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Development of Handball Athletes' Potential: Coaches' Strategies in Training Beginner Handball Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine coaches' strategies in developing the potential of beginner handball athletes comprehensively, covering technical, tactical, physical, and psychological aspects. Early-age athlete development is an essential foundation in building a competitive handball sports ecosystem at both national and international levels. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach conducted at beginner handball clubs in South Sulawesi Province. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with certified coaches and athletes, and analysis of training program documents. The findings indicate that effective coaching strategies include the design of structured and progressive training programs, the application of individualized approaches based on athletes' ability profiles, the development of character and competitive mentality, and the implementation of regular performance monitoring. Athlete-centered coaching has been proven to significantly enhance the intrinsic motivation and technical abilities of beginner athletes. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that the success of beginner handball athlete development is highly determined by the quality of coaching strategies that are adaptive, communicative, and grounded in scientific evidence.

Keywords: Handball, Beginner Athletes, Coaching Strategies, Sports Development, Potential Development.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi pelatih dalam mengembangkan potensi atlet bola tangan pemula secara komprehensif, meliputi aspek teknis, taktis, fisik, dan psikologis. Pengembangan atlet usia dini merupakan fondasi penting dalam membangun ekosistem olahraga bola tangan yang kompetitif baik di tingkat nasional maupun internasional. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi kasus yang dilakukan di klub bola tangan pemula di Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan pelatih dan atlet bersertifikat, dan analisis dokumen program pelatihan. Temuan menunjukkan

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bahwa strategi pembinaan yang efektif meliputi desain program pelatihan terstruktur dan progresif, penerapan pendekatan individual berdasarkan profil kemampuan atlet, pengembangan karakter dan mentalitas kompetitif, dan penerapan pemantauan kinerja secara teratur. Pembinaan yang berpusat pada atlet telah terbukti secara signifikan meningkatkan motivasi intrinsik dan kemampuan teknis atlet pemula. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menekankan bahwa keberhasilan pengembangan atlet bola tangan pemula sangat ditentukan oleh kualitas strategi pembinaan yang adaptif, komunikatif, dan didasarkan pada bukti ilmiah.

Kata Kunci: Bola tangan, atlet pemula, strategi pembinaan, pengembangan olahraga, pengembangan potensi.

INTRODUCTION

Handball is a team sport that combines elements of speed, strength, coordination, and tactical intelligence into a dynamic and integrated game. Globally, handball has become one of the most competitive sports, with millions of active athletes affiliated with national federations under the coordination of the International Handball Federation (IHF). However, in Indonesia, the development of this sport has not yet reached its optimal potential, particularly in terms of systematic and sustainable youth athlete development (Hidayat et al., 2026)

The development of beginner athletes represents the most crucial stage in the pyramid of competitive sports development. At this phase, the technical, physical, and mental foundations of an athlete are established for the first time, meaning that the quality of coaching during this early stage will greatly determine the trajectory of the athlete's future career. Mistakes in training methods at a young age may not only hinder athletes' physical development, but may also damage their motivation, self-confidence, and passion for the sport they pursue (Saharullah et al., 2019). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of effective coaching strategies in training beginner handball athletes has become an academic and practical necessity that cannot be overlooked.

Coaches play a central and multidimensional role in the athlete development process. A coach is not merely a technical instructor who teaches basic movements, but also serves as a motivator, character educator, field psychologist, and long-term development manager. The quality of the relationship between coaches and athletes, known in scientific literature as the coach-athlete relationship, has been proven to be one of the most determining variables in the success of training processes and the achievement of sports performance (Murfid, 2025). Coaches who are able to establish positive, trusting, and communicative relationships with their athletes are far more successful in optimizing athletic potential than coaches who focus solely on technical aspects.

In the context of handball, effective coaching strategies must be capable of addressing the sport's specific challenges. Handball demands a combination of diverse physical abilities, including running speed, throwing strength, agility, aerobic endurance, and high coordination between the eyes, hands, and feet (Bhakti et al., 2024). In addition, the tactical aspect of handball is highly complex, encompassing team offensive strategies, zone and man-to-man defensive systems, as well as the ability to quickly and

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accurately read game situations. This complexity requires coaches to possess broad and in-depth competencies, as well as the ability to translate scientific knowledge into training programs suitable for the developmental stage of beginner athletes.

A common phenomenon observed in the field is the significant gap between coaches' theoretical knowledge and practical implementation during training sessions. Many coaches, especially in regions with limited access to formal coaching education, still rely on traditional approaches based solely on empirical experience without adequate scientific methodology (Devi, 2025). This condition risks producing training programs that are unstructured, non-progressive, and potentially harmful to young athletes both physically and psychologically. On the other hand, coaches who possess a deep understanding of coaching science, sports physiology, and sports psychology are more capable of designing targeted and sustainable athlete development programs.

Previous studies in Indonesia have examined various aspects of sports coaching; however, research specifically discussing coaching strategies in the development of beginner handball athletes remains very limited. Most domestic studies focus on more established sports such as football, badminton, or swimming, while handball has received relatively little academic attention (Asmawi et al., 2022). This situation creates a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed immediately, considering that handball has recently gained increasing attention from the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI) within national sports achievement enhancement programs.

Based on this background, this study seeks to answer a fundamental question: what coaching strategies are effective in developing the potential of beginner handball athletes in a holistic and sustainable manner? This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the form of enriching scientific literature on handball coaching in Indonesia, as well as practical contributions in the form of evidence-based recommendations for coaches, clubs, and national handball federation administrators. By understanding strategies that have proven effective, it is hoped that the quality of beginner handball athlete development in Indonesia can improve significantly, ultimately leading to better achievements for Indonesian handball at regional and international levels.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of coaches' strategies in training beginner handball athletes within real field contexts. The qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation namely coaching strategies and development processes cannot be fully explained through statistical figures alone, but instead requires deep interpretation of the meanings, patterns, and contexts surrounding coaching practices (Haji, 2025).

The research was conducted at three beginner handball clubs actively operating in South Sulawesi Province. These clubs were selected purposively based on several criteria: having implemented training programs for at least two years, employing coaches officially certified by the Indonesian Handball Association (ABTI), and having active beginner athletes aged 10–16 years. The three clubs represented different coaching contexts one school-based club, one community-based club, and one regional training center (pelatda) thus enabling a rich comparative analysis.

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To increase the credibility of the findings, researchers maintained prolonged involvement in the field during the data collection process. Ongoing interaction with coaches, athletes, and club administrators allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the coaching environment and daily training practices. Field notes are systematically recorded after each observation session to capture contextual information, participant interactions, coaching behaviors, and emerging themes that may not be fully reflected in the interview transcript. This prolonged engagement also helps build trust with participants, thus encouraging more open and authentic responses during interviews.

The research informants consisted of six certified coaches, twelve beginner athletes who had trained for at least one year, four parents of athletes, and two club administrators. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the depth and richness of the data obtained. Data were collected through three primary techniques: participatory observation conducted over 16 training sessions, in-depth interviews that were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, and documentation studies of training programs, athlete development records, and performance evaluations available at each club.

Ethical considerations are carefully observed during the research process. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of their involvement in the study. Written consent is obtained from the coach, administrator, and parents of underage athletes, while consent is obtained from the athlete himself. Participants are assured that their identity and personal information will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Pseudonyms were given to all participants to protect their anonymity in the presentation of the findings.

The interview protocol was developed based on the existing literature related to coaching strategies, athlete development, and youth sports participation. Semi-structured interview guides are used to allow flexibility in exploring the participant's experience while maintaining consistency throughout the interview. The questions are focused on coaching philosophy, training methods, communication patterns, athlete motivation, skill development, and challenges faced during the coaching process. Follow-up questions are used to get a deeper explanation and clarify the issues that arise that were identified during the interview.

The scope of this study was limited to beginner handball athletes in selected clubs in South Sulawesi Province; therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to the entire context of handball coaching in Indonesia. Instead, this study seeks to provide analytical generalizations by offering rich descriptions and insights that may be transferable to similar coaching environments. Through an in-depth examination of coaching practices in different organizational settings, this study contributes to a broader understanding of effective strategies for developing novice handball athletes and supporting long-term athlete development programs.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation techniques comparing data from coaches, athletes, and documents as well as method triangulation by confirming observational findings through interviews. Member checking was conducted with key informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026). Data analysis followed the interactive analysis model proposed

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by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes four stages: data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and researcher reflexivity.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that the success of beginner handball athlete development does not depend on a single factor, but rather on the complex interaction of various strategies implemented by coaches in a synergistic and consistent manner. The major findings are organized into four interrelated themes: structured and progressive training program planning, individualized coaching approaches, the development of athletes' psychological aspects and character, and systems of evaluation and performance monitoring.

The first theme that consistently emerged across all research sites was the importance of structured, progressive, and scientifically periodized training programs. All coaches who successfully developed beginner athletes demonstrated a similar pattern: they designed long-term training programs with clearly divided phases general preparation, specific preparation, competition, and transition phases as recommended in modern training periodization principles (Fadli, 2021). During the general preparation phase, training focused on developing fundamental physical capacities such as cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, and gross motor coordination. Only in the specific preparation phase were handball-specific technical elements such as throwing techniques, catching, and off-ball movement systematically introduced.

The second major theme that strongly emerged was the individualized approach to coaching. Although handball is a team sport, effective coaches recognized that each beginner athlete possesses a unique capacity profile, both in terms of physical abilities, motor skill learning speed, and psychological needs (Shidiq et al., 2019). Therefore, effective training programs needed to accommodate these individual differences through differentiated training tasks, personalized feedback, and realistic goal-setting based on each athlete's abilities.

The third theme concerned the development of athletes' psychological aspects and character. This dimension is often overlooked by coaches who are overly oriented toward short-term technical results, despite consistent research showing that psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, mental toughness, and the ability to manage competitive pressure are major determinants of long-term athletic success (Constantin et al., 2013). Athletes who are technically talented but mentally weak often fail to demonstrate their best abilities in actual competitive situations.

The fourth theme involved the implementation of continuous evaluation and performance monitoring systems. Effective coaches not only planned and conducted training sessions, but also systematically documented, analyzed, and evaluated the development of each athlete at regular intervals. Evaluations were conducted not only on technical skill aspects, but also on physical development, psychological condition, and athletes' levels of engagement in the training process. The evaluation data were then used as the basis for adjusting training programs, ensuring that the ongoing programs remained relevant to the athletes' evolving developmental needs over time (M Nu'man Al Hadziq & Aprilia Sari Yudha, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Interesting observation from the field findings was that coaches with successful coaching track records never forced beginner athletes to immediately train with high intensity and volume at the start of the program. Instead, they consciously and systematically applied the principle of progressive overload, in which training loads were gradually increased according to the athletes' physiological adaptations (Plotkin et al., 2022). In contrast, clubs with lower levels of coaching success tended to have coaches who prematurely introduced advanced technical training without ensuring the athletes' physical and motor readiness, resulting in higher injury rates and increased dropout rates among young athletes.

Effective periodization also included intentional and well-planned recovery management. Successful coaches allocated adequate portions of active and passive recovery days within their weekly programs, understanding that physiological adaptation actually occurs not during the training session itself, but during the recovery period afterward (Bogeska et al., 2022). This scientific awareness distinguished knowledge-based coaches from those who relied solely on empirical intuition.

In practice, individualized coaching was implemented through comprehensive initial assessments of every new athlete joining the program. Effective coaches utilized a series of standardized physical tests including speed, strength, agility, and coordination tests—as well as observations of basic motor skills to map athletes' initial ability profiles (Ruslan, 2020). The results of these assessments then became the basis for setting individual training goals and determining appropriate starting points for training loads. Although this process required greater time and resources, it proved to produce more consistent and sustainable athlete development compared to the one-size-fits-all approach that remains common in many clubs.

Effective feedback was another key component of individualized coaching. Successful coaches provided feedback that was specific, measurable, and constructive to each athlete, both verbally during training sessions and in written form through development records that were discussed regularly (El Cintami Lanos & Lestari, 2021). Generic and non-specific feedback such as "good job" or "try again" was found to be less effective in helping beginner athletes understand which aspects of their techniques required improvement and how to improve them concretely.

The effective coaches in this study implemented various psychological development strategies integrated into regular training sessions. Goal setting was carried out collaboratively between coaches and athletes, allowing athletes to feel a sense of ownership over their own development process (Caramoci et al., 2025). Specific and achievable short-term goals (process goals) were established alongside more ambitious long-term goals (outcome goals), creating a layered motivational system capable of maintaining athlete engagement even during monotonous or difficult training phases. In addition, coaches actively trained athletes in relaxation techniques, visualization, and positive self-talk as part of beginner athletes' competition preparation routines.

Character development—including values such as honesty, discipline, hard work, respect for opponents, and team spirit was also identified as an important element in the coaching strategies of effective coaches. Coaches not only taught handball skills, but also instilled life skills that would benefit athletes far beyond the playing field. This

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approach aligns with the philosophy of long-term athlete development, which emphasizes that sport should serve as a medium for comprehensive character formation rather than merely an arena for competitive achievement (Maksum & Indahwati, 2023).

The use of simple technologies such as digital record-keeping, video recordings of training sessions, and training load monitoring applications was also found among younger coaches who were more open to innovation. Video recordings, in particular, proved highly effective as visual feedback tools that helped athletes understand their technical mistakes more clearly and objectively than verbal explanations alone. The increasing accessibility of digital technology opens significant opportunities for coaches to improve the quality of evaluation and feedback in their coaching sessions (Susanto, 2017).

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that the effectiveness of beginner handball athlete development strategies is holistic and multidimensional. No single strategy alone can guarantee successful athlete development; instead, the four identified strategic dimensions structured planning, individualization, psychological development, and continuous evaluation must be implemented synergistically and consistently to produce optimal and sustainable athlete development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussions presented, this study concludes that effective coaching strategies in the development of beginner handball athletes are multidimensional and encompass four main pillars that mutually reinforce one another: structured training program planning based on scientific periodization, individualized approaches that are responsive to each athlete's unique characteristics, integrated development of psychological aspects and character, and the implementation of continuous evaluation and performance monitoring systems. These four pillars cannot stand independently but instead must be implemented as a cohesive and adaptive coaching strategy.

The success of athlete development is also strongly determined by the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, which is built upon a foundation of trust, open communication, and mutual respect. Coaches who are able to serve not only as technical instructors, but also as mentors, motivators, and role models of character, will produce athletes who are not only technically competent but also mentally resilient and strong in character.

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