



THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL TEAMS THROUGH THE SOCIOMETRIC METHOD

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Abstract: *This article discusses the specific possibilities of the sociometric method in studying the socio-psychological characteristics of interpersonal relationships in professional football teams considered as small groups.*

Keywords: *group, team, interpersonal relationships, sociometry, selection methods, sympathy, antipathy, emotional connections, reference group.*

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have been conducted in social psychology concerning the investigation of interpersonal relationships within groups. This process has gradually developed to include the study of sports groups and the relationships existing within them, which gives it particular significance. Numerous scholars have investigated sports groups. Among foreign researchers, the works of Yu. L. Khanin, E. P. Ilyin, and Yu. A. Kolomeytsev, as well as the studies of the Uzbek scholar Z. Gazieva, devoted specifically to interpersonal relations and the psychological climate within sports groups, deserve special attention.

Interpersonal relationships within sports groups develop in accordance with the dynamics of group formation. Unlike other social groups, the development and study of interpersonal relations in sports groups present considerable difficulties.

Nevertheless, research in this field has attracted widespread attention and continues to develop through the extensive use of the achievements and research methods of social psychology in studying the system of interpersonal relations within sports groups.

Literature review. Any composition of a group reflects the objective state of relationships among its members, including dependence, subordination, mutual assistance, and cooperation. The primary way to study these relationships is through continuous observation of people's behavior and conduct within the collective. As J. Moreno, the founder of the idea of studying interpersonal relationships by means of sociometry, emphasized, interpersonal relations are based on feelings of sympathy and antipathy toward others that arise spontaneously and are inherent in every individual, although they cannot always



be explained. However, interpersonal relations cannot be viewed solely as emotional and psychological phenomena (sympathy and antipathy), even though these characteristics are important in determining the group's composition and cohesion. Interpersonal relationships should also be considered in terms of the norms, orientations, and views that emerge within the group (sports team) as a result of the active participation of all its members [1].

The following definition of sociometry is commonly accepted: it is a methodological system that quantitatively determines an individual's tendencies toward interpersonal communication and relationships, including sympathy, indifference, or antipathy [2].

The sociometric method seeks answers from respondents regarding their feelings of sympathy or antipathy toward group members in various situations (work, study, sports activities, and leisure). Such questions are called sociometric criteria. Strong and weak criteria are distinguished. Strong criteria concern important and essential aspects of an individual's life, whereas weak criteria are associated with temporary or situational factors, such as choosing a partner for a one-time task or selecting someone for duty.

Various approaches can be applied in sociometry, but all of them are based on the choices made by group members, their preferences, and their rejection of certain individuals. Choices may be free or fixed. In the first case, the number of

preferred individuals is unlimited; in the second case, respondents are required to indicate a specific number (for example, "Name the five best players"). In groups consisting of 10–15 people, including sports teams, it is advisable not to limit the number of choices, whereas in groups of 30–40 people, it is preferable to restrict the number of selected individuals to three to five. In addition, a methodology developed by N. V. Bakhareva and E. Bogardus, based on the principle of the social distance scale, has recently become increasingly popular in the study of interpersonal relations within groups. The essence of this approach is that each member of the group is asked to reconstruct the group and, with regard to each member, evaluate them according to the following criteria: "I would choose this person first for the team," "I would choose this person," "It does not matter," and "I would not choose this person." Each member is evaluated twice: according to their performance-related qualities and their emotional qualities. All criteria are assessed on a point scale (+2, +1, 0, -1, -2). The total number of positive and negative points accumulated by each member forms an algebraic value that determines his or her sociometric status within the group. Leaders occupy the upper positions, while those rejected by the group are placed at the lower level with negative scores.

The sociometric psychological status reflects the degree of popularity and necessity attributed to an individual by the group. It is formed through the



evaluation of personal and professional qualities manifested during joint activities and communication. The higher the athlete is rated in terms of professional or playing qualities, the more group members prefer to communicate with him or her. In newly formed sports teams, emotional ties initially prevail over task-related relationships. However, as the team develops, performance-related qualities gradually become dominant. The more socially and psychologically developed the group is, the greater the consensus among its members regarding whom they prefer or reject. Nevertheless, this may also lead to undesirable consequences. A rigid hierarchical structure based on status differentiation among members may result in the group's resistance to change and reduce its ability to quickly restore cohesion when solving problems.

The distinction between task-related and emotional qualities gave rise to the divergence theorem (Hofshetter) in Western psychology. According to this theory, task-related and emotional spheres are not interconnected; moreover, they may even manifest themselves in opposition to one another. Consequently, a person who occupies a high status because of professional qualities may have a low status in terms of personal qualities, meaning that he or she may not be popular or well-liked within the group.

In high-level sports teams, players' professional qualities are generally valued more highly than their emotional qualities. During the formation of such

teams, players possessing a high professional status are selected. At the same time, athletes may be evaluated differently as individuals. The greater the number of group members who receive high evaluations in both professional and personal qualities, the higher the maturity of the small group and the stronger the unity between collective and individual interests. Convergence, that is, similarity between these two structures, ensures the coincidence of formal and informal leadership, which is important for effective team management in the future.

One of the factors contributing to an athlete's satisfaction with belonging to a particular team is the convergence in the evaluation of positive qualities. This, in turn, strengthens the player's position within the team.

Sociometry provides a general picture of the group's structure; however, it does not explain the reasons underlying group members' sympathies and antipathies. Sociometric choices do not always accurately reflect attitudes toward particular members, and sociometric experiments do not necessarily correspond to real-life relationships. Individuals categorized as "unpreferred" in sociometric studies may, in reality, be quite successful in business and professional interactions.

Therefore, sociometry should indeed be used in studying interpersonal relations within sports teams, but one should not limit oneself exclusively to this method. It is necessary to understand the environment of the team—why it was



formed, whether its composition is final or provisional, the nature of competition, and other factors. Furthermore, it is essential to determine the real reasons behind some individuals being accepted while others are rejected.

One of the distinctive approaches to studying interpersonal relations in groups was proposed by E. V. Shedrina, who developed her own methodology. According to this approach, it is necessary to identify each person's circle of communication, that is, the individuals whose opinions they rely upon and whose attention they consider important. Studying the reference circle allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the group structure. E. V. Shedrina's approach creates opportunities for identifying the overall nature of interpersonal relations within the group by examining its reference circles. Another achievement of the sociometric approach in studying interpersonal relations within sports teams is reflected in the emergence of approaches aimed at investigating the adaptation of newly recruited athletes to the team, as well as the relationships between reserve players and main squad players, and between reserve players and coaches, which have become increasingly integrated into practical application.

Accordingly, one of the greatest difficulties faced by a newly recruited athlete in adapting to a team is his or her relatively low status and lack of authority in the world of sports. The fame surrounding well-known athletes in the

team to which the newcomer has been invited often puts psychological pressure on him or her and increases the sense of moral responsibility for both the successes and failures of the team. Under such circumstances, the team should accept the newcomer and provide him or her with moral and professional support.

Insufficient mastery and low social status may contribute to the development of a number of unfavorable psychological characteristics in young athletes, including reduced sociability, lack of aspiration for leadership, low self-esteem, irritability, and a depressed emotional background. Compared with long-standing team members, newcomers are more likely to exhibit anxiety, uncertainty, dependence on others, and emotional tension.

The degree of anxiety and self-doubt experienced by an athlete depends on three evaluative factors: self-evaluation, the evaluation expected from the team, and the athlete's own evaluation of the team. The lower the athlete's self-esteem, the lower the assessment received from the team, and the higher the value attributed to the team by the athlete, the stronger the feeling of anxiety becomes. Therefore, a number of pedagogical measures aimed at reducing negative psychological phenomena should be implemented.

First of all, coaches should demonstrate goodwill toward new members and create such an atmosphere within the team that the successes and failures of newcomers are perceived as



the successes and failures of the entire group. New members should feel that their activities are also important to the team. It is especially important to help a new member establish friendly relationships with other team members, as this enables him or her to feel more comfortable and integrated into the team.

The studies conducted by L. L. Gissen and Yu. A. Kolomeytsev may serve as examples in this regard. Purposeful work carried out by psychologists and coaches, together with the participation of group members in creating a favorable psychological climate for athletes with low sociometric status—including newcomers—led to an increase in the status of such athletes. Their attitude toward training changed, and in many cases they achieved higher sporting results. In working with newcomers, coaches should rely primarily on the opinion of the reference group. If the athlete's reference group is located outside the team in which he or she trains, low social status within the team becomes less psychologically significant. At the same time, personal changes alone do not necessarily lead to the accumulation of experience [1].

Relationships Between Main Squad and Reserve Players Research devoted to the relationships between main squad players and reserve players indicates that the interaction between coaches and both categories of athletes constitutes a complex issue. Many coaches believe that athletes should not be divided into main and reserve groups during training camps.

According to this viewpoint, such an approach contributes to team unity, cohesion, and the absence of tension in interpersonal relations. In this regard, the famous volleyball player G. Monzolevsky stated: “As I have observed in my own practice, uncertainty regarding the team lineup negatively affects the atmosphere within the team. Situations arise in which players themselves do not know with whom, when, and where they will play within the six-player formation, and consequently they fail to become a united team. Mutual trust, respect, and goodwill disappear. All these factors ultimately result in unsuccessful performances.”⁷⁷

Thus, the primary task of team leaders is to clearly define the role of each player within the team. This is particularly important when forming a team composed of players of different categories, since it prevents the team from splitting into two opposing groups. Nevertheless, the sports team should function on the basis of common goals and aspirations. According to the experience of seasoned coaches, the relationships between main squad players and reserve players should be maintained at a high level. Sociometric studies indicate that the cohesion among reserve players is lower than that among main squad players, which also affects the team's playing performance and emotional state.

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One reason for this is that reserve players often join the team relatively recently and have not yet fully integrated into it. Another reason may be competition for positions in the main lineup, which hinders the development of close relationships. Main squad players tend to evaluate reserve players negatively with regard to performance-related qualities—which is often justified—and emotional qualities—which is not always the case. This, in turn, influences reserve players to assess their own group negatively.

At the same time, main squad players possess high status in the eyes of both main and reserve players in terms of professional and emotional qualities. This may be attributed to a certain idealization of outstanding athletes resulting from their superior playing abilities. Conversely, the lower level of mastery demonstrated by reserve players often leads to a lower evaluation of them as individuals. Whether intentionally or not, this situation divides the team not necessarily into leaders and outsiders, but into “preferred” and “less preferred” members. Such circumstances complicate collective life and hinder the achievement of successful performances.

Reserve players may remain in secondary roles for long periods, but highly skilled athletes cannot tolerate such situations indefinitely. In this process, only the coach's appropriate educational efforts and the support of the team can smooth out these undesirable socio-psychological processes.

Conclusion/Recommendations .As is well known, in high-level sports teams, players' professional qualities are generally given priority over their emotional qualities. During the formation of such teams, athletes possessing a high performance-related status are selected. The greater the number of individuals who receive high evaluations in terms of both professional and personal qualities, the higher the level of maturity of the small group and the stronger the unity between collective and individual interests.

In conclusion, the sociometric method provides extensive opportunities for identifying the overall psychological profile of a group and determining the developmental tendencies of interpersonal relationships within the group.

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