

A First Assessment on How Covid-19 Affects Volleyball and Other Team Sports

Dr. Patsiaouras Asterios*

University of Thessaly, Department of Physical Education & Sport Science, Trikala, Karies, Greece

*Corresponding Author: Patsiaouras Asterios, University of Thessaly, Department of Physical Education & Sport Science, Trikala, Karies, Greece.

ABSTRACT

The year 2020 will be remembered by athletes and especially by all volleyball people as the arrival year of coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 and the Covid-19 pandemic that followed. As we already observe every day, Covid-19 has affected and still affects almost everyone and every part of society as well as sports. The pandemic and the undertaken actions in order to deal with the pandemic caused serious upheavals in the sports structure in team sports as in volleyball too and made very visible pre-existing systemic weaknesses. While in many parts of the world, initially the situation seemed to improve as governments, organizations and groups found and implemented increasingly effective strategies however the second wave of the pandemic found the European Confederations of team sports and the Confédération Européenne de Volleyball (CEV) unprepared to face a bleak reality. The challenges are many, more and more volleyball players, coaches', stakeholders are getting sick from the virus, and games or championships are being canceled and the implications for policy are briefly discussed.

Keywords: pandemic covid-19, teams sports, volleyball

INTRODUCTION

Pre-Existing Systemic Weaknesses in Sports and in Volleyball

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed some of the complexities and weaknesses of sports governance and amateur clubs in Europe. The consequences of Covid-19 and the forthcoming economic crisis in all European countries have forced stakeholders to have different interests and political solutions. Nowhere was there even a hypothetical scenario in discussions about how to end the season across Europe. We already understand that big changes are being violently caused as a result of covid-19 mainly in two areas. These are the tested relations between sports federations, associations, teams and public authorities (mainly national governments) and the so-called autonomy of sports.

The autonomy of sports is a widely disputed political and legal concept, since it is often found that government agencies are involved in sports issues. These issues include for e.g. the consolidation of sports, the fight against the set-up games, the doping, the fight against corruption etc. Sports organizations are aware of the limits of this approach, however, even the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for

example has adopted a less dogmatic and much more practical, flexible and realistic approach to sports autonomy (Denay, et al. 2020).

Due to Covid-19 pandemic has intensified oversight by government agencies, despite the autonomy of sport, as the crisis has further exposed the limitations of sports bodies and federations such in team sports. When governments tried to control the disease, organized team sports such as volleyball is, were among the first victims. Even if the CEV or the national federations or even professional associations protested against these first decisions, of course they had no choice but to follow the instructions given.

Once Europe begins to move away from the pandemic, sports can only make plans for short-to medium-term activity under strict control by governments and public health authorities. This may seem logical given the current situation, but the enhanced supervisory powers of public authorities over the Federations and volleyball in general will in turn have consequences that are worth predicting now.

The bargaining power of governments has increased with Covid-19, exporting compromises for more and wider redistribution of trade revenue by business groups. The sharp

decline in club revenues has also led to a sharp decline in the contracts of professional athletes in general and especially to volleyball players. In addition, the impending economic crisis is likely to increase the dependence of small to medium-sized sports organizations on public funding, especially national government agencies. This is not new, of course, but Covid-19 has the potential to increase that dependency.

In our everyday life much more attention is being paid to sports governance, with the Good Governance Codes being designed in many countries and the EU is also involved in this area. According to Denay, et al. (2020), it seems that with the vehicle of the Covid-19 pandemic, the relevant bargaining power in favor of the public authorities can be shifted to this complex sports network.

The purpose of this article is to describe the reality in the team sports having as example mainly volleyball and in this way, to try to deal with the consequences both in the short and long term.

DISCUSSION

Finding the Balance in the Health and Integrity of Team Sports

A first consequence of the Covid-19 epidemic worldwide was the suspension of anti-doping tests. Initially, the China Anti-Doping Agency (CHINADA, February 3, 2020) suspended its testing in mainland China and later the suspension of doping testing spread rapidly around the world along with the virus. In many areas it has not yet been repeated (Denay, et al. 2020).

As our knowledge of dealing with vcovid-19 improved, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has issued instructions to the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADOs) on how to perform at least certain tests safely. Nevertheless, most of the big sports competitions that would take place in the summer of 2020, as we already know with e.g. Tokyo Summer Olympics and Paralympics have been postponed. Both of these conditions raise questions about whether there should be some kind of consistent and universally accepted health care since the covid-19 vaccine does not yet exist.

Fill in the Blank Bet for Team Sports

When professional-level international sporting events were first suspended or canceled in March 2020, sports betting companies had few

betting options available for consumers. Indeed, there are reports of at least a 90% drop in bets in the coming months. However, the sports betting market has not evaporated. This gap was filled relatively quickly by a growing number of gambling for different sporting events such as table tennis or tennis. As a result, the money invested in such sporting events and sports is now missing from team sports and volleyball.

This in turn brings new, problematic new data and situations. As it has been pointed out previously, the governing bodies of team sport for e.g. in volleyball have been weakened as the basic revenues from the organization of events, the television broadcasts and the corporate sponsorships have been reduced. Businesses affected by Covid-19 are relatively unlikely to be able to keep their agreements with the CEV and the volleyball teams that made the pre-covid-19 era. This means that the governing bodies will have to reconsider their relations with sports bodies, public authorities and commercial enterprises.

Our old conceptions of the autonomy of sport can give way to new realities. These changes may lead to a new era of altruism, financial or material subsidies and solidarity between strong professional teams and weak amateur ones due to the financial crisis of amateur volleyball teams as professional teams rely on amateur teams to recruit their professional players. But this help from professional teams to amateur volleyball teams will come at a price i.e. and that will be a rethinking of how the sport is organized and who makes the plans.

As any financial crisis, even now, the concern of volleyball teams and other team sports such as soccer, basketball or handball teams is the cost control. In the short term, pay cuts and salary deferrals for players and coaches have created emergency conditions for those involved. In the long term, though there will be labor market interventions, such as the wider adoption of salary cuts, which will require the involvement of coaches and players as well as their professional unions to minimize the possibility of subsequent litigation (Tertipi, Rallis, Sfiri, & Kefala, 2020).

The Setback of Sports and the Protocols Dealing with Covid-19

The crisis will also put pressure on existing sports regulations. Already in volleyball, the protocol for starting the game and changing the field between the sets for the teams has changed.

The goal of all these protocols is to ensure, as much as possible, that the risk of spreading the Covid-19 virus is reduced as much as possible.

In addition to instructions on personal hygiene and the use of personal protective equipment, the protocols include instructions on the use of common equipment mainly for balls, reducing interpersonal closeness and contact between players and coaches to a minimum. We also note as a means of managing and avoiding the spread of covid-19 virus that games are played in the absence of spectators and that as a result is a strong tendency for the away team to win more games.

Interestingly enough is that, while in the pre-covid-19 era the presence of spectators-fans in the courts or stadiums created an additional external motivation and a psychological help for the home team and an additional stress for the away team, this no longer exists.

Despite the fact that these games are played behind closed doors, the English Premier League, the German Bundesliga, estimates that about 300 people will be required in each football game, while a volleyball game as proposed by the Greek Volleyball Federation requires 80 people. Although these protocols seek to reduce the likelihood of the virus spreading, no one can completely prevent it.

Team Sport and Television Broadcasting

The global value of the sports industry was estimated to be \$471bn in 2018 – an increase of 45% since 2011 – and before coronavirus stopped play, the only trajectory seemed to be upwards. But nowadays every part of the sporting activity stopped and been tremendous affected, from athletes, teams and leagues, to the media that broadcast and cover games (Hall, 2020).

Of course, in a long term, the basic operating model of sports championships will probably remain unchanged. The tournaments will continue to be organized in the same way - through a competitive season of predetermined length, with each team playing against another. However, the covid-19 pandemic has brought to the surface the fact that this model is directly dependent on television shows and live audiences (Andreato, Coimbra, Danilo, & Andrade, 2020).

As for television, covid-19 is likely to accelerate the adoption of D2C services for the distribution of sports content. These services are more

attractive now because they do not have a fixed schedule and large content libraries to keep people busy. Broadcasters' income from advertising team games and their desire to buy sports rights will decrease.

For professional sports teams this means that central league management will focus more on their internal services to sell content, and potentially make more, and/or low-priced deals with other digital players. Amazon has already proofed this idea: Prime Video subscribers in the UK increased by 35% in the third quarter of 2019, which coincides with the first live stream of Premier League games.

The absence of "real" sports is the golden opportunity for the development of virtual technologies (e-sports). E-sports has grown in recent years and presents a new way to attract fans and generate revenue for its organizers. In addition, these technologies could allow viewers - fans to experience live games, without having to be physically present - an idea that may once have seemed strange, perhaps massively inapplicable or unsightly, but now makes sense.

The Psychological Effects of Covid-19

The psychological effects of cancellations of training and volleyball matches show that many athletes may experience feelings of loss of ability and increased dissatisfaction (Ashdown-Franks, et al. 2020). We also see a reduced flow of young athletes in sport academies in team sports while on the contrary there is an increased flow of young athletes in individual sports such as track and field tennis or table tennis.

Perhaps it is too early to fully comprehend the magnitude of this flow but there is a risk that some talents that could join and evolved in team sports will be lost because they will find out participating in individual sports that they are not worth it and give up early the sport. On the other hand, individual sports are in an advantageous position because they will have access to a pool of talent that they may not have had access to in the pre-covid-19 era (Streeter, 2020). These results of the reduced inflow of young athletes in team sports and the increased inflow of individual sports will be seen in about five years from now.

For young children, team sports are often a way of socializing and utilizing social skills and for adults too to maintain such skills. Of course, all team sports such as soccer, basketball, volleyball and even individuals' sports such as

track and field or tennis affect children. However, in individual sports, children have a more difficult opportunity to socialize and integrate into society as a whole than in group sports. This may result a social distancing of these children in general (Vance, et al. 2005; Lubans, et al. 2016).

In these difficult times, the ability of sport to bring people together is being lost more than ever. We finally realize that the covid-19 pandemic has a huge impact on all forms of sport in general but also in volleyball in particular. From the Olympic and the professional to the sport of youth, the need for social distance and the cessation of the spread of disease means the cancellation of games and training, resulting in financial hardship and lost revenue, leading to frustration for teams and players for missed opportunities but also to disappointed fans and spectators.

The crisis that COVID-19 has caused and continues to cause requires a flexible approach to physical activity and team sports based on the need for social distance combined with changes in personal requirements and sports environments. We will definitely see team sports to adapt changes, e.g. the way equipment is distributed, physical proximity, even the way team sports are played, etc. but how they will change it is difficult to predict (Phelan, Kim, Chung, 2020; Hull, Loosemore, Schweltnus, 2020; Carmody, et al. 2020).

REFERENCES

- [1] Andreato Leonardo V., Coimbra Danilo R, Andrade, A. Challenges to Athletes During the Home Confinement Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Strength and Conditioning Journal*. 42(3):1-5. <https://doi:10.1519/SSC.00000000000000563>
- [2] Ashdown-Franks G, Firth J, Carney R, et al. Exercise as medicine for mental and substance use disorders: a meta-review of the benefits for neuropsychiatric and cognitive outcomes. *Sports Med*. 2020; 50:151–70.
- [3] Carmody S, Murray A, Borodina M, et al. When can professional sport recommence safely during the COVID-19 pandemic? Risk assessment and factors to consider. *Br. J. Sports Med*. 2020; May 7 [Epub ahead of print]. doi: bjsports-2020-102539.
- [4] CEV, 2020, Covid -19: Sport Specific Information. (<https://inside.cev.eu/en/covid19/>) (Retrieved November 2, 2020).
- [5] Denay, Keri L. MD, FACSM; Breslow, Rebecca G. MD; Turner, Meredith N. MD; Nieman, David C. Dr PH, FACSM; Roberts, William O. MD, MS, FACSM; Best, Thomas M. MD, PhD, FACSM; ACSM (2020). Call to Action Statement: COVID-19 Considerations for Sports and Physical Activity, *Current Sports Medicine Reports*: August 2020;(19)8: 326-328, Available from doi: 10.1249/JSR.0000000000000739
- [6] Hall S., (2020), This is how COVID-19 is affecting the world of sports. Project Lead, Media, Entertainment and Culture, World Economic Forum. (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/sports-covid19-coronavirus-exercise-specators-media-coverage/>) (Retrieved November 2, 2020).
- [7] Hull JH, Loosemore M, Schweltnus M. Respiratory health in athletes: facing the COVID-19 challenge. *Lancet Respir. Med*. 2020; S2213-2600:30175–2.
- [8] Lubans D, Richards J, Hillman C, et al. Physical activity for cognitive and mental health in youth: a systematic review of mechanisms. *Pediatrics*. 2016; 138:e20161642.
- [9] Phelan D, Kim JH, Chung EH. A game plan for the resumption of sport and exercise after coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) infection. *JAMA Cardiol*. 2020; May 13. doi:10.1001/jamacardio.2020.2136. [Epub ahead of print].
- [10] Streeter, C. COVID-19: Social Isolation and Optimism in Sport. *The sport Journal*. 2020. Available from <http://thesportjournal.org/article/covid-19-social-isolation-and-optimism-in-sport/>
- [11] Tertipi N, Rallis E, Sfiri E, Kefala V. The effect of Covid-19 pandemic in volleyball players and sports clubs in Greece. *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, 2020; Jul 20. <https://doi:10.23736/S0022-4707.20.11414-2>.
- [12] Vance DE, Wadley VG, Ball KK, et al. The effects of physical activity and sedentary behavior on cognitive health in older adults. *J. Aging Phys. Act*. 2005; 13:294–313.
- [13] World Health Organization. Considerations for sports federations/sports event organizers when planning mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19: interim guidance. [cited 2020 June 8]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/points-of-entry-and-mass-gatherings>.

Citation: Patsiaouras Asterios, “A First Assessment on How Covid-19 Affects Volleyball and Other Team Sports”, *Journal of Sports and Games*, 2(2), 2020, pp 1-4.

Copyright: © 2020 Patsiaouras Asterios. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.