

Basketball in the Republic of Croatia:a case study
of the Basketball Club Zagreb

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クロアチア共和国のバスケットボール：
ザグレブバスケットボールクラブ（カカザグレブ）の事例研究

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要約

クロアチア共和国はバスケットボール強豪国にも関わらず、育成方法や競技・運営システムに関する研究は多くは無い。そこで本研究はクロアチア共和国の一クラブを現地調査しその運営の実情の報告を目的とした。

調査対象クラブはカカザグレブとし2010年12月7日から14日に現地で視察・調査を行った。そこで各カテゴリーの公式戦、練習を視察しGM他スタッフにインタビューを行った。

カカザグレブの育成組織はバスケットボールスクールとチーム形式のものに大きく二分される。スクールは主として6～11歳が対象である。12歳以上のためのスクールもある。チーム形式の方はU-18、U-16、U-14と3カテゴリーがあり各チーム12～15人の選手がいる。合わせて22のクラスとチームがあり600人が所属していた。U-18はかなりハードで一年に約700回練習するという。また随時選手の入替えがある。さらに練習場確保の状況やコーチの身分も明らかになった。プロチームについては3つのリーグ戦に出場していた際の仕組みや練習の状況などが明らかになった。またスロベニアでの先行研究（出町・鈴木、2018）とも多くの共通点が見い出された。

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1. Introduction

The Republic of Croatia (hereinafter, Croatia) has had notable success in basketball on the world stage. The Croatian Men's National Team won a silver medal in the 1992 Olympic Games, and finished seventh in 1996 and sixth in 2008. In the World Championships (World Cup), the team finished third in 1994, tenth in 2010 and fourteenth in 2014. The Croatian Women's National Team has also had success, finishing tenth in the Olympic Games in 1992 and fifth in the European Championship (FIBA Eurobasket). The men's team ranked eighth in the world in October 2017 and ninth in December 2018, while the women were ranked nineteenth in August 2017 and twenty-first in October 2018. These results have been achieved despite the fact that Croatia has little more than four million citizens.

Although some studies have been done on tactical analysis, motion analysis and physiology related to Croatian basketball, few studies have focused on the competition management system, training methods and club management. One such study of the development system of Croatian basketball was conducted by Jakimenko (2005)¹⁾.

This study examined the question of why the acquisition of medals by the National Senior Men's Team in international competition is relatively

small compared to the Croatian Junior Men's Team. Some of the explanatory factors noted included the fact that young Croatian players sometimes play less for foreign clubs, the pressure to win placed on the head coaches by their clubs has been increasing, and some clubs have been unwilling to allow their players to be selected for the national team. To date, no study has described how the various basketball clubs in Croatia are managed. The current study was conducted to clarify the management system, training system, and training policy for age-group basketball players in Croatia, with a focus on one particular basketball club.

2. Methods

Basketball Club Zagreb (hereinafter, KK Zagreb) was chosen as the focus of this study, as the youth team and senior teams of the club have had good results in Croatia in past competitions.

A field survey was administered from 7 December to 14 December 2010 to gather observation-based information related to official games and practice games of KK Zagreb's teams in different age categories. (Because the initial letters of "basketball club" in Croatian are KK, the surveyed club in this study is commonly written as "KK Zagreb.") Interviews were conducted with general managers, coaches, trainers, and other club staff. At the same time, documents

and video materials related to basketball in Croatia were collected. After completion of the field survey, additional questions, confirmation, and interviews were conducted from Japan, as necessary. Analysis was undertaken based on the data obtained from the field surveys, interviews, documents, and earlier related research.

Throughout this report, Croatian notation is kept to a minimum, as in full names. In addition, some Croatian alphabet characters are replaced with Roman characters. Affiliation and titles are those at the time the field survey was conducted.

3. Results and Discussion

The senior team of KK Zagreb has had considerable success in the Croatia Men's Division 1 League. They have had multiple victories in the Croatian Basketball Cup and have participated in the Euroleague. The youth team of KK Zagreb has won a championship in the Croatia tournament and has produced players for the national youth teams such as the national U-18 team.

(3-1) KK Zagreb youth training organization

The youth training organization of KK Zagreb is divided into two main sections: the basketball school

department and the team style group department. The team style group department is further divided into three categories: U-18, U-16 and U-14. On the other hand, players under the age of 11 practice in the basketball school department. Although the U-18 team practices hard, the younger players focus on learning and experiencing the pleasure of basketball and feeling the basic movement of the game. For ages 11 years and under, the individual age groups are defined in one- or two-year increments.

The younger participants sometimes practiced by mixing boys and girls. Players aged 9-to-11 play on baskets that are the same height as the adult baskets. Children older than 12 who have had some basketball experience and who are likely to act as members of the "team" enter the team style group department. Children just beginning their basketball experience after 12 years of age are assigned to a basketball school to learn the elementary skills of the game. Players who improve sufficiently may then be admitted to the team style group department. In this way, players aged 12 or older who have basketball experience have an appropriate place to play. At the time of this study, there were 22 teams and classes in all in the team style and basketball school departments.

In Croatia, there are clubs and basketball schools other than KK Zagreb

for players aged 12 and older based on their basketball experience. Indeed, there is a structure extending across the entire country that is designed to accept players of various skill levels and conditions. This system may well be one of the factors that has made a small country such as Croatia a basketball power.

The U-18 team of KK Zagreb generally practices every day, twice a day. The first practice is mainly for improving individual skills and fitness, while in contrast the second practice centers on tactics and game style. The purpose and contents of the practices are clearly defined. For the first practice, the team is divided into two groups. On weekdays, one first practice is normally from 8 am to 9:30 am; the other is from 3:30 to 5 pm. The coach designates which players will be assigned to each group. The second practice, which includes all the players, is typically from 8:30 pm or 9:00 to 10:30 pm.

The menu of individual skills and fitness in the first practice varies according to the day. In many cases, personal shooting skills are developed and one-on-one drills are conducted. The menu is adjusted to fit specific conditions: for example, fitness and related activities are stressed on the day after a game. In such sessions, the assistant coach, athletic trainer or head coach, depending on the contents of the session, will serve as the main instructor. In the first practice, the head coach is rarely the main instructor (although, of course, he is present). In this way, the head coach, the assistant coach and the athletic trainer play a variety of roles.

Although the official season for the team is winter when league games are played, the team practices all year round. The head coach of KK Zagreb's U-18 team stated that "we practice 700 times a year." However, this seems to be true only for the elite teams in Croatia.

Table 1 Example of weekly schedule of KK Zagreb U-18 team

day of the week	time	practice/game	contents
Monday	8:00-9:30	practice	individual etc.
	15:30-17:00	practice	individual etc.
	20:30-22:30	practice	tactics & game
Tuesday	8:00-9:30	practice	individual etc.
	15:30-17:00	practice	individual etc.
	21:00-22:30	practice	tactics & game
Wednesday	19:15-	game	---
Thursday	8:00-9:30	practice	individual etc.
	15:30-17:00	practice	individual etc.

	20:30-22:30	practice	tactics & game
Friday	8:00-9:30	practice	individual etc.
	15:30-17:00	practice	individual etc.
	21:00-22:30	practice	tactics & game
Saturday	8:00-9:30	practice	individual etc.
	15:30-17:00	practice	individual etc.
	21:00-22:30	practice	tactics & game
Sunday	12:00-	game	---

Table 1 represents the typical weekly practice schedule for KK Zagreb's U-18 team. The team's competition is mainly the local league teams. These games serve as a lead-up to the national tournament. In addition, the team may also participate in international tournaments such as those sponsored by Nike Inc. or the Euroleague U-18 Games.

The number of players on each team in Croatia's youth training organizations is far less than the 100 players playing in some high school basketball clubs in Japan. The average size is 12-15 players per team. Although elite teams may choose players from the youth training organizations of European clubs, KK Zagreb chooses good players from in and around Zagreb. Official games start in October, but no tryouts are held in August or September. In fact, in the case of KK Zagreb, they not hold tryouts at all. They are "always" looking for good players. They work to identify good players all year round. Because each youth team has an approximate limit of 12-15 players, if a new player is brought

in, in principle, someone will leave. Sometimes 16- or 17-year-old players will be forced to leave the team in the middle of the season, which, according to the head coach, is a practice similar to a professional team.

The KK Zagreb basketball school U-11 class is divided into two groups, for a total of 30 players. Players are not selected based on skill level, therefore every child is eligible to participate. The teams practice twice a week for five months and three times a week for another five months. During July and August, practice is often closed. Practice is on weekdays and, occasionally, games are played on Saturday. Practice time per session is 60 or 90 minutes, the belief being that up to 90 minutes of practice time for children of this age was sufficient. The head coach of the class is Mr. Čedo Majstorović, who teaches at an elementary school next to one of the gymnasiums used by KK Zagreb. Despite its proximity, the KK Zagreb program is a totally separate from the elementary school. Because the policy of the KK

Zagreb basketball school emphasizes "enjoyment" first, the coach does not yell or conduct intense practices. Rather, he teaches the basics of basketball such as dribbling and shooting. For example, the main content of one practice was:

- (1) Dribble around cones in a zigzag pattern and shoot near the goal.
- (2) Try different types of dribbles in the drill in (1).
- (3) Dribble while running and touching heel to butt.
- (4) Dribble while extending the knee and running.

According to Coach Majstorović, in another one to two years, some of the children may go to a higher level club through tryouts and recruitment. He noted that having one or two out of 20 move up is a fairly good result.

Similar to KK Zagreb, most Croatian basketball schools targeting children 13-years-old and under typically practice two to three times a week. A few practice only once a week and some practice five times a week, but the latter schools are often criticized for overworking their players.

In general, in this age group, players pay roughly 27 euros per month to participate. However, Coach Majstorović did not take a salary and tried to make it possible for the children to join his class for free. Some basketball schools in Croatia, including KK Zagreb,

accept students from the age of six. In all, the youth training organizations of KK Zagreb have 600 players aged six to 18 years, all boys.

With 22 teams and classes, KK Zagreb needs a number of practice locations. The main venue is a large gym with three basketball courts that is also used by the professional senior team. The gym is next to the school and is connected by a hallway. It contains the KK Zagreb office with rooms for the general manager, staff, etc. Although KK Zagreb has preferential use of the venue, it is apparently not owned by the club. In addition to this large gym, there are at least three gyms nearby that KK Zagreb has preferential access to but does not own. In this way, KK Zagreb uses many gymnasiums in parallel. Assuming that the 22 teams and classes in the youth training organization of KK Zagreb each have a head coach and an assistant coach, 44 coaches in all are required. In addition, some teams have athletic trainers, whose status varies. The U-18 team head coach, Andrej Tesla, of KK Zagreb is a full-time coach. As noted above, the KK Zagreb U-18 team has practice in the morning, afternoon and evening, making it difficult for coaches to take on other tasks. Coach Tesla also holds the position of youth program supervisor and oversees the entire youth training organization of KK Zagreb. Most of the coaches of the other teams are part-time coaches who appear

to find coaching a rewarding experience. Most, if not all, have other jobs.

(3-2) Senior team of KK Zagreb

The senior team of KK Zagreb is a professional team. In the 2010-2011 season, the team belonged to three leagues: the FIBA EuroChallenge, the ABA League, and the Croatian domestic Division 1 league. (In this analysis, the focus is on the 2010-11 season in which the team took part in a large number of tournaments.)

At the time, the FIBA EuroChallenge was at the third level among tournaments held internationally in Europe.*¹ The ABA league is not the American minor league, but rather the Adriatic League. It is an international league, with clubs from countries along the Adriatic Sea. (Italian clubs do not participate.) Top-level clubs from Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina compete with one another. In the past, Israeli and Czech Republic clubs also participated.

At the beginning of the season, teams played in the ABA league on weekends (e.g., Saturday) and in the FIBA EuroChallenge midweek (e.g., Wednesday). In Croatia, until recently, the top ranked teams taking part in the ABA League were exempted from first round participation in the domestic

league; they joined the domestic league in the second round. The second round of the domestic league begins at around the time the ABA season ends so that these teams could participate. Slovenia had similar arrangements ²⁾, as did Serbia and the Czech Republic. Based on observing several club practices and official games, it is presumed that these countries instituted such a system owing to the fact that in the domestic leagues of these countries there is a substantial difference in power between the upper and lower clubs.*²

The senior team of KK Zagreb has two practice gyms. One is shared with the youth training organization and the other is the home arena of rival Cibona. The team practices mainly in the Cibona arena. Practice is generally held twice a day; for example, from 9 am to 10:30 am and from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm. The first practice is mainly for improving individual skills and related drills; the second practice centers on tactics and game style. During this particular season, the senior team had several foreign players. It seems that the local people do not consider players from other countries in the former Yugoslavia as "foreign players." Among the contracted players on the senior team in the 2010-11 season, there were two players who came up from KK Zagreb's youth training organization.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated and analyzed the activities and circumstances of KK Zagreb, a basketball club in Croatia. Results of a survey and a series of interviews showed the operation of the youth training organization and the management of the professional team. The possibility of further study exists. Investigation of clubs other than KK Zagreb would clearly be useful. Numerous studies have examined basketball in the United States. Efforts to add studies of Croatia and the European area should be undertaken.

The survey of Croatian basketball detailed here provides empirical data that should be useful to sport scientists, coaches, persons in charge of top leagues, and those in charge of developing basketball players while studying and building competition and management systems.

Notes

*1) The FIBA EuroChallenge has not been held since 2016.

*2) From the 2016-17 season, the Croatian domestic league now requires that clubs participating in the ABA league also take part in the Croatian domestic league from the beginning of season.

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