

“How to practice without preventing youngsters to be creative”

“I realized not to being enough concentrated on important things doing a lot of useless job”. Interesting views of the former World Champion Werner SCHLAGER shared with participants European Coaching Conference in Zagreb



23/11/2009 - During the European Coaching Conference in Zagreb the Austrian player Werner SCHLAGER, World Champion from 2003 and one of the conference guest-stars, answered our questions.

- What would you change in your practice basing on your nowadays experience?

“2/3 of the practice was useless, The important thing is to concentrate on the quality and not only on the quantity. You have to work on the important things! There are many different opinions and approaches therefore it’s vital to work individually as we don’t have so many players in Europeas they do in Asia, in particular in China”.

- Why do you think that the difference between Asia and Europe is even bigger by women?

“Quality of coaches in women’s table tennis could be one of the reasons, which is connected with the image that European coaches enjoy”.

- Which are the most important elements that players should be taught in order to reach the world’s top?

“Definitely, technique. In Europe we have many talented players, who are limited because of the incorrect technique thus they are loosing power, energy and therefore the effectiveness of their strokes. In China not all the players are talented but all are very hard working, which is indeed a gift and should also be considered as one of the components of talent”.

- Which are in your opinion the talent identification criteria?

“Talent can be hidden sometimes. Not necessarily what we see is all that can be squeezed out of the player. Talent it’s a variety and a complex of different elements. In my opinion another important issue is the psychological aspect – to be stubborn, consistent and hard working. To put it short for him it’s technique, mental stability and knowledge about the game”.

- Is science going to be included in the program of the WSA. Werner Schlager Academy?

“Definitely yes, but at the moment it’s still not defined in details. The wish is to incorporate all the border fields into the program of the Academy and to establish a competent team of experts”.

- Can you give us some tips on how to coach players?

“I have noticed that sometimes it’s only the nature of communication that matters... It’s important to get into the mental state of the player, including his knowledge – it’s not only about the technical skills but many times details matter much more during coaching. You probably know how it often works: if the player losses, he’s the one, who is blamed; if he wins, the merit goes to the whole team”.

- Could the organization of training camps, where we have 20 players and 1 coach be the solution?

"That's a provocative question. I believe that individual work pays off. However, in terms of quality of practice for me the question should be what I can benefit from my training or my partner, even if I practice with players, who are weaker than me. During practice a coach should give crucial directions to players and have a very individual approach as each player is very unique.."

- How difficult is it to sort out priorities due to the number of events top level players take part in and how much energy is there left

"Players have very different views on the calendar. The story is always about priorities. Every time I tried to do something different I failed as I was doing things that I was not used to. Mental pressure should always be present. The practice should be as similar as possible to competition in all possible aspects (rhythm, pressure, timing etc.)"

- During your presentation you mentioned that 2/3 of your practice was in vain. Why do you think so?

"I believe that in some periods of my career I focused too much on quantity, while my mind didn't follow and this prevented me to be creative"

- What do you think about the schedule at the EC? Would it be better to have them organized as the WC?

"I'm convinced that one of the players' problems is the lack of proper physical preparation. Moreover, also the communication between the players and the governing body should be improved. It's important to get the whole picture and to look at long-term consequences and results of any system that is or will be adopted in the future"

- What is your opinion about the change of regulations regarding speed-gluing?

"The discussions about that issue were really very intense. Well, in my opinion the only solution was to take the new material and to start practising with it in order to get used to it as soon as possible. A lot of flexibility and adjustability was required and I guess both were especially expected from professional players. I'm convinced that this change was for the good of the game"

- What do you think about the Chinese rubbers?

"I don't fully agree that there are only advantages when using Chinese rubbers – one of the disadvantages is that the ball must always be hit with great speed. If you know that you can use it to disarm the opponent by inputting much pressure on him and thus making him to be late on the balls."