

Basketball in the Italian Republic  
A case study of the Mens Sana Siena

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# Basketball in the Italian Republic: A case study of the Mens Sana Siena

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## 要約

イタリ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。そこで本研究はイタリ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。

調査対象クラブはメンズサーナシエーナとし 2010 年 3 月 11 日から 20 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、練習を視察しコーチ他スタッフにインタビューを行った。

メンズサーナシエーナの育成組織は U-19、U-17、U-15、U-14、U-13 と 12 歳向けのバスケットボールスクールがあることがわかった。同じ年代でもファーストチームとセカンドチームがある場合がある。ファーストチームは選抜された 12-14 名前後の選手で構成され、当時はイタリア中から選手が集まっていた。そして週間スケジュール、練習回数、練習時間が明らかになった。また育成組織のチームの指導においてこのクラブが最も大事にしていることが三つあるということが明らかになった。さらに選手をオールラウンドに育てようとしていることや大きい選手への指導の際に重視していることもわかった。またアメリカ人選手との比較の上で、イタリア人選手が目指すべき姿を二つ設定していることも示された。

keyword: Development, Training System, Youth Training Organization, 1 on 1, Italy

キーワード: 育成、トレーニングシステム、育成組織、1 対 1、イタリア

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## 1. Introduction

The Italian Republic (hereinafter, Italy) has been one of the most remarkable countries in basketball. According to the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) national team ranking, the Italian men's senior national team ranked 16th in the world in October 2017, 13th in December 2018, 13th in February 2019, and 12th in September 2019. The Italian women's senior national team ranked 31st in August 2016, 31st in October 2018, and 14th in November 2019.

Focusing on basketball in Italy and its management, competition and training system, Zhou et al. (2012)<sup>1)</sup> touched on Italy in reporting the development mode of competitive basketball in each country; they reported that Italian competitive basketball is closely related to The Italian National Olympic Committee. However, this was only mentioned without detail in a short sentence. Boroujerdi et al. (2013)<sup>2)</sup> calculated and reported the competitive balance of some of the top leagues in Europe, including Italy, using several parameters. Pozzati (2003)<sup>3)</sup> reported on the outline of The Italian Basketball Coaches Committee and the classification and acquisition program of coach licensing regarding coach training, which is one of the important keys of the training system. In any case, the actual

situation of the activities of the Italian basketball club was not reported.

Many Italian clubs advanced to the semifinals from the 1997–98 season to the 2010–11 season, marking this period as the golden age of Italian basketball in terms of the Euroleague results. Two Italian clubs reached the semifinals five times during that period. From the 2010–11 season to today, no Italian club has reached the semifinals in the Euroleague.

Because Mens Sana Siena was dominant in Italy during this golden age,<sup>4)</sup> this study focuses on that club. Regarding Mens Sana Siena, Pianigiani (2005)<sup>5)</sup> reported details on training, led by the U-18 first team. In this study, the activities of the entire club will be examined together with the field survey, using this as a base. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to clarify the training system and management system of Mens Sana Siena.

## 2. Methods

A field survey was administered from 11 to 20 March 2010 to gather observation-based information related to practice and official games of Mens Sana Siena's teams in different age categories. Interviews were conducted with coaches, trainers, and other club staff. At the same time, documents and video materials related to basketball in Italy were

collected. After completion of the field survey, additional questions, confirmations, 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, Italian notation is kept to a minimum, as in full names. In addition, some Italian alphabet characters are replaced with Roman characters. Affiliations and titles are those at the time the field survey was conducted.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Mens Sana Siena is a sports club located in Siena. Although Siena is a small town with a population of about 50,000, the club was known as a European powerhouse in basketball from the 2000s to the mid-2010s. For example, the club has won eight titles in the

Italian Men's Division 1 League, including seven consecutive victories in 10 seasons from 2003–04 to 2012–13.<sup>6)</sup> The club has also been to the semifinals four times since 2000 in the Euroleague.

Mens Sana Siena has a senior team and teams of each age group in the youth training organization, and all teams practice in the same arena. The youth training organization of this club includes age groups U-19, U-17, U-15, U-14, and U-13. There may be two teams in the same age group. For example, U-17 has a first team and a second team. The first team consists of 12 to 14 players, not only from Siena and its surroundings but also from Italy as a whole. According to the year, the majority of players are from outside Siena. The second team is made up of players not selected to the first team. There are also players who belong to different categories of teams at the same time, for example U-19 and U-17. Table 1 shows a typical weekly schedule for Mens Sana Siena's U-17 first team.

Table 1. Example of weekly schedule of Mens Sana Siena U-17 first team

Day of the week	Time	Contents
Monday	14:15–15:30 or 14:30–15:30	shooting and strength training divided into two groups
Tuesday	6:30–7:30	individual (for players who cannot come in the afternoon for classes and supplementary lessons)
	14:30–16:30	individual and strength training
	19:30–21:30	team practice
Wednesday	14:30–16:30	team practice

Thursday	14:30–16:30	individual and strength training
	19:30–21:30	team practice
Friday	14:30–16:30	team practice
Saturday	18:30–20:00	game
Sunday	-	rest

(Note 1) Players who are also in the U-19 team have a game on Monday night.

(Note 2) When senior teams play away games on Sunday, Saturday is the day of travel. Therefore, Saturday games may be shifted to Wednesday or Thursday. In this case, the team practice will start at 10:00 or 14:30 on Saturday.

Table 2 shows the practice days and times of Mens Sana Siena's youth training organization. However, it may be slightly different depending on the week. In addition, in each category, there is

another game about once a week. Apart from this, there is a beginner basketball school for the age of 12. This school is conducted once a week for about one hour.

Table 2. Practice days and times of youth training organization of Mens Sana Siena

Category	Average practice days per week	Practice time per session
U-13	3	1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes
U-14 second†	3	1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes
U-15 first	3	1 hour and 30 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes
U-17 first	7	1 hour and 15 minutes to 2 hours
U-17 second	3	1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes
U-19 first	2††	2 hours

† The club did not have a U-14 first team in this season.

†† In this season, the practice of the U-19 first team itself has been reduced because the majority of players of the U-19 first team overlapped with the U-17 first team.

Interviews were conducted with U-17 first team head coach Alessandro K. Magro to clarify the coaching philosophy and youth training policy of Mens Sana Siena. The result was as follows.

The coach of the U-17 team of Mens Sana Siena focuses on three primary skill areas. The first is

individual skill, which refers to techniques such as passing, dribbling, shooting, defense, and 1-on-1 play. The second is knowledge of tactics and the ability to understand them. The third is strength and conditioning. The club believes that when these three have evolved and become well interlocked,

players will have the opportunity to become professionals.

As for skills, Mens Sana Siena aims to coach all youth players to be well-rounded in their play. That is why the club lets all players do almost everything as much as possible. For example, the club coaches 1-on-1 skills while facing the basket outside the 3-point line and outside shots for big players. In addition, Mens Sana Siena believes that passing is the most important skill for big players. It therefore places special emphasis on coaching this skill to its big players. However, the most important thing to be aware of when coaching this age group is to give them confidence. For example, Mens Sana Siena does not let small players go inside and be blocked five times in a row just to raise their overall skills. The club believes that players will grow if they are confident. Our team has no tall players this season. The biggest player is only 200cm and does not have a muscular body. Therefore, the club is coaching for this situation.

Magro says he also serves as a senior team assistant coach, which motivates U-17 players. This club sometimes plays against opponents who have a big difference in ability, because the club has good players from all over Italy, as mentioned above. In that case, for example, Magro may instruct his team to 80 points more than the other

team.

Regarding study and school, some athletes still have to take supplementary lessons or equivalents. At this age, it is the club's policy that players go to school when they have to go to school, because basketball is not the only important thing.

Magro's position is to think about making good use of American players, at the same time developing Italian and European players. This is because, as mentioned above, he is a coach of the senior team and the U-17 team both. For this reason, he is aware of the differences between American and Italian or European players. In his perception, American athletes often have very high individual athletic abilities or excel in one thing. Because European players often do not have such abilities, he coaches them to play all-around and have the "mind" (i.e., intelligence, especially knowledge and understanding of tactics and basketball literacy) for the game.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study investigated and analyzed the activities and circumstances of Mens Sana Siena, a basketball club in Italy. Results of a survey and a series of interviews showed the operation of the youth training organization and the management of the professional team.

Therefore, the study's stated purpose has been achieved. The possibility of further study exists. Investigation of clubs other than Mens Sana Siena would clearly be useful.

This survey of Italian basketball provides empirical data that are expected to benefit sports scientists, coaches, people commanding top leagues, those responsible for nurturing basketball players in their formative years, and people charged with building competition and management systems.

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- 3)Pozzati, Antonio, "The Italian Basketball Coaches Committee". *FIBA ASSIST MAGAZINE*, 3, 2003, p.37.
- 4) The club name at that time, including the sponsor name, was Montepaschi Siena.
- 5)Pianigiani, Simone, "Creating and training a junior 'super group'". *FIBA ASSIST MAGAZINE*, 16, 2005, pp.6-9.
- 6) After winning the 2011–12 and 2012–13 seasons, due to accounting and financial issues, these season titles were revoked.