

The VSS and its sport promotion programs for the online-congress on the 4th of December 2020

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Abstract

Sports associations are essential for promoting physical activity in the whole population, from children to the elderly. In the autonomous region of South Tyrol, the 'Verband der Sportvereine Südtirols' (Association of South Tyrolean Sports Associations) has been active for 50 years and, with its 86,000 members, has the largest number of members in South Tyrol. The association represents 500 German- and Ladin-speaking sports clubs in South Tyrol. Today, the sports association is a place for meeting and practising physical activity, for socialising with new people and having fun together. In these times of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is particularly important that this opportunity exists, since lock-down moments and prevention measures reduce social relationships, exercise activities, and moments of fun together. The idea of VSS is also aimed at promoting talents, the enjoyment of physical activity and sport, being together and appreciating the opportunities offered by the physical environment. Through physical activity good relationships are also promoted and communication and interpersonal skills are developed. VSS activates various projects involving the society at various levels, from schools to families and sports clubs. A great deal of attention is paid to the training of sports technicians, experts and coaches, and their work is promoted through public awards for the 'best coaches'! There are currently several projects in place, such as: *Bewegte Kinder*, *Coole Kinder*, *Ballgaudifür Minis*. A great deal of attention is paid to the education and training of children. Efforts are made to offer appropriate activities for children in order to guarantee and promote the pleasure and enjoyment of physical activity. The "Verband der Sportvereine Südtirols" is situated in Bolzano, at the foot of the Dolomites, in a beautiful natural environment that can be explored and appreciated in all its potential through organised physical activity opportunities.

Keywords: sport clubs, association, physical activity, South Tyrol, sport.

Introduction

Presentation of the VSS and its sport promotion programs.

The "Verband der Sportvereine Südtirols" (eng.: Association of South Tyrolean sports clubs) - or short VSS - was founded 50 years ago with 500 sports clubs, 1,086 sports club sections and around 86,000 members, it is the group we are interested in with the highest number of members in South Tyrol.

The primary goal of the VSS is to give German- and Ladin-speaking sport clubs in South Tyrol a strong voice and to represent their legitimate concerns to authorities and associations. The VSS is able to support sports clubs through the financial help of the regional government of South Tyrol. Another goal is to advise, support, and help sport clubs in their role as service providers. For example, the VSS organizes training and further education for the sports clubs' members.

Education and training have the priority in the overall direction of the VSS, in the conviction that it is always the people with their commitment and their skills who guarantee and advance the development of the sport and its organizations.

Since the VSS was founded, it has been focusing on promoting the sport to children and young people. It is the youth and mass sport that makes the sport so valuable to society. When children move around in a variety of ways and enjoy sport, they train their basic motor skills almost by themselves, they discover their abilities and are encouraged and strengthened in their physical and psychological, as well as personal, development. For this purpose, the VSS developed 17 sport-specific youth sport promotion programs, which are carried out in close cooperation with the sports clubs' members and are financially supported by the South Tyrolean Raiffeisenkassen and the South Tyrolean Raiffeisen Association. Every year around 20,000 young athletes between the ages of 6 and 15 can benefit from this wide range of services.

This also includes initiatives that young and old people can partake in, such as the popular run series through South Tyrolean cities and villages, the programs for people with disabilities, or the ski meetings for senior citizens. VSS and sport clubs are thus contributing to the fact that, according to a study by the ASTAT (South Tyrolean Institute for statistics), since 2018, South Tyrol has been a leader in sport activities in Italy. This

study shows that 65% of South Tyroleans do sports on a regular basis. The proportion of children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 17 that do sport regularly or occasionally is as high as 75%.

The goal of the VSS with its sports promotion program for children and teenagers

The primary goal of the VSS is to pave the way to sports and physical activity for as many children and young people as possible. The focus is on the holistic development of young people and to create an affordable, sport-oriented sports program, which will have a playful approach and convey the joy of exercise. The goal with that is to lay the foundation for a lifelong passion for sports and physical activity. For the VSS, sport is education, an important field of learning in which, among other things, the so-called "self-efficacy" can be conveyed to children and young people. Sport is on the same level as music and art education. In sport as in music, children and young people experience that they "can do it" and that they can improve through hard work and constant practice. Learning what are known as executive competencies, a key term for important learning processes through sport, underlines the educational character of the sport.

By doing sports with other people, important social values such as respect, solidarity, fairness, team spirit, and reliability are taught to children. Of course, it is also the goal of the VSS to pave the way to better success through the funding and promotion of as many sports as possible. The enthusiasm for sport that can be developed and experienced in childhood and adolescence is fundamental to this.

Promoting talents

The promotion of talented and professional athletes is fundamentally the task of the professional sport associations, with which the VSS also cooperates. Nevertheless, we are proud that many internationally successful top athletes such as Peter Fill, Dominik Paris, Christoph Innerhofer, Petra Zublasing, Eva Lechner, or Jannik Sinner made their first sporting experiences as children in a VSS youth sports promotion program.

The difficulties of a youth-friendly sport

Unfortunately, the general pressure to perform in our society does not spare sports. So, we don't want to hide the fact that the concept of performance and the too-early specialization still influence the promotion of sports for children in a big manner. The VSS tries to counteract this problem with various awareness-raising campaigns (conferences with specialists, psychological workshops on sports for parents and trainers), as well as to convince the sport clubs to offer children a wide range of sports and exercises in order to expand their competence and passion for sports, which is certainly just as beneficial for their later athletic success.

The VSS was able to implement a corresponding pilot project under the motto "Schule und Verein – Partner in Bewegung" (eng.: School and Sports clubs - Partners on the Move) in cooperation with two primary schools and the sport clubs of that region. In an interval of more than 5 years, all primary school children, starting with the 1st grade, were given the opportunity to get to know as many sports as possible and to practice them. The primary schools have included these activities in their elective or compulsory programs. This project also formed the basis for a regional law that allows the recognition of the students' sport activities in a sport club by their school as a so-called elective subject to the extent of 34 hours per year.

Examples from the sports promotion program for children and teenagers

Let me now briefly introduce a few specific examples from the VSS youth sport promotion programs. These are generally carried out in the form of different events to promote exercise, organized training, tournaments, or championships. It is very important to note that the VSS has implemented specific rules in some sports and tournaments, which are intended to guarantee that as many young athletes and players as possible can participate. Some examples are the "fliegenden Wechsel" (eng.: flying change) in football, the mandatory player change after winning the ball in volleyball, adding up all the points won in a badminton tournament, or being able to participate in the final of the children's skiing championship without having to qualify for it in the district races.

VSS winter sports promotion program

The finale of the children's ski championship is considered a highlight among young ski enthusiasts. In 2019, almost 700 young skiers between the ages of 9 and 12 showed their talent.

VSS volleyball promotion program

The final tournament of the VSS volleyball championship has over time developed into a true family and volleyball festival. In 2019 more than 150 teams with around 750 children participated. While the children played volleyball on a soccer field, the parents and siblings pitched their tents and grilled on the soccer field next to it.

VSS badminton promotion program

The Badminton program aims to inspire children to exercise and do various forms of sport. A fascinating example is the VSS Children's Olympic Games, in which children compete in 7 different disciplines. The competition is about speed, coordination, target throwing, and endurance, with all exercises being played with the shuttlecock. Another valuable initiative of the badminton program is the Family Trophy, in which the children play in a team with their mother, father, siblings, or grandparents. This tournament series is intended to

promote not only physical but also social skills of children, and to strengthen the bonds with their own families. The parents must be given the chance to experience the sport and its challenges in interaction with their children.

VSS football promotion program

The football promotion program consists of around 500 youth teams and 5000 young people aged 8 to 15; it is the largest youth sports program in the VSS.

Play- and Sportsfestival in cooperation with the South Tyrolean Family association

In order to motivate the whole family to exercise and do sport, the VSS, in cooperation with the Catholic Family Association of South Tyrol, organizes the "Spiel- und Sportfest" (eng.: Play- and Sportsfestival) every two years, alternating in the various regions of South Tyrol. In 2019, over 800 children and their parents were able to try out different types of sports.

Examples from the member sport clubs ASV Raas and ASC St. Martin in Passeier

I would like to show two examples of how member clubs contribute to the promotion of broad and fun-oriented sport exercises for children, beyond the sports promotion programs of the VSS.

The project "Bewegte Kinder – Coole Kinder" (eng.: Moving Children - Cool Children) of the sports club ASV Raas aims to convey motor, mental, emotional, and social skills to children through playful movement. This was implemented through different elements from different sports and varied exercises with pedagogically qualified supervisors from the elementary school, the educational committee, the municipality, and the parent-child center in Raas. A different project of the ASV Raas, called "Ballgaud für Minis" (eng.: Ball fun for minis), on the other hand, focuses on the playful and varied movement experience with different kinds of balls. The sports club St. Martin in Passeier is also implementing the pilot project "Purzigagele" with a holistic, playful approach, under the direction of the educational science faculty of the Free University of Bolzano. Its aim is to promote a harmonious overall development of the children, to anchor the joy of movement in the long term, and to counteract the current decline in children's physical activity. The scientific support of the project enables the measurement of the current performance level of the children. On the other hand, with the knowledge gained, individual strengths and weaknesses can be recognized and promoted in a more targeted manner.

Through the accreditation of the sports club as an extracurricular education provider, the programs of the sports clubs can also be offered as a compulsory elective in addition to school sports.

Honoring exemplary youth work in a sports club and the trainer of the year

The VSS honors annually sports clubs for their exemplary youth work, as well as the trainer of the year, with the financial support of the South Tyrolean Raiffeisen Association. The reason behind this is that we believe that exemplary work in the sports clubs and from trainers should receive recognition and appreciation and serve as an example for others. For the competition of the "Vorbildliche Jugendarbeit im Sportverein" (eng.: Honorary youth work in sports clubs), meaning the honoring of exemplary youth work, the winners are not chosen based on their athletic results but rather on the basis of their educational work, that shall be oriented towards the interests of young people, taking into account their social environment. The same rules concern the competition for the trainer of the year, which focuses on the trainer as a charismatic figure of integration, due to their high level of human, educational, professional competence, and their personal commitment, which is usually also reflected in the personal success of the athletes.

In the year 2021 the VSS will award a prize for "Innovative Public Sports Spaces", and through that it will emphasize the sport-political demand for a school and a residential environment that promotes exercise and physical activity.

Annual mottos

I conclude my presentation with the annual mottos under which the VSS put his activities in recent years.

FAIR PLAY

Sport ist wert(e)voll (eng.: Sport is valuable/Sport has values)

Sport {VEREIN} t} (eng.: Sports club/Sport unites)

With these annual mottos the VSS wants to:

Highlight the importance of sport for the society

Give guidelines for the daily work in the field of sport

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