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REVIEW PAPER

**THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE PSYCHOSOMATIC STATUS OF ATHLETES
 AND SPORTS STAKEHOLDERS**

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the Covid-19 pandemic that has struck the world, the Republic of Croatia, the City of Zadar and its athletes and other sports stakeholders. The impact has significant consequences on health, the economy, and people's daily lives. It will be shown how and to what extent, the lack of sports activities affects the psychosomatic status of athletes and other sports participants and whether media broadcasts can replace the holding of "normal competitions" and also, the question arises as to whether online training is an adequate complement to the regular training process. The results of the research show that with all digital technology, it is still determined that the new virtual training violates the psychosomatic status of athletes and employees in sports. Online training is only partially an appropriate replacement for the regular training process. Also, there is significantly less interest in sports competitions without the presence of fans.

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Introduction:-

What is Covid-19? Such a question is asked all over the world, Europe, the Republic of Croatia, the City of Zadar, among students, retirees, athletes, scientists, etc. One small invisible organism, a virus, appeared as a mirror of our civilization and set a series of obstacles, conditions, new relationships, and the usual way of functioning of human society. Covid-19 as an event that completely surprised the world, is a typical example of the "black swan" appearing in modern society. After its first appearance (December 2019) in Wuhan, the capital of Hube province and in central China, the virus spread around the world influencing all social activities and economic activities (Petrović, 2020) Namely, regardless of whether the public reaction to this virus is considered excessive or not, the world is unpleasantly surprised, and the consequences for sports and global society will be enormous.

The theory is based on the fact that it has long been believed that only white swans exist, while the knowledge that black swans exist only after the discovery of Australia, thus confirming that every rule has exceptions (Taleb, 2007). After a group of scientists from the American Seton Hall University in New Jersey in 2020 determined the opinion of Americans on issues related to sports during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, then in the same year the Croatian Association for Sports Management conducted a study "I am athlete", the authors decided to conduct a study on athletes from the City of Zadar and got interesting data.

The connection between psychosomatic status and physical activity has long been in the focus of the public and science, which is also related to the way of life and social activities of modern man. The reality is nowhere near as

simple, specifically with mental health affecting not only emotionally but also the financial and social status of a person and his family (Eu Joint Action for Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2016). This was particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the global epidemic has caused numerous changes in social habits and customs in the physical garden of contact and this type of social behavior. Some of these changes seem reasonable, although many also consider them reasonable, are bizarre for certain groups of people. These changes, as stated in the text, covering numerous areas of everyday life, related to interpersonal behavior and customs among people, which for this paper is highlighted in the field of sports and sports activities (Primorac, 2020). In particular, the usual functioning in team sports (football, basketball, handball, water polo, volleyball, and individual contact sports) is disrupted. To get a complete and somewhat structural overview of this pandemic, it is necessary to state the impact of digital media on all social groups and therefore athletes. The media have made our lives easier, in the areas of business, connections, education, migration, etc. However, negative consequences have come with them. Social groups of people are increasingly retreating into virtual communities alienating themselves from the society to which they belong. The media, digital media today have "occupied" our everyday life to such an extent that life without them has become unthinkable, which can be read from the evidence on the streets of our cities and streets where people pass down with their eyes fixed on small screens (Turkle, 2011). In everyday life, and thus in athletes' lives, the word "digitalization" is appearing more and more often. Digital transformation refers to the process that begins from the moment when the organization starts thinking about the introduction of digital technologies in all business situations and lasts until the moment of its full integration (Ćirković, 2018). In the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of communication channels is a reflection of the digital transformation, because we manage as a society to stay connected almost as if we are physically together, which is evident in the field of sports. As can be seen, we are witnessing an explosion of advances in science, especially in the field of communications (Nambisan et al., 2019). Although tools for teleconferencing have existed for a long time (Webex, Netmeeting), today they are entering the mass use of digitalization through which it is held: classes, family and business meetings, board games, etc. For example, the daily number of users of the Zoom platform has dropped as much as 30 times (300 million users per day), not only digital platforms (Big Blue Button, Skype, etc.) are used by scientists, young people, but also older age people and all other subgroups of society, who want to keep up with the galloping digital society (Vidaček-Hainš, V., Bushati, J., & Bencek, 2014). For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to highlight the area of sports in which the conditions of training activities caused by the pandemic have changed significantly.

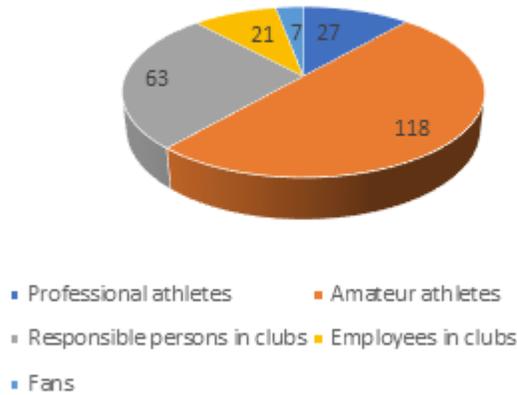
Therefore, for the purposes of the research, the survey method was used, where the sport's stakeholders of Zadar presented their views on the raised issues.

The aim of this paper is to determine the degree of lack of sports activities on the psychosomatic status of athletes and other sports stakeholders in Zadar and to directly determine whether media broadcasts can replace sports competitions in front of fans, or whether online training is an appropriate replacement for regular training. According to the presented research, it will be concluded whether the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic violated the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports stakeholders, are online training partly an appropriate substitute for the regular training process and whether there is significantly less interest in sports competitions without the attendance of fans.

Methods:-

The survey was conducted on 218 respondents who are in the period from 08 to 18 April 2020 filled out the questions addressed by this survey, among them, there are professional and amateur athletes, responsible persons in clubs, employees in clubs and federations (secretaries, administrators, accountants). Also, passionate sports fans from the area of the City of Zadar. The age of the respondents is from 15 to 65 years. Of the total number of respondents, 165 are males, 53 are females, and of the aforementioned total number are: professional athletes = 27, amateur athletes = 118, responsible persons in clubs = 63, employees = 21 and fans = 7.

Graph 1:- Structure of respondents' status
 Respondents status structure



The research was conducted online, by sending emails generated from the database of the Sports Association of the City of Zadar. For the purposes of this research, a survey method was used. The survey questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, divided into general and research aims. A survey is a quantitative form of research that collects different views and opinions of respondents, and identified changes that occurred in respondents due to the COVID- 19 pandemic in relation to the training process, sports activities, and competitions. In accordance with the aim, due to the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosomatic status of athletes and other stakeholders in Zadar was significantly disturbed and that online training was partly a suitable substitute for the regular training process, and that there is significantly less interest in sports without the presence of fans. The first part of the survey questionnaire refers to the general data of the respondents, and the second part contains questions aimed at answering the hypothesis set in the paper. After the implementation of the survey method, the completed survey questionnaires in the printed form were entered into the LimeSurvey program and exported to the specialized statistical program for data processing SPSS for further processing.

Results And Discussion:-

After the survey, the analysis of the answers received by the respondents was performed. On the questions related to “The degree of significance of the lack of sports activity on the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports workers, it was found that due to the lack of regular sports activity the psychosomatic status is disturbed” (Table 1), given that 35% of respondents stated that it has neither a positive nor a negative effect, while 19% of them state that it has a partially negative effect. 7% of them state that it has a completely negative effect, and 26% of them state that it has a partially positive effect, but still 13% of respondents stated that it has a completely positive effect. In other questions from the above group of questions, the answer most often answer was: that sports activity is an indispensable part of the everyday life of modern man. The answer is understandable considering that the respondents come from one of the sports segments.

Table 1:-presents the results of the question - How much sports activity has a positive effect on personality development, by helping the process of socialization of the individual and to develop desirable traits, to offer positive models for identification, to create useful habits, and to reduce pathological reactions in athletes and sports employees?

Completely negative	Partly negative	Neither negative nor positive	Partly positive	Completely positive
7%	19%	35%	26%	13%

Then on to a group of questions related to "if sports competitions were held without fans, what would be your interest in watching events online?" (Table 2.), we received answers: 29% of respondents stated that their interest would be completely lower, 22% of respondents stated that their interest would be partially lower, 25% of

respondents stated that their interest would be neither lower nor higher, 11% of respondents stated that their interest will be partially higher, and 9% of respondents stated that their interest will be completely higher.

Table 2:-presents the results of the question - If sports competitions were held without fans, what would be your interest in watching live events through the media broadcasts?

Completely less interest	Partly less interest	Neither less nor more interest	Partly higher interest	Completely higher interest
29%	26%	25%	11%	9%

In the question "How much do we miss sports and sports activity"? (*Table 3*), respondents stated answers that are quite scattered: 37% of respondents state that they miss them very much, 25% of respondents state that they miss them, 18% of respondents state "same as before", 14% of respondents state that "we occasionally miss it", and 10% of respondents state "I don't miss it at all".

Table 3:- presents results of the question - How much do we miss sports and sports activities?

I miss sports so much	I miss sports	Same as before	I miss sports occasionally	I don't miss it at all
37%	25%	18%	14%	10%

In the question related to the actual physical activity during the pandemic (*Table 4*), the following answers are given: 64% are significantly engaged, 25% of respondents stated the answer "same as before, but in another media", while 11% of respondents stated that they are less involved than before. From the previously mentioned results, it is evident that the respondents are still active in the field of sports only through adapted activities in accordance with the situation.

Table 4:- presents results of the question - How would you rate the amount of your involvement in sports and sports activities since the beginning of the pandemic COVID-19?

I do less physical activity than before	Same as before but only in another media	I practice physical activity significantly
11%	25%	64%

To the question "Does the possibility of holding online training affect your satisfaction and improvement of motor and functional abilities?" (*Table 5*), we received the following answers: 64% of respondents clearly stated that it affects, 25% of respondents were undecided, and only 11% of respondents stated "no" as an answer. These answers are expected given that some of the respondents are members of the so-called modern generation who use digital technologies in everyday life.

Table 5:-presents the results of the question - Does the possibility of holding online training affect on your satisfaction and improvement of motor and functional abilities?

It does not affect	Same as before but only in another media	I practice physical activity significantly
11%	25%	64%

The response of the respondents from the survey questionnaire came from the desire and motivation of the respondents who actively participate in the sports life of the City of Zadar. Of course, with the fact that they are connected with the Sports Community of the City of Zadar, with which they cooperate through various forms. Based on the conducted research and the results of the survey questionnaire completed by the respondents, some more topics were opened that should be examined in the future. Some of them are: "Under what conditions will sports competitions continue after the COVID-19 pandemic?", "Status of amateur sports in the City of Zadar after the Covid-19 pandemic", "Withdrawal of young athletes in the so-called virtual communities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic", etc.

The aim of this qualitative research is substantiated by the presented results. Due to the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosomatic status of athletes and stakeholders in Zadar was disturbed and online training is only partially an appropriate complement to the regular training process. Regular sports activities are an indispensable part of the life of athletes but also sports stakeholders. Although some sports

stakeholders do not practice regular physical activity, their daily lives are accustomed to living in that environment. When asked about sports competitions without fans and online viewing of matches, it is evident that the results show a slight lack of interest. The reason for this is that competitions without the presence of fans negatively affect the overall essence of the sport and the sporting spirit, while online viewing of matches correlates with the competition without the presence of fans and gives a gap in team view. Respondents also lack sports activity. It refers to a classic sports activity, whether in recreational, amateur, or professional terms. The activity requires some satisfactory material and infrastructural norms. Due to the closure of sports facilities and new legal norms, athletes are not able to conduct an adequate training process. They are trying in every way to cope in their own homes and nature to stay in training form. Therefore, playing sports before and during a pandemic is by no means the same. The population can argue that online training is only good as a temporary replacement. We assume that constant maintenance of online training or training without satisfactory training materials and infrastructure would undermine the overall anthropological status.

Conclusion:-

The COVID-19 virus pandemic changed our lives in just a few months. A comparative review of the available literature and research conducted tried to determine in what form COVID-19 influenced the psychosomatic status of athletes and other stakeholders in Zadar sports. What used to be quite common has become unthinkable, for the entire population, including members who play sports, work in the sports systems, and for those who watch sports. It is clear to everyone how professional and amateur sports have become huge victims of this pandemic, and this is one of the reasons for conducting research on this paper. According to the set research goals and established results, it is evident that due to the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosomatic status of athletes and stakeholders in Zadar is disturbed and that online training is only partially an appropriate substitute for the regular training process, and that there is also less interest in sports competitions without the presence of fans. The moral lesson in our society about this culture of exploiting others is summed up in the sentence of an athlete from Italy who has recovered from an infection: „The hardest thing for me is the thought that I could infect one of my colleagues“. These words of the Italian athlete permeate the necessary solidarity, care, empathy that the whole sport and all its stakeholders will have to respect if they want to move forward. Considering that there is still not enough research on this topic, and they are important for all athletes and stakeholders in Zadar, it is expected that the results of this paper will alert the population and contribute to the development of new guidelines in this area on a theoretical level. While in practice it is expected to serve as a platform for further research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports stakeholders and on online training as a substitute for a regular training process and interest in holding sports competitions without fans. Therefore, we hope that sports and sports activities in the Republic of Croatia and in the City of Zadar are “tough tissue” that will survive in any format, ie that it can be adapted to any place of performance, so it is thought that our sport will get out and proceed further in any modified form and media. The authors believe that we live in difficult times, but we hope that the situation will normalize after the escalation around the pandemic is reduced.

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