

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF MODERN SPORTS CLUBS

September, 28 2025

Presentation for International Sports Club Leaders.

Introduction of the club and presentation of possible problems

Distinguished colleagues, esteemed presidents, and friends in sport,

My name is Sara Martinšek, and I have the privilege of serving as President of the Sports Club ŠD Partizan Sevnica.

I am also president of another sports club in the municipality of Radeče, and in the past I held the position of President of the Sports Association of Sevnica.

For the last seven years, I have dedicated myself to leading our club.

During this time, we have grown from just 100 members to nearly 600 active participants.

This achievement is something I am very proud of, because it demonstrates that when a community believes in sport, people of all generations come together.

In our club, we welcome everyone — from toddlers as young as 10 months old to seniors, including one member who is 98 years old.

Sport truly has no age limit, and our mission is to keep doors open to all.

Of course, every sports club — whether in Slovenia or across Europe — faces challenges.

Each club has its own unique structure, its own traditions, and therefore its own problems.

But if I look at the landscape of Slovenian clubs today, I see three main challenges that are shared by many of us:

1.

Funding – ensuring sustainable resources to support activities.

2.

Coaches – finding qualified and committed coaches, or even coaches at all.

3.

Membership – attracting and keeping members engaged.

Let me share an example.

In large cities such as Ljubljana, Maribor, Zagreb, or Belgrade, clubs often have enough members and enough training sessions to employ coaches full-time.

In smaller towns like ours, this is simply not possible.

We may have many training groups, but each is too small to sustain a full-time coach.

In our club, for example, we work with nearly 20 coaches, but all of them have full-time jobs elsewhere.

Coaching is something they do in the afternoons, partly as a passion and partly as a way to contribute to the community.

It is not their primary career.

So how do we respond to this challenge? We grow our own coaches.

When young athletes finish elementary school, we invite them to stay involved by becoming assistant coaches.

We mentor them through this process.

And when they turn 18, we invest in their education, supporting them to obtain the necessary coaching licenses.

In this way, we create a pipeline of new coaches who already know our values, our community, and our athletes.

This is how a small-town club can sustain itself, despite not having the resources of a big city.

Coaches

Once our young assistants become licensed coaches, the responsibility does not end there.

It is not enough to simply have coaches — we must also take care of them.

Most of our coaches already have full-time jobs.

In the afternoons, instead of spending time with their families or enjoying their own free time, they come to our club to train children, youth, and adults.

They give us the most precious resource of all — their time.

That is why it is essential that they feel happy, motivated, and valued in our club.

Payment, of course, is one part of this, but it is not the only part.

Coaches need to feel:

- Accepted and comfortable within the club community.
- Appreciated and cherished for the work they do.
- Praised openly and regularly — because recognition in public shows them, and everyone else, how grateful we are.

In addition, we have found that organizing at least one annual social gathering for our coaches has a tremendous effect.

Whether it is a shared dinner, a bowling night, or simply an informal get-together, it strengthens bonds and creates a positive team spirit.

When coaches enjoy one another's company, they bring that same good energy into the gym.

They laugh together, they support one another, and this atmosphere naturally flows to the children and adults they train.

And when training is fun, when it feels positive and welcoming, members stay.

They continue coming to the gym, not only for exercise but because it is a place filled with joy, encouragement, and community.

In this way, investing in our coaches is also an investment in membership retention and growth.

Attracting and Retaining Members.

Once you have enough coaches, you can form enough training groups, and with enough groups, your membership can grow.

Coaches are therefore the foundation — but the next step is knowing how to attract new members.

Twenty or thirty years ago, the strategy in Slovenia was simple: you printed flyers, put up posters, or rented a billboard.

That was how clubs reached their communities.

But today, the world has changed.

Parents — the ones who bring their children to training — are now most often in their 30s to 50s, and this is exactly the demographic that is most active on Facebook and, increasingly, on Instagram.

This means our marketing has to modernize.

It is not enough to run one advertisement at the beginning of the season.

Clubs must be constantly present online, posting stories, photos, and videos throughout the year.

This shows parents, members, and the wider community that the club is alive, active, and fun.

And the cost is remarkably low.

Let me give a simple comparison:

- One large roadside billboard in a town like ours might cost €300–500.

If we are optimistic, perhaps 1,000 people pass it in a day.

But maybe 60% do not notice it at all, and those who do see it will only glance at it for a few seconds.

- Now take the same €300–500 and invest it in a Facebook campaign for one month.

That campaign will reach tens of thousands of people, not just once, but multiple times a day.

Marketing experts often say it takes at least seven exposures before a person who is even slightly interested decides to act.

With social media, people may see your ad not just seven times, but twenty or more — and if they don't join themselves, they may still talk about your club to friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

The result? For the same money, you achieve much greater visibility, stronger engagement, and a far more effective recruitment tool than any single traditional advertisement could offer.

Digital Tools to help you function

Finally, I would like to share one more way we can make our lives easier: by using free digital tools that are already available to us.

As I mentioned earlier, small-town clubs in Slovenia do not have the resources to raise future Olympians.

Our focus is different.

We focus on helping children — and all our members — discover that sport is a fun, accessible, and sustainable way to live a healthy life.

By doing this, we are not only shaping individuals today, but also building healthier habits for future generations.

In this way, sports clubs have an impact far beyond physical activity: we strengthen mental health, ease the burden on healthcare systems, and create communities that thrive.

But to keep this mission alive, we must grow membership and reduce costs for families.

To do this, we rely heavily on funding — from municipalities, from national programs, and from European projects such as Erasmus Sport.

The challenge, of course, is that applying for this funding requires enormous amounts of paperwork.

Our club alone applies to more than seven different funding programs, which is a heavy administrative burden for volunteers who already dedicate so much of their free time.

This is where technology becomes our ally.

Three years ago, as part of an Erasmus project with partners in Croatia and Serbia, we created a digital admission system for our club.

Instead of handing out paper forms to 15 different training groups and then typing in hundreds of documents by hand, we now use a simple Google Form linked to a QR code.

New members or parents scan the QR code printed on flyers, posters, or social media.

They fill in their details online: name, contact, group selection, and any special notes.

The form also includes information about costs, data protection consent, and even a simple option for families to request fee exemptions if they cannot afford membership.

All responses are automatically collected in Google Sheets, where data can be organized by group and shared — securely and only with authorized staff — with coaches or

administrators.

This system is completely free, environmentally friendly, and saves countless hours of administrative work.

What once took weeks now takes only minutes each year.

So, to summarize:

- We must invest in our coaches, because they are the foundation of every club.
- We must modernize our membership strategies, using social media to reach today's families.
- And we must use digital tools to make our work more efficient, so we can spend less time on paperwork and more time where we truly belong: in the gym, with our athletes, and with our families.

Sports clubs are not just places for physical training.

They are pillars of public health, mental wellbeing, and community spirit.

They help prevent problems that society often underestimates.

That is why it is our responsibility — and our privilege — to ensure that our clubs remain strong, alive, and accessible to all.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Final Thoughts

Sports clubs across Europe share common challenges but also common opportunities. By embracing digital tools, improving accessibility, and focusing on community health, we can secure the future of grassroots sports. Together, we shape not only healthier athletes, but healthier societies for generations to come.