

Abstract

This concept written by Linz AG Froschberg (Alexandra Mandl and Co Author Robert Renner) outlines the development of sports and table tennis over the last decades. It points out the changes and turning points in history which show us that a change in the European Table Tennis structure is necessary. Linz AG Froschberg recommends putting more emphasis on the club system all over Europe in order to create successful athletes. The club also introduces a new training concept in the framework of Centers of Excellence. These centers are international training hot spots for the most talented young athletes from. Their aim is to help the most talented young athletes to get education in various aspects, such as sports, table tennis, school and personality.

Linz AG Froschberg and upper Austria has got already a lot of experience in educating young female athletes. Therefore, the club would like to be the first official Center of Excellence for the most promising native European female and also male athletes aged from 10-21. There is everything ready for the upcoming Stars in Linz: Infrastructure, the professional surrounding, the experience and the enduring and growing success with players of every age. The City and the region of LINZ/Upper Austria, the ITTF HOT SPOT LINZ, the Sponsors, the Table Tennis Industry and the coaches as well are fully supporting, as regards content, the leading role of LINZ in the women`s and youth table tennis scene in Europe. In order to implement this concept an emotional and financial support of the ETTU and the ITTF is necessary.

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1. Introduction

The following paper will introduce and present the conceptual approach to the sustainable work with professional female athletes in table tennis, conducted by the Austrian club Linz AG Froschberg.

1.1. Vision

The next female table tennis world champion is from Europe.

1.2. Mission

Quality before Quantity. Linz AG Froschberg provides an international environment and professional training conditions for young and adult table tennis players from all over Europe. It is considered as a European Training Hotspot. The strategic focus is directed on female athletes.

1.3. Goal

To be the main European table tennis center for young athletes starting at the age of 10-12, willing to get a professional education in terms of sports and personality.

1.4. Values

The values we prioritize are quality, trust, teamwork, fairness and respect.

2. Sports Evolution

Just like an individual is part of a community and consequently part of a whole society, table tennis is part of a diverse world of sports. However, in order to be able to reach defined goals, it is important to understand the whole picture, not just individual parts. Therefore, we will be outlining the whole concept of sports and take into consideration its development and the turning points during the last decades. It is essential to examine the value of sports in a society and to be aware of historical facts in order to make change happen. That is why we will first emphasize the development of professional sports.

2.1. Historical Turning Points

Being a way to socialize and share emotions by competing with each other, sports always had a significant value in society throughout human history. It is evident that the Olympic Games, reintroduced in 1894, shaped the world of sports tremendously and put it into a spotlight which emphasized the development of sports during the last century. Back then it

was more a leisure activity. However, over the years it developed into a whole new field of business, industry and even science.

2.1.1. Company Involvement

One of the most influential things which happened was definitely the involvement of companies in sports events. In 1907 the first advertisements appeared, containing motifs of athletes exercising sports. However, a striking event happened in 1928. That is when Coca-Cola was first involved into the Olympic Games in Amsterdam. Since then it became common for companies to take a holding in sports events. Obviously, this changed the financial situation of sports as well as its reputation. It was more present throughout advertisements and athletes could spend more money on practicing their discipline.

After the industrial movement, the economy in the western countries developed rapidly which was profitable for sports too, since it got more financial support throughout the following years. Also the rising prosperity of the people after the World Wars was leading to a higher demand of leisure activities, since the people could afford it. One of them was sports events. At this point we can outline the importance of a well working economy, as it has a huge impact on any further areas.

2.1.2. Branding/Sponsoring

Another striking point in the development of sports dates back to the 70's when cigarette companies – being banned from TV commercials due to health issues – tried to find a new platform to present their brand. Consequently they used motor sports as their presenting platform. This was the beginning of the sponsoring area which also had a huge impact on the development of professional sports.

It is evident that athletes nowadays, who's profession it is to practice their sports, would not be able to afford their living without the financial support of sponsors and companies. The same applies for sports events. It is therefore important to understand the basics of marketing, to be able to comprehend the sponsor's/companies' targets.

2.1.2.1. Marketing

The evolution of marketing starts in the 50's, when marketing was used as a concept for distributing goods. Over the following decades it developed into a highly diverse field of studies. Especially due to the development of technology. Nowadays marketing is being used as a method to attract every potential customer individually and make him buy a certain service or product. A further feature of marketing is to advertise the brand of the company in a way that costumers associate a positive feeling with the company's brand. Especially when

companies try to carry out an image transfer, they often tend to use sports in their marketing campaigns. This is due to the message that sports and athletes convey.

2.1.2.2. Sports Marketing

Sports are being considered as an ambassador for a various kind of attributes, such as fairness, power, strength, respect etc. Depending on the sports, people think of different values when an athlete or a team comes to their mind. Companies try to borrow these values and transfer them onto their brand by making people associate their brand with the specific sport or athlete. According to these facts sponsors decide on which athlete, team or event they will sponsor.

Obviously, this means: the more popular a sport discipline is, the easier it is for the company to transfer its values onto its brand image. That is because people can relate more easily to the attributes which this particular sports discipline conveys. Furthermore, companies can reach a bigger target audience if they place their marketing campaigns in famous sports disciplines.

Concluding this, we can see, in order to get an extensive amount of financial support from companies, which is important to afford the living and practicing costs of athletes, it is important that people fancy this particular sports discipline. The people's awareness depends on various factors. However, we consider these three as the most important ones:

- 1) Personal Interest
- 2) Success of teams/athletes in a particular sports discipline in home region/country
- 3) Media/Surrounding

The individual's personal interest into a sports discipline is influenced by a lot of factors which are very individual and cannot be transferred to everyone. It is a personal decision which can hardly be affected by external factors.

The second criterion is the success of a team. However, in order to be successful it is important to have the ideal practicing conditions, including coaches, the infrastructure and the social part. Once the optimum conditions are given it is easier to be successful and consequently reach the attention of people.

Eventually, it is a difficult task to analyze the question, whether the media has an impact on the sports preferences of individuals or whether the media is influenced by the people's preferences. Nevertheless, this question will not be discussed in this work. We will just conclude that the media plays an important part in drawing the people's attention towards a specific sports discipline. However, once an athlete or a team is successful, the media will report about it and consumers will be aware of that sports discipline too.

In conclusion, we can observe that all these factors add to each other. In order to get a financial support to afford the practicing costs, it is important to have sponsors. Mainly sponsors target sports disciplines or athletes, in which a lot of their potential customers are interested in. The average person however, is interested into sports which the media report about or sports containing successful athletes/teams from the home region/country. In order to be successful, a team/athlete needs the optimum training conditions which require monetary expenses. This is where it comes full circle. Therefore, the development of other sports disciplines should not be underestimated and taken into regard when trying to improve the situation of table tennis.

2.2. Development of Table Tennis

2.2.1. Development Background

The development of table tennis is similar to the one of sports in general, as described in 2.1. It was seen as a social diversion in the late 19th century and developed into a recognized sport, once the first table tennis associations were introduced in England around 1900. During the 20th century the international table tennis federation (ITTF) was introduced. This paved the way for the first world championships held in England in 1926. At that time table tennis was mostly popular in Europe and all of the competitions were held in Europe. The absolute European dominance ended in 1952 when the first World Champion originated from Japan. Since then competitions have been held worldwide. In 1959 China was celebrating their first world champion in any sports. However, from the 50's until the 80's a strong European dominance still could be observed, especially of Swedish players. This ended in 1981, when the Chinese Reign started. Since then China has had a total triumph at every single world championship, apart from a few exceptions.

2.2.2. Chinese Reign

2.2.2.1. Political Background

This dramatic change can be assigned to various reasons. First of all, table tennis is considered as an unofficial national sport in China since the 1950's. It was given this popularity because of politically based reasons. In 1949 Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China, a communist state, governed from Beijing. The former nationalist regime by Chiang was defeated and fled into exile. Chiang established an exile government in Taiwan, which was supported by the US American government, as they have been an allied of China during the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937-1945. However, the ITTF recognized the Communist Chinese government in Beijing over the exile leadership in Taiwan in the early 50's. The US government on the other hand did not recognize it until 1979. Since then the ruler Mao Zedong decreed table tennis the national sport, and invested

into raising competitive players. In 1959 Rong Guotuan, a Chinese table tennis player, won the world championship, defeating his Japanese opponent during the finals. This was also considered a prestige victory regarding the ruthless invasion of Japan during the 1930's. Since then table tennis was a symbol of national pride.

Also, in order to approach the People's Republic of China to the United States, Mao Zedong introduced the ping-pong diplomacy in 1971. He invited the U.S. American table tennis team to China, which smoothed the way for America's President Richard Nixon, who officially visited the country the following year. We can clearly see that due to these historical facts table tennis earned a high reputation in China, which lead to the fact that financial and emotional support by the government and people was a matter of course.

2.2.2.2. Chinese Training Centers

The training centers in China are organized in a very different way than in Europe. The Chinese table tennis system consists of a club structure. Most of these are independent in terms of finances and structure. Every town has various clubs as well as a professional club for athletes who are progressing a lot. Depending on the player's level one can join a specific club. Furthermore, all of the professional clubs offer the required processes of a professional sports institution which an athlete needs: Scouting, Sports Education – Table Tennis, cooperation with schools – school education - and support once they have reached a top level. It is important to mention the financial aspect at this point, as this should not be underestimated. The professional clubs pay the salary for their players. These salaries are relatively high. Therefore, it is important for every single athlete to reach the top level. Consequently, the competition is very intense. Not only the competition between the athletes but also the competition between the clubs is intense, since they need financial support to be able to pay their athletes.

Since the Chinese system is build up in a very hierarchical and strategically way, the performance of the coaches is very well evaluated. During a nationwide congress, occurring a few times per year, it is appointed which type of player will be needed for the national team in the future. The coaches of professional clubs stick to this strategy and scout the required players on a hierarchical basis. There is put a lot of emphasis on the clubs, as it is attractive to the local government and the business of table tennis to raise new and attractive professional players within a club.

However, not every player can get to a professional level. Nevertheless, the Chinese system keeps these players within their system, offering them various jobs, for instance as a coach. Some of these players also move to other countries exporting their knowledge about training

methods and table tennis to overseas. But since it is not the top players, the most important knowledge is being kept within the country, which explains the enduring hegemony of China.

We can see that the success of China is a structured process which developed over the last decades. Compared to Europe they offer a better general education package to athletes, including a better education for coaches, a better cooperation with schools, a better way to keep athletes within the system after their career and eventually a better incentive system. The players are the brands of China's professional clubs. In order to keep up a good standard of living they get paid and receive the optimum conditions which enable them to focus on their profession – table tennis.

2.2.3. European Training System

Obviously it is technically not possible to compare a continent to a country. However, it is important to study a well working structure which could be transferred on Europe too.

Trainings centers in Europe are organized individually in every country which implies a lot of differences in structure and funding. This difference also includes the structure of employment, the development of ideas as well as the goals being aimed at. There is no general norm for training centers in Europe and there haven't been made any changes within this structure over the last decades. This means that this system has been growing over the years, remaining the same as it was when it was first introduced.

The point we are trying to emphasize is that national associations in Europe developed their own knowledge on training methods and financial structures without sharing it with other countries. However, we are convinced that working together and creating synergies would progress the development of table tennis in Europe. In order to work on a professional basis and to become the most successful continental table tennis federation worldwide, it is necessary to introduce one leadership and system of development within Europe. The described consensus can only be established by the ETTU, as it has the power to manage all national federations.

2.2.3.1. Club System

Since we know from China that it is necessary to focus more on a club system in order to create successful players, an approach to a solitary system would be for instance to implement a structure, based on incentives. This means that all European clubs get support in various ways, if they work together with national associations and the ETTU. Clubs should be able to take care of their athletes in athletic, social, financial and infrastructural terms. This support needs to be managed by the ETTU.

At the moment the regard of the clubs in Europe seems to be at a very low level, since this system is not attractive to athletes nor companies or political parties. In addition, the level of competition within European clubs is low, which doesn't make it interesting for clubs in terms of finances to be successful.

It is striking that most of the clubs are trying to receive funds through companies in the private sector or governmental funds. This financial support however, is in most of the cases not enough to create successful athletes on their own. Instead, this money is being used in order to buy professional players from overseas. Consequently, the current system is destroying itself by:

- Taking the professional athletes to foreign Clubs which don't support any Youth Education
- Not creating employment structures for players, coaches etc...
- Not getting any funds by the European Table Tennis Association in order to develop standardized training programs, resp. not having an incentive system for clubs, advancing them to be competitive

In addition, most of the clubs which work with young players don't have the financial possibilities to pay for them once they become professional players at the adult stage. Over the years the International Table Tennis Federation was introducing more competitions, only allowing players, who are part of a national team/association, to participate. These competitions are attractive for these athletes since they offer prize money. Consequently the time resources of the professional players are not sufficient enough to concentrate more on club level based competitions. Through this, the responsibility of the clubs also decreased.

It is important to establish a couple of table tennis education centers all over Europe competing with each other, but teaching the same (European) training methods. We believe that just like in China, Europe needs a Coaches Academy in the future, educating them how to raise professional players from a young stage. Furthermore, it is important to create a system which supports coaches, clubs, managers, presidents and players with the same goals in mind.

The current system is established in a way that relies on people working on a voluntary basis. However, looking towards the future this must change to people working on it professionally in order to reach an evolved professional level. It is therefore important to also offer an attractive work offering to managers of clubs in terms of tasks and finances. We need clubs and people working on an auspicious system. That is why changes within the current European club structure need to be done.

2.2.3. Center of Excellence

Apart from the rebuilding of the system and the focus on the clubs including more worldwide Club competitions, we would like to introduce new Centers of Excellence (CoE), which are training and education hot spots for the most promising talents from Europe. We believe that there is a need for them, especially within the current situation in Europe`s women table tennis. There should be 1 or 2 of them in Europe, focused on the elite athletes

Candidates from smaller countries and with less chances to get quality practice should be chosen by equality before candidates that are from e.g. Germany or France, because everybody can get perfect conditions in these countries.

One of the responsibilities of the CoE`s would be the communication with clubs all over Europe in order to scout the best talents according to their success. This „Center of Excellence“ needs to be organized as a residential training center but it must offer time resources for club and National Team interests as well as private matters at the same time. The goal of the CoE system is to create professional conditions for the European table tennis system in various ways (Athletes, Coaches, Managers, etc.). This means that after having left a CoE without being successful as a player, one could pursue a professional career as a coach, sports manager, etc. Eventually, the CoE system must be transparent as well as it must keep the future of young people in mind.

This is a very important aspect when considering the financial situation which is to an extensive amount dependent on governmental funds. It must be evident to the sponsor that the CoE is worth sponsoring, as it is an education center improving the situation of table tennis in Europe. In addition, it is necessary to be also supported by the ETTU.

The attending players and coaches should be having a regular income through the new idea of an European incentive scheme. The incentive scheme should be a benefit for the associations:

- Better practice for young athletes
- Cheaper education for associations
- Direct contact to the Table Tennis suppliers pool
- The players will learn from the best players and coaches
- Direct contact to the sponsorship pool
- The players will not need to change the nationalities
- The players get job perspectives

- The players of the CoE will be sent to various competitions and championships for free

What is the new incentive scheme for National associations, regions and Clubs?

Every medal at World and European events should bring real funds for the winning Association, but that's not the end of the road, paid out in a way that the whole season is for collecting the titles and at the end of the year the money should be split in a transparent and fair way to the nations, which has to split that funds also transparent within the Association. By having the incentive scheme integrated, the motivation for success will rise.

Also Clubs should get funds for International success, prize money for the Champions League and also the ETTU CUP is very important.

The national association of a country is responsible for managing the National Team, it is also their responsibility to recruit and educate beginners of a young age. Associations cannot be in charge of the professional education of players which are above the average level of the national Elite. By organizing training courses and events in every part of the country and after all educate the talents for a World career; the Associations will lose the focus on finding and scouting talents. It's only possible to implement a system that feeds itself through human resources, knowledge and experience and funds. That's why we need specialized CoE`s. They also offer an opportunity for people to involve into table tennis professionally by being a sports manager, a physical therapist or psychologist. It is important to raise the level of professionals working with athletes in order to be more successful. Furthermore, it is also valuable, to offer people who are not successful enough as athletes to remain in the domain of table tennis and work in another position in order to afford their living. The CoE prepares people leaving the academy to be independent. That is why we believe that CoEs in Europe would be a successful innovation. It is important to maintain people being raised with table tennis within the system and keep them employed. As can be seen in the private economy sector, a professional approach towards a concept is necessary, in order to create a well-structured and healthy enterprise. Another important aspect is satisfied employees. Therefore, it is important to give young players, entering CoE, further alternatives for their future.

The CoE construct can also be fundraised by European Union, the table tennis supplier's pool and a table tennis sponsoring pool, Sports Development Agencies and the Olympic movement, if the ETTU and the ITTF are supporting that idea.

The CoE will be coexisting with the ITTF HOT SPOT LINZ, which can help to raise the training quality and quantity, as well as the income of the CoE, in direct benefit for the structure and the players of the CoE. This model is creating a perfect commitment of the players. They can help to fundraise for their training base and get a lot financial benefits out of it. Of course the concept can be increased to be an International education school within the ITTF development system.

Professional players?

Everybody who reaches the stage of getting paid from a Club or winning prize money, who still wants to practice at the CoE, has to pay for the CoE Fund in order to support the new generation. Everything will be complete transparent and fair, so that the incentive scheme is building a positive and athletic attitude in everybody's mind.

Why LINZ?

Simply because everything is already here: Infrastructure, the coaches, the schools, the medical surrounding, the experience, the network, the best players and the motivation for success! But most important, **to create on a different place the HIGH LEVEL standard, like it already exists in LINZ, would cost double or three times**

-> more time

&

->money

Financial Independence will be the goal of the CoE !!!

How can one player qualify for CoE?

The ITTF Hopes and the ETTU Eurokids are useable tools to search for players before cadet stage. Beyond that qualifying system, every **European Association can nominee one Girl and one Boy candidate for a 1 Year apprenticeship every year, which will be for free for the Association and the player, if the player qualifies through the tournament series at the CoE. After one Year, the CoE will determine the renewal of the election for another period of 3 Years.**

Conclusion

Independent of the sports development of table tennis in Europe, a strong development of education, technology and global connection took place in Europe. This enabled other sports disciplines to develop and to get people interested in. Obviously, this variety has as a consequence that every sport has less spectators due to the wide and diverse offer because people were not only focusing on one sports discipline. Whereas in China, table tennis had a unique role due to the historical facts and the communist system, nowadays China is developing more and more into a highly connected and modern state, in which the influence of the western society on the Chinese attitude and way of living can be seen. As mentioned before, it is necessary to observe the whole picture of sports development and its impact worldwide. This change implies that other sports disciplines in China, such as soccer or basketball, become more interesting to Chinese people and the hype about table tennis slowly starts to decrease. Therefore, it is now, that the European Table Tennis has to step in and take the opportunity to catch up with the success of Chinese players. One possibility would be to establish new Centres of Excellence. The following part will outline the aspired concept of such a centre in Linz, Austria, supported by the club Linz AG Froschberg.

3. Introduction to Linz AG Froschberg

The table tennis club Linz Froschberg was founded in 1970 and began to compete with only one men team. Only a year later the first women team started to practice and compete. Günther Renner founded the department of competitive table tennis in the Club more than 35 Years ago and since then the women's teams of this club became very successful on a regional, national and nowadays also international level. Linz AG Froschberg has won the Austrian Team Championship 14 times, as well as the European Champions League twice. The women's teams also participate in the European Super League, offering younger athletes of the club to gain experience on an international level.

One of the most successful players of the club is Liu Jia, European Champion in Singles, who moved to Linz when she was 14 years old. Also, the club has helped to develop players like Iveta Vacenovska, Petrissa Solja, Sofia Polcanova and Stefan Fegerl. All of this success was only possible because of the well-developed training facilities throughout the years, which helped the athletes to reach their best results. A fact which definitely should not be underestimated is the familiar atmosphere, which makes it very pleasant for the athletes to practice in Linz. In the following part the education program will be described, including all important aspects.

4. Education Program

It is evident that a CoE consists of various factors contributing to each other in order to create a professional environment for athletes. In the following part these will be outlined shortly, starting with the stages of the Table Tennis Long Term Participant/ Athlete Development plan (LTP/AD), kindly provided by the Canadian Table Tennis Federation. Although, only the stages starting at “training to train” are relevant for the concept of Linz AG Froschberg, it is also important to outline the stages an athlete has to undergo before that.

4.1. Sports Education

4.1.1. Active Start: Age 3-5/6

Mission of the coach

- Teach fundamental movement skills and link them with playing in a safe, stimulating and **FUN** environment.

General objectives targeting the child

- Have fun
- Develop camaraderie
- Learn how to move skillfully

Guiding principles for the coach

- Focus on improving fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, balancing twisting, wheeling, kicking, throwing and catching
- For this age category, physical activity is essential for healthy development and must become a part of the child’s daily life. It is therefore important to educate parents to teach their child not to be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except while sleeping
- Games for young children (3-4 years old) should be non-competitive and participation oriented
- Active participation of the children in the activity is of primary importance

Specific objectives for the child

- Acquire all basic movement skills building towards more complex movements
- Explore risks and limits in safe environments

- Build confidence and self-esteem
- Get familiar with hand-eye coordination and more specifically with racket games

4.1.2. Fundamentals: Age 5/6-8/9

Mission of the coach

- Develop fundamental movement skills, build overall motor skills (ABC's) and teach basic sport specific skills through active participation in a fun and safe environment

General objectives targeting the child

- Develop basic multi-sport skills involving fundamental movements (running, jumping, balancing, twisting, wheeling, kicking, throwing and catching) in different environments (indoor, in water, in snow, on ice, etc.)• Introduce motor skills (agility, balance, coordination, rhythm, time/space orientation, speed, dexterity, hand-eye coordination, etc.)
- Acquire and develop basic table tennis skills
- Learn the basic rules of the game and ethics of sports
- Develop focus, self-confidence, and positive attitude
- Try to instill the love of sports through active participation

Guiding principles for the coach

- Teach basic technical strokes (based on biomechanical principles), the correct racket grip
- To learn a good technique, repetition in short, entertaining exercises is required
- Limit the information communicated to the participant to what is essential
- Appropriate rubbers to spin the ball must be used
- No periodization but well-structured programs and practices
- Table tennis organized activities once or twice a week at the beginning of this stage and 3-4 times a week at the end of this stage (the child should also participate in other sport activities)
- Encourage training groups over private training (child needs to interact with other kids)
- Competition must be participation oriented (not winning oriented) and age based (not rating based)
- Be clear, concise and adapt the terminology to the age level
- Coaches should be knowledgeable in child development
- Create a fun, safe and joyful environment

Specific objectives for the child

- Execute basic table tennis strokes in simple exercises with consistency
- Learn good body position and basic footwork technique
- Hit the ball from different parts of the table
- Understand how to respond to different spins
- Develop the ability to focus on the task
- Learn to appreciate competition as a learning environment

4.1.3. Learning to Train: Age 8/9-11/12

Mission of the coach

- Develop general physical fitness, teach sound basic technical & tactical skills and develop basic mental qualities

General objectives targeting the participant

- Continue to develop basic multi-sport skills involving fundamental movements
- Develop motor skills (agility, balance, coordination, rhythm, time/space orientation, speed, dexterity, eye-hand coordination, etc.)
- Develop and consolidate all basic technical skills in controlled conditions
- Develop basic mental skills
- Develop basic tactical skills
- Introduce and develop basic practical tactical knowledge
- Introduce conditioning
- Introduce ancillary activities (warm-up, hydration, cool-down, stretching, etc.)

Guiding principles for the coach

- Technical and tactical acquisition must come at the beginning of the session (learning requires a rested central nervous system and concentration)
- Only communicate the technical or tactical information the participant needs to know to accomplish the task
- Frequent multi-ball training to consolidate basic techniques
- Exercises with 70% success rate is necessary for learning to occur
- Skill (technique) learning must come under the umbrella of tactics. The participant must have a clear idea of what tactical problem he/she can solve with the skill taught
- 3-4 training sessions a week at the beginning of this stage and 5-6 sessions at the end

(1.5 to 2 hours each session) plus other sport activities

- Encourage training groups over private training
- Monitor PHV (peak height velocity) with girls
- Cash in on the windows of optimal train ability: flexibility; speed; endurance
- The young athlete should spend more time training than competing (70% / 30%, as an indicator only)
- Introduce single periodization

Specific objectives pursued by the athlete

- Develop all technical strokes in opposition confrontation situations
- Develop efficient footwork technique
- Develop a taste for effort and conditioning
- Develop the capacity to adapt to different situations
- Learn how to focus on the opponent
- Develop a positive attitude
- Start to self-analyze training habits and performances in competition

4.1.4. Training to Train: Age 11/12-15/16

Mission of the coach

- Raise the performance capacity of the athlete, prepare her/him to perform at identified competitions and reach a peak performance at the decisive competition(s) of the year.

General objectives targeting the athlete

- Consolidate and refine all basic technical skills in competitive situations
- Increase the athlete's repertoire of skills
- Commit to a style of play
- Consolidate / Refine basic practical tactical knowledge.
- Learn how to play against different styles
- Acquire new practical tactical knowledge tailor made to the level of performance of the athlete.
- Develop decision making.
- Introduce game plan.

- Learn how to cope with the challenges of competition
- Develop endurance, strength, speed and suppleness
- Further develop basic mental skills
- Introduce ideal performance state
- Develop ancillary capacities (warm-up, hydration, cool-down, stretching, etc.)

Guiding principles for the coach

- Focus on the quality of training (the player needs to be challenged throughout a training session)
- Frequent multi-ball training to consolidate/stabilize techniques
- Guide the player through his style of play
- 5-6 training sessions a week at the beginning of this stage and 8-10 sessions at the end (2 to 2.5 hours each session)
- Introduce sport medicine and sport sciences (work with specialists such as sports psychologists, nutritionists and physical trainers)
- Encourage training groups over private training
- The skills or tactics have to be consolidated or performed in a state of light to moderate fatigue in order to prepare the athlete adequately to competition.
- When preparing the athlete for competition, the training sessions must mirror the requirements of competition regarding active time and rest time.
- The athlete has to learn to extend to the limit of his/her performance capacity systematically in order to improve.
- The training load should be raised gradually and progressively.
- Be aware of the growth, development and maturation process in boys.
- Monitor PHV (peak height velocity) with girls and boys.
- The ratio training to competition should be around 60% / 40% (as an indicator only)
- Coaches should be knowledgeable on growth, development and maturation process
- Apply single or double periodization

Specific objectives pursued by the athlete

- Adapt technique to different spin, speed, placement and trajectory
- Develop an efficient service and return game

- Build strong tactical patterns
- Develop anticipation
- Control the activation level
- Focus on elements you can control

4.1.5. Training to Compete: Age 15/16-21/23 (late bloomer)

Mission of the coach

- Integrate all performance factors in a complex and harmonious blend in order to perform on a regular basis at identified, major, domestic and international events

General objectives targeting the athlete

- Determine clear goals and identify the path to reach them
- Develop all sport specific physical qualities and continue to develop general physical qualities
- Refine/Maintain/Master all technical skills in competition situations Develop game plans and apply them efficiently
- Develop and improve ideal performance state
- Optimize ancillary activities and develop autonomy
- Refine / maintain sequence of basic sport skills at competition intensity/density (1 sport).
- Develop consistency in implementing variants of basic skills and the new skills acquired in a competition environment.
- Increase and improve the athlete's repertoire of skills.
- Increase the success rate of the skills executed in competition.
- Increase the success rate of the basic practical tactical knowledge implemented in competition.
- Develop / Consolidate new practical tactical knowledge tailor made to the strengths of the athlete.
- Improve decision making (individual tactics)
- In an analogous competitive situation, the player should be able to solve the same tactical problem using different ways (skills/techniques).
- Develop general physical conditioning as well as specific physical conditioning.

- Continue to develop fundamental mental skills.
- Develop the performance capacity of the athlete/team and integrate the performance factors (10 Ss) to reach a peak performance at a pre-determined time of the year.

Guiding principles for the coach

- Training intensity must always be high to optimal
- A lot of repetition is required to automate technique
- Link technical work to decision making and variations
- Individualize the work accordingly to the style of play
- 8-12 training sessions a week (2 to 3 hours each session). Significantly raise the volume during school vacations.
- Encourage training groups over private training
- Manage and lead an integrated support team (IST) becomes important
- In competition, the athlete should concentrate on the task to do, not the outcome
- Frequent matches where the player can win and lose against opponents of the same gender and age category (cadet, junior or under 21). The choice of competitions must favor athlete development.
- Training intensity must always be high to optimal. Sub-maximal intensity will alter the motor coordination of the athlete
- In training, more time should be spent on random conditions (to mirror competition) than on controlled conditions
- Monitor fatigue / recovery adequately
- Be aware of the factors that influence tactical thinking when the athlete is confronted with a decision making situation: speed of the action taking place; quality of the observation of the athlete; experience and tactical knowledge of the athlete; memory (remembering practical problems solved) and emotional state of the athlete.
- When preparing for a competition, the athlete should focus on exploiting the flaws and deficiencies of the up-coming opponent.
- The athlete must learn to stick to a game plan and not to panic when encountering difficulties
- Apply single, double or multiple periodization tailor made to the athlete's needs and the competition calendar

Specific objectives pursued by the athlete

- Develop specific physical qualities according to the style of play
- Practice with “in game” philosophy
- Develop a good tactical knowledge about oneself and main opponents
- Adapt quickly to the opponent’s strategies and variations
- Constantly force the opponent to adapt
- Develop visualization abilities
- Introduce and develop ideal performance state
- Learn to relax in stressful situations

4.1.6. Learning to Win: Age 18/19 + (depends on the rate of development)

Mission of the coach

- Monitor all aspects of performance in order to help the athlete reach a peak performance in major international events

General objectives targeting the athlete

- Is fully committed to the pursuit of international excellence
- Develops an efficient personalized approach to performance
- Has good consistent international performances
- Raises the level of her/his game in decisive moments
- Explores aspects related to the post-sport career

Guiding principles for the coach

- Understand the path the podium: early senior years are difficult for a young player.
- Integrate performance factors to meet the up-coming competition requirements
- Organize training in mostly random conditions
- Employ video analysis as an important part of success (especially in competition)
- Ensure personalized work with the best sport science specialists
- Lead 10-12 training sessions/week (2-3 hours each session) and regular training camps.
- Manage all demands related to the athlete’s career (accommodation, support staff, sponsors, media, etc.)
- Model all possible aspects of training and performance.
- The training structure of high performance athletes is a mirror image of the coordinated and goal adapted method. Because of the international competition

calendar, training is punctual and temporarily focused on special preparation for major events.

- In training, more time should be spent on random conditions (mirror competition requirements) than on controlled conditions (block learning).
- Monitor fatigue / recovery adequately.
- Frequent preventive breaks permitting recovery to avoid overtraining and injuries.
- Coaches have to be more effective in managing and leading an integrated support team (IST)
- Apply single, double, triple or multiple periodization tailor made tailor made to the international competition calendar and the athlete's contextual reality.

Specific objectives pursued by the athlete

- Continue to develop general and specific physical qualities according to the her/his needs
- Master techniques and all its variations (spin, speed, precision and trajectory) in competition situations
- Develop a precise mental and tactical profile
- Refine basic strategies against the different styles
- Take information on opponents (during the point and between points) and uses it to win points
- Continue to develop the ideal performance state

4.1.7. Living to Win: Age 24/25 + (peak performance: 25-35)

Mission of the coach

- Monitor in detail all aspects of performance in order to help the athlete reach the podium in major international events

General objectives pursued by the athlete

- Fully commit to the pursuit of international excellence
- Refine personalized approach to performance
- Have excellent consistent performances
- Peak for major events
- Raise the level of game in decisive moments
- Have personal projects besides table tennis

,Guiding principles for the coach

- Plan towards winning major events (not to earn money)
- The athlete must have the opportunity to face the best athletes in the world regularly
- The smallest details will make a difference
- 7-9 training sessions a week (2 to 3 hours each session). Regular training camps. (The volume diminishes because of the high number of competitions and traveling days.)
- Statistically based video analysis is an important part of success (especially in competition)
- Ensure close and personalized work between the best sport science specialists, the athlete and the coach
- Make sure all demands related to the athlete's career (accommodation, support staff, sponsors, media, etc.) are monitored
- Single to multiple periodization (based on major events)

Specific objectives pursued by the athlete

- Refine and maintain specific physical qualities according to the style of play
- Mastery of technique and all its variations (spin, speed, precision and trajectory) in stress situations
- Use very subtle variations to win points
- Develop a precise mental and tactical profile of main opponents
- Be able to surprise the same opponent from one match to another
- Take information on your opponent (during the point and between points) and use it to win points
- Refine ideal performance state

4.1.8. Active for Life

The athlete enters this stage at the point of withdrawal from high-level competitive table tennis.

When it occurs, two options are offered:

1. Keep training to stay physically healthy:

- Practice table tennis for fun
- Play in regular league competition
- Keep competing at Master's level (in table tennis or in another sport)
- and/or

2. Stay involved in table tennis:

- Move to sport-related careers (coaching, administration, officiating, small business enterprises, media,

- Etc.)
- Become a volunteer (board member, mentor, etc.)

4.2. Personnel

In order to execute the sports education program, it is necessary to have the optimal personnel resources. The whole club Linz AG Froschberg, consisting out of three sub-clubs, has got 5 coaches, of which 3 are working only with professional athletes. Plus there are working 2 National Team Coaches and 1 Upper Austrian Team Coach in the hall.

The athletes also have the possibility to access medical experts for free, as well as a masseur and an athletic trainer and a psychotherapist.

4.3 Infrastructure

The Sportpark Lissfeld is situated in the southern part of Linz; next to a wide spread park and a public recreation area. The train station and the airport of Linz are situated within a few minutes by car and the nearest highway is situated at a distance of 100 m. There are 2 halls which can be accessed for practicing with 18 Tables all together. However, one of them is being used permanently for table tennis, providing 10 tables for competition or practicing. This hall is supplied with a red floor and 1000 LUX light. In addition, athletes have the opportunity to make use of the Olympic Center of Upper Austria and the schools hall in walking distance with another 14 Tables. At the Olympic Center they have the possibility to get an athletic check up and make use of a work-out room.

4.3.1. Living Conditions

Depending on the age, the young athletes live together in private apartments, offered by the club, or in local residential communities being supervised by pedagogues. This facility is the Kolping Heim, Hotel Turmfalke and some scholarship homes, which also supports the athletes in their schooling affairs. All these living facilities can be easily accessed by public transportation.

4.3.2. Scholar Education & Halls/Tables

Young athletes have the opportunity to visit a secondary sports school which is supporting the training schedule of the athletes. They can practice two times a day on 18 tables in our halls and on 14 Tables in the Table Tennis school. This school offers education up to the age of 15. After that the players can choose to have further education in a high school, which

also is focusing on elite sports education. At this point it is important to emphasize the fact that both of these schools offer German classes and help the pupils to become integrated.

4.3.3. Leisure Activities

Since we know that not only table tennis exercise but also other sports are important for the development of physical abilities, the young athletes have got the possibility to take part in various sports programs offered at the Sportpark Lissfeld, such as Soccer, Beach volleyball, Tennis, Nordic Walking etc. In addition, Linz AG Froschberg has got cooperation with a local Wellness Club and Spa, which is situated within 5 min. walking distance from Sportpark Lissfeld. The region of upper Austria also offers a lot of outdoor activities, such as skiing, climbing or hiking. It is a future goal of our club to engage a pedagogue who will be in charge of the young athletes during their free time and take them to leisure activities.

4.3.4. Social Infrastructure

Most of their time, the athletes spend with each other since they live, study and practice together. The coaches also play an important role in their daily life and spend a lot of time together with the athletes. Also the manager can be considered as a person of trust and in the future a specialized pedagogue. New friends can be found in school or within the club, as Linz AG Froschberg has got over 600 members. Due to time resources most of the social contacts of the young athletes remain within the table tennis community.

5. Economical Structure

It is evident that Linz AG Froschberg is dependent on private and governmental funds. These include some private sponsors as well as funds for professional athletes by the Austrian Sports Ministry. However, in order to progress the training center and become more professional, further financial support will be necessary. Therefore, we will outline a short SWOT analysis to point out why it is worth supporting the training center at Linz AG Froschberg.

5.1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

Linz AG Froschberg already has got a couple of top international athletes and consequently the know-how how to work with professional players. Furthermore, these players provide the

optimum training conditions for further athletes. It enables young players to practice in a professional environment and to learn a lot from the pro-athletes. An additional strength of the club is the familial atmosphere which is provided by all of the club members, helping new athletes to feel accepted and as a part of the club right from the beginning.

Weaknesses:

The capacity of the training center Sportpark Lissfeld can only offer space for 18 tables which can be used permanently. Also, at the moment Linz AG Froschberg can only accept to educate players who will join the club. It's a future goal to educate players at the training center of Linz Ag Froschberg independent of their club or nationality.

Chances:

Regarding the development of the western influence in China, it is highly probable that table tennis slowly will start to lose its hegemony in China. This is a chance for the European Table Tennis to catch up and consequently a chance for Froschberg to educate a new generation of athletes. Furthermore, Froschberg has got the chance to educate players on a qualitative level instead of a quantitative level. This differentiates Linz AG Froschberg from most of the other training centers around Europe. The goal of the club is not to make profit out of it, but to offer a qualitative training program to chosen talents. The most important point is that we support **Women in Sport** by priority.

Risks:

Since the club is dependent on sponsors, it is always a risk that the financial situation might prohibit the development of the training center. An economic crisis or various other factors concerning the government could lead to the threat that the financial support would not be sufficient in the future. Also, regarding the development of sports in general, we can see that the club system is not as attractive to people anymore, since there are various other facilities to practice sports, such as fitness centers or public/private sports studios. So we will need more professional staff in the near future.

5.2. USP

The Unique Selling Proposition of Linz AG Froschberg is the fact that we have the closest accumulation of native European top female athletes all over the continent.

6. Prospect

The focus is directed on educating young female players aged from 10 years onwards, including their sports education, school education as well as giving them financial and social

support. Until now, the main competence of the club consists of educating young female athletes. Therefore, we would like to improve this field in the future and get the support and funds from diverse institutions and the ETTU.

The time has come to make changes to the European table tennis system and introduce the first Center of Excellence. Since Linz AG Froschberg has got a lot of experience in educating young female players, it would stand to reason that this club would be the ideal test subject, being the first CoE in Europe. For this purpose we need the support of the ETTU and the ITTF.