be observed who do not speak seriously to club trainers or to those who run district or district bases and with whom they could work well (of course that is only part of the truth, but at least ...). Full-time coaching contracts in association structures or at the federal level and modest professional competence with low fee contracts in clubs compete instead of complementing each other - and this despite extensive scientific and practical training, which the German Table Tennis Association and its regional associations claim for themselves.

How can something like this be, except that there are virtually no control bodies for structures that promote teaching and performance? How can it be that there are regional associations in Germany that recognize the management of a tournament as further training for a Trainer C license for table tennis?

The training to become a “table tennis coach” (regardless of what sports science or sports pedagogical basis is present in addition to professional suitability) is almost completely unsecured from a professional point of view; and thus also worth next to nothing. There is no real academic recognition of the profession of trainer (not even as a qualified certified trainer). And there is also hardly anything to be seen of the systematic advanced training of all trained trainers.

If one inquires which German trainers are involved internationally in a professional dialogue, how many trainers regularly read international specialist bodies on the technical problems of their sport, which and how many trainers take note of training scientific, biomechanical and sports medicine basic literature on the respective requirement profiles of their sport and Which trainers attend international trainer congresses or are regularly involved in national advanced training programs, you will quickly see that there is only a tiny minority to speak of. However, the majority ought to be.

In view of these facts, it can hardly come as a surprise that sport-loving school leavers and sport-oriented high school graduates do not expect the coaching profession to be part of their future expectations. If you ask sports students at German universities, the career aspiration of a coach is as good as nonexistent. Sports management: yes! Trainer: More like no ...

This sober consideration of the current situation of the table tennis coaching profession could be continued. It would certainly have to be more differentiated. Nevertheless, I trust myself to make a judgment with relative certainty: The situation of the table tennis coaching profession in Germany is extremely critical: especially in our sport - but also in almost all Olympic sports associations - there

is a coaching problem whose solution has become urgent. German sport has got into a crisis with regard to the coaching profession. Politics, clubs, associations and a lack of interest in change have paved the way into this crisis. Paths out are urgently needed ...

## **Those who face uncomfortable truths have the chance to change something**

Two questions regarding professional table tennis coaching largely dominate the efforts for a serious discussion today. And both questions are - in my eyes - remarkably stupid. Both questions are examples of how not to discuss training and coaching employment. And behind both questions are uncomfortable truths.

### **The # 1 inconvenient truth for many coaches:**

No, devaluation and lack of appreciation  
of Table tennis coaches (inside) is not funny!

The first question - whether it is justifiable to employ professional table tennis trainers in clubs (e.g. in cooperation models) - is hardly discussed at all. This would be an extremely effective model for the future. Club selfishness, prejudices, half-knowledge and incompetence predominantly hinder a factual discussion. As long as clubs and their elected, mostly voluntary executives deny qualified training work the right to exist and assume that they have no political or organizational usefulness, and that you do not cooperate with the neighboring club, serious and serious attempts at discussion are unnecessary. Clubs further reduce the fact that coaches only produce costs that could not be financed by the club fees, which are largely still disproportionately low.

Of course, such an equation of valid membership fees and consideration from a trainer is not justifiable. It is degrading. And the arguments some people use to defend these extremely derogatory lines from coaches is breathtaking. Anyone who does this proves the first uncomfortable truth: There is, especially at the club and association political level, a shockingly high number of (elected) people who are blind to devaluation and ignorance of trainers who carry out this important function have taken on a (mostly independent) working life.

The German Table Tennis Federation and its regional associations should face this uncomfortable truth in order to remedy the situation. A simple question could help: What have you actively done in the last three decades to ensure that

the "job description of a trainer", the acceptance of this profession or the appreciation of those who work in this area at their own risk are changed or even noticed, let alone looked at? Apart from the fact that there is otherwise no appreciation on the part of the umbrella organization for the important work of the colleagues. Every self-employed coach during the months of crisis with enormous loss of income would at least have been happy to receive a letter of solidarity or a phone call from his national association. Have you contributed to changing the importance of trainers or active training work in clubs and associations that are in the midst of enormous social change, so that perhaps even a loss of members can be stopped? I tend to think no ... Instead, facts can be observed that are sometimes extremely counterproductive:

- There are still trainers who - even in state / association cadres) - work with little or no (based on their qualifications) pay!

- There are players who accept this free offer for free (and do not offer anything in return)!

- With this, interest often disappears, because the work is also worthless. Trainers who - whether part-time or full-time - set the appropriate fee are, conversely, devalued as "money makers" or "too expensive".

Working on reality would mean real work, e.g. conveying to clubs why goals are possibly important and correct, how voluntary work in the club can be achieved, how to recruit young talent, find qualified trainers, get a modern website or market table tennis better as a sport. Or clubs are also prepared for the enormous social change that is currently dominating our world. For example, it would make sense to think about nationwide professionalization in Germany and employ appropriately qualified trainers in projects. Instead, actions can be observed that completely bypass the "day-to-day business of the clubs" due to social change and come to nothing.

They should understand that there is nothing wrong with ignoring those who might bring them members and successes. And that - who continues to do so - leverages the limits of one's own propriety and makes oneself untrustworthy! In Germany there should have been an active trainer placement exchange for a long time - of course free of charge for those who use it. Nationwide! Without an "outsourced payment brokerage exchange", which obviously does not work and has managed the same (few) entries for years instead of being up-to-date.

With the consent of trained trainers, the DTTB could forward their contact details to interested clubs and associations and act as an intermediary. Why doesn't this happen? We could employ hundreds of professional table tennis trainers in Germany and achieve the associated positive results for the quality and quantity of our sport.

**The inconvenient truth # 2 for many clubs and associations:**

Anyone who denies that we have a coaching problem  
in Germany increases mistrust!

The second question - whether the passivity of clubs and associations is partly responsible for the current situation - I would like to raise here. Club and association officials usually declare that "circumstances" are to blame for the fact that no qualified trainers can be employed. A popular argument that is believed to be accepted. Then you read sentences like "The overall development in sport is unfortunately currently no guarantee for all-round development in the youth field that everyone wants - we have nevertheless used our opportunities and achieved success." Or "We only have a voluntary national trainer and the finances allow no big leaps for us. "

And that is at least big nonsense, because it suggests that other powers determine whether you can change something or not - regardless of what you call "success".

Every club or association has the opportunity to organize money. You don't know how? Then they should deal with it. Each club or association also has the right, for example, to pursue its own (non-) development policy. However, there are no longer any excuses for "doing nothing". Anyone who seriously believes that their own members would not consider systematic training for overall further development to be necessary in a highly complicated and complex sport in order to justify freedom, proves above all the second uncomfortable truth:

That there are (elected) people, especially among those responsible for clubs and associations, who are blind to grievances within the German table tennis sport and their own "house" - and who do not react at all to offers of conversation ("Vogel Strauss Syndrome") or in the following criticism of existing conditions only react with denial, repressing reality and counter attacks. So here we switch from reflection to reflex ...

Anyone who repeatedly only replies by complaining about a "general suspicion" against which volunteers have to be protected because they receive no payment

(and thus officially also have no responsibility), is not really doing anyone a favor - because this reflexive one in the end, defense only increases the distrust of clubs and associations for many coaches. And thus contributes to the fact that it doesn't get better.

We don't need people who have a firmly established view of the world and who express themselves condescendingly to table tennis coaches. The doors are then barricaded in such a way that no more air can come in from outside. We don't need people who are constantly looking for so much self-confirmation for their theses that everything only works the way they have been practicing for years, that they unconditionally support everything that halfway fits into their thinking. We do not need people who are ready to block out everything that takes place or should take place around it.

Instead, we need pro-active people, tolerant people, we need dialogical discourse, but not meaningless arguments with people who always want to be right anyway. That doesn't help anyone, and certainly not our sport. We need good debates about it. And they are uncomfortable ... especially because there are also public opinions that stir up prejudices against the work of fee or professional trainers:

***Dr. Spin (09.04.2020 08:51)***

*So unfortunately I can't understand this action (headline: coaches struggling for existence) either. Keep your eyes open when choosing a career. It is not for nothing that millions choose a different path even though their athletic performance and social skills are significantly higher. Why do you think? Nobody starves to death in Germany, survival is always ensured. So: in the worst case, off to the employment office. There you can then be imparted according to your knowledge, skills and physical predispositions. In the case of professional athletes who, as you have heard so often here, like to work with people, on people, for people, it means going where the workforce is needed and brings the greatest benefit to the solidarity community. Off to harvest! But only for food that is actually needed by the general public. The "poor asparagus farmers" are definitely not among the food producers worthy of support. Years of exploitation on the backs of foreign workers should not be supported and no one really needs asparagus. But otherwise there is the chance for professional athletes to do something positive for their reputation in society. It is time for the previous beautiful life, which has made it possible for the community to give something back to the community.*

***Kick it (08.04.2020 17:37)***

*Table tennis means the world only to a few. Given this limited horizon, the moaning of the "poor" fee coaches is no surprise. Certainly a terrible idea of having to earn a living with real work in the future. Do you know what will happen in popular sport if all of the paid "coaches" disappear? Nothing. Everything as before and nobody will notice. The progress of each individual is still solely dependent on himself and his own commitment and talent. Seen in*

*this way, Corona also has something good. It shows the pathological excesses in sport and the media world. Sport is the best hobby of all! But just that. Professional sport is a joke.*

***Kick it*** (08.04.2020 07:33)

*I can only agree with 100% "I can't hear it anymore". TT trainer is not a job but a Tengel Tangel job with which you can keep yourself afloat in good times. Not in bad ones. In addition, it naturally affects many, many others as well, although they can do more, achieve more and, in contrast to freelance trainers, are actually needed and needed in life. The H-trainers should show a little more SOLIDARITY with the general public and take a KFW loan in a nice manner like others, which is then repaid without being on the pocket of others.*

***Ich kann's nicht mehr hören*** (07.04.2020 13:44)

*"He turned his hobby into a profession and became a full-time table tennis trainer". And that's exactly where the dog is buried: you earn money with a hobby, so you live from the fun society. In times like these, it shouldn't come as a surprise that you are low on certain priority lists! All this giant sports industry with profit and the whole rat tail as well as the associated journalism should be urgently questioned with regard to funding. Then the clubs just have to bake smaller rolls and play a few leagues lower when the sponsors took away because they no longer want / cannot invest their money in the sport. They are right now to focus on the essentials and that is not sports sponsorship. And no, in my opinion, in the case of sport, "the state", i.e. the taxpayer, does not have to help out ... Watch out when choosing a career!*

The German table tennis sport will only really advance the debate if it becomes uncomfortable: In other words, if people on both sides of the mental barricade approach the other. When they no longer deny or suppress what does not fit into their own worldview of the coach who is either always evil or holy and who spreads "fake news". Either-or is not making progress, only both-and.

Table tennis trainers must be trained in their assignments in the youth and adult sector in such a way that they can argue for themselves that their customers or employers clearly benefit from their work. Is table tennis in Germany also (or particularly) further developed through the active placement of qualified trainers?

Does it (also or especially) promote the image of the table tennis trainer in the "public" if there is an active mediation between trainers and potential clients?

And the DTTB should be interested in answering the question of why its own trainer training (including the C and B trainer training delegated to its regional associations) has not increased (significantly!) To trainers in the last 30 years has resulted in clubs. And why some state associations really offer at least "remarkable" C-Trainer advanced training courses ...

A democratically run association should do both: It should protect coaches who (possibly) hold out their heads for a professional or semi-professional career in table tennis for the further development of their clubs, as best they can. And he should actively advertise with his clubs to implement qualified and good training.

I can't see that anywhere at the moment ...

## **Solutions begin with good and appropriate communication ...**

Once you have made sure of the problem, you are aware of the extent of the crisis and have agreed that it is so, you know what you are talking about, so it is possible to come to appropriate solutions. Here, too, openness and honesty are required. The problems must not be belittled. It is also not allowed to set wrong priorities. Above all, one must not fall into the usual rut, in which only "commissions" are formed and thus the problems are put on the back burner. Difficulties cannot be postponed. In short: the problem must not be carried out on the back of those affected. Clear and transparent communication is helpful here.

The desirable solutions are then quite obvious.

- First and foremost, it should be understood that the problem must first be dealt with primarily and fundamentally through new financial investments. This does not necessarily mean the provision of funds that are specifically raised for the benefit of the trainers. In clubs, there should be a restructuring of appropriate club contributions of the clubs, which are based on simultaneously newly created training structures (roughly: "with qualified training" / "without qualified training" - both in the junior and adult sector). There should be no more discussion about whether trainers add value or not (unless they would not work in the sense of this added value). It should become a matter of course that the services of the trainers are appropriately rewarded in a comparable way, as is the rule for professional athletes, professional managers, officials and other participants, for example in the system of high-performance sports. But qualified work also has its value in recreational and popular sports - and that is usually rewarded. Especially from those who participate ...

- Second, a clear definition of the coach's profession is required. The job description of the trainer is to be classified in the social structure of the professions, assessed and given a social appreciation according to this assessment. The DTTB as well as the VDTT should hold this discussion with the table tennis public. It is no longer acceptable if the profession "table tennis

trainer” is specified and then the question follows: “Nice! And what do you do for a living?” The profession of coach has to be compared with other professions and the question of the appropriate and fair evaluation should be asked. On the basis of this evaluative classification, I assume that the coaching occupation is to be defined as an academic occupation that is equal to the academic occupations in terms of its endowment. It has to establish itself alongside the profession of sports educator and it should be organized professionally in the same way.

- Thirdly, one should agree that such a trainer profession requires training at universities that is characterized by a symbiosis of scientific foundation and intensive practical relevance. This already exists - in the form of a certified trainer training at the German Sport University in Cologne. But: How many of the successful graduates work as professional table tennis trainers afterwards? And where?
- Fourthly, the profession of trainer requires practice phases, trial work, learning from a model, gaining practical experience and initiation rites that lead to the profession. For this, experienced professional table tennis trainers should encourage young trainers, support them and also guide and set an example in certain important areas in practice.
- Fifthly, one of the solutions to be sought is an open, responsible player who appreciates the role of the coach and who is committed to the concerns of the coach up to and including checking the financial opportunities the coaches provide are. This is also the special task of clubs and associations
- Sixth, associations should learn that coaches have to represent their own interests while protecting their own interests. Union associations of coaches should therefore not be viewed as a disruptive factor or an element that jeopardizes the sport. Rather, the representation of professional interests must become a matter of course.

With all the solutions offered here in outline, it should be noted that these are only suggestions. They can be replaced and supplemented with better ones, which can also be completely different. There are certainly alternatives and it is worth entering into an ideas competition. The profession of trainer is tied to athletic performance, in mass sport also to quantitative performance (membership growth, satisfaction of the participants). It is as risky as the athlete's career or the continued existence of the club.

The Corona crisis now clearly shows: The pressing issues should now be taken up. More radical, possibly, but also more realistic! Who encourages and inspires their association (s), their thinking, their organization (s) to renew themselves now? Who stands in front and explains to all players, all clubs, that the priority now is not the "team competition", but the need to use the space that has been fought back for training and the restoration and renovation of our clubs and associations that represent our sport, to advance?

And in which associations are "thinking after me about the flood" and "irresponsible consumption" (without committed cooperation) finally ostracized instead of always complaining about the fact that "... nobody agrees to ...: - /"  
And in which clubs and associations do you self-critically judge yourself and try to finally recognize things that have repeatedly not worked as the "wrong path"?