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MIGRATION OF MEN ATHLETES TO THE ROMANIAN
HANDBALL LEAGUE

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Abstract

The present research follows the migration of foreign men handball players from Romania's best league for seniors, exploring migration during the competition season 2016-2017, offering details about how many foreigners are playing for a Romanian club, their age and citizenship, the number of teams changed and years already spent in Romania, the position occupied on the field. Analyzed data points out an amount of 56 foreign men handball players, 15 various citizenships, from 3 continents (Europe, South America and Africa). The foreign sector represent 23.3% of all players which are under contract with the clubs certificated to play in the best Romanian league. 48 players are for the first time in our country. The mean age of the foreign men handball players is 29.1 years, with the upper limit being reached by goalkeeper, playmaker and line player positions, with average values over 30 years old, being differentiated only by a few months. 39% of the foreigners are occupying the two back positions, while the less represented position from the handball field is the right wing, where 4 foreign men handball players have a contract with a Romanian team.

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1. Introduction

Eight years have passed since the European Commission decided to declare 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which demonstrates that the problem of integrating different cultures into the European society has passed a long time ago its starting point. Interactions registered not only in Europe, but worldwide, through economic, cultural, academic and sport exchanges have accentuated the multicultural character of an increasingly larger number of countries.

Sport is a field in which the migration of people around the globe remains a significant phenomenon, both in terms of the movement of elite athletes and the impact that sport participation can have on more general migrant and host communities (Evans, 2010).

“Migration of athletes can be approached from different theoretical perspectives extending from geographical studies of migration patterns to historical and sociological studies” (Maguire & Bale, 1994, p. 6).

The present research addresses the migration of athletes in the field of handball, in Romania.

There are more than 10 years since in the Romanian handball league for men was registered the first contract with a player from abroad. Following the evolution of this phenomenon, we can conclude that it's peak was reached in 2015. It is also the year when those who decide the destinies of the Romanian handball started to point out questions about the disadvantages of increasing the import of players from abroad. Problems have arisen, such as the chances of the young Romanian players to gain experience through the number of minutes played, thinking about the future of the national teams of Romania. Changes have been made to the internal regulations of the Romanian Handball Federation regarding transfers from abroad to Romanian clubs. No limit regarding the number of foreigners was imposed, but the international transfer fees have been increased, and in the same time a value criterion have been added. The new modifications allows the Romanian clubs to transfer 2 players free from any limitation, with a fee of 1000 Euro for each, but for the 3rd one, only players from the top 3 leagues in Europe, based on the ranking drawn up by the European Handball Federation (EHF). The clubs has to pay for the 3rd player a fee of 2000 Euro, for the 4th 3000 Euro, and so on. The new rule contains also a modification regarding the presence in the national teams for players under 33 years old, and over this age.

2. Problem Statement

The topic of migration in sport has begun to be exposed in the research domain by the founders of this new direction, J. Maguire and J. Bale, since the phenomenon started to become a requirement in many elite sport branches. The origin of this new direction goes back to 1994 and since then, the issue has been widely debated and viewed from various perspectives. However, men's migration has been much more observed and researched than the migration of women. In the perspective of typologies between migrating athletes in sport, researchers have listed a number of characteristics (Falcous & Maguire, 2005), followed by other researchers that have completed the list with various characteristics (Agergaard, Botelho, & Tiesler, 2014; Kossakovski, Herzberg-Kurasz, & Zadkovska, 2016).

The scientific exposure of the phenomenon of migration also differs depending on each sport branch. Most studies refer to football world (Muller, 2010; Elliot & John, 2015), rugby (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013), basketball (Piggot & Evans, 2013) or even cricket (Fletcher, 2014). The migration issue is very poorly represented in the world of handball, we could only find one article in this regard (Agergaard, 2008).

3. Research Questions

The current study aims to give an answer to the following questions:

- What is the number of foreign men players who are under a contract with a club enrolled in the Romanian handball league?
- What countries are these players representing and from which continent are they coming to Europe?
- Since when are the foreign men players in the Romanian league?
- How many clubs have they changed since their arrival in Romania?
- What is the age of the foreign men players and the position occupied on the field?

4. Purpose of the Study

The present research follows the migration of foreign men handball players from Romania's best league for seniors, exploring migration during the competition season 2016-2017, offering details about how many foreigners are playing for a Romanian club, their age and citizenship, the number of teams changed and years already spent in Romania, the position occupied on the field.

5. Research Methods

Subjects of the present research are the 56 foreign men handball players registered with a signed contract for one of the affiliated clubs to the Romanian Handball Federation. As the total number of men handball players active in the Romanian League is 240, the percent of foreign players is 23.3.

In order to interpret and analyze the data regarding the foreign men handball players, we have used statistical and mathematical indicators, such as sum, mean or standard deviation. For a better understanding of the results, we used also the graphical representation (the pie chart and clustered column).

6. Findings

In the competition season 2016-2017, the best men's handball league from Romania gathered a number of 56 foreigners with contracts signed with one of the 14 teams in the championship. 3 of these 14 clubs has no foreign players as a part of their teams: HC Vaslui, CSM Focsani 2007 and CSM Fagaras.

A totally different transfer policy has been adopted by HC Odorhei, team with 9 foreign men handball players out of a sum of 17, HC Dobrogea Sud, with 8 players and two coaches from outside

Romania, SCM Politehnica Timisoara, with 8 players, and CSM Bucharest, with 7 players and two coaches from outside Romania.

Taking a closer look at the 56 foreign men handball players from the Romanian championship, we revealed in Table 01 the year of these players' arrival in our country.

Table 01. Year of arrival in Romania for each foreign player

| Year | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2011 | 2009 | 2008 | 2007 | 2006 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| No. of players | 28 | 16 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

As seen above, half of the foreign players are at their first experience in our country. 16 players came at the beginning of the competitive season 2015-2016, 6 players are already counting their third season, and only one player came to Romania almost 11 years ago, in 2006, counting his 11th competition season.

After seeing the number of years spent in Romania by the existing foreign players, we continued to take a look at the number of clubs changed by the foreigners. In Table 02 can be seen that 48 players are under a contract with the same team from Romanian handball, 5 players have moved once to a different Romanian club, 2 are playing for their third club, while one player is already playing for his 5th team.

Table 02. Number of clubs changed by the foreign men handball players in the Romanian championship

| No. of teams | First | Second | Third | Fourth | Fifth |
|----------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| No. of players | 48 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

The mean age for the 56 foreign players from the best Romanian men's league is 29.1 years (SD = 4.26). The table below (Table 03) shows what position are these players occupying on the field and what is their age. It can be seen that most players transferred from outside Romania occupy the position of left back (12), followed closely by the right back position, with 10 players, the goalkeeper and line player positions, with 9 players each. Six foreign players can be found each on the left wing and playmaker positions, while on the right wing position, only 4 foreign players has a signed contract with a Romanian club.

Table 03. Distribution of foreign men handball players by position and age

| Position | LW | LB | PM | RB | RW | LP | GK |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number | 6 | 12 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 9 |
| Age (Mean ± SD) | 29.5±3.5 | 28.6±3.01 | 30.7±5.35 | 27.5±3.88 | 26.9±3.58 | 30.3±4.11 | 30.4±6.37 |

Legend: LW=left wing; LB=left back; PM=playmaker; RB=right back; RW=right wing; LP=line player; GK=goalkeeper

Analysing the mean age of the foreign men handball players (distributed by their position on the field), it can be interpreted from the table above that, on each position, the foreign players from the Romanian league, have reached maturity. Thus, the lower limit of mean age is 26.9 years for the right wing players, while at the opposite pole can be found the goalkeeper, line player and playmaker positions, where the mean age is over 30 years, being differentiated only by a few months.

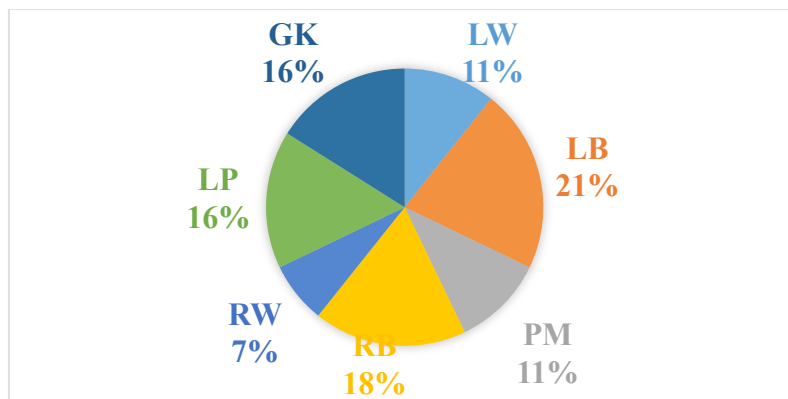


Figure 01. Distribution of foreign men handball players on playing positions

For a better understanding of the distribution by specialized position on the field, Figure 01 shows it in percentages. It can be observed that 21% of all foreign players from the Romanian league are situated on the left back position, followed by the right back position, with 18%. The players responsible for long-distance shots represent 39% of all foreign players from the Romanian championship. Both the line players and goalkeepers represent each 16% each of total, while the right wing is the most underrepresented, with 4 foreign players, which means 7% of the total amount of foreign players in the Romanian league.

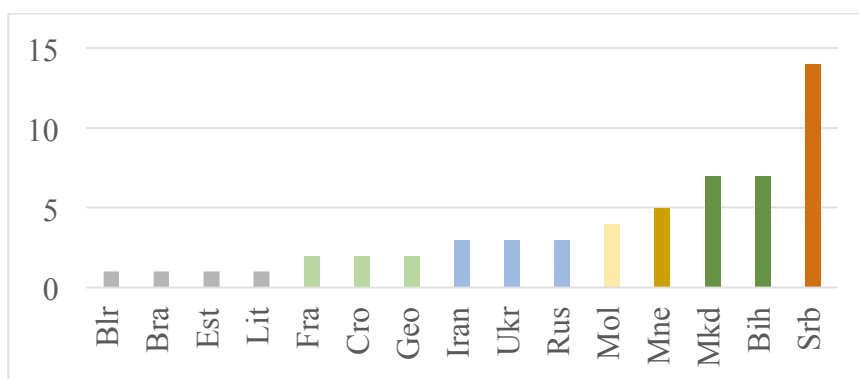


Figure 02. Country of origin for all foreign handball players

Regarding the country of origin for the 56 foreign men handball players, it can be seen in the figure above that they come from 15 distinct countries spread over three continents: Europe, Asia and South America. Most of the players are from Serbia (15), Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina give 7 players each to our Romanian league, while countries like Brazil, Estonia, Lithuania and Belarus are represented by only one men handball player.

7. Conclusion

In the season 2016-2017, the best men's handball league from Romania includes a number of 56 foreign players under contract with one of the 14 teams, meaning 23.3% of the total number of players.

Three out of the 14 clubs decided for different reasons to not involve foreign players in their strategies. A different transfer policy has been adopted by HC Odorhei, with 9 foreign players out of the

total of a team containing 17 players. Also HC Dobrogea Sud and SCM Politehnica Timisoara, each with 8 players from outside Romania are in top 3 teams with imported players.

The mean age of the 56 foreign men handball players is 29.1 years (SD = 4.26), and the most experienced players are found on the goalkeeper, line player and playmaker positions, with values of the mean over 30 years old, being differentiated only by a few months. At the opposite pole, the youngest representatives are found on the right wing position, with a mean of 26.9 years old.

The 56 foreign men handball players come from 15 countries spread over three continents, namely Europe, Asia and South America. Most of the players are from Serbia (15), Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina give 7 players each to our Romanian league, while countries like Brazil, Estonia, Lithuania and Belarus are represented by only one men handball player.

Of the total number of men handball players from outside Romania, 28 are in their first year of experience in our country, 16 came at the beginning of the competitive season 2015-2016, while the player with the biggest number of years spent in Romania came to our country almost 11 years ago, in 2006.

48 players have not changed the teams for which they decided to come into the Romanian handball, 5 are playing for their second Romanian team, while one player is already in his 5th team.

Overall, the analysis of the migration of foreign players to Romanian men's handball has helped to gain an inside on this field, which is very poorly documented in terms of research. The Romanian sport needs further studies with much more information regarding migration, with a focus on details such as typology, gender differences and distinctions between sport disciplines, since the sport migration phenomenon is still growing.

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