

Attitudes, motivations and professional opinions of elite tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement

Abstract of PhD Thesis

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Introduction

Physical activity and sport are part of universal culture, which includes the preservation of physical and mental health, the development of performance, the development of willpower or the practice of competitive activities (Takács 1972, Dorogi 2012). It is of particular importance if sport, as a means of integration, also helps people with typical developmental stages to develop positive attitudes towards their fellow human beings with disabilities.

My choice of topic was influenced by the fact that, as a sports professional in the international and national Special Olympics (SO) movement, I have experienced the difficulties caused by my athletes' disabilities on a daily basis for more than 10 years. These are challenges not only for the individuals but also for those around them: their families, professionals, teachers and educators. I believe that the research presented in this dissertation and its findings will help to better understand the importance of social inclusion and that inclusiveness, which is now essential for inclusion, can significantly help to improve the perception of people with disabilities and, alongside this, the quality of their lives, their quality of life and their human relationships (McConkey et al. 2019, Laoues-Czimbalmos 2023). Based on my experience, I believe that sport is an area in which all participants can find opportunities to create value for themselves and for a community. These experiences and reflections have led me to explore the knowledge, motivations and attitudes of professionals who directly interact with people with disabilities in sport, in addition to examining the environment in which the relationship between sport, inclusion and inclusivity can be achieved.

Objectives and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to present the work of coaches and sports professionals working with people with disabilities and its relevance to the lives of the people concerned. I consider it important to present the work of sports professionals working in the Special Olympics movement (especially in the sport of tennis). Their presence and work are crucial to the development of sporting lifestyles for people with disabilities and are essential for the implementation of integrated training and sporting activities in an inclusive way. The research presented focuses on the detailed analysis and

examination of coaches' and sports professionals' opinions, motivations and experiences. My main aim is to describe and define as precisely as possible the attitude, general perception and coaching motivation of a coach working in the Special Olympics movement towards athletes with intellectual disabilities, through which he/she has come into contact with athletes. Also important is his/her opinion on integrated (combined) training and its inclusive implementation.

The analysis of the literature has shown that the attitude, motivation and motivation of coaches towards people with intellectual disabilities is a complex, longitudinal process and only changes in a positive direction if it is accompanied by constant interaction and feedback. In the case of the research that forms the empirical basis of this dissertation, I studied coaches who have, so to speak, gone beyond the initial sensitisation, have a positive attitude towards their athletes with intellectual disabilities and thus consider it their mission to develop and coach people with intellectual disabilities, moreover through the practical and theoretical teaching of tennis, a very popular social sport.

In my research, I considered it important to find out the sociodemographic characteristics and professional background of tennis coaches who also work as coaches within the Special Olympics movement. I was curious to find out the relationship between the sociodemographic characteristics of male and female coaches and Hungarian coaches and the international "elite" tennis coaching group in terms of age, family background and professional experience. I considered it important to explore the general experiences and opinions of elite tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement regarding the coaching of their tennis players with intellectual disabilities, in order to find out what impact they think tennis has on the lives of their athletes with intellectual disabilities and whether tennis as a social sport helps them to integrate into society, to achieve effective inclusion and to improve their lifestyle. I was looking for answers to the question: what are the sport-specific opinions of elite tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement? Did they experience any differences in the training sessions they designed and organised for their athletes with average intellect and their athletes with intellectual disabilities? What is typical of a training session for tennis players with a traditional intellectual disability and why along these lines is the integrated (unified) sport introduced by the SO and the Unified Sports movement itself good? I also think it is important to answer how the adaptive and inclusive education and competition system Play+Stay,

jointly proposed by the International Tennis Federation and the International Special Olympics Association Tennis Sports Committee, is perceived by SO tennis players? Finally, I would like to know what motivated coaches to join the ranks of professionals who teach tennis to people with intellectual disabilities? What motivates their colleagues to choose this specific segment of the coaching profession?

Hypotheses

I have defined the hypotheses according to three aspects in each of the question areas. For my study, I hypothesized gender and ethnicity comparisons not from a qualitative perspective, but rather to juxtapose sociodemographic and occupational differences and characteristics, and *disability history* as a significant sociodemographic characteristic.

H1: I hypothesize that I will find a significant difference *between male and female coaches' responses* regarding *their overall experience of* coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities, i.e., that they will provide statistically significant different responses.

H2: I hypothesize that there is a statistically significant difference between the opinions of *Hungarian and international* coaches regarding *their overall experience of* coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities.

H3: I hypothesize that coaches who have prior disability experience will give statistically significantly different responses *to questions about their general coaching experience* compared to coaches *without* prior disability experience.

H4: I hypothesize that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of *male and female coaches in their sport-specific opinions* about coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities.

H5: I hypothesize that I will find a statistically significant difference between *Hungarian and international* coaches in *their sport-specific opinions* about coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities.

H6: I hypothesize that coaches who *have a history of disability* will have statistically significantly different responses to questions *examining sport professional opinions* compared to coaches *without* a history of disability.

H7: I hypothesize that there is a statistically significant difference between *male and female coaches'* responses to questions *about coaching motivation*.

H8: I assume that there is a statistically detectable difference between *Hungarian coaches' and international coaches'* answers to questions *about coaches' motivation*.

H9: I hypothesize that the responses of coaches *with prior disability experience* to questions about coaching motivation and motivation will be statistically significantly different from the responses of tennis coaches *without prior disability experience*.

Methods

In my research I surveyed the professionals and coaches of the Special Olympics movement in international and national tennis. I also considered it important to share the survey with coaches working in the tennis section of the Hungarian Special Olympics Association. As a way of validating the results of my research, I conducted structured in-depth interviews with members of the Special Olympics International Sports Resource Team (N=10), who are members of the team responsible for the tennis professional documents, regulations, rule changes, division methodology, adapted tennis rules developed in cooperation with the International Tennis Federation, and the procedure for the organisation of international competitions.

For my exploratory research I used a survey with open and closed-ended questions, which consisted of 4 parts. *In the first set of questions*, I sought to obtain sociodemographic data and professional background of the interviewed tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement. *In the second set of questions*, I was interested in the general experiences and opinions of tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement regarding the coaching of their tennis players with intellectual disabilities. *In the third set of questions*, I asked about the coaches' sport-specific opinions on coaching their tennis players with intellectual disabilities. Finally, in the *fourth set of questions*, I asked about the motivation and commitment of elite tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement to coach their tennis players with intellectual disabilities. I conducted a structured in-depth interview with members of the SOI Sports Committee, with questions based on the findings already known.

Results

I analysed respondents on the basis of the eight sociodemographic questions asked in the first part of the survey. The 8 questions were analysed by comparing male and female respondents and by comparing the Hungarian and international sample. It is important to note that the 77 main international coaches were from 41 different countries, representing six of the seven regions of the Special Olympics (Figure 1).

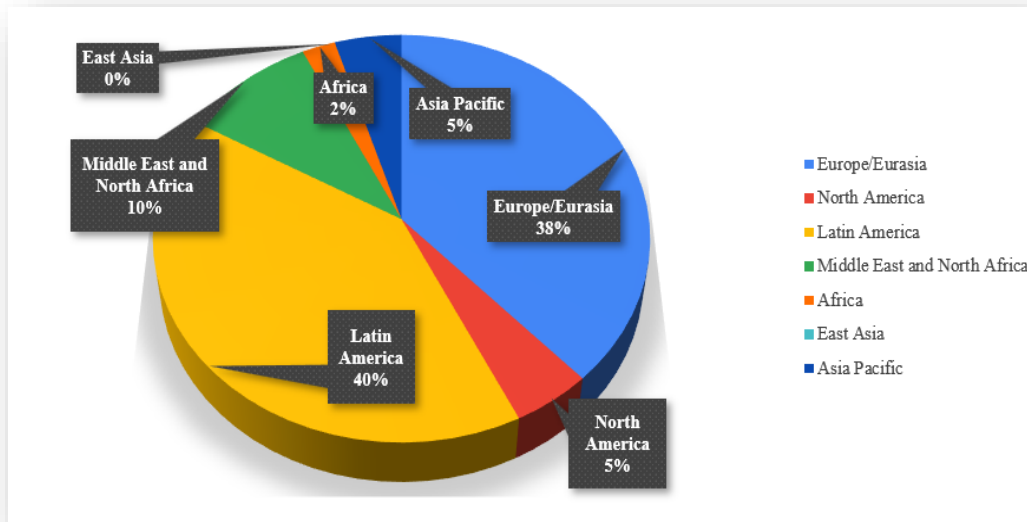


Figure 1: Number of countries completing the survey by region of the Special Olympics movement (own editing)

Hungarian SO tennis coaches have formed a separate group (sample). The total sample of coaches varies greatly in age. The average age is 45.4 years. I also examined the marital status. The answers of the respondents revealed that 41.2% (47) of the interviewed coaches (N=114) are *single*, 58.7% are *married* or *in a partnership*. Regarding the educational level, I found that the professionals working in SO are *highly educated*, as 37.8% of the Hungarian coaches have a *college* degree, 27.7% have a *university* degree and 32.5% have only a *high school diploma*. In my survey, I asked the samples *about* their *employment status* as tennis coaches in the Special Olympics tennis program. In terms of the proportion of men and women, there are more male coaches in voluntary employment (N=52, 75.4%), while women also have the highest proportion of volunteers (64.4%), but a lower proportion than men. I felt it was important to find out how long the interviewees had been working with athletes with intellectual disabilities. Across the

whole sample (N=114), most respondents indicated *a time range of 4-10 years*, i.e. 48.2% of the total respondent population (55 respondents) had been working with tennis players with intellectual disabilities for at least 4 years and up to 10 years. *Examining disability history* is an important aspect for this dissertation, so I also asked the coaches about this. The questioning was not limited to intellectual disability but could be understood to apply to any type of disability. A surprising and highly significant result is that 46.5% (53) of the total sample of coaches (N=114) answered *yes* to the question, i.e. there is a person with a disability in their environment. 53.5% (61 persons of the total population answered the question with a '*no*'.

Results of the general coaching experience, coaching opinion survey

I wondered whether coaches also deal with athletes of average intellect in addition to athletes with intellectual disabilities, because my previous research has shown that versatile sport experience can be an important prerequisite. Of the total population of coaches (N=114), 63.1% (72) coached athletes of average intellect in addition to their athletes with intellectual disabilities, 33.4% coached only tennis players with intellectual disabilities, while only 3.5% responded that they coached tennis players with other disability types (wheelchair, visually impaired, and hearing impaired) in addition to their athletes with intellectual disabilities. An attempt was also made to discuss *whether* coaches think *it is more difficult to coach* tennis players with intellectual disabilities than players with average intellect. According to the whole population, athletes with intellectual disabilities have a *different developmental pace* (26.3%) and therefore *require a different type of coaching attitude* (26.3%) to conduct training sessions and only 11.4% said it was *not more difficult at all*. I was also interested in the views of the coaches on *the changes* due to the impact of tennis coaching, and they provided a number of valuable responses to my questions. In their opinion, tennis coaching improves e.g. *mental* (1), *physical* (2), *social skills* (3), but also *self-confidence*, *self-assurance*, *autonomy* (4), as well as *discipline* (5) or *adaptability* (6). For the total population, there were only 6 (5.2%) who *perceived no change* (7) and 8 (7%) who *could not answer* (8) the question, but most perceived more positive changes. I was also curious to know which age groups were more preferred by coaches. I grouped the responses according to the age groups developed for the schooling question. Looking at the total population of coaches (N=114), respondents preferred the *under-21* age group (45.6%), while when comparing gender, female coaches

preferred *any age group* (46.7%), while males preferred a younger *age group - under-21* (49.3%). The *older age group (21+)* received the fewest 'votes' of all samples, although it is important to bear in mind that the slower development of people with intellectual disabilities means that many are capable of greater mental, physical and social development after they reach adulthood, or so-called 'ageing'. It is interesting to note that the responses of coaches *with and without previous experience of disability* were significantly different in this area ($p=0.005$). I thought it was important to ask whether coaches thought that *parental background* influences the tennis careers of athletes with intellectual disabilities, to which 50.8% of coaches answered *yes*, 43.8% answered *not necessarily*, while 5.2% *could not* say at all. We were also interested in the coaches' opinions on *what skills and abilities* they believe are developed and enhanced in the daily life of athletes, which the respondents attribute to the positive impact of tennis. According to 63.2% of the total population, tennis develops many skills and abilities that have an impact on the everyday life and social competence of athletes with intellectual disabilities. According to the coaches, tennis helps them *to integrate into society and socialise* (14.1%), teaches them *perseverance and consistency* (16.4%), *good self-esteem and self-confidence* (19%), *cooperation* (22.2%) and helps them to lead *an independent life* (28%). I also asked about the difficulties that coaches experience when coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities. The coaches' responses revealed that they had *difficulties with the athlete learning too slowly* (2.6%), *poor concentration* (12.2%), *behavioural problems* (20.1%), *poor technical knowledge* (5.2%) or several of them highlighted difficulties in implementing the training, such as *lack of good practice* (3.5%), *lack of help and volunteers* (11.4%), *difficulty in organising training* (17.5%) but many respondents still described the delivery of specific training as a *positive challenge* (16.6%)

I have formulated a number of hypotheses in relation to the question of *general coaching experience*. I used a non-parametric two-sample t-test to test hypothesis H1. However, the significance values were all greater than 0.05 ($p>0.05$) for the variables tested, i.e., I found no statistically significant difference between the responses of the two samples. I also formulated another hypothesis (H2) related to this issue. The significance value was greater than 0.05 ($p>0.05$) for all variables tested, i.e. I did not find any statistically significant difference between the responses of the two samples. My hypothesis H3 was also formulated in this survey. The significance value was greater than 0.05 ($p>0.05$) for

four variables (2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6) and less than 0.05 for three variables (2.3: $p=0.008$, 2.4: $p=0.005$, 2.7: $p=0.002$), i.e. the answers of the coaches *with* and *without F.E.* differ partially. The two groups of coaches have different opinions on *the impact of training* (2.3), the preferred *age group* (2.4) and the *difficulty of training* (2.7).

Results of the answers to the sport-specific questions to coaches

I was curious to find out whether coaches think there is a difference between the way tennis players with intellectual disabilities *train* and the way their peers with average intellect train. After processing the responses from the entire population, I grouped them into five categories. Most of the male and female respondents said that they thought *that a different training method was necessary* when training people with intellectual disabilities. This was 53.6% (37 people) of the total population of male coaches ($N=69$) and 42.2% (19 people) of female coaches ($N=45$). For men, 16 (23.3%) responded that this was due to differences in *intellectual* ability, while 11 (24.4%) of women indicated *physical* differences. I was also curious to know the answers given on the basis of their perceptions of *the characteristics of the training method and training organisation*. Regarding the whole population, coaches (68 persons) mostly mentioned the practice of tasks *with a higher number of repetitions*, but many (66 persons) indicated a *slower learning* process compared to the training of athletes of average intellect as a characteristic difference, which is related to a lower intensity of training. I saw it important to ask coaches *what level of severity* of intellectual disability they thought it would be possible to teach people with intellectual disability to play tennis at a level of proficiency that would enable them to compete at the large court, green and hardball levels (levels 4, 5, 6) as defined by the SOI tennis section. The question was answered with a *medium severity* of intellectual disability response, comparing the responses of the total population, international and Hungarian coaches, and male and female respondents. It was also important to ask coaches *about the typical playing style of the athletes*, for which the responses received were quite critical. Out of the total coaching population, 36 (31.6%) of the coaches felt that the specialist tennis players had *poor technical knowledge* and tended to play a one-plane *baseline game* with few tactical elements. During the questioning process, I felt it was very important to address the unique and revolutionary tennis methodology issues that have changed the entire "SO tennis society" globally and that make my PhD topic unique. Regarding the introduction

of the teaching of the multifaceted program, only two foreign male coaches in the total population indicated that they *did not support* the introduction of Play+Stay, i.e. a total of 1.7% of coaches disagreed with the introduction of the program. Continuing along the line of sporting issues, I also asked the coaches for their views on the introduction of the Play+Stay competition system. Of the total population (114), 97.4% thought that the introduction of the Play+Stay competition system *was a good decision from a professional point of view*, of which 39.5% thought it was a good *decision* because it allowed athletes to compete *in more divisions*. I also wanted to know why coaches think it is important for tennis players with intellectual disabilities and athletes with average intellect *to participate in joint training sessions and other events*. majority of respondents described *achieving inclusion and integration* as the most important mission of integrated training. An interesting finding is that there is a significant difference in this question when comparing the responses of coaches *with* and *without prior disability experience* ($p=0.0001$). An important question is whether the sample is aware of the purpose of the *Special Olympics Unified Sports* program, so I asked about this in the sports inclusion questions. The role and purpose of the Unified programme was unanimously selected as *integration, inclusion and avoiding exclusion* by most respondents, but many also wrote the version of *inclusion, support and adaptation*. I also find it interesting that the third most responses were on *the importance of the professional and practical role of the Unified Sports programme*, i.e. that the coaches believe that the programme has also "raised the level" of the technical skills of the athletes. And there was a significant difference between the responses of coaches *with* and *without prior disability experience* ($p=0.004$). An important aspect for me was to find out what the coaches perceived as the *potential for inclusion* in the sport of tennis. According to the coaches, integration is a *community-building* tool that helps *to develop friendships* between athletes with intellectual disabilities and athletes with average intellect. It also helps to motivate and challenge coaches, teaches *independence and independent living skills*, but also plays a part in developing *better sporting knowledge, skills and abilities*. Finally, I was curious to know why, based on the coaches' opinions and experiences, tennis can be a good sport for athletes with intellectual disabilities. Most of them (44.7% of the total population) said *tennis was good for physical development*.

I have formulated three hypotheses in relation to this question. However, in my hypothesis H4, the significance of the response categories to the questions was greater than 0.05 for all variables ($p > 0.05$), i.e. there was no difference in the sample of the tested variables in terms of their sporting opinions. In my hypothesis H5, the significance of the tested variables was greater than 0.05 for all variables except one (3.1: $p = 0.002$) was greater than 0.05 in all cases ($p > 0.05$), i.e. I found a difference in the two groups' responses only in the question of *whether they use a different training method* for athletes with average intellect than for athletes with intellectual disability. In my hypothesis H6, the significance value was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for all variables except two (3.7: $p = 0.0001$ and 3.8: $p = 0.004$), i.e. the two groups under study had different opinions on the question of whether it is important to *share the experience of training and competing* with players of average intellect. Similarly, there is a detectable difference regarding *the purpose of the SO Unified Program*, which suggest that *disability history* may influence the opinion on sporting experience.

Results on motivation and motivation

The answers to the question on their motivation revealed a wide range of reasons. 41.2% of the total population started working out of *a sense of vocation*, 21.1% (24 people) started working *because of the developmental impact of tennis in practice*, 11.4% because of *family* motivation and also 11.4% because of their *professional* qualification. Based on what is known from the literature reviewed and my previous experience, I consider it important that athletes with average intellect and intellectual disabilities *meet outside the sports field*. I was curious to find out what motivates coaches to meet outside of training. 22.8% of the respondents said that there was no need to meet outside training, while 77.2% of the total population, however, said that it was important to meet and to be active together outside training. One of the biggest challenges for the Special Olympics movement is recruitment, so we were also interested in *how* respondents *could motivate their colleagues to teach tennis to tennis players with intellectual disabilities*, as there are usually few opportunities to meet people with disabilities in the field of sport. Categorising all responses, coaches saw success in developing skills as a motivation. 32.5% of the total sample of coaches would motivate their colleague by the success of *intellectual development*, while 25.4%-25.4% would motivate their colleague by the success of *physical* and *social* development, and least but not insignificantly (14.9%) by

the positive attitude and enthusiastic behaviour of the athletes. Finally, I was curious to know what motivates the respondents as coaches to coach tennis players with intellectual disabilities, i.e. what motivates them to this great and wonderful task and mission. The motivation of 49.1% of the coaches (114) *the sincerity and grateful attitude of the athletes*, but many of them are most confident in *the food and usefulness of their work*, as are 21.6% of the Hungarian coaches and 32.5% of the international coaching group. Many cited *spectacular physical improvement as* a motivating factor for their athletes, as did 14.5% of male coaches and 17.8% of female coaches, and there were only 7 coaches *who could not* answer this question.

I have formulated three hypotheses on this issue. In my hypothesis H7, the significance value was greater than 0.05 for all variables ($p > 0.05$). In my hypothesis H8, the significance value was greater than 0.05 for all variables ($p > 0.05$). Finally, in my hypothesis H9, the significance value was greater than 0.05 for all variables except one (4.1: $p = 0.028$) was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for all variables tested, i.e. there is a difference between the responses of the two groups of coaches mentioned above on the question of what motivates them to teach tennis to people with intellectual disabilities.

The *sociodemographic* characteristics of the expert group show that all of them have been working in the tennis profession for more than 10 years, all of them have been working with athletes with intellectual disabilities for more than 5 years, 4 of them for more than 16 years and two of them for more than 26 years. Two of the interviewees have been working *in the tennis section of the Special Olympics* movement for more than 21 years and are even its founders. I also felt it was important to ask their views on their *disability history*, as one of the most important aspects of my thesis is to examine this. Three of the experts believe that prior experience of disability is necessary to develop *empathic thinking* or positive attitudes, while three believe that it requires a high level of knowledge *of disability basics*. Four of them *do not* think that prior experience *important at all*. However, *social sensitivity* is essential, which three experts consider to stem from *family involvement*, four *from commitment to the profession* and three from *the empathy and willingness to help of coaches* towards people with disabilities. Although the panel members are not all practising coaches anymore, I was curious to hear some of their views on coaching and practice. I was interested in how they think *the training and coaching methods of* tennis players with average intellect and those with intellectual disabilities

differ. In their opinion, *patience* (2 people), without which the session will not be effective, the *professionalism of the coaches* in progressive tennis instruction and in the basic knowledge of disability (2 people), and the slower developmental rhythm (3 people), which requires *more training time* to ensure that an athlete with a weaker intellectual ability can acquire the appropriate technical and tactical knowledge. According to three experts, *there is no difference*, nor should there be, but a training plan should be developed *using inclusion*, in which each athlete has a task appropriate to his or her ability. According to the experts, the *results of inclusive education* could be easier *social integration, closer to mainstream society* (3), greater *sporting* development with greater impact, which is the aim of the Unified Sports programme (4), or *self-actualisation* and *self-confidence* (3). Tennis, as a social sport and as a tool for inclusion, helps to "*hide*" the *differences of athletes and sportspeople* (2 participants), to apply the "Principle of Participation for All" (Special Olympics 2024) developed by the SO Unified Sports Programme in a wider *practical* way (3 participants) and to develop *a positive outlook on life* (5 participants). Finally, they were also interested to know where they felt that *participation in integrated sport* could directly help athletes with disabilities in areas of civic life and where they saw the greatest impact. Two of the expert group see the biggest changes in terms of assertiveness and integration in *the school environment*, five in terms of *employment*, three in terms of social relationships and in terms of *healthy lifestyles* and *quality of life*.

Conclusions

Nine hypotheses have been formulated around the theme, which is divided into four sets of questions. I hypothesized that there is a difference between the sociodemographic characteristics, general and sport experience, opinions, commitment and motivation of international elite tennis coaches and Hungarian coaches. I also hypothesized that male and female coaches will give different answers, while I hypothesized that the opinions of respondents with and without previous disability experience may also differ.

In my H1 hypothesis, I hypothesized that I would find a significant difference between *male and female coaches'* responses regarding *their overall experience of coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities*, i.e. that they would give statistically

significant different responses. The significance value was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for the variables tested, i.e. there is no statistically detectable difference between male and female respondents in their general experience of coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities, and thus I rejected this hypothesis. It follows that we cannot infer the answers to the questions asked based on the gender of the respondents.

I also formulated another hypothesis (H2) related to this question, in which I hypothesized that there is a statistically detectable difference between the *Hungarian and the international* coaching group's opinion on *their overall experience of coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities*, i.e. that they give statistically detectable different answers. The significance value was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) for the variables tested, i.e. there is no statistically detectable difference between the *Hungarian and international* coaches' responses *regarding their general experience of coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities*, and thus I rejected this hypothesis.

In my third hypothesis (H3), I hypothesized that coaches who have prior disability experience will give statistically significantly different responses *to questions about their general coaching experience* compared to coaches *without* prior disability experience. The study found that there were statistically significant differences for three variables, thus partially confirming my hypothesis. *Disability experience* is an important topic and aspect of my thesis, because no one has previously researched whether coaches in the Special Olympics movement who have a person with a disability in their environment have different perceptions of their coaching experiences in the Special Olympics movement. The research presented in this dissertation has also shown that people with a disability in their environment *are more easily sensitised* and have more *positive attitudes*. In this context, it follows that the general experience is that coaches who *have previous experience of disability* are more likely to choose sport for people with intellectual disabilities as their profession.

I have also formulated three hypotheses on the second question. Based on my hypothesis H4, I hypothesized that there would be a statistically detectable difference between the responses of *male and female* coaches in their *sport-specific* opinions about coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities. The study revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between *male and female* coaches' opinions on the sport-specific aspects of *tennis coaching*, and I therefore rejected this hypothesis.

According to my hypothesis H5, I hypothesize that I will find a statistically detectable difference between *Hungarian and international* coaches in *their sport-specific opinions* about coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities. The testing of this hypothesis revealed that there was a statistically detectable difference between *Hungarian and international* respondents in terms of coaches' sport professional opinions on coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities on one variable, thus my hypothesis was partially confirmed, as I found a *significant difference* in coaches' responses between international and Hungarian coaches' opinions on coaching methods for tennis players with intellectual disabilities and their peers with average intellect. It follows that national and international coaches have different opinions on whether or not to use a different training method for their athletes with or without intellectual disabilities. There is also no consensus on the responses of international elite tennis coaches, a topic on which research has been done previously (Orbán-Sebestyén et al. 2023).

In my hypothesis H6, I hypothesized that coaches who *have a history of disability* would give statistically significantly different responses to questions about *sport professional opinions* compared to coaches *without* a history of disability. The study found that there was a statistically significant difference between the responses of coaches *with and without* prior experience of disability in coaches' *sport professional opinions* on coaching tennis players with intellectual disabilities for two variables, thus partially confirming my hypothesis. Regarding whether professionals *with* and *without* previous experience of disability consider it important to train and compete together with peers of average intellect, they gave statistically different answers in some aspects. For those variables where this is the case, it is worth investigating in more detail in a new study, but the results show that coaches without previous disability experience would emphasise the inclusion of players *with lower ability*, whereas coaches with previous experience would emphasise the inclusion of players *with higher ability*. An interesting finding was that there was a significant difference between the responses of the professionals *with* and *without* previous disability experience, also in terms of *the purpose of the SO Unified Sports programme*, which suggests that the integrated sports programme run by the SO movement has many benefits and purposes, but that the two groups of coaches have different missions and purposes. The research presented in this dissertation shows that

the role and purpose of the *Unified Sports program* is primarily one of *inclusion* and *non-exclusion*. While coaches *with no previous experience* tended to focus on learning to be *inclusive* and *adaptive*, coaches *with previous experience* emphasised *the importance of* the Unified Sports programme's *professional and practical role*, i.e. that the coaches believed the programme also 'raised the level' of the athletes' technical skills.

In my hypothesis H7, I hypothesized that there is a statistically detectable difference between *male and female coaches'* responses to questions *about coaching motivation and motivation*. The study revealed that there was no statistically detectable difference between male and female coaches' responses to questions about coaching motivation and motivation, so I rejected my hypothesis.

In my hypothesis H8, I assumed that there is a statistically detectable difference between *Hungarian coaches' and international coaches'* answers to questions *about coaches' motivation and motivation*. The study revealed that there was no statistically detectable difference between the Hungarian and international coaching sample in their responses on motivation and motivation, so I rejected this hypothesis as well.

Finally, in my hypothesis H9, I hypothesized that the responses of coaches *with prior disability experience* to questions about coaching motivation and motivation would be significantly different from those of tennis coaches *without prior disability experience*. The study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference for one variable, thus partially confirming my hypothesis. When asked *about what motivated them* to teach tennis to people with intellectual disabilities, most respondents highlighted the *enthusiastic and sincere* attitude of the athletes. However, the responses revealed that coaches who have a person with a disability in their environment are more motivated by *the usefulness of their work*, while those who have no previous experience of disability are more motivated by *the spectacular physical development of* the athletes to work in the tennis section of the Special Olympics movement.

Answering research questions, recommendations

1. Based on the results presented and their conclusions, it is possible to outline the sociodemographic characteristics that help to build a profile of a SO-athlete coach. I have previously elaborated on these several times, but to summarise the most important correlations, the research revealed that the multidimensional coaching role as

demonstrated by McConkey (2018), with its emphasis on caring, social responsiveness, engagement and family-centredness, was confirmed in my research. Also in Dowling and colleagues' (2012) research, in addition to these factors, the team-building and personality development roles were found to be important in examining patterns, and a unique finding was that *disability history*, as a new aspect, could be an important guideline in the profiling of professionals.

2. The research question was to investigate the general experiences and opinions of the sampled coaches about the coaching of their tennis players with intellectual disabilities and the impact they think tennis has on the lives of their athletes with intellectual disabilities. I also investigated whether tennis, as a social sport, helps them to integrate into society, to integrate effectively and to improve their life skills. The results showed that they all have positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. They believe in the importance of inclusion and are aware of the potential of inclusive sport. The literature review has already shown that the role of coaches is complex and multidimensional, which was confirmed by our results and further details and knowledge were added. An outstanding finding is that coaches are increasingly emphasising the importance of integrated sport and inclusive approaches rather than traditional, segregated SO tennis coaching. This is supported by my results and I make this as a recommendation.

3. The research question was to find out what elite tennis coaches working in the Special Olympics movement have experience and opinions about the Unified Sports movement and the Play+Stay programme, and why athletes with intellectual disabilities benefit from it. Through processing the data, I have gained a wealth of new information about the importance tennis coaches place on unified training and competition, and how their professional experience has shown that the introduction of Play+Stay has made a significant difference to coaching and competition. These are also of particular importance because this adaptive approach has made tennis more accessible, accessible and popular with athletes with intellectual disabilities. The training and competitions based on the principle of individual merit participation in the international competition system of the Special Olympics also challenge the coaching teams I studied, and the research showed that their knowledge and understanding of this issue is lacking. However, the integrated sport of the future is through inclusion, so my suggestion is that

if coach training or testing is to take place, it should be as widely publicised and communicated to SO coaches as possible.

4. Finally, the research question was to find out what motivated the coaches to join those who teach tennis to people with intellectual disabilities and what motivated their colleagues to choose this particular segment of the coaching profession. Based on the results, I concluded that *disability experience* is also an important aspect that plays a role in the motivation of coaches, in addition to their professional career, as it is clearly a motivating factor to have a person with intellectual disabilities in one's environment or family who has an influence on them and whom they would like to help. Helping people, teaching them to lead a healthy lifestyle and play sport, and continuous improvement all show that a coach is motivated to work with people with disabilities. The result is the development of an athlete who regularly participates in international and national competitions of the Special Olympics movement, has a circle of sporting friends, good relations with fellow athletes and can be an active member of society. I would therefore propose that the motivation of tennis coaches working in the SO should include, in addition to achieving sporting success and results, the improvement of the lifestyle of athletes with intellectual disabilities, as an inevitable factor in enabling them to live as independently as possible, according to their abilities.

List of own publications

List of publications related to the topic of the thesis

Orbán-Sebestyén K, Szilárd Zs, Farkas J, Ökrös Cs, Roswal G. (2023) Attitude of elite tennis coaches working with athletes with intellectual disabilities participating in Special Olympics. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 67(2): 123-135.

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