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Promoting the principle of alcohol abstinence in sport Promowanie zasady abstynencji alkoholowej w sporcie¹

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Abstract: A hundred years ago, the principle of alcohol abstinence was almost obvious in sport. These days, it is still observed, but its importance has weakened. At the same time, we have knowledge about the role of this principle in maintaining the training effects of athletes and in the general education of sport adepts. Certainly, this principle should be promoted, which may not be easy given the prevailing opinions on this issue. In professional sport, we note various deviations from this rule, even leading to a breakdown in the careers of individual athletes. In addition, it turns out that the fairly widespread belief in the preventive role of sports activities is not always based on research results. Sometimes, training, especially team games, aggravates the level of alcoholism in young people. This is why it is interesting to examine the opinion on the role of abstinence in the preparation of athletes in various research groups. In this case it was a group of voluntary, consistent abstainers. In general, they strongly confirm the role of abstinence in sport, but not all aspects of this acceptance are knowledge-based. Some have an ideological character. Based on these results, we are able to develop and recommend an optimal way of communicating the principle of abstinence in sport, by means of which the stereotypes in this area can be avoided.

Keywords: sport pedagogy, abstinence, training, alcohol, Olympism

Abstrakt: Przed stu laty zasada abstynencji alkoholowej była w sporcie niemal oczywista. Obecnie nadal bywa przestrzegana, ale jej znaczenie osłabło. Jednocześnie dysponujemy wiedzą o roli tej zasady w utrzymaniu efektów treningu sportowców i w ogólnym wychowaniu adeptów sportu. Z pewnością należy promować tę zasadę, co może nie być łatwe z uwagi na panujące opinie dotyczące tej kwestii. W sporcie zawodowym notujemy rozmaite odstępstwa od tej zasady prowadzące nawet do załamania karier poszczególnych sportowców. Ponadto okazuje się, że dość powszechne przekonanie o profilaktycznej roli zajęć sportowych nie zawsze jest oparte na wynikach badań. Bywa, że trenowanie, zwłaszcza gier zespołowych pogarsza poziom zachowań alkoholowych młodzieży. Dlatego interesujące jest zbadanie opinii na temat roli abstynencji w przygotowaniu sportowców w różnych grupach badawczych. W tym wypadku jest to grupa dobrowolnych, konsekwentnych abstynentów. Generalnie potwierdzają oni stanowczo rolę zasady abstynencji w sporcie, ale nie wszystkie aspekty tej akceptacji są oparte na wiedzy. Część ma charakter ideologiczny. Na podstawie tych wyników można opracować i zalecać optymalny sposób komunikowania zasady abstynencji w sporcie, przy pomocy którego ominię się panujące w tym zakresie stereotypy.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika sportu, abstynencja, trening, alkohol, Olimpizm

1. Introduction

Sport is an important aspect of modern activity, especially in connection with the Olympic idea. Professional sport plays an important economic, political, and media role

¹ Polska wersja: <https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2021-3-Wojc.pdf>

(Coakley, 2017; Westberg, 2018; Chambers, Sassi, 2019). Amateur sport is an element of health promotion and contributes to citizens' quality of life. In a variety of ways, sport, both professional and amateur, is present in the lives of many people since childhood. Playing sports involves at least minimal training and physical activity. It is therefore worth asking how this activity relates to the issue of risky behavior of children, adolescents, and adults, especially in the field of alcoholic behavior. It is assumed that the use of ethyl alcohol (mainly in the form of alcoholic beverages – beer, wine, vodka) is a very serious risk factor for premature loss of health and life. According to experts, ethanol is the most dangerous drug with negative social effects (Nutt, King, Philips, 2010; Bonomo et al., 2019, Lubman et al., 2020). Therefore, the relationship between sports activity and the use of this psychoactive substance is important. It may be that sports activity improves the level of risky behavior (reduction), but it may also be that it sometimes raises this level (O, Brien, Lyons, 2000; Bobrowski, 2003; Bobrowski, 2007; Grelot, Peretti – Wastel, 2009; Wałach – Bista, 2012, s. 87; Wierziński, 2016, s. 16; Baker, Safai, 2016; Yusko, 2008, Steinback, 1997; Berdzik, 2016; Westberg, 2018; King et al., 2020; Exner et al., 2021). Furthermore, the negative impact of ethanol use on training effects and sports results may also be visible (Kamińska, 2012, s. 78-80; Świdorska, 2012, s. 143-149; Yusko, Brickman, White, 2008, s.281-90; Exner, 2021, s. 3-4).

When the Olympic idea emerged, a hundred years ago, the attitude towards the use of ethanol by athletes was definitely negative and critical (Chatziefstathiou, 2005/2019; Chatziefstathiou, Garcia, Segiun (red.), 2021). It was thought that the athlete should be a total abstainer (and thus a health specimen) (Gorodyński, 1913; Szulc, 1937; Pawluczuk, 2010). Currently, this principle is treated differently. It is cultivated in some environments (Braun, 2021), which is reflected in the content of contracts concluded with players by sports clubs, while in others it is considered archaic and redundant (Stewart, Smith, 2008; Burke, Maughan, 2000, p. 405 - 413; Stewart, Smith, 2015). In this study, we were interested in how these issues are perceived in the environment of radical, voluntary abstainers. We will also make intergroup comparisons in further studies. This study can be the basis for selecting the optimal ways to promote the principle of abstinence in sport. Promoting this principle again seems to be something very necessary, but it can be difficult in terms of communication due to the prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions. Struggling with them will cause cognitive dissonance and hinder communication on this important issue.

2. Material and methods

The study group consisted of pilgrimage participants of the Catholic abstinence movement known as the Crusade of Human Liberation². It is a movement of tens of

²Pilgrimage of CHL to Jasna Gora, over 1200 participants, September 28-29, 2019.

thousands of people adopting the principle of voluntary abstinence of members extended by the principle of not drinking alcohol and not acquiring it (Kulbacki, Kulbacki, 2013).

From this point of view, this is the most radical movement, referring to the attitudes of the early twentieth century (e.g. in W. Lutoslawski's "Eleusis" movement or in the scout movement). The motive for joining this movement is social love and transforming the social environment into a favorable one for the free use of alcohol (a kind of solidarity with people abstaining due to health reasons, e.g. as part of alcohol addiction syndrome therapy). Accession decisions are usually mature and thoughtful, based on a broad foundation of responsibility and reflection. Rooting this movement in attitudes characteristic of the early twentieth century especially favors comparisons of opinions about the role of abstinence in sport, because the principle of sports abstinence at that time spread in a socially natural way (Danielewicz, 1983; Grodyński, 1913). A certain "archaism" of this attitude, as well as its radicalism suited the researcher.

In contrast, the reference group (rather not a control group) was a group of 51 people from one of the uniformed services. It was a group among which there were no alcohol abstainers³, and their results in the AUDIT screening test were higher than average⁴. Therefore, it was something like a second social pole in relation to the study group. Thanks to such features of the reference group, it was possible to compare the results and observe to what extent the views of the test group are original and related to their abstinence. Due to the smaller size and purposeful way of selecting the group, I called it a "reference group" and not a control group in the strict sense of the term.

The average age in the study group was 52.4 years (standard deviation 12.9), and in the reference group the average age was 37.6 years (standard deviation 4.9). In the study group 45.5% were men and 54.5% women, while in the reference group 70% were men and 30% women. This distribution further shows the differences between the two groups. In addition, the study group represented a wider spectrum of professions than the reference group, which was very uniform.

As you can see the groups were different and the reference group cannot be considered a classic control group. Nevertheless, its presence allows a better visibility of the specificity of the group of abstainers as there were no such subjects in the reference group. In the continuation of the study, we anticipate more accurate inter-group comparisons, referring to the tendencies shown in this study.

It can only be added that the reference group presented a picture closer to the average attitudes represented by adult Poles in terms of alcohol use. It is true that the number of abstainers among adult Poles is significant, but they do not prevail, while relatively many

³Such a result was revealed during the Author's work with this group. None of the participants were alcohol abstainers.

⁴The result also obtained during the mentioned workshops. Over 50% of the participants obtained a higher number of points in the AUDIT test than the risky drinking threshold.

people have a similar alcohol behavior profile to the reference group (Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health WHO, 2018, p. 281).

Questionnaires of the auditorium survey (diagnostic survey) in the study group were collected from all participants of the pilgrimage who arrived at the meeting room half an hour before its official start and had time to fill it in freely. 130 questionnaires were collected, of which 125 as fully completed were qualified for further development. Thus, the selection of the research group was a targeted choice, but also random, due to the fact that the collected questionnaires constituted only 15% in relation to the whole group (over 1000 people). Most of the respondents filled in the sheet independently, which took 3 to 8 minutes.

Questionnaires in the reference group were collected during a training workshop. In this group there were fewer deficiencies in the completed questionnaires, which indicates good conditions for collecting information.

Since the main research issue was the views of the abstinence group, we will now focus on this one, but very interesting group. Interesting due to its "congruence" with the concept of abstinence in sport and rooting in an ideology dating back to the end of the 19th century (a European abstinence movement motivated by religion or health)⁵.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions (most closed) with little characteristics of the respondents (interest in sport, practicing it, gender, age, occupation). It can be found in the Annex. Women slightly dominated in the study group (54.5%), the average age was quite significant (52.4), which, paradoxically, contributed to the research purpose, because the respondents shared a smaller distance to the times when alcohol abstinence was considered a necessary attribute of practicing sport. Some respondents reported their professions. From this point of view, the study group was dominated by people whose daily activities did not require high physical activity (so-called white-collar workers). In contrast, the reference group was dominated by professions requiring considerable physical fitness.

3. Results

Most of the respondents declared a general interest in sport ("supporters"), some even intense, especially among the surveyed men. A significant proportion declared that they had practiced some kind of sport in the past or are practicing it now.

The first strictly substantive question concerned the identification of behaviors that interfere with sports activities. The question was: *Do you think any of the following behaviors are*

⁵Founder of CHL Venerable Servant of God priest prof. F. Blachnicki followed the work of Silesian priest Kapica from the beginning of the 20th century and on the ideological achievements of scouts from the interwar period.

not conducive to achieving outstanding results in amateur or competitive sports: a) abuse of alcoholic beverages, b) use of drugs, c) smoking.

Table 1. Attitude to sport: Are you interested in sport, are you a supporter? N=125

	Yes	Yes, but not too much	No	Difficult to assess	No data
Study group N 125	48	46	7	22	2
%	38.4 %	36.8%	5.6%	17.6%	1.6%
Reference group n=51	18	23	8	2	-
%	35.3 %	45.1 %	15.7 %	3.9 %	-

Table 2. Playing sports (indicating the discipline).

	Played sports	Did not play sports
Study group	34	91
%	30.4 %	72.8 %
Reference group	24	27
%	47.1 %	52.1 %

As you can see, this was not yet a question about alcohol abstinence but only about the abuse of alcoholic beverages. The respondents collectively chose answers indicating a collision of all three behaviors given with sports activities. They were as a group almost uniformly convinced that each of the three behaviors interferes with outstanding sports results. The result shows the mentioned radicalism of the studied group's attitudes.

Table 3. Assessment of the harmfulness of risky behaviors for outstanding sports results

	Ethanol abuse	Drug use	Smoking tobacco
Study group	117	104	101
%	93.6 %	83.2 %	80.8 %
Reference group	45	45	40
%	88.2 %	88.2 %	78.4 %

The next question already contained the issue of the principle of abstinence in sport, although given backward. The respondents were to indicate which behavior is harmful to good, outstanding sports results: abstinence, use of any amount of alcohol, alcohol abuse.

This question was technically difficult, as it was easy to be structurally mistaken and choose abstinence as harmful. It could also happen that the respondents indicated abstinence on purpose, if they thought that it was also "harmful" to sports results (according to a saying: "What kind of man doesn't drink?"). Here are the results.

Table 4. Assessment of the harmfulness of selected attitudes towards ethanol from the point of view of outstanding sports results

	Abstinence	Using any amount of alcohol	Alcohol abuse
Study group	4	80	99
%	3.2 %	64.0 %	79.2 %
Reference group	-	14	42
%	-	27.5%	82.4%

An interesting distribution of responses was obtained, among which the predominant statement was that both the use of any amount of alcohol and overt abuse of it were harmful. In other words, the respondents in this question declared clear support for the timeliness of abstinence in sport. At the same time, the results differed slightly: more people pointed to the harmful effects of "abuse" than "using any amount of alcohol". This may mean some degree of consent for low, moderate consumption of ethanol by athletes. Indications for "abstinence" may be rather an artifact, but it may have been individuals who, despite the fact that they themselves are abstinent, considered abstinence as detrimental to athletes. There would only be 3.2% of such people. For the record, we also note this result, although we consider it as the effect of the respondents' mistake.

The next question (in questionnaire No. 5) concerned the possible knowledge of the respondents about the destructive role of alcohol use in relation to fitness (especially to the effects of training and the effect of alcohol on striated muscles). We currently have the results of research that illustrate this negative effect (Danielewicz, 1883, s. 67-68; Fernandez - Sola et al., 1995; Slavin et al., 1983; Parr et al., 2014, Steiner et al., 2015; Zinowiewa et al., 2016; Shenkman et al., 2018; Shenkman et al, 2019; Crowell, Laufenberg, Lang, 2019), but there is little social awareness of this. And yet it would be an excellent foundation for the general principle of abstinence in sports. If it is true that drinking damages the effects of training and weakens the muscles of the trainee, then this effect alone would be enough for the motive of abstinence. It was interesting to what extent the subjects were aware of this kind of relationship.

Do you know that physiological studies have shown that the use of alcoholic beverages destroys the effects of training by damaging the actin-myosin connections in the athlete's muscles?

□ YES, I have heard about it □ NO, I haven't heard about it

It turns out that a significant proportion of the respondents have heard of this effect, although not everyone.

Table 5. Knowledge about the negative effects of alcohol on trainees' muscles

	Heard about it	Haven't heard about it	No response
Study group	82	41	2
%	65.6 %	32.8 %	1.6 %
Reference group	31	20	-
%	60.8 %	39.2 %	-

The result suggests the possibility, or even the need to refer to this type of research in pro-health education, also due to the fact that, for example, young people are very concerned about their muscles. It is therefore a great "preventive argument". A relatively large part of the group was aware of such an effect (65.6%), which is surprising to the extent that this knowledge has not been and is not somehow specifically exposed in media. It is usually known only by specialists. Perhaps the respondents decided that "it is good to know about it". The case would require a separate, more thorough checking in the next study.

At the same time, 32.8% of the respondents have not heard of this effect. And yet it is a fundamental matter in the issue being studied. This result shows the need for educational dissemination of knowledge on this subject.

Perhaps the result indicates a somewhat idealistic nature of support for abstinence in sport ("because abstinence is good as such, it is also good in sport"). Let us repeat: it seems that as part of a possible restitution of the principle of abstinence in sport, the promotion of similar research results describing the negative physiological effects of ethanol use would play a significant role.

In the next question (No. 5), the respondents were to respond to the principle of abstinence in sport in the light of the original assumptions of the sports movement dating back to the turn of the 20th century (Grodyński, 1913; Szulc, 1937), when it was alive and almost obvious (*"A hundred years ago, when the Olympic movement emerged, it was recognized that athletes must radically avoid drugs (do not smoke, drink or use drugs)." This tendency was: a) correct, proper; b) exaggerated, too radical; c) difficult to assess*).

Table 6. Assessment of the principle of full abstinence propagated during the renewal of the Olympic movement

	Correct	Exaggerated	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	116	1	7	1
%	92.8 %	0.8 %	5.6 %	0.8 %
Reference group	40	6	5	-
%	78.4 %	11.8 %	9.8 %	-

The vast majority of the respondents (92.8%) chose the option A) – correct and proper. Therefore, in this particular environment, this principle retains its attractiveness, as it did 100 years ago. The members of this movement (CHL) could be an important support in the "recovery" of this principle, if we had a sense of the necessity of such restitution.

The next question delved deeper into the justification of this idea. According to numerous published memories and interviews with outstanding athletes, some of them fell into addiction to alcohol or gambling, and getting drunk is typical of people who intensively practice sport to a greater extent than in the general population (!) (Anderson et al., 1991; Nelson, Wechsler; 2001; Brenner, Swanik, 2007; Ford, 2007; Martens, 2007; Yusko et al., 2008; Barry et al., 2015; Weaver al., 2013; Wierzbiński, 2016; Tavalacci et al., 2016). The question concerned the assessment of environmental standards among modern athletes: do they support sobriety or rather favor addiction. The distribution of answers is interesting.

Recently, there have been many recollections of outstanding athletes who have become addicted (e.g. alcohol addiction, gambling).

Do you think that their troubles could have any connection with playing sports, e.g. environmental habits?

yes, they could have a connection *no, they did not have a connection* *difficult to assess*

A very significant proportion of the respondents indicated the answer A) "they could have a connection" (63.2%). In other words, in this group there is suspicion, hypothesis or some kind of conviction etc. that the environmental norms prevailing among athletes are not abstinent, but on the contrary – they are conducive to becoming addicted. This is a very interesting intuition. It corresponds to some of the ratings found in the media. From time to time such an accusation is made against the sports environment, especially the professional one.

Table 7. Assessment of environmental rules prevailing among athletes from the point of view of the impact of breaking abstinence on the breakdowns of individual players' careers

	Yes, could have connection	No, no connection	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	79	19	25	2
%	63.2 %	15.2 %	20.0 %	1.6 %
Reference group	30	4	7	-
%	58.8 %	7.8 %	13.7 %	-

Another question concerned the impact of strict abstinence on the results of important sports competitions. It read as follows:

Do you think that strict compliance with the abstinence rule before important competitions would help to achieve the success of Polish national teams and clubs, e.g. in team sports (football, volleyball, hockey, basketball)?

yes, it would help *no, it has no connection* *it is difficult to assess*

In the case of this question, we have a very strong belief of the respondents that maintaining abstinence before important competitions would be conducive to achieving outstanding results. Up to 93.6% indicated this value of abstinence.

Table 8. Impact of abstinence before important competitions on their positive result in team sports

	Yes	No	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	117	1	7	-
%	93.6 %	0.8 %	5.6 %	-
Reference group	38	1	12	-
%	74.5 %	2 %	23.5%	-

The next question asked about knowledge of a specific athlete who had lost his/her career as a result of alcohol problems.

Do you know any outstanding athlete whose career has collapsed due to alcohol abuse? Enter his/her name below (or several names if you know them):

It turned out that 23.2% (n = 29) of the respondents in the study group knew of such a story (probably from the media), and were able to identify such a person "by name". It's quite a high ratio. It can be a sign of high dissemination of this type of messages. As we know, the media looks for sensation. On the other hand, this may raise legitimate concerns about environmental standards in sport, especially in professional sport.

In the reference group, this ratio was even significantly higher. Twenty-four people named such a specific person (47.1%). This shows a greater knowledge of the sports environment or greater "erudition" in the sports press.

The next question examined the respondents' attitude to possible training by their own children, from the point of view of possible preventive benefits.

If your children were to train a team sport in a club, would you expect that it would be beneficial to their behavior from the point of view of preventive purposes? E.g. that they will not use alcohol or smoke?

yes, it would be beneficial *no* *difficult to assess*

It turns out that the majority of respondents are very positive about possible training. Therefore, they duplicate some common belief about preventive benefits of practicing sport, despite the fact that research shows the ambivalence of sport as a preventive measure (Bobrowski, 2003; Bobrowski, 2007; Torres, 2004, s. 255; Steptoe et al. 1997; Woitas – Ślubowska, 2009, s. 124). In some ways, this is also contrary to the negative assessment of environmental standards in sport that has appeared in previous questions. Here are the results:

Table 9. Positive preventive expectations for practicing sport (training) by own children

	Yes, it would be beneficial	No	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	108	4	11	2
%	84.6 %	3.2 %	8.8 %	1.6 %
Reference group	43	2	6	-
%	86 %	3.9 %	11.8 %	-

As you can see, positive expectations for sport as a preventive value dominate. This is puzzling because previous statements would require greater caution in this matter. Could the respondents rely on the fairly widespread stereotype that attributes sport with a permanent preventive value? This is probably the case, unless we allow the interpretation that the respondents used a hidden, "magic" assumption like "it will not happen to me, it does not apply to me – benefits yes, losses no". This interpretation cannot be ruled out. It seems that the respondents know almost nothing (3.2% know) about the so-called preventive ambivalence of sport among young people. This is an extremely important moment from the point of view of the location of preventive sport. Society should probably be educated on this matter, showing in what conditions sport is a protective factor and in which situations it is a risk factor.

The next question concerned the same matter, but more precisely. An additional element has been introduced in the form of differentiation of coaches' attitudes. The question was:

It is believed that practicing sport is one of the best preventive measures. Do you agree with this opinion?

yes no it depends who coaches difficult to assess

More nuanced statements were obtained, showing that the respondents are aware of the relationship between the preventive action of sport and the attitudes of coaches.

Table 10. Sport as a preventive measure

	Yes	No	It depends who coaches	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	83	4	25	10	3
%	66.4 %	3.2 %	20.0 %	8.0 %	2.4 %
Reference group	31	8	4	8	-
%	60.8 %	15.7 %	7.8 %	15.7 %	-

As it can be seen here, the respondents showed more moderation in glorifying sport as a preventive measure. As many as 42% had doubts. It turns out that with closer inquiry we obtain a slightly more realistic picture, where the attitudes of coaches determine the preventive value of training. However, most still support the autonomous value of sport in prevention, which is not consistent with objective knowledge, as already mentioned (Thorlindsson et al., 1990, Bobrowski, 2007).

The next question concerned the possible relationship between famous sport failures and sobriety of competitors before the competition. It read as follows:

After losing an important football match, a sports journalists expressed the opinion that it happened because of the players' "party" on the eve of the competition. Was this a probable opinion? yes no difficult to assess

Table 11. The relationship between possible drunkenness and a lost match

	Yes	No	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	92	-	29	4
%	73.6 %	-	23.2 %	3.2 %
Reference group	36	3	12	-
%	70.6 %	5.9 %	23.5 %	-

The respondents again revealed the intuition that accompanied them – abstinence can be broken in professional sports and this has a negative impact on performance.

In a way, the summarizing element was the following question:

Should PE coaches and teachers undergo preventive training?

yes no it is difficult to assess

The vast majority of respondents deemed necessary the preventive training of sports coaches. It was as high as 82.4%. Attention is drawn to the almost complete absence of the answer "no" (one person) with a small percentage of abstentions! It is a view referring to the views of the early twentieth century, when Gustaw Szulc (Szulc, 1937) wrote: "*A physical educator, unaware of the need to fight alcoholism by the means at his disposal, does not properly fulfill his role.*"

Table 12. The need for preventive training of sports coaches

	Yes	No	Difficult to assess	No response
Study group	103	1	16	5
%	82.4 %	0.8 %	12.8 %	4.0 %
Reference group	44	2	5	-
%	86.3 %	3.9 %	9.8 %	

This result seems to be a call for the restoration of rules in sport, especially in professional sport (Lecoutre, Schultz, 2009; Sethi et al., 2016).

4. Discussion

The study assumed that there would be many such respondents in the study group who support the principle of full abstinence in sport, both amateur and professional. The data reinforce this hypothesis, especially when compared to the reference (control) group. In almost all categories, the results of the study group are high (and higher than the reference group's). Therefore, personal choice of abstinence may affect some radicalism of attitudes and expectations towards the sports environment.

At the same time, there are several aspects of the responses in which the results of the study group and reference group do not differ much. This may mean that in these aspects the position taken is either very universal (shared by the so-called general public) or the abstinent respondents are basing their judgments on a certain type of ideology, to a lesser extent referring to the internal consequence of life choices and assessments.

Let's try to synthesize the obtained results. Thus, most of both groups have interest in sports (74.8% in the study group, and 80.4% in the reference group) and part of them even practiced a discipline (respectively, 30.4% and 47.1%) . This shows the importance of sport for modern people. It is very significant, as is everything that is associated with sport. Both good and dubious aspects of sport certainly resonate in the daily lives of many people. In this respect, both groups are "typical", which justifies further exploration of their views.

In both groups we have a clear recognition of the harmful effects of alcohol abuse, drug use, and smoking in sport (in the study group a slightly higher percentage - 93.6% for alcohol, and lower - 83.2% for drugs, while in the reference group it is 88.2% for alcohol, and 88.2% for drugs). You can see that choosing an abstinent lifestyle slightly increases the

expectation of moderation among athletes. There is relatively less recognition for non-smoking as an attribute of sport, worth explaining in further studies. It is known that smoking has adverse physiological effects (hypoxia). However, since the question was not asked whether respondents smoke, it is worth exploring in further research. Perhaps this is the effect of cognitive dissonance in smoker respondents.

The next question was much more important from the point of view of the research goal. It was asked whether any amount of alcohol is harmful to athletes in terms of sporting results. It is believed so by up to 64% of voluntary abstainers and 27.5% of the reference group. Thus, support for the principle of athletes' full abstinence is shared by two-thirds of the study group. You can recognize this result also in such a way that the possible restitution of this principle in modern sport requires its observance by those who would promote it. For example, if a coach or sports activist is not an abstainer himself, he probably will not support the old rule now.

Of course, there was a lot of support for moderation in both groups – in the abstainers' group 79.2%, and in the reference group up to 82.4%. In an attempt to understand this result, we can ascertain that while full abstinence is supported rather by abstainers (which is understandable in its own way), moderation in sport is a requirement in both groups. Four-fifths of the respondents believe that ethanol abuse is at odds with sporting results (in addition to objective knowledge on the subject).

The declaration in both groups that respondents are aware of the harmful effects of ethanol on muscle function is puzzling. Up to 65.6% in the study group and 60.8% in the reference group. This is an optimistic result, which would please someone promoting the sobriety of athletes, but it seems that this may be an artifact, because it is difficult to see a sufficiently wide coverage of this issue in the media. To acquire this knowledge, one must actively seek it and at a scientific level. Thus, it seems that the answers were rather dictated by the respondents' suppositions. It is probably worth considering to provide broader and more source information about current research results, indicating the destructive role of using ethanol for muscle fitness and training effectiveness. After all, such aspects decided about the spread of the principle of abstinence in sport several decades ago. What is worth noting is a slightly higher frequency of declarations in the group of abstainers (by 4.8% more) than in the reference group.

The next question directly concerned the acceptance of the principle of abstinence, recognized a hundred years ago, when the Olympic movement emerged. And here we have a very high percentage of acceptance of this principle in the study group, and less, although also high (!) in the reference group. In the group of abstainers it is 92.8%, and in the reference group 78.4%. There is a slightly lower acceptance among people who are not abstainers, but let us emphasize – in both groups it is a very high indicator. As many as 9 out of 10 abstainers considered this cardinal principle as still valid.

In the next question, the perception of the relationship between the norms in the sports environment and individual athletes getting into trouble appeared. The results indicate that the respondents can see such a relationship. It is 63.2% in the study group and 58.8 % in the reference group. It can be assumed that they are closely watching the sports arena and are convinced that in the current sports environment, someone with an individual risk of alcohol-related problems (e.g. more susceptible to addiction due to biological reasons – sex, age, origin) may be affected by the effects of environmental lack of moderation. This is an important result because it shows that the current perception of the sports environment is not based on perceiving it as being moderate. So how about the positive preventive effect? An environment perceived as being risky cannot have a positive impact on young people, for example. This partly explains the observations that negate the preventive effect of sports training on youth behavior.

What's more, up to 93.6% in the study group recognizes that maintaining abstinence would help to achieve outstanding sports results. In the reference group this percentage is lower – 74.5%. Still, these are high percentages, indicating some common intuition that there is a positive correlation between abstinence and high sports performance.

Very many respondents were able to indicate "by name" athletes who literally "drank away their career". In the study group it was 23.2%, while in the reference group 47.1%. These are high percentages. If there were no such unpleasant cases in the sports environment (and in the media), then respondents would probably have more difficulty in identifying such people. Meanwhile, they were able to do it. This can be considered as some indirect measure of the scale of problems of this kind (when a significant proportion of respondents in both groups see and know the cases of athletes who literally "drank away their careers"). This indicator alone would prompt reflection on the fate of the principle of abstinence in sport, which to some extent we have lost, and yet obviously protected against such a turn of events. Noteworthy is also a much higher percentage of knowledge of the environment among the respondents in the reference group. As you can see, we have a paradox here: knowledge of someone's alcohol problems does not translate into a possible change in behavior in the reference group, at least at this particular moment.

The above answers in both groups indicate, on the one hand, demanding a return to the noble principle of abstinence or moderation in sport, and on the other, reveal doubts about the realism of such a return. In both groups there is a large presumption that in today's sport this rule does not work or works to a small extent. So how do the respondents, especially in the study group, relate to the possible preventive role of sport?

It turns out that, in both groups, they still recognize the preventive value of training a discipline. Was it a kind of idealization of sport or wishful thinking? Here as many as 84.6% of respondents from the study group and 86% from the reference group think that sports training would benefit their children! In the previously cited works a different picture

appears: we often detect the negative impact of sport on the level of risky behavior or the ambivalence of sport from this point of view. It is worth quoting another study clearly indicating that it is sports activity that increases the level of ethanol use in many indicators (Bosco, Allen, Tomborou, 2012; Poortinga, et al. 2007; Brenner, Swanik, 2007; Ford, 2007; Zhou, Heim, 2014). Despite the previously expressed doubts about the state of affairs in adult sport, the respondents from both groups consistently point to the preventive value of youth sport – contrary to the research results and their own doubts expressed in previous answers. What are we dealing with here? With a strong, well-established stereotype? This is a very fascinating issue, the more so that the next questions bring an analogous picture, with some significant difference.

Now, still more than 60% of the respondents connect sport with prevention (66.4% in study group and 60.8% in the reference group). In this question there was the opportunity to indicate the conditions for such a positive impact – the attitude of coaches. Twenty percent of the study group (and 7.8% in the reference group) considered that the preventive effect depends on the attitude of a specific coach. This is an interesting lead, because it also concerns the last question.

Before we deal with it, let us look at the penultimate question, in which we asked again about the impact of violating abstinence before important competitions. Amazingly subjects in both groups concluded in unison (73.6% and 70.6%) that there could be a correlation or causal relationship between breaking abstinence and losing a game. It can be seen that this criticism of the behavior of modern athletes has reappeared.

Perhaps the most important question was the last one: should sports coaches be trained preventively? Are they supposed to be educators? Up to 82.4% in the study group and 86.3% in the reference group of the respondents believe that sports coaches should be trained preventively. Interesting in this case is the unanimity in both groups and very high support for such an idea. Six out of seven respondents consider this necessary. If we consider how often in practice reference is made to the preventive value of sport, the issue becomes clear: without adequate preparation, coaches will not support abstinence restitution rules in sport. In addition, according to the respondents, mainly from the abstinence group but also a significant part of the reference group, it would be advisable and even necessary from the point of view of the effectiveness of sports training (Anonymous, 2019).

During a famous social experiment in Iceland, during which the phenomenon of teenagers getting drunk was significantly reduced (Kristjansson et al., 2016; Wojcieszek, 2017), heavy investments in sports activities were made. Iceland currently has one of the most active sports population of young people and a very large group of educated coaches. At the same time, it was tended to to ensure that these coaches understand why the focus was on them and what the community expects from them. They were not only coaches but also prevention teachers. As a result of this factor, mass sports activities served as a

preventive tool of influence. If this coaching attitude is missing, then we probably have the phenomenon of increased alcohol consumption by athletes (Martens et al., 2005, Martens et al., 2007, p. 859-879).

5. Conclusions

The surveyed abstainers (and often also people from the reference group) notice the negative phenomena associated with resigning from the principle of alcohol abstinence in sport, especially professional. They negatively assess the lack of moderation of athletes, associating it with smaller sports achievements, and even with a career breakdown. At the same time, they do not lose confidence in sport as a preventive activity, but especially in the group of abstainers it is associated with expecting the right attitude from coaches. One can risk the thesis that if the coach is not an abstainer personally (just like the people from the study group), they find it difficult to refer to the principle of abstinence in sport and has a good chance of ignoring it in their coaching work. Therefore, a possible restitution of this rule would require intervention and training for the coaches themselves. This is theoretically possible and there are precedents, but this seems more like a postulate than reality.

Recommendations for communicating the principle of abstinence in sport

The research presented in the article showed the entire difficulty of promoting the principle of abstinence in sport again, in the face of numerous cognitive distortions and stereotypes of the respondents. Apart from declarative support for this principle, there are contradictions in the responses. It seems that a greater number of messages should be prepared to convey reliable knowledge about alcohol-related harm in sport (e.g. the matter of physiological damage, the matter of broken careers). It is worth constantly revising the stereotype about the automatic relationship between training and abstinence. It also seems that the first groups that could reach these messages should be coaches, physical education teachers, and perhaps also sports journalists. Moreover, it seems that there is an urgent need to expand society's knowledge of these topics, especially in view of the tendency to replace qualified preventive measures with sports training.

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Annex

Dear Sir or Madam! Please complete the short survey questionnaire which will be used for scientific research in the field of health education and physical culture. I assure you of complete anonymity and use only in the form of generalized research results. **Thank you very much for your cooperation.** Research author: Krzysztof A. Wojcieszek, PhD hab., professor at the Criminology and Penitentiary University in Warsaw.

1. Are you interested in sport, supporting it?

- yes
- yes, but not too much
- no
- difficult to assess

2. Have you practiced (trained) any sport?

- yes
- no

Enter what kind.....

3. Do you think any of the following behaviors are **not conducive to** achieving outstanding results in amateur or competitive sports?

- abuse of alcoholic beverages
- drug use
- smoking

4. Are the following harmful to good, outstanding sports results:

- abstinence
- use of any amount of alcohol
- alcohol abuse

5. Do you know that physiological studies have shown that the use of alcoholic beverages destroys the effect of training by damaging the action-myosin connections in the athlete's muscles?

- YES, I have heard about it
- NO, I haven't heard about it

6. One hundred years ago, when the Olympic movement emerged, it was recognized that athletes must radically avoid drugs (do not smoke, do not drink, do not take drugs). Was this tendency:

- correct, proper
- exaggerated, too radical
- difficult to assess

7. Recently, there have been many recollections of outstanding athletes who have become addicted (e.g. alcohol addiction, gambling). Do you think that their troubles could have any connection with playing sports, e.g. environmental habits?

- yes, they could have a connection
- no, they had no connection
- difficult to assess

8. Do you think that strict compliance with the rule of abstinence before important competitions would help to achieve the success of Polish national teams and clubs, e.g. in team sports (football, volleyball, hockey, basketball)?

- yes, it would help
- no, it is not connected
- difficult to assess

9. Do you know any outstanding athlete whose career has collapsed due to alcohol abuse? Enter his/her name below (or several names if you know them):

.....

10. If your child were to train a team sport in a club, would you expect that it would be beneficial to their behavior from the point of view of preventive purposes? E.g. that they will not use alcohol or smoke?

- yes, it would be beneficial
- no
- difficult to assess

11. It is believed that practicing sport is one of the best preventive measures. Do you agree with this opinion?

- yes
- no
- it depends who coaches
- difficult to assess

12. After losing an important football match, a sports journalists expressed the opinion that it happened because of the players' "party" on the eve of the competition. Was this a probable opinion?

- yes
- no
- difficult to assess

13. Should PE coaches and teachers undergo preventive training?

- yes
- no
- difficult to assess

Your gender: F / M Your age Your profession

Thank you very much for completing the survey!